

# VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER UPDATE

Events, news, and information promoting the stewardship of Virginia's forest resources.

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VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Virginia Forest Landowner Update is published four times per year (January, April, July, and October) by the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program. Circulation 8,000.

Print subscriptions are free of charge to citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia and non-resident Virginia forest landowners. The Virginia Forest Landowner Update is also available at: www.cnre.vt.edu/forestupdate.

## Young Forests: Essential Habitats for Wildlife

### By: Steve Capel, Young Forest Habitat Initiative

Indigo buntings, chats, American woodcock, cardinals, cottontail rabbits, golden-winged and prairie warblers, bobwhite quail, field sparrows. All of these species plus many more have been in decline. On average, they have declined 3% per year.



Northern bobwhite quail chicks rely on brushy habitat in young forests.

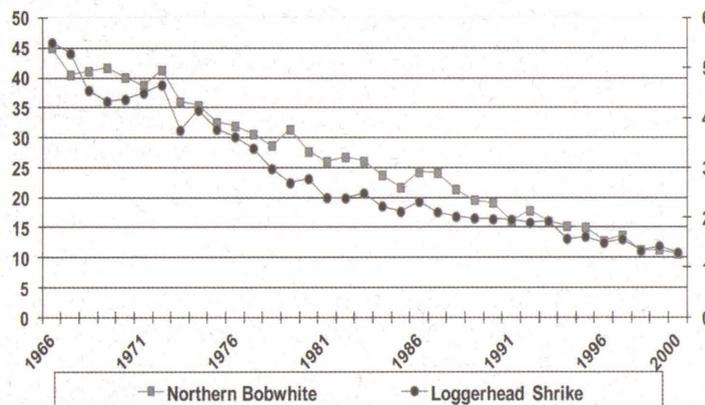
Photo by: Dwight Dyke, VDGIF.

Q. What do all these critters, and many more than I can list here, have in common that might be causing this decline?  
A. They rely on that elusive and disappearing habitat commodity — young forests.

As a landowner, you may think of young forests in other terms – cutovers, old fields, field borders or that odd corner that always produces a nice bucket of blackberries. The common thread is that they all have a lot of small stems (brush) per acre.

Not all of these species use exactly the same habitats. Bobwhites like a good broomsedge field mixed in; buntings like to forage from the mature woodland edges into the shrublands; woodcock like the moist soiled shrublands. I think every chat I have heard in Virginia was calling from the middle of a young cutover. But, all of them use shrubland of some kind for an important part of their life cycle.

Pesticides, predators, diseases and weather all impact populations of these species to some extent. When biologists identify the similarity in population trends of different species (see graph below), they begin to look for commonalities – the similar conditions that all of the species have in common. In the case of the species mentioned above, they all depend on shrubs and stemmy, woody growth that ranges up to 10,000 stems/acre for the backbone of their habitat. Sounds like a cutover fits the bill pretty darn well! State Wildlife Action Plans in the East have identified over 50 species that are declining due to the loss of shrubby habitats. They refer to these species as “Species of Greatest Conservation Need”.



US Fish & Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Survey Population Abundance Index for northern bobwhite quail and loggerhead shrike between 1966-2000, showing steady population decline.

Last spring, it was a long time before I even saw my first indigo bunting, and I heard far fewer chats as I ran my Quail Call Count Routes. Yes, these species can still be found on the landscape, but at noticeably declining frequencies. What I did notice was more traffic sounds and more

