



# The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) Maintaining Habitat Diversity



Louisiana Sustainable Forestry Initiative

[www.laforestry.com](http://www.laforestry.com)

## *Thoughtful considerations pay year-round dividends for wildlife*

### **Introduction**

*Why* do you own your forestland? A source of periodic income? Hunting and recreation? Investment? Regardless of your primary objective, many landowners take great pleasure and pride in providing habitat for the variety of plants and animals that live on their land.

Managing your forest and managing for habitat diversity doesn't have to be expensive or difficult. Mostly, it takes a little attention to detail and proper instruction during forestry operations.

Below are some suggestions and instructions to conserve or increase habitat diversity on your property. For additional assistance please utilize the references found at the end of this information sheet.

### **Maintaining Habitat Diversity**

Habitat diversity comes in many forms. A forest can have different stand ages, different species and stands come in a variety of shapes and sizes. You may even want to consider what your neighbor's property provides for habitat as part of the overall wildlife needs – after all, wildlife does not pay attention to property boundaries.

No single piece of property can provide all needs for all wildlife. The key is to evaluate your lands, determine what species the property is best suited to and then develop a wildlife habitat plan that targets improvements for those species.

### **Game Wildlife Species**

*SMZs* – Streamside management zones along creeks are designed to protect water quality but also provide a change of habitat from adjacent harvested acres. Often, SMZs are stocked with hardwoods such as oak, hickory, dogwood and beech, which provide mast (such as acorns) as well as hollow cavities for nests and dens.

*Other water bodies* – small streams, beaver ponds and sloughs - provide rich habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, amphibians, turtles and possibly fish. Carefully consider and protect these minor waterways when making your forest management plan.

*Thinning* – Thinning your timber opens up the forest canopy, allowing sunlight to hit the forest floor which stimulates a host of species to grow. This is one of the most important ways to increase timber growth and improve wildlife habitat.

*Burning* – Low-intensity prescribed burning, done on a 3 to 5 year cycle, keeps brush, briars and saplings in the understory from becoming an impenetrable thicket. It also encourages grasses, forbs and legumes to germi-



*Riparian areas prove to be a valuable habitat for a wide variety of game and non-game species.*

nate and grow. A combination of thinning and prescribed burning keeps a forest healthy and open – as well as creating great wildlife habitat.

*Food plots* – Small areas, planted in grains, grasses, legumes or clovers provide nutritional supplements for deer, turkey and other wildlife. More information about food plots is provided in the web link below.

### **Nongame Wildlife**

Management for nongame wildlife will provide you with year-round enjoyment and entertainment. Even during hunting season, songbirds, turtles, owls and other critters are fun to watch while sitting in the deer stand. Here are some low-cost management practices you can establish on your tree farm.

*Snags* – Dead trees may not look pretty unless you're a cavity nesting bird. Twenty-five to 40% of the local species of birds prefer to nest in cavities – including bluebirds, woodpeckers and wood ducks. Research has shown that dead trees and snags are tremendously important to a variety of wildlife for nesting and foraging.

*Leave trees and patches* – When planning a harvest, consider leaving either scattered live trees across the stand or leave small patches of trees as a temporary refuge. Leave trees and patches become important perch, nesting and foraging areas while the surrounding stand is being reforested.

*Brush piles* – After a harvest, tops, limbs and other logging debris may look unsightly, but they become important cover and shelter for songbirds, lizards, mice and other wildlife. Larger brush piles can be used as den sites for large animals like raccoons, bobcats or

black bears.

*T&E Species and other rare species* – Threatened, endangered and other rare species usually have very limited and specific habitat requirements. In Louisiana, many of these species are aquatic mussels, fish or crayfish and don't need much other than clean water. Following voluntary forestry Best Management Practices ensures the protection of water quality. Other protected species, such as the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker may require you to seek expert advice from a trained biologist. Another classification of rare species, Globally Imperiled Species, may or may not be federally protected, but landowners are encouraged to protect these species because of their rarity. Information about threatened, endangered and Globally Imperiled Species is available from the Natural Heritage Program of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

### Links and Information

This information sheet is designed to be a starting point for landowners to incorporate some basic wildlife habitat management practices into his or her forest management plan. For more information about these practices, please utilize the following list of web links.

#### *For Wildlife:*

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries - Natural Heritage Program and Landowners for Wildlife Program:  
[www.wlf.louisiana.gov/](http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/)

Louisiana Forestry Association, Louisiana Voluntary Best Management Practices for Forestry: <http://www.laforestry.com/Resources>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology:  
<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1189>

Quality Deer Management Association: [www.qdma.com](http://www.qdma.com)

National Wild Turkey Federation: [www.nwtf.com](http://www.nwtf.com)

Food Plots: <http://www.lsuagcenter.com>  
[www.qdma.com](http://www.qdma.com)  
<http://aces.edu/forestry/>

#### *Further Forestry Advice:*

Consulting Foresters of Louisiana: <http://www.acf-foresters.org>

Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry:  
<http://www.ldaf.louisiana.gov>

American Tree Farm System: <http://www.treefarmssystem.org/>

Sustainable Forestry Initiative: <http://www.sfiprogram.org/>

<http://www.aces.edu/forestry/>



*Game species are a big consideration for landowners who want to hunt on their own land or derive the income from a lease.*



*The red cockaded woodpecker is a federally listed endangered species that in Louisiana is mainly found on nation forestland.*