

Permanent Forest Openings for Wildlife

Job Sheet

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)
MU Extension - School of Natural Resources

Landowner:	Farm #:
Stand(s):	Tract #:
Date:	County:
Contact:	

WHY DEVELOP FOREST OPENINGS FOR WILDLIFE?

PURPOSE:

Permanent forest openings are clearings within a stand of timber that are usually planted to perennial green browse plants such as clover mixes, or left in natural, early successional herbaceous vegetation. These openings serve as a valuable source of food for wildlife including brood habitat for forest birds and browse for deer and wild turkey. Creating forest openings also improves habitat for forest edge species.



SPECIFICATIONS:

- Openings should be one-quarter to three acres in size.
- Permanent forest openings are generally not needed or justified in forested tracts less than 40 acres in size.
- No more than 10% of a forested tract should be devoted to permanent forest openings.
- A number of well-scattered openings are more beneficial than a single large opening of comparable size.
- **This tract should have** _____ openings approximately _____ acres in size installed and located according to attached Conservation Plan Map.
- Permanent forest openings must be placed on relatively flat and broad ridge tops where soil quality is typically better and erosion hazards are reduced.
- Avoid placing openings within 150 yards of existing water sources for the protection of amphibians.
- Openings should be cleared of all trees and woody vegetation including all stumps. Consider using removed materials for downed tree structures. See JS-Biol-21 Downed Tree Structure job sheet for details. Stump removal is necessary so that proper vegetation planting/response can occur. Do not leave any standing trees within the opening. Windrow, burn, scatter, cut up or remove excess downed trees and brush. If piling this material, attempt to incorporate as little soil in with the woody debris as possible, as "dirty" brushpiles make great predator habitat.
- Take into consideration the possibility of soil erosion. Avoid working on highly erosive sites and limit soil disturbance in areas of concentrated flow.
- Irregular shaped openings are preferred and provide great edge habitat for wildlife.
- Openings should be at least 30 feet wide.

- Manage for plant diversity. Plant permanent forest openings to green browse plots. Annual grain food plots, wildlife-friendly grasses and forbs, or natural regeneration into native herbaceous vegetation can also be utilized. See JS-BIOL-25 Food Plot Job Sheet.

MAINTENANCE:

- Control of sprouts, trees and brush is required as these often invade openings after construction. The opening will be maintained in an open, herbaceous condition.
- Openings should be kept on a disturbance schedule to encourage new growth of desired vegetation. A three-year cycle is good.
- Light disking is a cost-effective method to encourage the desired plant community. See JS-BIOL-24 Light Disking Job Sheet.
- Consider prescribed burning to help encourage herbaceous plant growth. Burn only under an approved burn plan from NRCS or MDC. See IS-MO-338 Prescribed Burning Information Sheet.
- Use herbicides to suppress invasive vegetation and to control noxious weeds.

PRIMARY HABITAT CONSIDERATIONS:

- Provide nesting and brood habitat for forest birds, turkeys, and other ground nesting wildlife.
- Provide natural food and cover for rabbits, deer, forest birds, and turkeys.

Consult with NRCS, MDC wildlife professionals, or University Extension for additional recommendations.

Comment:



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