

INTEGRATING WILDLIFE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT WITH AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

In 2001, state residents and nonresidents spent \$1.3 billion on wildlife recreation in South Carolina. Studies have also shown that wildlife and recreational hunting are major contributors to the economy in rural South Carolina. The majority of wildlife habitats in South Carolina occur on private lands. Consumptive (hunting, fishing) and non-consumptive (wildlife observation, birding) uses of wildlife resources can benefit farmers and other landowners seeking means of supplementing decreasing economic returns from agricultural and forestry operations. Wildlife management activities must complement existing operations so landowners can continue to receive revenue from timber and agricultural products. Cost-sharing and technical assistance for various wildlife habitat improvement practices are available through the U.S.D.A. Farm Bill. However, there is a need for information that demonstrates and evaluates these alternative management options in real life settings. For the purposes of demonstration and evaluation, we are establishing eight wildlife habitat practices under the U.S.D.A. Farm Bill Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program on agricultural and forestland at the Clemson University's Pee Dee Research and Education Center. These practices include: 1) prescribed burning, 2) field borders, 3) filter strips, 4) forest openings, 5) forest stand improvement, 6) hedgerow planting, 7) native warm season grass establishment, and 8) riparian forest buffers. Data collected post-establishment will document changes in vegetative structure and composition in areas where practices are implemented and use of those areas by herpetofauna, avifauna, and small mammals. Early observations indicate the need for better methods of control of non-target vegetative species.