

## UI Extension Forestry Information Series

### Integrating Wildlife Improvements Into Your Woodland Plan

*Don White*

Almost everyone enjoys seeing wildlife. For many people, non-game species such as song birds, owls, hawks, woodpeckers, and squirrels have taken on new importance. Several practices can be done either during a harvesting operation or at other times at little or no expense that will improve wildlife habitat.

Let's start with roads. Forest roads should be located permanently, to be used over and over again for recreation, wood gathering, timber harvesting, cross country skiing, wildlife observation, and other activities. Shoulder and right of way areas can provide a fine source of browse species for big game. If trees are thinned a little heavier on the sunny side of the road for 50 or 60 feet back from the shoulder you can easily double the amount of available browse. Erosion on the shoulders and in the roadbed can be prevented by seeding them with a mixture of grasses and clover (ruffed grouse love white dutch clover). This practice will also help keep noxious weeds from taking over the site.

Small water holes established at not too great a distance from each other are highly desirable. One location that is often easy to develop for a water hole is the downhill side of a culvert. It doesn't have to be huge to serve a large number of birds and mammals.

If you have spring areas or a natural stream, try to preserve an area about the height of the mature trees on each side of the drainage in a more natural state. This doesn't mean that you don't harvest some trees from that area – it does mean that they must be harvested carefully so as not to needlessly harm that fragile site. Selective harvesting will frequently improve the habitat in those riparian zones.

Leave many large snags across your woodland. There

are 65 species of birds and 30 species of mammals that use dead trees for shelter, food, or rearing their young. Studies have shown that large populations of forest birds significantly reduce insect problems. The more woodpeckers you can encourage the less trouble you will have with bark beetles. The rhythmic drumming on dead trees is an indispensable ritual of woodpecker courtship, as well as an integral part of their territorial defense.

Not all birds can excavate their own cavities in trees. Only 17 bird species are capable of the task. Eighty other animal species use previously excavated or natural tree holes for their nests. Because wood is a good insulator, a tree trunk home provides protection against high summer and low winter temperature extremes. A nesting pair of woodpeckers will drill out between one and three cavities before finally selecting one to complete for their own nest.

By leaving several large dead trees per acre, a woodland owner can attract an army of insect eating critters that work for him all day, everyday. Your dead trees may be worth as much or more as wildlife habitat as some of your live trees, and you don't even have to saw them into boards to make them valuable.

Improving browse species for deer along road right of ways and fringe areas is a fairly common practice among woodland managers. But what about root-rot openings? We currently do not have a cure for root diseases other than encouraging species of trees that show some resistance. I have seen all species of conifers die in those openings, while the hardwood brush species flourish. Why not manage those root-rot

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

openings for wildlife while we wait for a cure for root disease?

Most of the private woodland is in the lower elevations where a population of deer exists both winter and summer. Therefore, we should be looking at a mixture of species that provide browse in all seasons. You may find many of them already growing in these openings. Here are some species that deer prefer:

- |                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| redstem ceanothus | spirea       |
| serviceberry      | ninebark     |
| pachistima        | snowberry    |
| red osier dogwood | Oregon grape |
| western red cedar | huckleberry  |
| kinnikinick       | cascara      |
| maple             | rose         |
| willow            | chokecherry  |
| syringa           | western yew  |

Chat-ta-chat – Chat – Chat-ta-chat – I love the sound of that squirrel keeping track of my every move. If you enjoy squirrels, leave them a place to hide and to store next winter’s food supply. Don’t burn all slash piles. Leave about one medium sized pile per acre. The ideal pile to leave is the one that is too close to other trees to burn anyway because fire could damage the remaining trees. A pile that is right next to a tree is ideal. The slight increase in insects and fire hazard when leaving a few, critically placed slash piles for wildlife can be offset by careful management of slash and other risks elsewhere on your woodland. Enjoy your woodland by balancing its many uses. Harvesting timber is just one of the many benefits it can provide.

This information first appeared in Woodland NOTES, Vol. 2, No. 1.  
**About the Author:** *Don White* is a former Area Extension Educator - Forestry and Professor at the University of Idaho.

