

## Enhancement Activity- ANM19 - Wildlife Corridors- Wildlife Friendly Fencing

Fencing may be necessary to keep livestock in, or out of your property, but fencing may cause problems for wildlife that need to move freely to escape predators, to forage for food, or to find a mate.

In Michigan, The Wildlife Conservation Order under Act 256 of the Public Acts of 1988 mandates passage for wildlife in known travel lanes shall be accommodated using perimeter fencing less than 52 inches in height and the bottom of the fence is spaced at least 4-inches above the ground. Alternatively, constructing passage areas 40 feet wide, 52 inches or less in height, and no more than 660 feet from the next passage will allow wildlife passage. This order does not apply to an exclusion structure which does not kill, harm, capture, trap, or collect animals and which is constructed to deter or prevent damage by wild animals to private property, including but not limited to fences to protect livestock, poultry, and other birds, including captive-reared game birds; farm crops; orchards; and gardens. A Michigan Department of Natural Resources permit is needed when constructing fence for temporary enclosure of wild, free-ranging deer, elk, bear, or moose.

Wildlife friendly fence allows wild animals free passage, is easier to construct, and is less expensive than many other types of fence. If your property is already fenced, it may be possible to convert the old fence without much expense or labor. If you are fencing your property for the first time, please consider the safety of your wildlife neighbors.

### **What kinds of fence cause problems for wildlife?** Fences that:

- are too high to jump;
- are too low to crawl under;
- have loose wires;
- have wires spaced too closely together;
- are difficult for fleeing animals or birds to see; or create a complete barrier.

### **When you design your fence, consider:**

- purpose of the fence;
- topography – hills, gullies, streams and wetlands;
- species of wildlife present daily or seasonal wildlife movements in the area;
- presence of water, food and cover for wildlife;
- presence of young animals.

### **The placement of fences is just as important as the type of fence used.**

Fencing need not restrict wildlife movement everywhere on your property. Wherever possible, design your fence to provide wildlife free travel to important habitats and corridors, as well as access to water. Wetlands and riparian habitats are especially important for all wildlife.

### **Fence and Crossing Placement**

Watch for daily and seasonal wildlife movement patterns and look for trails. Use special purpose fencing only in the areas needed, such as livestock pastures, livestock feeding areas, around haystacks, gardens, orchards, yards, play areas, or kennels. Design property boundary fences so wildlife can easily cross, or with gaps or lay-down sections for wildlife passage wherever livestock are not present.

Work with your land's topography. Swales, gullies, ridges and stream corridors can funnel wildlife through an area – keep these open to allow wildlife passage and avoid topography traps.

Place crossings, jumps, open gates and other wildlife openings in appropriate locations. Deer and elk are more likely to use openings at fence corners than in the middle of a fence run, unless there is cover, habitat or natural corridors or trails to attract them through. Intermittent openings should be placed where animals naturally travel: in riparian corridors, along gullies and ridges, and on existing game trails.

***Wildlife Friendly Ideal***

Wildlife friendly fences should be low enough for adult animals to jump, high enough for animals to crawl under, and minimize the chance of tangling. Also design the fence with:

- A top wire or rail preferably no more than 40" above the ground, and absolutely no more than 52";
- At least 12" between the top two wires;

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- At least 18" between the bottom wire or rail and the ground;
- Smooth wire or rail for the top, and smooth wire on bottom;
- No vertical stays;
- Posts at 16.5-foot intervals;
- Gates, drop-downs, or other passages where wildlife concentrate and cross.

References:

Paige, C. 2008. A Landowner's Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fences. Landowner/ Wildlife Resource Program, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena, MT. 44 pp.

National Audubon Society Audubon-at-Home, USDA-NRCS, Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch, Arizona Antelope Foundation. Wildlife Friendly Fence (Online).  
<http://www.audubonresearchranch.org/PDFs/FenceBrochure-May2008.pdf> accessed 7/23/09.