



Wild Know-How

Fall 2017

A Private Lands Newsletter from the Division of Wildlife

Kentucky Completes Grouse Restoration Plan

By Zak Danks
KDFWR Ruffed Grouse & Wild Turkey Program Coordinator

After a year of collaboration, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) released a bold 10-year restoration plan entitled “Kentucky Ruffed Grouse and Young Forest Strategic Plan 2017-2027” (<http://fw.ky.gov/Hunt/Pages/Grouse.aspx>). The plan seeks to increase grouse populations on focal areas (public and private) and build partnerships that can lead to better hunting and long-term forest sustainability over the next 10 years.

Although technical in nature, the document was designed to be visually appealing and easy to read for everyone from dedicated grouse enthusiasts, to wildlife-minded landowners, to professional land managers – in short, anyone with a keen interest in bringing grouse back and/or managing for healthy forests.

Like Kentucky’s successful quail restoration plan (“Road to Recovery”), the grouse plan hinges on the creation and ongoing management of suitable



Joe Lacefield photo

habitat. Having “Young Forest” in the title makes this clear, indicating the need for more early stages of forest growth, called succession, whether it is the first 25 years after a farm field is abandoned or the 15 to 20 years after a stand of timber is cut. Unlike past wildlife restoration plans for deer, turkey, and elk, the plan does not involve stocking birds. Why? First, the primary factor limiting grouse populations is the lack of suitable young forest habitat. Releasing birds into older aged forest would be a recipe for disaster. Second, grouse are still present across the rugged, forested expanses of eastern Kentucky. If we act now to

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KENTUCKY
QUAIL
PROJECT



FALL CHECKLIST

September

- ___ Order tree and shrub seedlings.
- ___ Spray herbicide to kill fescue.
- ___ Sow clover and cool season grasses.
- ___ Prepare firebreaks and seed to winter wheat.

October - November

- ___ Leave a portion of crops standing all winter for wildlife.
- ___ Leave food plots fallow for two years (minimum).
- ___ Plan for next year’s projects.
- ___ Do not fall-plow crop fields.
- ___ Order catalogs for seedlings, shrubs, or seed for spring.
- ___ Flood moist soil management units.





Brian Clark photo

Clover Plantings

By Chris Grasch
KDFWR Private Lands Biologist

One of the questions I'm often asked is "what should I plant in my food plot?" Typically food is not a limiting factor for wildlife in Kentucky but if asked, my answer is usually a mixture of clover. A small clover plot can be very attractive to many game and nongame species. In addition to the nutrition clover provides it can make excellent brood rearing habitat, fix nitrogen in the soil and provide pollinator habitat for bees and butterflies. Also, if managed properly a clover planting can last 3 to 4 years reducing the cost and labor of replanting an annual food plot.

There are several ways to plant clover and several steps to help insure you are successful. First it's always help-

ful to get a soil test. Clover requires a pH of around 6.0 to 7.0 and a soil test can help make sure you apply the right amount of lime to your area to meet this requirement. Next make sure you have your area prepared for planting, this may require herbicide applications, mowing and/or disking. The key is having enough bare ground so the seed gets good seed-to-soil contact, making sure to avoid planting your seed too deep. Clover planted deeper than 1/4 inch may not emerge, ideally clover should be planted at a depth of 1/8 inch. Next select the clover species you want to plant. There are many varieties of clover to choose from and some will grow better in certain locations than others. I like a combination of ladino clover (2lb/acre) and medium red clo-

ver (4lb/acre). These are readily available at most farm and seed supply stores.

Clover can be planted in the spring or fall by broadcasting or drilling the seed, my preference is a fall planting usually in September or early October. Clover can also be planted in late winter or early spring by a method known as frost seeding. Broadcast your seed in February or early March on a heavy frost or snow. Frost seeding takes advantage of a process called "heaving" where moisture in the soil freezes and expands upward. When the frozen moisture melts, it carries

your seed into cracks and crevices for excellent seed to soil contact. Clover is a small, dense seed and germinates at lower temperatures, beginning growth early in the spring, which helps clover establish itself before competition from other vegetation.

