



Natural Resources
Conservation Service - Delaware



INTEGRATING WILDLIFE HABITAT

INTRODUCTION

For anyone who has ever watched a great blue heron in flight, or a deer bound across an open field, it's easy to understand how the presence of wildlife enriches our lives. Delaware landowners play an important role in providing the habitat upon which our state's diverse and magnificent wildlife depend.

Wildlife habitat can be easily integrated and enhanced in agricultural operations. Grasslands, hedgerows, riparian areas, and wetlands can provide wildlife with much-needed food and shelter. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers landowners both technical and financial assistance to improve wildlife habitat on their land.

CONSERVATION PLANNING

For more than 75 years, NRCS has placed a high priority on helping agricultural producers meet their environmental and economic goals through conservation planning. NRCS conservationists work one-on-one with producers to design a conservation plan that provides scientifically sound alternatives for accomplishing their goals and a timeline for implementing conservation practices, including those for wildlife habitat.

A VARIETY OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES

There are a wide variety of conservation practices that landowners and operators can implement to enhance wildlife habitat on agricultural lands. Practices can be as simple as planting native grasses, forbs, shrubs, or trees; planting field borders and hedgerows to support native pollinators; fencing livestock out of sensitive riparian areas; or enhancing a pond to attract wetland-dependent species. (See the next page for specific examples of conservation practices.)

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

EQIP, a voluntary conservation program administered by NRCS, provides technical and financial assistance to eligible participants who want to create or improve wildlife habitat on properties that they own or manage. This funding is intended to help participants develop habitat for upland, wetland, aquatic, and riparian species.

Also through EQIP, additional financial incentives are available in Delaware to provide optimal habitat for the bog turtle, a federally-listed threatened species.

About the USDA NRCS, Delaware

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Delaware works to protect and conserve natural resources on private lands. Contact your local USDA Service Center for more information.

Delaware USDA Service Centers:

Kent County: 302-741-2600
New Castle County: 302-832-3100
Sussex County: 302-856-3990
(Select extension 3 for NRCS)



AVAILABLE CONSERVATION PRACTICES FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT

NRCS Delaware offers technical and financial assistance on a number of conservation practices that promote wildlife habitat on agricultural lands. Here are some examples:



Conservation Cover and Tree/Shrub Planting

Plantings of grasses, legumes, wildflowers, trees and shrubs can provide a diversity of food resources, cover and shelter that allows ground-nesting birds, pollinators, and other wildlife species to

flourish. Conservation cover and tree/shrub plantings are usually established in large blocks or whole fields, but can be any size or shape.



Field Border

A strip of perennial vegetation, primarily grasses and forbs (but may include shrubs), can be planted along one or more edges of a field to provide nesting and winter cover, and travel corridors

that connect to other wildlife habitat areas. Flowering plants can be included to provide pollen and nectar for pollinators.



Hedgerow or Windbreak

Linear plantings of trees and shrubs within and around fields can provide food, cover and travel corridors for wildlife. With the inclusion of appropriate flowering species, pollinators

will have access to needed pollen and nectar.



Riparian Herbaceous Cover

A strip of herbaceous vegetation, usually native grasses and wildflowers, can be planted adjacent to streams, ditches, ponds, or other water bodies. This practice improves water quality for fish

and other aquatic life, and provides travel corridors and nesting cover for terrestrial wildlife.



Streambank Protection

Measures that stabilize and protect the banks of streams or constructed channels can be used to control erosion and improve water quality. Streambank protection measures may include woody and herbaceous plantings that improve

habitat for riparian wildlife.



Pond

A pond can be managed to restrict livestock access and provide habitat for waterfowl, fish, and other aquatic species, as well as a water source for upland wildlife.



Shallow Water Area

Shallow water can be provided and managed to benefit primarily waterfowl and wading birds, but also to support reptiles, amphibians, insects, and other wildlife that need shallow water during

at least part of their life cycle.



Wetland Restoration

Former or degraded wetlands can be restored to a close approximation of the pre-disturbance condition to provide natural wetland functions and wildlife habitat. This practice involves restoring

wetland hydrology to the extent feasible, and may include planting of native wetland vegetation.



Wildlife Habitat Management

Upland and wetland habitats can be actively managed to provide nesting, feeding, resting, and protective cover for terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.

Management of vegetation may be appropriate in both upland and wetland habitats, and may include planting of annual food crops for wildlife. Water level management may be utilized in wetland habitats.

MANAGEMENT OF ESTABLISHED PRACTICES

Most conservation practices need some periodic management to maintain the desired habitat. For herbaceous plantings, management may include mowing, burning, disking, and/or using approved herbicides every 2 to 3 years to maintain the planned vegetative community. Plantings damaged by storms, livestock, chemicals, tillage or equipment traffic may need to be shaped and reseeded. Tree and shrub plantings usually do not need regular management, except to remove undesirable species or thin the stand. Once established, most wildlife habitat plantings do not need additional plant nutrients.

To maximize wildlife benefits, do not disturb habitat areas during the primary nesting season (April 15 - August 15). Spot treat noxious weeds as needed and control livestock and equipment access to the area.

For more information on NRCS conservation programs and services, visit:

www.de.nrcs.usda.gov

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