

Forest edge helps wildlife, gradually

Head and shoulders
Photo of DC or
Soil Conservationist
here

By _____,
District Conservationist, Natural
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_____ County.

Edge-- the transition zone between two different types of vegetation-- can be key to good wildlife habitat on a farm.

How good it can be depends on the diversity and quality of the plants that offer food and cover. Just as importantly, those plants need to create a gradual transition from the tall forest trees to the relatively short crop or grass field next to it.

Most transitions are abrupt-- but the direct change from low ground cover in a crop field to tall trees doesn't help wildlife.

What many species like is a wider, more gradual border area. At least 30 feet, but preferably a wider zone of grasses, weeds, shrubs, vines and small trees offer the berries, seeds, browse, and insects helpful to wildlife.

Northern bobwhite quail is among the species that relies heavily on edge habitat.

Creating a forest edge.

The transition edge can be converted from no transition by planting shrubs or small trees. Another option is to encourage the area to revert naturally to native plants. Stop grazing, mowing or cropping the area and the natural process will probably work in short order. A light disking or other periodic disturbance will help weeds and other native species to come along more quickly.



Good edge habitat has a gradual transition from tall trees to shrubs to grasses or crop fields.

If the trees in the forest are close to one another, the edge can be improved by thinning the tree stand. Consider a commercial timber sale, or cutting trees for firewood. Thinning the stand near the edge allows sunlight to reach the forest understory. The sunlight then promotes more growth of plants that offer food and cover for wildlife.

Creating forest openings.

An option or addition to creating edge on the outside of large tracts of forests is to create small openings within the forest. Ungrazed clearings in a forest diversify the habitat, and offer woodland birds such as wild turkeys the annual weeds, grasses and seedlings that poult need.

With selective thinning, good fruit and nut producing trees, den trees, and snags can be left for more food and cover for wildlife. It's a good idea to have five to ten acres of small clearings for every 100 acres of forest, with clearings ranging from one to three acres.

For more information, stop at our office at _____ (Number) _____ (Street) _____ in _____ (city) _____, or visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute's website at www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov or the NRCS home web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov

Wildlife Ways Did you know....



The black-capped Chickadee, which prefers edge habitat, stores or caches seeds and insects in bark, dead leaves and knotholes. Each bit of food is stored in a separate place, remembered as long as a month before the meal.