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EVENTS CALENDAR			For the most complete listing of natural resource education events, visit the on-line events calendar at <a href="http://www.cnr.vt.edu/foreupdate">www.cnr.vt.edu/foreupdate</a>		
Contact	Date	Location	Event	Time	Fee
DCR	April, May & June	Virginia State Parks	<b>A variety of events and activities.</b> For a complete list, visit: <a href="http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/parks">www.dcr.virginia.gov/parks</a>	Varies	Varies
MP	Year-round	State-wide	<b>Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteer basic training.</b> <a href="http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/chapters.html">www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/chapters.html</a>	Varies	Varies
JF	April 5	Danville	<b>Spring Venture Outdoors!</b> Join experts from VA Cooperative Extension, VA Dept. of Forestry and others for a one-day short course on current "hot topics" affecting management options for your woods. Free shiitake mushroom logs to first 20 registrants!	9-3:30	\$10/person; \$15/family*
PSE	April 10	Webinar	<b>Early Successional Habitat</b> Learn how to create early successional habitats on your property.	12-1 & 7-8 p.m.	Free
JF	April 12	South Boston	<b>Investing in Sustainable Forestry: What to Know About Water Quality &amp; Best Management Practices</b> Please join us for a one-day workshop to learn how protecting and improving water quality through Best Management Practices can be a sustainable investment in the future of your forest.	9-3:30	Free*
JG	April 27-29	Appomattox	<b>4th Annual Landowner Weekend Retreat: Focusing on the Forest</b> Join fellow forest landowners, the Virginia Department of Forestry and Virginia Cooperative Extension for an interactive weekend learning about actively managing your woodlands.	Fri. 7 p.m.- Sun. 1 p.m.	\$60/per- son; \$90/ couple**
JF	May 4	Farmville	<b>Spring Venture Outdoors!</b> See above.	9-3:30	\$10/person; \$15/family*
NC	May 5	Montpelier	<b>The Woods in Your Backyard: Pine Beetle Edition</b> Learn how to deal with pine beetles and how to give your backyard a makeover.	10 - 2	\$10*
PSE	May 8	Webinar	<b>Oak Management and Regeneration</b> This webinar is suitable for landowners interested in managing for oaks on their property.	12-1 & 7-8 p.m.	Free
FOSA	May 16	Boyce	<b>America's Old-growth Forests</b> Join Joan Maloof of Salisbury University for a program about old-growth forests and efforts to identify and protect one such forest in each appropriate U.S. county.	3-5 p.m.	\$10
JG	May 23	Green Bay	<b>Stewardship Through Support &amp; Selectivity: Vegetation Management Class</b> Learn how to control exotic invasive vegetation using the correct tools and application methods. CE Credits available.	TBD	TBD
AD	June 2	Weyers Cave	<b>Backyard Woods Workshop</b> Small lots (<10 acres), such as the one you may own, are a big deal. Learn how to create natural areas and wildlife habitat on these lots.	9 - 3	\$20/person; \$25/couple*
EP	June 18 - 23	Appomattox	<b>Holiday Lake Forestry Camp</b> Open to Virginia residents aged 13-16 with an interest in natural resources, who have not attended before. Nominations must come from a non-related adult by April 16.	All week	\$75**
AD	Aug. 14 & 21	Staunton	<b>Focusing on Land Transfer to Generation "NEXT"</b> Are you prepared to pass the environmental and heirloom values rooted in your forest to the next generation? Join us for a workshop with free legal guidance from professionals in inter-generational land transfer.	12:30-7	\$50/person or couple*
PSE	June 12	Webinar	<b>Hemlock Woolly Adelgid</b> Current information on this exotic invasive insect.	12-1 & 7-8 p.m.	Free

\* includes meal(s); \*\* includes meal(s) and lodging

Event Contacts on page 4

## Financing Your Early Successional Habitat Restoration Project

By: David Bryan, Natural Resources Conservation Service

While many Virginia landowners are interested in providing habitat for early successional wildlife, especially game species like northern bobwhite and American woodcock, these projects unfortunately cost money. However, money should not be a deterrent to getting habitat on the ground. The State and Federal governments both have programs whereby landowners can be PAID to implement wildlife projects geared towards habitat creation and restoration. Please take advantage!



*Quail habitat including fields, grasses, and forest cover. Photo by: Mike Budd, VDGIF.*

On the State side, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries leads the State Quail Best Management Practices (BMP) Program in partnership with the Soil & Water Conservation Districts. Landowners can be paid \$150-\$350 per acre to implement practices such as establishing field borders, leaving croplands idle, eliminating detrimental fescue grass, and planting native warm season grasses – a favorite for nesting quail. This program is quick and easy in terms of the paperwork, but is only available in 15 priority counties (Augusta, Bland, Culpeper, Essex, Greene, Greensville, Halifax, King & Queen, King William, Madison, Orange, Rappahannock, Southampton, Sussex, Wythe).

On the Federal side, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers a host of programs that may be used to improve wildlife habitat throughout Virginia. For example, the USDA's Natural

Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), which pays up to 75% of the costs of implementing wildlife practices. WHIP can help you install wildflower meadows and native grasses or improve your current habitats by routine prescribed burning, herbicide applications, and pre-commercial thinning. These latter three practices are specifically helpful to forest landowners interested in early successional management. Additionally, the NRCS also offers the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) which includes practices such as pre-commercial thinning and the stabilization of logging decks and roads with native warm season grasses. WHIP and EQIP are competitive programs with flexible, short-term contracts generally lasting less than 5 years.

The Farm Service Agency, sister agency to NRCS, also has several programs that are helpful for wildlife. For instance, within the Conservation Reserve Program, a practice known as Upland Bird Habitat Buffer or CP-33 was specifically designed for cropland owners to idle or plant their field borders in order to develop the scrubby edge habitats that quail and woodcock need. This practice pays well and includes a sign-up incentive, cost-share for practices, and annual rental payments for 10-15 years. Other practices in the Conservation Reserve Program, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement can also be used to benefit wildlife. Please visit your local USDA Service Center for details.

