

Plum Thickets for Wildlife

Joel D. Glover, Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Dept of Con & Nat Resources

When most people consider planting something to improve the habitat for wildlife on their property, they normally think of a plant that will produce food in the form of seeds or forage. While supplementing natural food with a planted species is normally a good practice, people interested in managing wildlife habitat need to remember that all species of wildlife require more than food to thrive. Adequate food, water, cover and space in close proximity to each other provide good habitat. While most folks easily understand the need for

food and water, they often fail to consider the importance of cover. Cover is an essential component of wildlife habitat and in many cases a lack of cover renders otherwise good habitat useless.

Sufficient cover is not only needed as shelter from the elements but it also protects animals while they feed, breed, roost, rest and travel. Depending on the species, cover may consist of a dense stand of trees, a thick clump of weeds or a pile of rocks.

While some species require a minimal amount of cover, other species,

such as bobwhite quail are very strongly associated with protective cover. In winter, when grass and weed covers become thin, shrub covers and thickets are particularly important. Native shrubs such as Chickasaw Plum, Prunus augustifolia, provide a low thick overhead canopy that affords protection from avian predators while leaving bare ground beneath which the birds can maneuver through. When managing for a low mobility species such as quail, land managers must insure that all of the necessary habitat components are in close proximity to adequate protective cover. The more time coveys spend moving and feeding, the greater the chance of detection by predators. By arranging food sources and protective covers such as plum thickets closely together you can enhance bird survival and optimize the number of birds on the property.



Chickasaw Plum

Calendar

- Jul 22-23** - AP and EA Annual Meeting, Destin, FL
- Jul 25** - Quarterly Wiregrass RC&D Council Meeting
- Aug 1-2** - Grazing Clinics, Alabama A&M, Sand Mountain Research and Extension, Center, AL
- Aug 2** - Area II District Supervisors Meeting, Noccoalula Falls Park, Etowah County, AL
- Aug 6-10** - Eng Software Training, Auburn, AL
- Aug 9** - Area V District Supervisors Meeting, Farm Center, Houston Co, AL
- Aug 16** - Area I District Supervisors Meeting, East Colbert Church of Christ, Colbert Co, AL
- Aug 21-24** - AU T-Square Erosion and Sediment Control Training, Mobile, Montgomery, Huntsville and Birmingham, AL
- Sept 6** - Red Water Blues Field Day, Cullman, AL
- Sept 13** - Red Water Blues Field Day, Prattville, AL
- Sept 20** - Area VI District Annual Meeting, Hilton Inn, Orange Beach, AL
- Sept 27** - Red Water Blues Field Day, Spanish Fort, AL
- Nov 4-6** - Alabama RC&D Annual Meeting, Cawaco RC&D Council, B'ham, AL

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Stop Cogongrass Hitchhikers

Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*), sometimes called Japan grass, continues its rapid spread across Alabama and the Southeast, reducing forest productivity, destroying wildlife habitat, and impacting rights-of ways. One way this aggressive weed is spreading so quickly is by hitchhiking around the state, catching rides on skidders, road graders, mowers, food plot equipment, and other forest and road maintenance equipment. Help slow the spread of cogongrass by following these three steps:

1. Learn to identify cogongrass
2. Avoid cogongrass when possible
3. Clean vehicles, equipment and clothing after operating in contaminated areas.

Learn how to identify cogongrass:

- Leaves – 1/2-1 inch wide, 1-6 feet tall; edge of leaves is rough like sandpaper; often yellowish-green in color with whitish midrib that is generally off-center especially near the base of the leaves; leaves brown after a freeze.
- Flowers – 2-8 inches in length, silvery white in color; seeds also silvery white, light and fluffy, will blow off like dandelion seeds; blooms spring or early summer, or after disturbance.
- Plant base – no apparent stem so leaves appear to almost arise directly from the ground, plants are more spread out than clumped.
- Rhizome/roots – dense mat of light-colored rhizomes (underground stems) that are covered in flaky scales, are strongly segmented and have sharp points.
- Whole plant – plants grow in dense, often circular patches.



This aggressive weed catches rides on skidders, road graders, mowers, food plot equipment, and other forest and road maintenance equipment.

Avoid cogongrass infestations. Cogongrass is spread by both wind-blown seeds (a single plant can produce 3,000 seeds) and underground branching rhizomes. Each rhizome, or fragment of rhizome, can start a new plant. Seeds or pieces of rhizomes moved to new areas in contaminated soil, hay, sod, or on equipment can easily sprout and start new infestations.

