



NORTHERN HARDWOOD NOTES

Making Wildlife Openings

Most wildlife doesn't prosper in our dense second-growth pole stands. Game animals and birds in particular need openings where various grasses, shrubs, and herbs will flourish away from the dense shade of northern hardwood trees. Here animals, such as deer, bear, and snowshoe rabbit, find the food they need, especially in spring and fall. And birds, such as the ruffed grouse and woodcock, use the openings for nesting and brood rearing.

One rule of thumb is to turn 3 to 5 percent of your total forest area into wildlife openings. You should locate some openings on areas where growing conditions are naturally adverse; this will extend the life of the opening and make it more cost-effective. But there is usually a much larger area of overstocked, good sites that will be improved by the creation of wildlife habitat.

Locating Openings

Locate some openings on poor sites where trees will be slow to reproduce. Some likely areas are:

- Frost pockets,
- Poorly drained sites,
- Very dry sites,
- Sites with shallow soil.

You can, of course, look for such sites on topographic maps, soil maps, aerial photos, and forest type maps. A change in species will often indicate a wet spot—for example, a pocket of black ash, red maple, yellow birch, American elm, black spruce, or hemlock growing in the midst of sugar maple.

On good sites, try to locate openings where the advance reproduction is less than 1 foot tall, no more than 2 feet. This will assure a longer life for the opening. Advance reproduction more than 1 foot tall will most likely sprout after it is cut down.

Try to create openings bordering on a logging trail, another timber type, or a marsh. Game will use the trail for a travel lane; openings that border other types will contain a greater variety of vegetation.

Making the Opening

Make openings 1 to 10 acres in size; several smaller ones are better than one big one. Make openings irregular in shape so that the perimeter will be longer and have more "edge" vegetation. Try to leave large crowned, codominant trees on the edge. Such trees are less likely to develop epicormic sprouts than smaller crowned trees when the stand is opened up. Because existing branches will persist after the opening is made, border trees should have a bole free of branches for a log and a half. (Warning: Don't leave valuable saw log-size yellow birch along the edge of the openings. Such trees are vulnerable to sapsucker damage. See Note 7.07, *Minimizing Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker Damage*). If possible, leave clumps of conifer on the border as cover and shelter for wildlife.

If you make openings in stands heavily stocked with good sprouters, such as red maple, basswood, or aspen, cut during summer and spray stumps with a safe herbicide to discourage sprouting.

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