

Wildlife Habitat in Field Borders (Supplement to Job Sheet 386)

USDA – NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE – NORTH CAROLINA



Photo courtesy of Melissa McGaw, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.



Photo courtesy of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Field borders can be developed to create valuable cover and food resources for wildlife that inhabit grassy and brushy habitats, such as bobwhite quail, gray fox, indigo buntings, and box turtles. Well-managed field borders may also provide foraging opportunities for typical forest wildlife, such as raccoons, whitetail deer and wild turkey. This job sheet will help you design a field border that provides optimum wildlife habitat.

The importance of properly managed field borders to wildlife include:

- ◆ The diversity of plants in a well-managed field border will increase the availability of food resources such as seeds and insect prey (important for many wildlife species, e.g., during the first few weeks of life, the diet of species like quail and turkey chicks is composed almost entirely of insects).
- ◆ Field borders provide links between forests and fields around the farm, expanding the amount of useable wildlife habitat.
- ◆ Field borders provide critical winter and nesting cover for a variety of grassland wildlife.

Field Border Establishment

- ◆ Recommended field border width is at least 20 feet. Where a field border for wildlife will be used as an equipment turn-row, the field border width should be sufficient to allow a minimum of 20 feet of undisturbed habitat.
- ◆ For wildlife habitat purposes, the ideal field border will appear unkempt and be composed of a variety of plant species.
- ◆ A field border managed for wildlife will attain a height of 3-6 feet. It should be comprised of planted species, for example, switchgrass and shrub lespedeza, as well as volunteer vegetation such as beggarlice, goldenrod, and ragweed (See attached table of Suggested Wildlife Field Border Mixtures).
- ◆ Existing cropland can be converted to a field border for wildlife by establishing desired vegetation (See attached table of Suggested Wildlife Field Border Mixtures).

- ◆ Field borders can be widened and enhanced for wildlife by cutting woodland edges back to encourage low growing food and cover plant species.
- ◆ The Southeast Quail Study Group recommends the following for replacing tall fescue with wildlife plantings:
 - Step 1: Mow, graze, or preferably burn the fescue in late winter for a spring treatment or late summer for a fall treatment.
 - Step 2: Allow the fescue to green-up to a height of at least six inches.
 - Step 3: Spray the field with one or two quarts per acre of glyphosate (Roundup™) or 3 WSP (water soluble packets) of Plateau™, 6-7 ounces of surfactant, and ten gallons of water per acre. Always check the product label to insure that the mixture used is adequate for the situation in which this herbicide will be used. In spring treatments wait two weeks after the initial spraying. If there is still green fescue, spot spray the problem areas. For fall treatments, spray during fall green-up then wait until the next spring and spot spray if needed.
 - Step 4: After a good kill is achieved, establish wildlife-friendly vegetation.

To get the most wildlife benefits out of a field border, consider the following management practices:

- ◆ Periodic disturbance of field borders is necessary to stimulate growth of desirable vegetation and to eliminate encroachment of woody vegetation.
- ◆ As a rule of thumb, disturbance should occur within a field border every 3-5 years. However, if visual observation suggests more or less frequent disturbance activity is required, then adapt the schedule accordingly.
- ◆ Although disturbance is necessary, not more than 50% of all field border habitat should be disturbed in any one year. In addition, never disturb all of the field border habitat around a single field in the same year.
- ◆ Prescribed fire and light disking are preferred management tools.

