



Wild Know-How

Fall 2019

A Private Lands Newsletter from the Division of Wildlife



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.



Your land matters; more importantly *you* matter!

John J. Morgan, Small Game Program Coordinator, KDFWR

Wildlife, water quality, air quality, and soil health all depend on people. The human footprint on earth is just that substantial! To take a line from our friendly neighborhood Spiderman, “with great power comes great responsibility.” How each landowner chooses to use their land has an effect on natural resources. How society (as a whole) values the land is paramount to not only the future of the natural world, but the well-being of future generations of people.

In the US, the average state is 74%

privately owned. In KY, that number climbs to 93%! Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources has one of the country’s largest private lands programs to support wildlife, because the resources we cherish call your land “home”. Our partnership with you and other Kentuckians is working toward a future of leaving the land better than we found it. We aim for our children and grandchildren to enjoy a better tomorrow, because of what we choose to do today. For that aim to become a reality, we have work to do!

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Bearwise Kentucky

**John Hast, Bear/Furbearer/Wild Pig
Program Coordinator, KDFWR**

The return of black bears to the forested mountains of eastern Kentucky is a testament to the care landowners have given this area over the last eighty years. Our ancestors unintentionally overharvested game and timber throughout much of the Cumberland Plateau. Slowly, this area has flourished and returned to an area known for its vast tracts of productive forestland. As these forests returned, so too did the black bear by population expansion from Virginia, West Virginia, and Tennessee.

For many landowners across eastern Kentucky, their relationship with bears may become strained due to potential damage these animals can inflict around the home and farm. In the summer months, the most common complaint we receive about bears involves garbage. The first step for any landowner in bear country is to have a method with which to secure your home garbage. This can be as complex as a bear proof container or as simple as leaving your trash can in the garage or outbuilding until the morning of pickup. Securing your garbage will keep bears from frequenting the areas



around your home and from developing a taste for human foods.

Bears also frequently damage fruit trees, bee yards, and small chicken coups in search of food. These crops, along with garden plots, can easily be protected with an electric fence. Additionally, bee yards and chickens should be placed away from timbered areas and watercourses as these habitats are frequently traveled by bears. Luckily, for recreational farm owners interested in attracting deer, most typical food plot plantings will not be of interest to bears. Corn, on the other hand, will be especially attractive once the corn reaches the milk stage in mid-August. Protection of these plots can be achieved with an electric fence, but avoiding planting corn is best.

A common frustration with hunters is bears destroying corn feeders set up for deer. Tactics hunters use to keep deer feeders safe include hanging them from cable or applying grease to the

pole in which the feeder is attached. For those hunters in areas with a lower bear density, emptying the feeder for a week or two will likely cause the bear to move on in search of a better food source. Hunters have also reported damage to tree stands, especially the foam seat cushion,

and ATV seats. Bears have a curiosity often quenched by their strength. If they wonder what might be inside of an ATV seat, for instance, they simply tear it open and find out!

Hunters who encounter a bear while hunting should not approach the animal. It is suggested hunters make themselves known to the bear as opposed to remaining hidden. With relatively poor eyesight, bears may not realize what you are until they are downwind and catch your scent. Don't sit still and let a bear walk up to you – stand up, take your facemask off and yell at the bear. Don't be that guy on YouTube taking video of a bear as it climbs up your tree stand.

For more information on living and hunting in bear country, please go to www.bearwise.org. This site includes information on constructing electric fences and building garbage enclosures, as well as information on safely hiking and hunting in areas with bears.



Help fund bobwhite restoration by
purchasing the quail license plate.
You can follow our progress at
facebook.com/KentuckyQuail



What's Next? What To Do When Your USDA Contract Expires

**Chris Mason, Private Lands
Biologist, KDFWR**

Dear Participant:
Thank you for being part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Farm Service Agency records show one or more of your contracts expire on September 30, 2019.

You may be one of many landowners who have received a similarly addressed letter from the USDA and are now faced with making decisions for acreage that has been providing wildlife habitat for a decade or more. Once your CRP contract has expired you are free to crop, graze, hay, or use the land tied to the program at your discretion. But, what about the habitat and wildlife response you have enjoyed for years and the program income you have counted on? Here are some ideas that might help.

Check with your local USDA office to see if all or some of your expiring CRP acreage is eligible for re-enrollment. For CRP or CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) acreage not eligible for re-enrollment, check to see what your options are for transitioning into a new continuous CRP contract. The continuous CRP program payments may not be what you have come accustomed to and not include all the expired acreage, especially if you were enrolled in CREP, but it could be enough to make it worth keeping habitat and wildlife on the farm.

To explore longer-term conservation benefits, ask your local USDA office if you have acreage eligible for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Agricul-



tural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Wetland Reserve Easements under this program have great wildlife benefits and very attractive financial incentives. The emphasis of the program is to protect, restore, and enhance wetland functions and values for migratory waterfowl and a variety of environmental benefits. Additionally, NRCS handles all of the restoration work and associated costs.

If you are thinking of converting some or all of your expiring acreage to agriculture use, it does not mean you have to sacrifice all the wildlife benefits of the habitat you established and maintained through CRP. Consider using NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that will provide incentives to incorporate quality wildlife habitat on working lands. Maybe EQIP can help with that needed fencing while also providing incentives to establish wildlife and pollinator hab-

itat along a stream or woodland edge.

Although your contract is expiring, it does not mean the associated habitat and wildlife have to expire. It may simply be re-enrollment that lets you hold onto the habitat you worked hard to establish and maintain, or it may require maintaining quality wildlife habitat outside of involvement in a USDA program. More likely, it will take a somewhat complicated approach of transitioning into one or a combination of programs that assist with maintaining and enhancing the habitat left when your CRP contract has expired.