- Do not mow, bushhog, or even go through cogongrass, when seed heads are present.
- Do not work in cogongrass infested areas when soil is muddy and rhizomes can easily be broken off and stuck on equipment.
- Do not push roads or fire lines or grade roads through cogongrass. If unavoidable, try to do contaminated sites last.





W. Hancock, USDA, ARS

- Clean equipment after operating in infested areas. If working in areas infested with cogongrass is unavoidable, clean vehicles, equipment and clothing before moving to an uncontaminated site.

Cogongrass is a Federal and State Noxious Weed and it is illegal to transport plants, seeds or plant parts. Cleaning vehicles and equipment in the field may be a challenge, but do the best you can. Every little bit helps and it will keep you from breaking the law!

Areas to clean and check:

- radiator, grill, undercarriage and tops of vehicles
- blades, and under the deck of bushhogs, mowers, etc.
- tires, rims, and tracks
- places where seeds and rhizomes can stick to grease and mud (seals, bearings, etc.)
- clothing (especially wrinkles, cuffs, and hats)
- if water is available, a pressure washer is the best tool for the job. If water is not available, use a broom and a shovel to dislodge as much

seed and rhizome material as possible. When in the field, follow best management practices:

- do not wash off parts of the machine that have oil buildup
 - do not use chemical detergents
 - do not wash in a location where water runoff will reach a stream
 - clean in an open site that can be monitored and any new cogongrass plants eradicated
- Also schedule a thorough cleaning at a garage or other facility as often as possible.

For more information about cogongrass and its control visit <http://www.cogongrass.org> or contact your county Extension office. Visit <http://www.aces.edu/> counties or look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find contact information. Prepared by: Dr. Nancy J. Loewenstein; School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University.

From a publication by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. An Equal Opportunity Educator and Employer.

(Plum Thickets for Wildlife, continued from page 1)

Although plum thickets may be an essential component of quail habitat, they do not coincide with another essential quail management technique, controlled burning. Since the plums will not withstand burning, they must be protected from fire. Fortunately, however, there is yet another practice that will protect the plums while providing many benefits for quail. That practice is known as strip disking.

Areas lightly disked in winter set the stage for the growth of beneficial quail foods.

Lightly disking around the perimeter of thickets will provide a barrier of bare dirt around the plums and will also promote the growth of beneficial native foods that quail depend on. Areas that are lightly disked in winter set the stage for the growth of partridge peas, beggar weeds and other beneficial quail foods. In subsequent years these areas will also provide nesting cover. Disked on a three year rotation, these areas provide many benefits.

Anyone considering a habitat improvement project should consider the vital role that adequate cover plays in the lives of many wildlife species.



You can identify cogongrass by the whitish midrib that is generally off-center, especially near the base of the leaves.

Releasing Hardwoods Planted Under the CRP-CP22 Riparian Buffer

Tim Albritton, State Staff Forester, USDA-NRCS

Many planners, biologist, foresters, and natural resource professionals have asked if post-planting release is warranted or even feasible and if the landowner can get cost-share assist with this treatment under the CRP program.

In most cases, where an existing pasture or idle field is being converted to hardwoods under the riparian forest buffer practice, a post-planting release is warranted. The question frequently arises “Why if we are planning a pre-application herbicide treatment do we need to plan for a post-planting treatment as well?”

The pre-application herbicide treatment is usually needed to control early successional trees, shrubs, and other plants that invade these areas and will compete with the newly planted hardwoods. The application is usually made, depending on the specific herbicide, in the summer during periods of active growth. Subsoiling, if needed, is a complementary practice that is usually recommended as well.

The trees are then planted in the winter, usually December or January. The problem occurs the following spring and early summer as new grasses and weeds begin to emerge and compete with the young hardwood seedlings for available water, light, and nutrients. High seedling mortality occurs and

leaves the landowner with a dilemma; site prepare the entire field again and replant which is very costly or interplant the gaps which is usually ineffective.

A better solution is to plan a post-planting release in cases where a heavy grass competition is expected. This practice is authorized under the CRP and it can be planned in conjunction with the pre-application herbicide – broadcast treatment.

Over the past 7 or 8 years significant portions of Alabama have experienced droughty conditions and this intensifies the struggle for the hardwood seedlings to survive. Release treatments have been proven effective at increasing the seedling survival and thus improving the effectiveness of the riparian buffer.

There are a limited number of herbicides listed for hardwood release, however, at least one does exist that I am aware of -- ***Oust® XP**. The timing of the application is important. The label recommends the chemical be applied before the hardwood tree seedlings or transplants break dormancy (bud swell stage). I have included below some selected excerpts from the label for your convenience. However I always encourage anyone considering the use of a chemical to read the entire label.

