

# FOREST RECREATION AND AESTHETICS

Many landowners do not realize that they can simultaneously manage their forest for profit, wildlife habitat, investment, recreation and beauty. In fact, properly planned forestry activities can enhance visual appearance, improve recreational opportunities and sustain and increase wildlife populations.

## Enhancing Visual Appearance

Integrating forest management for scenic beauty and diversity can be viewed as landscaping on a grand scale. It is the arrangement of sizes, colors, textures and form across your forest.

## Protecting, shaping, and creating open spaces

It is preferable to protect and manage existing openings rather than to create new openings from scratch. However, large tracts of similar age or species can be made more diverse by creating openings. They can enhance views, improve wildlife habitat and increase plant diversity.



**Maintenance activities include:**

- ?? Mechanical clearing: periodically mowing or disking strips on an alternating two to three year cycle keeps woody vegetation in check. However, mowing should be restricted in the spring to allow ground nesting wildlife to rear their young without disturbance.
- ?? Herbicide control: Using selective herbicides to maintain the species composition of the opening. A legally-labeled, safe and effective herbicide that is known to control the targeted species should be selected.
- ?? Prescribed Burning: Burning should be conducted at two to seven year intervals, based on a cycle compatible with wildlife, aesthetics and timber objectives.
- ?? Farming: while farming techniques maintain fields and open spaces, edge treatments can be modified or intensified to meet wildlife, aesthetic and diversity objectives.
- ?? Timber harvesting: thinning young trees or harvesting mature trees creates openings and dramatically changes the forest landscape. Your plan should lay out the timber sale area, log decks, skid trails, roads and accumulation areas to match your aesthetic objectives.
- ?? Controlled grazing: to control growth in pastures and fenced clearings, supervised livestock grazing can be used.

**Managing the forest edge**

Minimizing the contrast between the opening and the forest is the primary goal in managing aesthetics on the forest edge. It defines the shape and texture of the forest setting. A soft transition from the low vegetation of the opening to shrubs and then to taller trees is desired.

**Considerations for managing the forest edge include:**

- ?? Create or maintain wavy edges with indentations to improve visual diversity,
- ?? Introduce irregularity to straight forest edges,
- ?? Establish or maintain irregular outlying clumps of trees to create a natural appearance of the forest edge,
- ?? Favor a mixture of hardwood and conifer species for variety of the edge,
- ?? Retain or establish trees and shrubs of varied shape, form, flower or foliage color, and
- ?? Plant vegetation to support desired wildlife.

## Reforestation

Reforestation is an opportunity to establish attractive, diverse forest edges. Alignment and spacing of planted trees and the intensity of site preparation and competition control can create different looks.

### **Practices for reforestation include:**

- ?? Varying site preparation techniques to favor species diversity,
- ?? Plant seedlings in rows that follow the natural contour to minimize erosion,
- ?? Mix the species composition where practical,
- ?? Vary planting density, leave openings and opt for mixed stands, especially where practical from an economic and soil productivity standpoint, and
- ?? Establish or protect stream side management zones to enhance water quality, provide wildlife habitat and scenic diversity.

## Prescribed Burning

Burning is an inexpensive tool to manage some thick barked fire-tolerant tree species. It is an often overlooked opportunity to impact the visual diversity of the landscape.

Prescribed burning creates an open stand and stimulates the growth of many fire-enhanced flowers and legumes. When aesthetics is a consideration:

- ?? Leave unburned islands around critical habitat or highly-valued areas,
- ?? Level and re-seed plowed firelines with scenic and wildlife -friendly plant mixtures,
- ?? Mimic a natural transition or edge around the burned area curving the firelines,
- ?? Put in properly constructed firebreaks when prescribed burning, and
- ?? Cut timber (if desired) to keep the aesthetic qualities of the land.

**In Georgia, there are specific guidelines for prescribed burning. In order to burn, you must get a burn permit. Call your local Georgia Forestry Commission office for more information.**

## Improving Recreational Opportunities

Many people enjoy hiking, bird watching, hunting, camping, picnicking, picking berries and just being in the great outdoors, but the majority of land suitable for outdoor recreation is privately owned. Some owners open their lands up to the public, while others restrict the use of their land.

In Georgia it is illegal to trespass on another individual's land; however, it is strongly suggested that landowners properly post the land and gate access points.

## Managing Access

Access can be managed several ways:

Open public use requires no effort. Preferably, you should require verbal or written permission from recreationists, but this is difficult to enforce. Uncontrolled public use often decreases the quality of recreational opportunities available to you or your friends.

Access to family, friends, neighbors and responsible recreationists who ask permission. This requires that the land be posted and/or that you issue guest permits. The obvious advantages of posting and granting written permission are better control of activities on your land and reduced abuse of your property.

Lease your land for recreational access. Landowners who lease recreational rights usually charge at least enough to pay their property taxes. Often the lessee posts the land, polices trespassers, maintains roads, trails and gates and picks up litter.

Permit daily use for a fee. Daily written permits are issued by the owner. This is often used by owners of hunting and fishing preserves, campgrounds and waterfowl impoundments.

Form a cooperative with neighbors. Landowner cooperatives build a sense of community among neighbors with similar recreational goals. The acres entered into the cooperative can be for personal enjoyment or made available to the public through one of the methods above.

**When leasing land or allowing permit users, a legal advisor should be used to limit the liabilities and provide a legal, written contract.**

## Constructing Roads and Trails

Two types of roads are built on forestland, permanent and/or temporary. Most temporary roads are built during timber harvesting; however, proper construction is necessary to prevent soil compaction and soil erosion.

Correct construction of roads and trails is essential for timber, wildlife, scenic beauty or recreation. Roads should be built following BMP's. Roads and trails should be posted and gated to deter trespass.



Roads and trails provide access for harvesting timber, monitoring the growth and health of your forest, exercising, recreation, education and observing nature. Well planned roads or trails provide low-cost access and require minimal maintenance.

**To improve the aesthetic quality of roads:**

- ?? Manage roadsides with perennial vegetation to enhance wildlife, visual quality and soil erosion prevention,
- ?? Plan road placement to minimize the number and extent of roads and *skid trails*,
- ?? Expand openings adjacent to roads (*daylighting*) to enhance plant diversity and for rapid drying of the road surface,
- ?? Place roads on the contour, taking advantage of natural curves within the landscape, and
- ?? Surface heavily used roads with low-cost native or natural materials, such as wood chips, bark, or *mulch*.

Scenic beauty and recreational opportunities can be enhanced by good forest management.

**Improve the aesthetic quality of recreational trails:**

- ?? Keep slopes on trails below 10 percent grade to minimize soil erosion and maintenance,
- ?? Place trails on the contour, taking advantage of natural curves within the landscape,
- ?? Develop narrow paths into environmentally sensitive areas, instead of major trails,
- ?? Surface heavily used trails with low-cost native or natural materials, such as wood chips, bark, or mulch,
- ?? Vary the direction of the trail for variety, points of interpretive interest and to maximize users' exposure to natural features, water bodies and vegetative changes, and
- ?? Provide trail markers, benches, and picnic table to increase the enjoyment of recreational trails.