

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR AMERICAN WOODCOCK AND RUFFED GROUSE IN RHODE ISLAND

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Woodcock and ruffed grouse populations will respond to habitat management using the techniques described below; however, other wildlife including many songbirds, small mammals like the New England cottontail, butterflies and other insects will benefit from these created habitats, making this management an important tool for maintaining biological diversity.

American Woodcock:

Good habitat for the woodcock must be comprised of four key elements that meet the life history needs of the bird: singing grounds for courtship, nesting and brood rearing areas, daytime feeding areas, and night roosting fields. If your site does not contain all of the following features, consider adjacent properties which may meet some of the needs.

1. **Singing grounds:** are small openings in the forest or in old fields that are comprised of short vegetation without slash or other debris on the ground. Singing grounds can be permanently maintained or incorporated into periodic forest management projects that create 1 to 2 new clearing each year on the managed parcel. It is best to place singing grounds within or near daytime feeding covers and nesting areas. Clearings should be a minimum of 0.5 acres in size where surrounding trees are greater than 25 feet tall, but may be as small as 0.25 acres where surrounding trees are less than 25 feet. When possible clearing should face south and be rectangular. The number of clearings needed will depend on the quality of the surrounding habitats and may be increased so long as there is an increase in singing males.
2. **Nesting and brood rearing cover:** are comprised of cutover areas and coverts of dense regenerating hardwood saplings and shrubs near singing grounds that provide concealment and protection for woodcock from predators. Young mixed hardwood saplings and conifer patches (1 to 5 acres) within 100 yards of a singing ground provide excellent nesting cover. Habitat for woodcock should be created on 5-year cutting cycles.
3. **Daytime feeding covers:** are best located on rich moist soils which can provide earthworms a staple comprising 50 to 90% of the woodcock's diet. Abandoned overgrown farmlands often make excellent feeding covers. Periodic cutting (every 5 years is desirable) of strips or blocks to create dense coverts is required to maintain sufficient feeding areas for woodcock. Invading trees will replace dense saplings and reduce the quality of the habitat after about 10 years. Good feeding covers should be located within 0.5 mile of nesting/brood covers.
4. **Roosting fields:** night roost fields should be permanent openings of 3 to 5 acres in size located within 0.5 miles of the daytime feeding covers. Roosting fields

should be maintained by a regular mowing schedule. Create roost fields at a rate of 1 per 100 acres of habitat.

Ruffed Grouse:

Good habitat for the grouse must meet the needs of the bird during the nesting, brood rearing and adult phase. The habitat created need not be extensive in area but must be well distributed and interspersed throughout the landscape to meet the needs of this bird.

1. Nesting cover: is usually located within close proximity to brood rearing habitat and most often within 100 feet of a woods road, small woodland opening or edge. Nesting areas may often be located in more mature stands with the nest placed against the base of a tree or stump which provides the hen with good visibility. Nesting cover is best found within habitats that contain an interspersed of patches of regenerating hardwood saplings, old fields and young forests that contain a mixture of hardwoods and conifers.
2. Brood rearing habitat is best described as young and diverse with dense patches of young forest coverts adjacent to small forest clearings or permanent edges such as woods roads. Sunlight here can increase the diversity of herbaceous vegetation and improve conditions for insects, an important component of the young grouse's diet. Young forest patches, created by clear cutting, of various sizes ranging from 1 to 10 acres, interspersed throughout the parcel are required. Periodic cutting of new patches at 10 year intervals is required to provide sufficient habitat to maintain grouse.
3. Adults: require a diversity of mixed hardwoods and conifers interspersed throughout the area to meet year round needs. Young forests of second growth regenerating hardwoods are important for protection from predators. Patch sizes may be varied from 1 to 10 acres. Grouse feed on the buds from a variety of trees including birches, maples, cherry and aspen that occupy young forests. Maintain small patches (0.5 acres) of conifers interspersed throughout mixed hardwood stands of various ages to provide important winter cover and thermal protection for grouse during the winter.

Management practices harmful to ruffed grouse:

1. Clean farming
2. Selective forest harvesting and high grading of woodlots
3. Heavy grazing of woodlands
4. Prohibition of forest cutting and harvesting activities
5. Reforestation with conifers over large contiguous areas
6. Maintenance of pure stands of any one species of tree or shrub

References:

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