



# FOREST OPENINGS FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT

(647)  
Biology Job Sheet #4

## Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - Minnesota

### WHAT ARE FOREST OPENINGS?

A forest opening is a grassy field dominated by herbaceous plants. Openings are important because they provide edge, produce important foods during critical times of the year, and are used for nesting and bedding areas. Openings provide a nutritious, high protein source of food, especially in the early spring and late fall when other foods are limited.



Openings are typically constructed or maintained where white-tailed deer management is a goal. However, over 150 wildlife species use openings at some point during their lives, including black bear, moose, ruffed grouse, woodcock and wild turkey.

### REQUIREMENTS

Knowing what you have, what you want, and developing a plan to improve your habitat is the essence of a successful project. The design, layout, and timing of opening establishment and maintenance varies with the species being managed. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can assist in developing a specific project plan.

Openings should be...

- Established on upland sites with south or southeast facing slopes. These sites are preferred because they tend to remain free of snow for a longer period of time in spring and fall. South facing aspects also tend to

green up earlier in the spring.

- The recommended size of openings varies by species requirements. Forest openings should have a 3:1 ratio of length to width, and generally range from 0.5 acres to 10.0 acres in size. Forest openings of 1-3 acres are typically desirable. Woodland sites <40.0 acres in size generally will not benefit from openings.
- Caution should be exercised when proposing forest openings in woodland sites larger than 250 contiguous acres in size. Forest openings in this situation should not exceed 1.0 acres, since large openings may lead to habitat fragmentation for non-target forest interior nesting species.
- A number of scattered openings are more beneficial than a single large opening of comparable size. Forest openings scattered throughout a forested area create greater diversity, and benefit a wider variety of wildlife, other than game species.

### ESTABLISHMENT

Forest openings may be developed by one, or a combination of the following methods.

- Mechanical: including hand cutting, shearing, hydro-axe, disking, and other appropriate techniques.
- Prescribed Burning: Check with your local MDNR wildlife manager or forester about required permits. See NRCS practice standard PRESCRIBED BURNING (338) for additional recommendations.
- Chemical: including broadcast, spot, cut stem treatments or basal spraying. Always follow label directions.

A clean seedbed is required for proper establishment of grasses and legumes. Double or triple disk the area to break up tree and brush

root systems. If brush or stumps are removed, they should be burned or buried rather than piled.

Native grasses and legumes are recommended, refer to NRCS practice standard UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT (645) for species site adaptability. The following introduced mixture is also acceptable.

Species	Seeding Rate (PLS lb/ac)
White Dutch Clover	4.0
Medium Red Clover	3.0
Alsike Clover	2.0
Kentucky Bluegrass	1.0
Timothy	1.0
Red Fescue	1.0
	12.0

NOTE: Orchardgrass or redtop grass may be substituted for the above grass component.

Broadcast and drag seed. A nurse crop of oats may be used to provide cover and food the year of establishment.

## MAINTENANCE

Clover is relatively short lived and will be taken over by the grasses and natural revegetation within 3-5 years without management. Maintenance of the site by 1) mowing, 2) burning, or 3) light disking every 2-3 years will help prevent encroachment of trees and brush.

Once clover becomes scarce, or if woody vegetation encroachment comprises more than 10% of existing openings, a decision should be made whether to continue maintenance of the site or re-establish grasses and legumes.



MDNR

### Site Specific Comments and Recommendations

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large Print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA 's Target Center at (202)-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write the USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14<sup>th</sup> and Independence Ave. SW. Washington D.C., 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**February 2001**

## Practice Specifications Approval and Completion Certification

**LANDOWNER/OPERATOR ACKNOWLEDGES:**

- a. They have received a copy of the specifications and understand the contents including the scope and location of the practice.
- b. They have obtained all necessary permits and/or rights in advance of practice application, and will comply with all ordinances and laws pertaining to the application of this practice.
- c. No changes will be made in the installation of the job without prior concurrence of the NRCS.
- d. Maintenance of the installed work is necessary for proper performance during the life of the practice. The practice life is \_\_\_\_\_.

**I have reviewed all specifications and agree to install as specified:**

Landowner/operator name and title (type or print):		
Landowner/operator Signature:		Date:
Landowner/operator name and title (type or print):		
Landowner/operator Signature:		Date:

***NRCS Review Only***

**DESIGN INSTALLATION AND LAYOUT APPROVAL:**

Designed By:	Date:	Job Approval Authority (JAA):
Approved By:	Date:	Job Approval Authority (JAA):

**RECORD OF COMPLETION AND CHECK OUT CERTIFICATION:**

Treated Acres:	Date Completed by Client:	Date Certified:

**Certification Statement:**

I certify that implementation of this conservation practice is complete, meets criteria for the stated purpose(s), and meets the NRCS conservation practice standard and specifications.

NRCS Signature:	Date:	Job Approval Authority (JAA):