



Assessing Land for It's Wildlife Potential

Jack Holman & Gary Homerstad

Whether you currently own a piece of property or are looking to buy, habitat diversity is the key for wildlife potential. With diverse habitat comes a greater diversity of wildlife species. The quantity and quality of wildlife within diverse habitat is dependent upon the degree of wildlife management activities and practices applied. Simply put, the five basic tools of wildlife management involve the plow, axe, cow, fire, and gun. It is important to incorporate each and not just one or two if you are to maximize the land's wildlife potential. A good wildlife management plan is a must.

Habitat is comprised of food, cover, water, space, and the optimum arrangement of the aforementioned. Primary wildlife foods include browse, mast, forbs, grasses, and supplemental forms such as crops or food plots, protein feed, and minerals.

Browse species are very important because they are available throughout the year. The leaves, mast, and tips of tender twigs are utilized. Browse species have varying degrees of utilization based on their palatability. Some of the major browse species include sumac, elm, oak, hackberry, and mulberry.

Forbs are high in protein and are generally preferred over most other food types but they are susceptible to drought and freezing temperatures. Forbs also have varying degrees of palatability. The leaves, stems, and seeds are consumed. Some examples of quality forbs include Engelmann's daisy, partridge pea, orange zexmania, butterfly weed, and Turk's cap.

Native grasses are utilized, but not nearly to the extent of browse and forbs. Tender shoots and the seeds are more often utilized. Tall native bunch grasses actually play a greater role for wildlife in the nesting and bedding cover they provide. Major species include big bluestem, little bluestem, yellow indiagrass, sideoats grama, eastern gamma, and switchgrass. Tame grasses are not considered to be very beneficial for wildlife. Land with

extensive stands of tame grasses minimizes habitat diversity. Some of the more common tame grasses include coastal bermudagrass, Bahia grass, King Ranch bluestem, buffelgrass, Kleingrass, and ryegrass.

Habitat cover takes on many forms and types. The general classifications include grassland, rangeland, timber, bottomland, riparian, and pasture. Topography is an important component of each and may vary from flat to hills and valleys. An interspersion of the various cover forms increase diversity and create an edge effect frequented by deer and other wildlife. Wildlife needs various types of cover including nesting, brooding, loafing, roosting, and escape. Any one type of cover that may be lacking can severely limit a wildlife population. Not all cover is good cover if it is in the form of noxious vegetation. Some native and most introduced species are extremely invasive and severely limit wildlife diversity in much the same way as tame pasture. Some examples include Chinese tallow trees, McCartney rose hedge, running live oak, huisache, mesquite, yaupon, privet, and eastern red cedar.

Water is rapidly becoming a very valuable economic resource. As the human demand for water increases, less and less of it will be available for wildlife use. Surface water is critical to wildlife, especially in the more arid regions of the state. A river, creek, or other drainage coursing through a property provides a natural distribution. For wildlife purposes, it is best if water is available on a one-quarter mile basis. This is often the case in the eastern half of the state. Lakes, ponds, tanks, wells, and/or troughs can be created to take up the slack where water distribution is lacking. Shallow water wetlands and moist soil units add elements of diversity that is especially valuable for migrating waterfowl.

Space is the habitat component hopefully comprising the optimum arrangement of food, cover, and water. The larger contiguous land masses are obviously more likely to contain the most diverse habitat and wildlife. All is not lost on smaller acreages, however, because more landowners are becoming members of wildlife management cooperatives. In that sense, small

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WASHINGTON COUNTY

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President's Remarks

A new year and a new president.....

My name is Sara Byman and I live in the Greenvine area of Washington County. I was introduced to the WC Wildlife Society in 2002 when my husband, Nelson, and I bought our property and decided to build a house and barn. New to country life, we quickly learned about wildlife management practices as we planted supplemental food plots and put up nest boxes. What an enlightening experience it has been!



