

MANAGING PRIVATE LANDS FOR WILDLIFE

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In Georgia, and across the Southeast, the future welfare of wildlife rests primarily in the hands of private landowners. Why? Because habitat (i.e. food, cover, water, and space) is the key to wildlife abundance and over 93% of Georgia and 75% of the Southeast is in private ownership. Most landowners have a variety of objectives for their land and blending the management of multiple natural resources is not an easy task. Often the primary uses are timber, crop and/or live stock production, with wildlife being a secondary objective. The first steps to successful integration of management practices should include setting realistic objectives, inventorying current habitat conditions and capabilities, and developing long-range plans. The good news is there are many sources of help for landowners desiring to enhance wildlife habitat on their lands. State fish and wildlife agencies have professionally trained wildlife biologists located throughout each state who are available to work with landowners, free of charge, in the development of wildlife management plans. Other agencies including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, University Cooperative Extension Service, and state forestry agencies are also available to

provide landowners with technical assistance in various aspects of natural resource management. In addition there are private consultants that can be contracted for assistance. When wildlife is one of the land management objectives, landowners should be certain that persons assisting with the planning are professionally trained in wildlife management. Furthermore, when multiple resources are involved, as is often the case, an interdisciplinary team approach usually provides the best results. In addition to technical assistance landowners may qualify for economic incentives for wildlife habitat development. For example, there are federal programs that may provide cost share and in some cases incentive payments for certain habitat practices. The most notable are those of the 1996 Farm Bill. Some state wildlife agencies also have cost share programs that address wildlife management on private lands and there are private organizations that provide seed and seedlings and in some cases financial incentives for wildlife habitat improvement. Landowners seeking assistance with wildlife management can start by contacting the local office of their state fish and wildlife agency.