While the vast array of government programs and their regulations can be intimidating to landowners, Virginia's five Private Lands Wildlife Biologists were hired specifically to become the program experts to assist landowners through the process. NRCS conservationists are also trained professionals that can answer your questions regarding USDA Programs. Please let them help you! Ultimately it is the combination of programs, professionals and landowner enthusiasm that will help restore the habitats we so dearly need in Virginia. Quail, woodcock, turkey, songbirds and so many other species depend on it – let's get to work!

**David Bryan is a Private Lands Biologist in Northeast Virginia.**  
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**Editor's note:** For a first-hand description of applying for and receiving cost-share assistance, see "Virginia's Quail Action Plan: Helping Landowners Restore Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat", *Virginia Forest Landowner Update* Vol. 25 No. 1, Winter 2011 (<http://cnre.vt.edu/forestupdate/newsletters/Volume%2025/Quail.pdf>).

**Young Forests cont. from page 1**

houses and maturing pine stands on one of the routes that I've run for 23 years, indicating a decline in habitat and an increase in human habitation.



**Early successional shrub-scrub habitat.**

Another example is the woodcock. Their primary breeding range extends from Atlantic Canada through New England and New York to the Great Lakes states, and south into New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. Woodcock sightings have become less frequent in recent years. Spring breeding surveys document declines of 2.5 to 3% per year.

Bobwhite whistle counts across the Southeast have shown over 3% declines per year for more than 50 years! The Wildlife Action Plans of these same states list over 50 species using shrublands for part or all of their life cycles.

Over the last 50 years, the number of acres of young forest in the East has dwindled. For the sake of discussion here, young forests are lands that have recently been or will soon be timbered but are in a seedling-

sapling growth stage. In Virginia, young forests have been in decline, down some 7% in the last decade alone. Lots of things contributed to this trend — suburban sprawl, objection to logging, particularly as it often plays out on our National Forests, and in more recent years closing of paper mills, and a dramatic decline in construction demand for dimension lumber.

Today the task facing wildlife biologists, who are trying to slow the decline and begin the restoration of shrubland-dependent species, is to determine how we can increase shrublands on the landscape. Very clearly the biologists have an ally in folks engaged in active forest management. As some Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries quail biologists have noted, were it not for active forestry, Virginia would be out of the quail business. There may be an occasional covey to admire or bob calling in the spring, but surely no more quail hunting here.

The loss of some paper mills is beyond our control as the paperless society forges ahead. The construction industry will improve via dynamics that are beyond the control of mere land managers! The good news is that there are steps any timber manager can take to make their timberlands more attractive for wildlife. We also can find ways to add or enhance shrublands around field edges by changing the way we manage open lands, and even showing how active forestry can continue to be applied on those suburban acres tied up in 5 and 10 acre lots.

These days it is taking more intentional efforts but the opportunities remain. Wildlife as an accidental by-product of our increasingly intensive land management is not as common. It seems to take a more intentional effort these days, but the opportunities remain. The other articles in this issue will help give you an idea of the opportunities and assistance that are available.

**Steve Capel is a Wildlife Biologist.**

**804/379-4519; stevecapel41@gmail.com; www.timberdoodle.org.**

**EVENT CONTACTS**

Contact	Name/Affiliation	Phone	e-mail/website
DCR	Department of Conservation & Recreation	804/786-1712	www.dcr.virginia.gov
MP	Michelle Prysby	434/872-4580	www.virginiamasternaturalist.org
JF	Jason Fisher	434/476-2147	jasonf@vt.edu
PSE	Penn State Extension	NA	http://extension.psu.edu/private-forests/tools-resources/webinars/upcoming/forestry-series
JG	Jennifer Gagnon	540/231-6391	jgagnon@vt.edu
NC	Neil Clark	757/653-2572	southeast@vt.edu
FOSA	Blandy Experimental Farm	540/837-1758 x 0	http://www.pecva.org/index.php/events/americas-old-growth-forests-1
AD	Adam Downing	540/948-6881	adowning@vt.edu
EP	Ellen Powell	434/220-9083	ellen.powell@dof.virginia.gov

## Creating Early Successional Habitat for Wildlife

By: Katie Martin, VA Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries/Natural Resources Conservation Service

They say it takes a village to raise a child; in much the same way it takes a network of landowners, biologists, farmers, foresters, hunters and contractors to create and maintain early successional habitat.