I have enjoyed meeting like-minded people at the many programs, field days and annual meetings and have learned much about how to preserve and protect the land and our wildlife for future generations. Being active in the Greenvine Co-op and having served as its Co-Director and Director have prepared me to serve as your President of the Washington County Wildlife Society for 2007.

I would like to remind you that **it is time to renew your Wildlife Society membership for 2007**. Your participation is needed now more than ever. Your membership in the Washington County Wildlife Society insures continued participation in wildlife related projects, field days, workshops, and other educational events. Your dues help support and sponsor our local youth in wildlife camps, programs, and educational activities. With your generous support, the Society is expanding many of these efforts to include more students and different age groups. Also, with a one-time donation of \$1,000 or more, the Society will honor and recognize your lifetime commitment to the Society. You may mail or drop off your check at the Washington County office of the Texas Cooperative Extension located at 1305 East Blue Bell Road, Suite 104 in Brenham.

In an effort to provide better and more meaningful programs for the community, the WCWS has joined forces with the Texas Wildlife Association, Texas Master Naturalists, Native Plant Society, Bluebonnet Master Gardeners and Texas Bluebird Society to bring a very special program to you this year.

Please join us on Friday, May 25 for an informative program on **Rainbow Soil: Managing for the Ultimate in Soil Quality** presented by Dr. Patricia Richardson from The University of Texas at Austin. She is an expert in the area of ecologically sound land management and quite an entertaining speaker.

Help us get the word out to your family, neighbors and friends and join us for a great meal and an excellent program. There is a \$10 charge for this event and we ask that you kindly RSVP to the Extension office at 979 277-6212 by May 17.

I am looking forward to meeting all of you soon!

Sara Byman
President

The Planting of Supplemental Food Plots for Wildlife

The planting of supplemental food plots for wildlife seems to be a practice that is welcomed by most landowners and land managers who are interested in wildlife management. A well-planned food plot can provide as much as 4 to 5 tons of forage per acre. However, the maximum benefits can only be obtained if the food plot is a compliment to the native vegetation. Food plots should be available when native vegetation is lacking or is in low nutritional value. We generally refer to these times as stress periods. In our area these stress periods normally occur in mid to late summer and late winter prior to the spring green-up.

April is the time to start preparing to plant warm season plots. The success of the plot depends on the land managers ability to correctly choose an appropriate seed variety, plant in a suitable site and use the correct planting procedures. Some considerations before you plant may include: Where should I plant? What should I plant? When should I plant? How should I plant?

Where?

Best if plots are located adjacent to some type of escape cover and in good soils. If possible, use separate areas for warm season and cool season food plots. The size of the plots should be one to five acres for every hundred acres of habitat present. Several smaller plots spread throughout an area is better than on large plot. Long narrow plots are better than wide ones. Food plots should be fenced from cattle and the bottom wire should be at least eighteen inches from the ground. It is not recommended to plant plots near public roads since they might encourage illegal hunting.

What?

A combination cowpeas and some type of small grain works very well together in a summer food plot. Cowpeas will come in many varieties such as Iron and Clay, Chinese Red, Purple Hull and Black-eyed. Soybeans may also be used in place of Cowpeas. Small grains can consist of

milo, millet and sunflower. Many landowners have had good luck with mixing commercial "wild bird seed" with their cowpeas. The addition of small grains into the food plot will serve a dual purpose to provide seeds for many species of birds and also as the seed head mature it will provide a food source well into July and August for the deer and other wildlife.

When?

Warm season plots should be planted in mid April depending on available soil moisture. Food plots that are not planted by mid May increases the risk on not getting adequate rains to sustain growth.

How?

Cowpeas and small grains are fairly simple to plant; the site should be shredded and disked or tilled to create a clean seedbed. Approximately 50 lbs of cowpeas or soybeans and 25 lbs of small grains or wild bird seed should be planted per acre. The seed should be evenly spread over the area by a commercial seeder or by hand depending on the size of area to be planted. Seeds should then be lightly covered with a disk or some type of drag to insure ground to seed contact. The end results should be a planting depth around no more than 1 inch deep. Plots will need to be fertilized correctly to realize the full benefit. Soil test should be taken to determine the lime and fertilizer requirements.

