



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources

10 BEST THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP WILDLIFE ON YOUR COMMERCIAL FORESTLAND

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Every forestland owner has different views of wildlife and different forest management objectives that may impact wildlife. Wildlife, of course, have various levels of impacts- real or perceived- on the health of the forest, on the landowners economic bottom line, and on the overall satisfaction or lack of the landowner derives from their forestland. Regardless of your overall objectives and the place wildlife may fit in, there are numerous things each forestland owner can do for wildlife on any stage of forestland development. The following 10 items are some of the most common and important planning and management measures that you can implement to address the widest array of wildlife species on almost any forested parcel- especially those managed for timber.

1. **MAKE WILDLIFE PART OF YOUR OVERALL FOREST MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES.** Although this may seem obvious to many- it is not practiced by most. This is no different than making site preparation, plantation management, thinning or harvest layout as objectives. Considering wildlife habitat development and needs, and wildlife populations in your long-range management schemes is just good business. This includes both desirable wildlife species as well as those that do or may damage forest resources. (See Dale Nolte article in Winter edition)
2. **FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH WILDLIFE SPECIES AND HABITAT EXPECTED IN YOUR AREA.** This is just as important as getting familiar with tree species and growth rates, site conditions, and other timber management parameters. In fact it is done the same way: read, take classes, ask questions, join organizations (such as the state farm forestry chapters), and the old time-tested method that successful tree farmers do so well- observe and record.
3. **INVENTORY HABITAT TYPES.** Just as you get familiar with your different timber stands and site characteristics and catalog these, the same can and should be done for wildlife habitat. More than 400 species of forest-dependent wildlife occur in the Pacific Northwest and they partition their basic habitat requirements among different stand sizes, age-classes, tree species and density, among other attributes. You can't do much about stand age and size but some key habitat components (described below) may be common to all stands. There are many ways to quantify habitat including listing several habitat variables on inventory cards in addition to the usual items when cruising forestland. A more subjective way is to just list the habitat components you observe on your forestland but it is difficult to record

quantifiable changes over time. What species you can expect is related to the different forest stand characteristics and the individual species' habitat requirements.

4. **MEASURE DECADENCE.** This refers to dead and dying trees – defined as snags and wildlife trees - those with a lot of defect such as broken or multiple tops, heart rot, or other forms of damage in addition to coarse woody debris - fallen trees, logs, large pieces of logging debris, and large fallen branches. The old adage that 'there's a lot of life left in that dead tree (or log)' is so true. In fact, better than a third of the forest dependent wildlife species find their food, shelter, or cover requirements in decadent trees and logs. Snags come in all sizes so don't overlook high stumps and small diameter suppressed trees as well when assessing this habitat component.
5. **ASSESS UNDERSTORY AND GROUND COVER.** This "brush" layer is food, shelter, and cover to well over 100 species of wildlife. Most of these understory trees, shrubs, and groundcover plants are partially shade tolerant. Pay particular attention to those that produce "mast"- berries, fruits, and nuts as these are particularly important. Consider how you can protect or even enhance some understory plant species within the confines of your timber management.
6. **LAYOUT ROADS AND SALE AREAS AND HARVEST TIMING TO MINIMIZE IMPACT TO WILDLIFE.** As example this may include no harvest during the spring or early summer nesting season if that is of concern or possibly no late winter harvest on wet unstable soils or in key winter range for some wildlife species. If you have choices you can decide where the best road locations are and how to lay out the unit to minimize habitat loss.

Well, the background education and planning is done. At harvest time you can put the planning steps into action.

7. **LEAVE A LEGACY WHEN CLEARCUTTING.** Of particular concern are snags, wildlife, trees, and coarse woody debris. These wildlife resources can be marked for retention at time of harvest. Where safety is an issue, consider clumping trees around the hazard tree so safety is not compromised. Even leaving high stumps standing or long-butts on the ground are excellent ways to retain some wildlife habitat structure. Questions always arise whether to clump or leave single trees. Why not use a combination of retention patterns so more diversity is added and you have more choices to minimize harvest and management problems?
8. **RETAIN EXISTING AND FUTURE HABITAT WHEN THINNING.** Poor quality trees or those with obvious signs of defect can be marked and retained for future wildlife use in stands slated for thinning. Consider a variable density thinning approach in order to open up some areas for more ground cover and shrub development and to retain some denser patches for hiding and shelter. Small diameter snags and smaller pieces of coarse woody debris can also be created and retained when thinning.

9. **PROTECT SPRINGS AND SEEPS.** These often get overlooked even where forest practice rules require their protection. Even the smallest of these contribute a great deal towards wildlife habitat. They serve as amphibian breeding pools, drinking water, and a source of forage and hiding cover around the wetted perimeter. Keep equipment and noxious weeds out of these and maintain a vegetated border when harvesting timber. With appropriate planning you can even develop some of these into a pool or series of small pools.

10. **SITE PREP AND SOW.** If you have done some harvest and subsequent site preparation you probably are going to get an invasion of some noxious weeds. Unfortunately, most of these have little wildlife value. Consider sowing one of the commercially available (or have one mixed) wildlife forage seed mixes along logging roads, skid roads, landings, on slash burns, steep hillsides, or other locations that need to be protected from erosion and weeds. Most mixes are not sown so heavily as to harm tree seedling growth nor do they include invasive species. You can even add some shrub seeds such as blue elderberry, cascara, serviceberry, or others in the mix to further enhance habitat in locations where they will not interfere with commercial tree growth.