Once your clover is planted monitor the area for competition. Clover plots will usually need to be mowed one to two times a year to avoid grasses or weeds overgrowing the area. Unless competition is taking over your plot do not cut clover in late June thru early August to avoid damaging your clover and possible ground nests.

Contact your local wildlife biologist to discuss clover plantings and other options for providing and improving wildlife habitat on your property.

Encourage Bats On Your Land

By Zack Couch
KDFWR At Risk Species Biologist

Kentucky is home to approximately 15 species of bat. Some species, like the Eastern red bat, occur statewide in a variety of forested (and even urban) habitats. Other species occupy more restrictive habitats; the Virginia big-eared bat, for example is only found in 9 eastern Kentucky counties where it inhabits caves in oak/hickory or beech/hemlock forests. Regardless of your location in the state, your local bat population provides an important value to your community. From preying on mosquitos that can ruin your family picnic, to controlling populations of crop pests that cause significant economic loss to farmers; the bats you see flying through the tree line at dusk benefit everyone.

A few options exist for landowners interested in encouraging bat activity on their land for pest control, species conservation, or wildlife viewing opportunities.

Bat Houses

Several “bat house” designs are found with a quick search on line. One of the most common designs, called the “rocket box,” can be constructed easily and cheaply from materials found at your local hardware store. It is important to remember when installing bat boxes, regardless of design, that height and sunlight are the two most important considerations. Placing bat houses 12 feet (or more) in the air, in areas that receive full sunlight, will provide greater success. Also, be sure to allow for a clear flight path in and around the opening to the bat house.

Water Sources

Water sources, especially in the

dry summer months, are a vital component of quality bat habitat. Farm ponds in an open field, small woodland ponds, stock tanks, and creeks provide areas for bats to not only get a drink, but also to forage on insects utilizing the same resource. Installation of any water source is nearly always beneficial to wildlife. Landowners who install ridgetop ponds (especially in wooded areas) provide an important water source for bats to utilize when emerging at dusk from a hot day in their roost. Additionally, these ponds can provide quality habitat for native amphibians.

Healthy Forests

Many of Kentucky’s bat species live in cracks and crevices in trees during the warm summer months. Trees with “exfoliating bark” that is peeling away from the trunk provides an excellent roost to hide from predators and raise their pups. Live white oaks and shagbark hickories

are highly desirable roost trees due to their exfoliating (or shaggy) bark. Additionally, dead trees are often utilized as roosts. Called snags, trees of a variety of species, including maple and ash, often provide excellent roosting opportunities as their bark peels away from the trunk. Landowners should try to maintain a wildlife friendly forest by encouraging the growth of mature white oaks and hickories (which also makes a great place to hunt deer, turkey, and several species of small game) and not cutting down dead trees unless they pose a safety risk.

Landowners who take an interest in promoting bat habitat on their property will be rewarded with less time swatting at mosquitos and more time spent relaxing on the front porch, or along a field edge, stream, or pond watching bats perform acrobatic maneuvers throughout the night sky in search of their next meal.



John MacGregor photo



Brian Grossman photo

Deer Fawning Habitat

By Kyle Sams, KDFWR Deer & Elk Program Biologist

One of the most important and often overlooked aspects of deer habitat is fawning habitat. White-tailed deer fawns require cover to hide from predators. Quality fawning habitat consists of dense vegetation at the ground level. The best way to get that dense vegetation is with early successional habitat. Early successional habitat is a term describing habitat with vigorously growing grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees that provide excellent food and cover for wildlife but need disturbance to be maintained. Early successional habitat can be achieved by leaving the tractor and bushhog in the barn, allowing the fields to grow into early successional dense vegetation. There are situations that do require more hands on management in order to achieve this habitat such as converting thick stands of fescue into more wildlife friendly habitat. Because fescue can out compete native vegetation,

it is best to consult your local Private Lands Biologist to get guidance on the best way to remove and convert these fescue stands. Removing fescue can be accomplished by using prescribed fire, disking, and/or herbicides. On the other hand, if your property consists of mostly timber, the best procedure to create fawning habitat is to conduct a timber stand improvement. Thinning out a portion of the less desirable species such as red maple or beech will open the canopy allowing the sunlight to penetrate to the ground level. In addition to the timber stand improvement, you may want to utilize prescribed fire on a 3 to 4 year rotation to stimulate understory growth. Whether in timber or open ground, the key to maintaining your newly acquired early successional habitat is disturbance. This again can be achieved through prescribed fire, cutting, or herbicide applications.