Finally

Food plots are no way a cure-all for poor habitat management. Without consideration of the native food source and cover requirements for wildlife, food plots will not provide the adequate nutrition needed by most wildlife species on a daily basis. If you have questions about habitat management on your property please feel free to contact me: Robert Lehmann, Texas Parks and Wildlife (979) 277-6297 or come by my office in the Washington County Annex building located at the fairgrounds in Brenham.

Fawn Production

Excerpt from

DEER MANAGEMENT IN THE POST OAK BELT TPWD WILDLIFE DIVISION BULLETIN 7000-96

An adult doe in excellent habitat will normally have 2 fawns in late spring. These fawns are typically kept some distance apart and are hidden in tall grass if available. Fawns have little scent and will remain hidden if supplied with sufficient milk. When they become 4 or 5 weeks old they will begin to follow the doe. Fawns are usually weaned between 4 and 6 months old.

Most doe fawns will reach 6 months of age while the rut is in progress. With adequate nutrition as many as two-thirds of the doe fawns have been known to breed. If bred, doe fawns usually have only one fawn. Under less than optimal conditions or where deer are competing heavily with livestock or other deer, less than 10% of doe fawns will breed and adult does often will have only one fawn.

The number of deer, quality of habitat, degree of livestock competition and weather are common factors in determining the health of a fawn. If these factors are not favorable the fawn will not be born healthy and the doe will not supply enough milk. The fawn then may succumb to exposure and disease, or wander from its hiding place and be killed by predators.

Because of poor habitat management that results in improper nutrition and lack of tall grass cover, fawn production in our area typically averages less than 40 %. In other words only 1 fawn is raised per 3 does. This low production is unnecessary. With proper habitat management, addressing the food and cover requirements, the fawn production can be increased to near 100%.

WCWS Calendar

May 25 - Rainbow Soil: Managing for the Ultimate in Soil Quality

6:00 pm Social, 6:30 pm Fried Catfish Dinner, 7 pm Program

Presented by Pat Richardson, PhD. Washington County Event Center, 1305 E. Blue Bell Rd. \$10/per person. *RSVP to County Ag Extension Office 979-277-6212 before May 17.* Joint meeting with NPSOT, Texas Bluebird Society, Texas Master Gardeners, Texas Master Naturalists, Texas Wildlife Association and Washington County Wildlife Society. Sponsored by the Texas Cooperative Extension Service and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.

June 16 - Canoe Trip, Kid's Fishing in Stocked Pond, and Nature Outing at Lake Somerville

Members of WCWS are invited to a field trip for fun and learning at Nails Creek State Park on Lake Somerville Saturday June 16. Adults and Youth over 12 are invited to join a canoe paddling outing down Yegua Creek through vegetation and terrain not seen by many county residents. Birds, snakes, turtles, fish, deer, and wild hogs are also possible sights. It takes about three hours for the trip, so we will gather at the park boat ramp at 8:15 am to sign release forms and board a shuttle to the put-in on the Yegua. We should be back at the boat ramp by noon. Life jackets, canoes, paddles will be provided, or you can bring your own. The canoe trip will be guided by TPWD staff and supported by Texas Master Naturalist members

For those looking for a less strenuous outing, TPWD staff assisted by local members of Texas Master Naturalist program and your WCWS volunteers will have a Kid's Fish activity at pond in the park stocked with bream, small bass, and catfish. Rods, reels, bait will be provided or you can bring your own. It's a fun way to spend the morning with your kids or grandkids or to introduce new friends to the out of doors.

Park entrance fee is \$3/person 13 and older. For those taking the canoe trip and using TPWD canoes and equipment, the fee is \$10/person. If you bring your own canoe or kayak, there is no fee other than the entrance fee.

Bring a picnic lunch and we can all share a meal together and tell tales about the biggest fish caught or the pretties snake seen.

