



The Habitat Corner

MAKING THE BEST OF A NATURAL DISASTER

As a property owner myself, the mere thought of a “natural disaster” makes me just cringe. Over the past few years it seems that just about everyone in Tennessee has been affected in some way by a natural disaster. It could have been the recent massive floods, one of a multitude of tornadoes, or possibly just straight line winds. One landowner friend, Donald Hosse, took a direct hit from a large tornado in 2007 on his 120 acre property in Hickman County. I know you’ve all heard the phrase, “When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade!” Well, Don’s cup had runneth over.

Don’s property was primarily forested terrain. He had some old growth pines and oak-hickory woodlands, but after the storm it was mostly a twisted mangled mess of trees on the ground. Don called me about his situation, and I really had to step back and think about it. We decided to take advantage of some of the conservation practices offered and cost-shared under the USDA’s Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). Through WHIP, Don was able to create about 12 acres of fields, planting them to native grasses and interspersed perennial and annual food plots. Once the logger took what timber was salvageable off of these areas, the dozer man began clearing. During the logging and clearing process several more acres were opened up at Don’s expense. It was a slow process, but, you could see the canvas unfolding right before your eyes. We laid out large areas on both side slopes of the ridge for native warm season grasses and wildflowers. We then took the flatter ground on the top and arranged small perennial and annual food plots all the way through the farm. Some of the other areas on the farm were allowed to naturally regenerate, creating excellent bedding cover for deer as well as quality native shrub habitat for small game.

We are now three to four years into the project and the Hosses are already reaping the benefits. Don and his two daughters have taken several deer and turkeys off of the farm, and their bee hives are producing more than ever with all the perennial clover, wildflowers, and other pollinator-attracting plants that have been established. Before the project, most of the deer and turkey were just “passing through” the property. After taking what once was predominantly trees and diversifying the tornado-damaged habitat in these areas, Don is



Anna Hosse, with a turkey she harvested on the Hosse property.

by Clint Borum, TWRA Private Lands Biologist

now holding more wildlife on the land including several coveys of quail and more rabbits. With the addition of good nesting and bedding cover and ample amounts of food supply, it’s a “no-brainer” on why these animals are staying in the area.

HABITAT TIPS:

Food is typically not the limiting factor in holding game on your property in Tennessee, and natural foods are usually adequate with good habitat management. Be familiar with the biology of the species that you are attempting to manage for, and know what types of habitat they require. Make sure to address your property’s nesting or reproductive habitats and protective cover situation first. Then take into account your “leftover” acreage and address it with vegetation that might fill voids such as brood-rearing cover or late winter foods. This approach will put “the bedroom” and “the dinner table” together for wildlife on your property.

HABITAT PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES:

Free management planning is available through your local TWRA Private Lands Biologist or NRCS Biologist. Now is the best time to enroll to compete for USDA program funding in 2012. Check out our new habitat website at www.tnwildlifehabitat.org.

ASK THE BIOLOGIST:

- Q: How do I establish “good cover” for wildlife on my farm?
- A: You first have to take an assessment of what types of plant species are on your property. Increasingly we are seeing invasive exotic plants competing with native plants in both grasslands and forests. Long-term control of invasive plants often entails the use of herbicide applications. Once those species are under control, native plants can be planted or may naturally re-establish. Having a trained biologist evaluate your property is a good first step to developing a management plan that will help you reach your property’s wildlife potential.

“Helping Landowners and Wildlife Through Habitat Enhancement”

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has Private Lands Biologists that will assist you in developing a management plan for your property and a strategy to implement it. See www.TWRAPrivateLands.org for who to contact for technical assistance and other useful information on habitat management and programs.