

TRANSITION ZONE MANAGEMENT: FITTING WILDLIFE IN TO MODERN FARMING

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Abstract. Modern agriculture still provides the opportunity to manage for wildlife both in and out of the crop. Transition zones are defined as those areas between crop fields and other crop fields, other land uses, and/or non-crop habitats, such as streams or woodland. In the Southeast most transition zone management has been directed toward control of non-point source water pollution. However, wildlife benefits of this management have received much less attention. Transition zone management techniques such as herbaceous field margins, hedgerows, conservation headlands, and center-pivot irrigation corners, and beetle banks offer opportunities to increase early successional wildlife without sacrificing farm income. Although some of these techniques have enjoyed great success for integrating wildlife conservation and farming in other regions, most of the techniques have not

been tested in the Southeast. Generally, these types of management attempt to create either more permanent vegetation through the year or address various limiting factors in the life history characteristics of target wildlife species. For example, in North Carolina, herbaceous field borders along drainage ditches have been used successfully to improve quail habitat and run-off water quality. In the United Kingdom, conservation headlands have been used to double brood survival rates of gray partridge, one of their most important gamebirds. Not only do these technique not have to have a major impact on farm production, but they can provide added wildlife, aesthetic, and water quality values. The key here is that the most useful of these techniques have come when wildlife and agricultural interests have worked together to develop management that is beneficial to both wildlife and farming.