

GUIDES FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT - MANAGING TRANSITION ZONES

Transition zones are areas that reduce the abrupt change between different types of wildlife habitat such as a soybean field and a forested area. These areas can provide feeding, nesting, and escape cover for many wildlife species. The establishment of these transition zones is the easiest and least expensive wildlife management practice on agricultural lands because nature does the work. A transition zone should be a minimum of 30 feet in width. In most situations, the transition zone can be established in desirable shrubs and grasses by not mowing, disking, burning, or grazing for 1 to 2 years. Natural succession will regenerate vegetation consisting of desirable grasses, legumes, forbs, and shrubs in most areas. Transition zones should not have to be planted unless erosion is a problem or the cropland has no native seed bank due to heavy herbicide usage.

To keep these transition zones in desirable vegetation, they must be managed on a recurring schedule. Light strip disking is one management tool that can be utilized to achieve this objective. For best diversity of plant species, these areas must be lightly disked on a 2 to 3 year cycle. The best time to disk is late winter or early spring, prior to the beginning of the reproduction season of most wildlife species or late fall after the nesting season. For the best diversity of plants, the timing of disking should be varied each year. For example, late fall disking will encourage different plants than late winter or early spring disking. This practice can be rotated with prescribed strip burning to get an even better diversity of desirable plants. [See MS-ECS-645-09 (JS/SS), rev. September 2011, Wildlife Management Techniques – Light Strip Disking, and MS-ECS-338-02 (JS), revised September 2011, Wildlife Management Techniques – Prescribed Strip Burning, for more information on these wildlife management practices.]

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