Jerry Johnson, a Technical Services Specialist with DuPont, points out that the Oust® XP labels stresses the dormant application of this product and always use caution when applying to stressed seedlings. He also reminds us that with a pH of 6.5 or more - reduce the Oust® XP rates. The effectiveness of the rate can double at a pH of 8 or more.

There is no “silver bullet” answer to all of the challenges and difficulties you face with regards to hardwood establishment. However, a post planting release may provide the newly planted hardwood seedlings with an opportunity to develop a sufficient root system early, which is very important during the late summer when the competition peaks.

** Trade names are used solely to provide specific information. Mention of a trade name does not constitute a guarantee of the product by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does it imply endorsement by the USDA or NRCS over comparable products that are not named.*



Band Spraying Hardwoods

Selected excerpts from the Dupont Label for Oust® XP:

Hardwoods

Hardwood Site Preparation—Application Before Transplanting

Apply 3 to 5 oz per acre on sites where northern red oak, white oak, chestnut oak, American sycamore, ash (white or green), red maple, sweet gum, or yellow poplar are to be planted. Make all applications before transplanting.

Hardwood Release—Application After Transplanting

Apply 1 to 4 oz per acre in stands of American sycamore, ash (white or green), bald cypress, oaks (such as chestnut, northern red, southern red, overcup, pin, swamp chestnut, cherrybark, water, white, pin, etc.), red maple, sweet gum, or yellow poplar.

OUST® XP should be applied before the hardwood tree seedlings or transplants break dormancy (bud swell stage). Applications made over the top, after the trees have broken dormancy, may injure or kill the trees.

Natural Hardwood Regeneration

OUST® XP is recommended for herbaceous weed control in commercial reforestation areas where hardwood seedling regeneration is desired following shelterwood seed cuts. Apply 2 to 5 oz per acre using appropriate ground equipment. For control of striped maple and beech, tank mix with 1 to 2 qts per acre of glyphosate. For best results, apply late summer to mid-fall. Note that hardwood seedlings present at the time of application may be severely injured or killed.

IMPORTANT PRECAUTIONS—FORESTRY ONLY

- Applications of OUST® XP made to trees, conifers, or hardwoods that are suffering from loss of vigor caused by insects, diseases, drought, winter damage, animal damage, excessive soil moisture, planting shock, previous agricultural practices, or other stresses, may injure or kill the trees.
- Applications of OUST® XP made for release (trees present) should only be made after adequate rain fall has closed the planting slit and settled the soil around the roots following transplanting.

Upcoming Training Opportunities

Grazing Clinic

A one-day grazing clinic will be held at the Sand Mountain Extension and Research Center on September 21, 2007. The event will involve instruction as well as hands-on exercises. Topics to be covered include:

- Grazing Methods
- Physiology of Forage Growth
- Environmental Impacts of Grazing
- Pasture Economics
- Forage Response to Grazing
- Economical Fertilization in Pastures
- Poisonous Plant Identification
- Fencing and Watering Technology
- Animal Nutrition on Pasture
- Minimizing Hay Requirements

The cost of the clinic is **\$40** per person and must be paid in advance. This fee includes a number of valuable educational resources including the book *Southern Forages*. Registration materials can be picked up at 8:00 a.m. Lunch and refreshments will be provided, and the meeting will end around 4:30 p.m. **Pre-registration is required.** Reservations will be taken on a **first-come, first-served** basis. For more information, call Eddie Jolley, NRCS Conservation Agronomist at 334-887-4564 or e-mail eddie.jolley@al.usda.gov.

AU T-Square Training Seminar

Auburn University's Technology Transfer Center (T-Square) has announced a new training seminar in erosion control, sediment control and stormwater management technology. The seminar will review effectiveness of sediment and stormwater basin, uses for polyacrylamides, tools for basin design, establishing cover for slope stabilization, selected ALDOT specifications and concerns, and ADEM regulations and concerns. Seminars will be in Mobile, Montgomery, Huntsville, and Birmingham on August 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th respectively. For more information visit the following web site:

<http://www.eng.auburn.edu/departments/eesv/T2/seminars.html>

Red Water Blues Field Days

Three field days are being offered to help planners, designers, contractors, inspectors, and others learn more about erosion and sediment control practices and products: Sept. 6 - Cullman, Sept. 13 - Prattville, and Sept 27 - Spanish Fort.

Pre-registration is \$40 (\$50 after Friday prior to each event). For more information visit the website: www.swcc.state.al.us/link_handbook_seminars.htm.