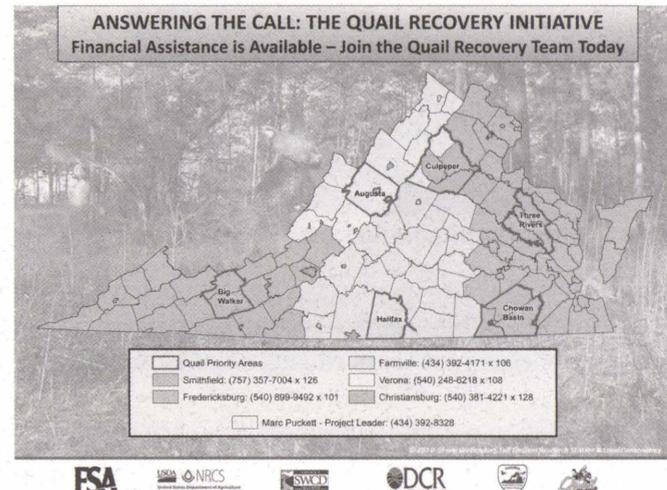
With today's technology, there is an endless supply of information available for landowners interested in creating wildlife habitat. The trick is trying to sort the wheat from the chaff. A good place to start is to contact one of the following natural resource professionals to help you begin the planning process:

Natural Resource Conservation Service  
<ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/VA/Contact/VirginiaEmployeeDirectory.pdf>

Virginia Private Lands Biologist  
<ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/VA/Contact/VirginiaEmployeeDirectory.pdf>

VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries  
<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/about/offices/>

These professionals can help you develop a management plan for your property based on your goals, acreage and available resources.



The keyword for early successional habitat is disturbance. Whether it's a thinned pine stand, warm season grass field or a shrub thicket, succession happens! Basic management practices such as disking, prescribed burning and herbicide applications can create a successful disturbance regime. Disking and burning are excellent tools for controlling competition, rejuvenating the native seed bed and removing heavy thatch layers. Herbicide applications are also beneficial for controlling competition and creating openings. These practices are best implemented on a rotational basis. Rotational management across the landscape ensures you have a variety of successional stages (bareground, native warm season grasses/forbs, and shrub thickets) available for use during different parts of a species life cycle.

Many landowners have access to the equipment needed to implement habitat improvements, but for those who don't there are plenty of options available. If you lease land to clubs or individuals for hunting rights, check with them about trading habitat work for hunting privileges. How about neighbors who farm? They may be able to assist you when a tractor or disk is needed. There are also contractors available who specialize in wildlife and forestry that can work with you to implement your management plans. The Virginia Department of Forestry keeps a list of Virginia Prescribed Burn Managers who are able to assist landowners with implementing prescribed burns in a safe and effective manner.

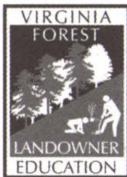
Habitat development doesn't happen overnight. Once succession has been set back to ground zero it will take anywhere from 1 to 5 years to reach the desired condition. A basic timeline would be native warm season grass/forbs/native weeds present in 1 to 2 years, while shrub thickets may take 5 years or longer to develop. The timing of maintenance activities will depend on your desired habitat type. Under thinned pines to control hardwood competition and promote native grasses and forbs, disturbance will be needed every 2 to 3 years. Developing shrub thickets may wait 5 to 10 years before disturbance is needed.

Early successional habitat can't maintain itself into perpetuity without continued management. With a little planning and commitment to ongoing management, private landowners can work together to create networks of early successional habitat across the landscape that can benefit many early successional species.

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SPRING 2012



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**Useful Resources**

- \* For more information on the bobwhite quail in Virginia, visit the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries website: <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/quail/>
- \* For more information on the Woodcock Management plan, visit: <http://www.timberdoodle.org/> (note: timberdoodle is another name for the woodcock).
- \* The USDA Forest Service has released the 2011 edition of Federal Income Tax on Timber: A Key to Your Most Frequently Asked Questions. This is available at: [www.timbertax.org](http://www.timbertax.org). Share this with your tax preparer!
- \* Are you a Smart Phone user? If so, check out the University of Florida's list of ecology-related Mobile Phone Apps at: <http://www.wec.ufl.edu/faculty/brunae/AppList.php>. Let me know your favorites!
- \* For all you beekeepers out there, visit the Virginia Beekeepers Association for current Virginia bee information: <http://virginiabeekeepers.org/>

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Virginia Department of Forestry	Virginia Tech Department of Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation & Virginia Cooperative Extension	Virginia Forestry Association	Virginia Tree Farm Committee
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This publication is supported by matching grant funds from the Virginia Forest Stewardship Program administered by the Virginia Department of Forestry in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service.



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