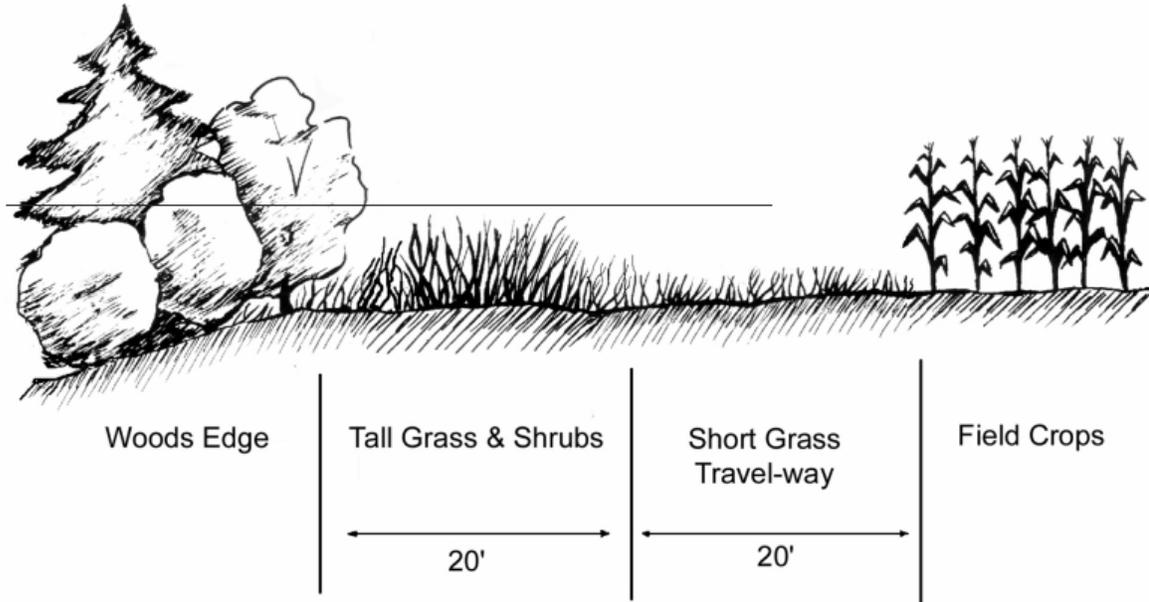
Field Border Management for Wildlife		
METHOD	TIMING	NOTES
Prescribed Burning	1 February through 15 April	burn prior to spring green-up; insure firebreaks are properly installed to contain fire
Light disking	1 February through 1 April	use disking to chop woody vegetation and lightly scarify the soil surface; leave a minimum of 30% residue
Weed Sweep™ herbicide appl.	15 April through 15 June	select herbicide to control target species and follow label directions for environmental concerns
Spot spray herbicide	15 April through 15 June	select herbicide to control target species and follow label directions for environmental concerns
Mowing	15 September through 1 April	mowing should be done after August to avoid quail nests, rabbits, turkeys and other ground nesting wildlife; mow to maintain ≥12 inches of

		cover, 18 inches preferred
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SUGGESTED FIELD BORDER MIXTURES BENEFICIAL TO WILDLIFE

PLANTING DATE	MIXTURE/RATE
1) 15 September thru 1 November.....	Small grain planting allowed to develop into native vegetation
2) 15 September thru 1 November.....	Small grain/switchgrass mix (40 lbs. wheat or rye, 5 lbs. switchgrass)
3) Fall/Spring.....	Small grain planting overseeded with Kobe or Korean lespedeza
4) January thru-April.....	10 lbs. Kobe, 5 lbs. partridge pea, 40 lbs. wheat or rye, 4 lbs. little bluestem
5) May thru August.....	5 lbs. browntop millet, 5 lbs. Kobe, 3 lbs. 'Atlantic' Coastal panic grass, 3 lbs. switchgrass, 3 lbs. little bluestem
6) September thru December.....	40 lbs. wheat or rye, 5 lbs. switchgrass, 2 lbs. Ladino clover
7) Early Summer.....	Switchgrass - 7 lbs. drilled, 9 lbs. broadcast
8) Early Summer.....	'Atlantic' Coastal panic grass - 10 lbs. drilled or broadcast
9) Early Summer.....	Eastern gamma grass - 8 lbs. drilled only
10) May.....	5 lbs. switchgrass, 4 lbs. Atlantic' Coastal panic grass, 3 lbs. Kobe/Korean Lespedeza
11) Late February thru mid-April.....	3 lbs. reseeding soybeans, 5 lbs. Kobe/Korean lespedeza, 5 lbs. red clover, 5 lbs. partridge pea
12) September-thru October.....	18 lbs. Shilo orchardgrass, 40 lbs. wheat or rye, 3 lbs. Ladino clover, 5 lbs. crimson clover
13) Sept.-Nov.....	10 lbs. Kobe lesp., 40 lbs. wheat/rye/oats, 4 lbs. little bluestem, 3 lbs. innoc. white clover, 3 lbs. unhulled shrub lespedeza, 2 lbs. orchard grass, 5 lbs. switchgrass
14) April-June.....	15 lbs. browntop millet, 15 lbs. sudex, 5 lbs. Kobe lesp., 3 lbs. hulled shrub lesp., 3 lbs. 'Atlantic' coastal panic grass, 3 lbs. switchgrass, 3 lbs. Eastern gamma grass, indian grass, or big bluestem

Two Zone Field Border for Wildlife



Additional information is available from your local NRCS office, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, and various conservation organizations.

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