For more information on the Canoe Trip contact Dave Redden at 979-218-0493 (mobile) 936-878-1988 (home) or e-mail at dred-den@tconline.net. For more information on the Kid's Fish, contact Carrie at the Extension Office at 979-277-6212. We will need to know how many people to expect so we can have enough equipment ready for you.

Washington County Bird Watch

By Darrell Vollert

Spring migration for birds is well underway in the Central Brazos Valley, with the last two weeks of April and the first week of May being the peak time. Hawks, shorebirds, hummingbirds, flycatchers, vireos, swallows, and warblers are migrating through right now. These birds are known collectively as neotropical migrants.

They are migrating from their wintering grounds in the tropics to their nesting grounds in the temperate zone. Broad-winged Hawks, Upland Sandpipers, Chimney Swifts, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, White-eyed Vireos, Northern Parulas, Black-and-white Warblers, and Hooded Warblers are just a few of the neotropical migrants that have been seen in the area in recent weeks. In the coming weeks thrushes, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, and orioles will join the others and migrate through the area.



soon. Painted Buntings are abundant nesters in Washington County. Indigo Buntings nest in riparian areas in the county. Both of these buntings love millet seed. They will eat seed on the ground and in hopper feeders. Eastern Kingbirds, Indigo and Painted Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks, Dickcissels, and other birds that nest here are attracted to row crops such as milo, sorghum, wheat, sunflower seed, and corn. They eat tons of insects that infest these crops. ~

Darrell Vollert is a native of Washington County. He leads private birding tours in Texas, and assists with the coordination of birding field trips for the Texas Ornithological Society in southeast Texas. Look for more birding articles from Darrell in our future newsletters.

If you do not have your hummingbird feeders up, now is a good time to clean them and fill them with sugar water. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and a few Black-chinned Hummingbirds are migrating through the area. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds nest here. Use four parts water to one part sugar. Avoid using red food coloring. Food coloring damages their little kidneys. There is enough red coloration on hummingbird feeders to attract them. Native plants that are attractive to hummingbirds include salvias, hummingbird bush, turk's cap, cigar plant, firecracker fern, and fire spike. All of these natives do well in our soils.

Painted Buntings and Indigo Buntings will be arriving very

A field trip is scheduled to coincide with the peak of migration in the Central Brazos Valley. The trip will be held in the Brazos Bottoms east of Chappell Hill on Saturday, May 5th. The trip is limited to 10 participants and the cost is \$15.00 per person. The duration is 8am-11am.

Contact Darrell Vollert at 979-251-4986 or visit his website at: www.DarrellVollertNatureTours.com for more information. Darrell's bird guiding services are available for individual and small group trips to the Upper Texas Coast, East Texas Pineywoods, Texas Hill Country, and the Central Brazos Valley.

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properties are managed as one large property, except by many managers. For example, in general, deer require an optimum of 50 percent brushy cover. A large property would have a good arrangement of cover if it were distributed throughout the ranch, rather than all lumped into one corner. A small property might be comprised of 100 percent brushy cover but is too small to otherwise meet all the requirements of a deer's home range, while a neighboring property of equal size may be mostly open comprising better quail habitat. And so forth. A good wildlife management plan is all it takes in either case.

There are variables such as soil types that will have a bearing on just how much habitat diversity can be created on

a given property. For example, chalky/gravelly soils are not as productive as combinations of clay, sandy, and loamy soils. Combinations of clay, silty, and peaty soils make good ponds, wetlands and moist soil areas. In actuality, several soil types comprising a property lend more to habitat diversity.

No matter the property, habitat diversity and wildlife can be enhanced. The degree of management and expense will be driven by the factors discussed heretofore.~

Both Holman and Homerstad are members of the TOWMA Advisory Committee. Holman is past president and co-founder of his local WMA and is a ranch broker. Homerstad spent 33 years as a wildlife biologist with TPWD before retiring in 2006 as TPWD Technical Guidance Biologist.



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Washington County Wildlife Society
Wildlife Management Associations (Coops)