New Tools Available

C-Graz Planning Tool

NRCS conservation planners in Alabama have a new tool to help plan grazing systems. The software is approved by NRCS and was developed by the ESRI group in South Carolina. It is being used by several states in the Southeast. The tool allows clients to quickly see potential effects that various grazing management options have on the forage production and availability for their livestock. By balancing the forage production and availability to the livestock needs clients should be able to reduce supplemental feeding expenses. The software uses livestock and forage information from the client to compare various management scenarios. After planning decisions are reached, the software produces a grazing management plan for the client. Ultimately, clients will be able to make economical and informed management decisions for their operation while improving the forage and animal resources.

New Look for Conservation Practice Standard

The Alabama conservation practice standard for **Fence** will have a new look. While the standard has not changed, more information is being provided for conservation planners and clients in ways to properly install the various farm fences. The new look will include drawings for installing fences, construction specifications, and a job sheet to provide a better understanding of proper fence installation. Look for it soon in Section IV on the Alabama e-FOTG: http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/efotg_locator.aspx?map=AL

Conservation Tillage Workshops Held In Dothan and Decatur

Ben Moore, Resource Conservationist, Luverne, AL

Two conservation tillage workshops were held in Dothan and Decatur. Over 135 farmers, researchers, and agricultural agency personnel heard from farmers who told about their experiences with conservation tillage systems. The farmers were more than willing to share with others about their convictions and lessons learned about conservation tillage farming.

Billy Lee of Lawrence County said, "I have a peace of mind knowing that I'm farming in a way that enables the farm to sustain itself." He also said that a lot of the risk in farming is taken out because conservation tillage

systems conserve and maintain more moisture. Jimmy Brooks of Monroe County says he has improved his soil organic matter, saved time, labor, and fuel. He says he has no plans to ever go back to a conventional tillage system. Auburn University and ARS

scientists presented the latest research about the management of cover crops, weeds, fertility, nematodes, and compaction. Randy Raper of the USDA-ARS said that conservation tillage systems must be managed as a long-term, multi-year system to achieve all the maximum benefits. Bob Goodman, Auburn University economist, presented on the economics of conservation tillage systems and how conservation tillage can save on many input costs, but varies greatly from farm to farm.

Attendees were able to examine new equipment and see some equipment in operation. The partners and sponsors for these workshops were: AL, Northwest Mountains Rivers & Valleys, and Wiregrass RC&D Councils, USDA-ARS, USDA-NRCS, Auburn University, Alabama SWCS, ACES, SWCDs, ADECA, Landmark Park, TN Basin Clean Water Partnership, Dale Co. Farmer's Federation, Wiregrass International Inc, SunSouth LLC, Northside New Holland, and Kirkland Farm.



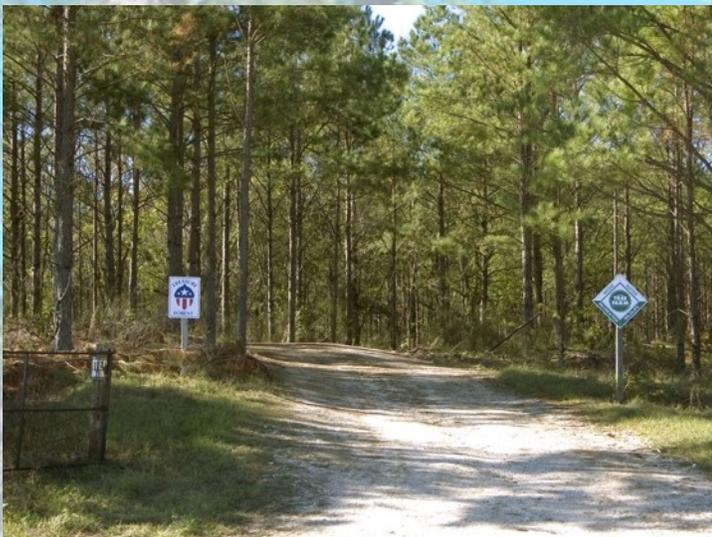
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**Mark
Your Calendar!
September 25-26, 2007**

Alabama Forest Health Conference

Four Points by Sheraton Tuscaloosa Capstone
320 Paul Bryant, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (205-752-3200)

Sharing the latest information on pests that
impact forests and what we can do about it.



Sponsors:

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USDA-Natural Resources Conservation
Service (NRCS)
Society of American Foresters (SAF)
Black Warrior Chapter

Topics include:
Alabama Forests
Forest Diseases
Forest Insects
Invasive Weeds



8.5 Hours of Forestry CFE's will be awarded to participants

Registration and Conference information: Elizabeth Bowersock, Auburn University
Phone: 334-844-1012 Email: bowerep@auburn.edu