Temporary Forest Openings for Wildlife

Job Sheet

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)
University Outreach and Extension – The School of Natural Resources

For:	**County:**
Field(s):	**Farm #:**
Date:	**Tract #:**
Designed By:	**Contact Information:**

PURPOSE:

Temporary forest openings, often called group openings, are essentially small clearcuts created in a forest to provide early successional forest habitat for wildlife. The purpose of temporary openings is to provide sunlight to the forest floor, which will result in an explosion of sprouts, shrubs, grass, and herbaceous vegetation. The resulting thicket provides high quality food and cover for a large number of wildlife species, especially neotropical songbirds, wild turkey, ruffed grouse and whitetail deer. Foresters often use group openings to help regenerate shade-intolerant trees such as oaks.

A new temporary forest opening.

SPECIFICATIONS:

- Openings should be irregularly shaped and located on flat or gently sloping ground, to avoid causing erosion. Openings should be distributed throughout the landscape, and need not comprise more than 5-10% of the total forested acreage.
- A number of well-scattered openings are more beneficial than a single large opening of comparable size.
- South facing slopes are preferred since they tend to remain free of snow for a longer time in the spring and fall.
- Openings are generally not necessary in forested sites of less than 40 acres in size if quality edge habitat exists adjacent to fields and other open areas.
- Temporary Forest Openings are created with a chainsaw by cutting and dropping all trees and brush in an area 1-5 acres in size, within a large block of forest. All woody stems over 1" in diameter should be cut, and stumps left no higher than 6" for desirable species and 18" for others. Stumps of undesirable tree species may be treated with herbicide to prevent resprouting, while desirable species such as oak are often cut low to the ground and left untreated to encourage quality stump sprouts.
- This practice is generally not suited to the use of heavy equipment.

Desired vegetative response one year later.

- Openings should be placed in recently harvested areas where few or no quality trees remain. Otherwise, sites should be chosen that exhibit poor tree form, growth and vigor, poor species composition, or little potential for future timber sales.

MAINTENANCE:

- By the temporary nature of these openings, some wildlife benefits will disappear as the new seedlings and saplings form a canopy and site matures to a more forest-like condition.
- Create new openings periodically as existing openings "disappear".
- Follow-up timber stand improvement can be used to thin overstocked situations that occur as openings mature back to a forested condition.
- Use herbicides to suppress invasive vegetation and to control noxious weeds.

PRIMARY HABITAT CONSIDERATIONS:

- Provide nesting and brood habitat for songbirds, turkey, and other ground nesting wildlife.
- Provide natural food and cover for rabbits, deer, and turkeys.

Consult with an NRCS or MDC wildlife biologist or forester to avoid picking sites containing valuable timber potential. Contact your University Outreach and Extension Center for additional information on wildlife habitat management.

Comment:

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