Start by reaching out to your local Private Lands or Farm Bill Biologist. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife has dedicated wildlife biologists serving private landowners in every county that can help with assessing your existing CRP habitat and navigating conservation options after your contract has expired.

Prescribed Fire 101

**Jimmy Woods, Public Lands
Biologist, KDFWR**

Songbirds or trophy whitetails? Butterflies or bobwhites? Rabbits or wild turkeys?

Regardless of the animal you are managing for, prescribed fire can play a role in improving habitat on your property. However, unlike many other habitat improvement practices, the presence of fire alone does not improve habitat. Instead, fire is a tool, and if used correctly, many different habitat improvements can be achieved. Like any tool, fire can be used most effectively in the hands of a professional. That being said, having a basic understanding of prescribed fire will help you determine when a fire would be the appropriate tool for the job.

Not all fires are the same. One fire may consume only fine grass and dry leaves while another may consume large logs and brush. The differences in the way a fire behaves are caused by interactions between the fuel the fire is burning (grasses, leaves, or otherwise) and the conditions in which the fuel

exists (i.e. the weather conditions, the time of year, or the topography). By understanding how these factors interact a fire can be prescribed during a specific time of year under specific conditions in order to produce the results you want. The ability to manipulate a fire's intensity by choosing when and where to burn is what allows fire to be used as a tool.

Among the most common reasons for using prescribed fire is the objective of reducing woody vegetation in open fields. This is important because, through succession, open fields are constantly being invaded by shrubs and trees. If no action is taken, these areas eventually lose their grass component and transition into forested habitats. Prescribed fire can be used to turn back the clock by killing the woody species in the field. The best time of year to accomplish this is in the late summer and early fall (September- October). By preserving the integrity of these grassy areas, a wide variety of wildlife species are likely to see a benefit, including quail, rabbits, deer, and many songbird species.

The late summer and early fall is also an excellent time to burn Native Warm Season Grass (NWSG) stands. While NWSG grasses are very beneficial to many wildlife species, their greatest contribution comes in the structure they create and not in their food value. Over time NWSG stands can become too thick for many species of wildlife. By burning these grass stands during the late growing season the grasses can be thinned, resulting in more beneficial structure for wildlife.

There are countless other ways prescribed fire can be used, and the more you learn about prescribed fire, the



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.

more applications you will find. Of all the tools I have used to improve wildlife habitat, I have not found any with as wide a range of applications as prescribed fire. And here's the good news — you don't have to do it alone. To learn more about whether prescribed fire is a good fit for your property, contact your local Private Lands Biologist.

“Land,” continued

We are entering a period of global mass extinctions, and many of our once common species are struggling. The planet is trying to tell us something. In the Commonwealth, the once common “bob-white” whistle echoed across all 120 counties. Everyone knew the bob-white, now many Kentuckians have

never heard one. Monarch butterflies and bees did their pollination work without much fanfare. It was just – normal. Bees are now “hired” to conduct pollination for some forms of agriculture. Bats zipped about in the waning light eliminating many of man’s insect pests, but a new disease threatens their existence. Grassland songbirds created a spring symphony that didn’t seem

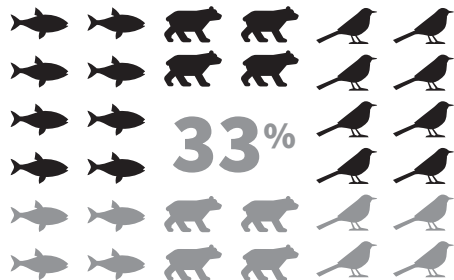
that important at the time, but their melodies are slowly waning from our fields. Think about watching a movie without the musical soundtrack. Music just makes things better. Nature is our daily symphony. In many cases, you don’t truly notice background sound until it’s gone. Even worse, a slow erosion of sound over long periods of time risks recognition of that loss. We are experiencing sound erosion!

Turning the corner for meaningful natural resource conservation doesn’t happen by accident. It happens by a movement spawned by the will of the people. “We’re with the government, and we’re here to help” just doesn’t resonate well, particularly with today’s political turmoil. Trust in government is low, arguably, an all-time low. Successful management of forests, fields, and waters hinges on passionate landowners like you. We’ve been here before, our ancestors caused the extinction of the passenger pigeon and decimated the abundant buffalo. We’ve polluted waters to the point that they sustained fire. We drove our national symbol to the verge of extinction. We – the people – responded and demanded change. It’s time to demand that we do better! That demand starts with you. Reach out to your neighbors and collaborate on improved land management, communicate with your legislators and make conservation a significant political issue, and demand more from state and local governments. Yes, that even includes us! It’s our responsibility to leave the land better than we found it; it’s time to answer the call.



America’s Fish & Wildlife are in Danger

We’re facing a funding challenge that threatens our nation’s precious fish and wildlife



Americans love the outdoors and the wildlife that inhabits it... but 33% of all U.S. species are at risk of becoming endangered

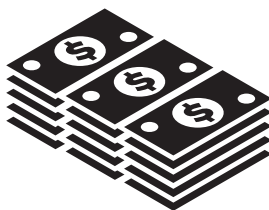
What will it take to protect our nation’s fish and wildlife?

Current Annual State Wildlife Grant Funding (nationally)



\$62 MILLION

Wildlife Funding Needed Annually (nationally)



\$1.3 BILLION



More funding for wildlife means more funding for wildlife habitat on private lands. To learn more about this important initiative please visit OurNatureUSA.com.



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PRIVATE LANDS BIOLOGISTS