Creating fawning habitat does not just provide dense vegetation for fawns to hide, it also provides escape cover



WINTER CHECKLIST

December

- ___ Check for wildlife use of your habitat improvement projects.
- ___ Check fences to keep livestock out of woodlands.
- ___ Hinge-cut cedars and/or create brush piles.
- ___ Plant tree and shrub seedlings.
- ___ Conduct timber stand improvements.

January

- ___ Contact a wildlife biologist to discuss upcoming planting season.
- ___ Take soil samples to determine soil nutrient needs.
- ___ Prepare firebreaks for upcoming prescribed burns.
- ___ Order seeds for spring planting.

February

- ___ Mow Korean lespedeza or clover fields to encourage new growth.
- ___ Burn or mow fescue sod in preparation for converting to other cover types.
- ___ Disk fields in preparation for renovation to clover and grass.
- ___ Erect, clean, or repair nest boxes; check predator guards.
- ___ Install nesting platforms for geese.

and additional forage for your deer population. Along with these benefits for deer, early successional habitat is excellent for small game species and many other species of wildlife!

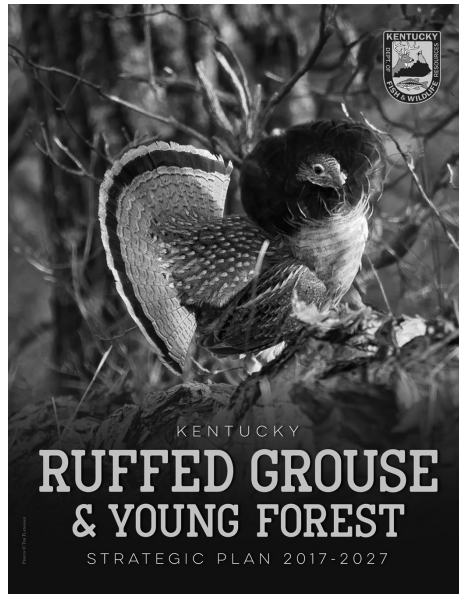
For more information on deer habitat, contact the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources at 1-800-858-1549.

“Plan,” continued

create structurally diverse young forest habitats among more mature forests, populations of native birds will experience better survival and reproduce as they have in localized storm damaged areas. The 2012 tornado in northeast Kentucky is a recent example showing how grouse are on the increase thanks to localized habitat creation.

Many facets of Kentucky’s grouse plan are underway. For example, Northeast Region staff have managed over 3,600 acres of forest in 2016 and so far in 2017! Much of this has been with prescribed fire and forest stand improvement that improves growing conditions for desirable plant species. Over 700 acres of invasive plants have been treated, a key factor to ensure healthy forests. Over 130 acres of timber have been harvested commercially, with more scheduled in the coming years. Timber harvest can be an efficient means to remove wood volume, which both creates young forest structure needed by grouse and makes growing space for young oaks that need sunlight.

Another major facet of the plan seeks partnerships with Kentucky’s forest sector, from foresters and loggers to industry. The only real way to fuel on-going habitat management for grouse and sustainable, healthy forests will involve better utilization of lower grade timber standing in east Kentucky’s woods. Our partners with the Division of Forestry, UK Forestry Extension, and the Kentucky Forest Industries Association have been working on this front for a long time. It’s time the “thunder chicken” stepped to the plate, adding the weight of the wildlife commu-



nity and habitat interests to the need to grow jobs for a depressed region.

Another encouraging element of the plan involves young forest habitat work by private forest landowners. Since 2013, KDFWR has partnered with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to deliver the Southeastern Kentucky Early Successional Habitat Initiative. This involves free technical habitat assistance and a competitive cost-share program designed to help landowners create young forest habitat. “SEKESHI” is a wing of the beneficial Environmental Quality Incentives Program. To date, over 3,000 acres have been enhanced through these EQIP contracts. For more information, contact KDFWR’s NRCS liaison for east Kentucky, Randall Alcorn, at 859-745-3156, extension 156.



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PRIVATE LANDS BIOLOGISTS

