INDIANA DIVISION OF
FISH & WILDLIFE

Wildlife Corridors

Habitat Management Fact Sheet

One of the greatest threats to wildlife populations is habitat fragmentation. Increasing human populations and the need for both agricultural and urban development is quickly destroying essential wildlife habitat. Wildlife corridors provide a balance between increasing human populations and the need to preserve and improve existing wildlife habitat while creating new habitat where it will most benefit wildlife populations. Corridors help increase survival for many species by; increasing food sources, providing valuable cover, decreasing the chance of predation, and by reconnecting fragmented and isolated populations.

Wildlife corridors are defined as narrow strips of land that differs, usually in terms of dominant vegetation, from the surrounding area. They serve as traveling avenues for wildlife species between two similar yet fragmented habitat areas, and provide important sources of food and cover for many species. Depending on the specific management goals, corridors can be developed in a variety of ways including; natural revegetation, establishment of tree, shrub, and/or herbaceous cover, fence row establishment through a plowed field, or establishing a buffer along streams or roadsides. The main purpose in establishing a corridor is to connect two areas of habitat while also providing a variety of food and shelter. The habitat types being connected may include grasslands, wetlands, woods or old fields.

A minimum corridor width of 50 feet and a maximum width of 200 feet will provide adequate habitat for species using corridors as a travel lane or for food, nesting or escape cover. Widths of less than 50 feet may encourage nesting activity while not providing enough cover to prevent predators from easily destroying those nests. Wildlife species such as deer, fox, raccoon, turtles and reptiles will use corridors to travel between larger habitat areas. Species using corridors and field buffers to forage and nest in include quail, pheasant,

cottontails, turkeys, songbirds and insects. Insects using the field borders provide an important food source for a variety of wildlife including songbirds, quail, pheasants and turkeys.

Types of corridors vary widely and can be specific to a landowner's management goals. For example, a shelterbelt planted between a crop field or other open area and a house can be planted to coniferous trees and berry producing shrubs. Depending on the space available and the desired width of the shelterbelt, a couple rows of berry producing shrubs (dogwood, crabapple, chokecherry, etc) planted on 6-8 foot spacing in between rows of coniferous trees such as pines or spruce spaced at 10 – 12 feet would be an effective design. This shelterbelt would provide energy savings to the landowner and reduce wind erosion, while providing excellent nesting and escape cover and food to a variety of wildlife species. Keep in mind not to plant a shelterbelt too close to the house or barn to prevent snow from drifting against the buildings.

Consider a 50-foot wide field border along a crop field that connects two wooded tracts. If a combination of warm season grasses, legumes such as ladino clover, and some natural vegetation areas were provided, not only would the woodlots be connected with a viable travel lane, but excellent food and cover would be provided for many wildlife species. If woody cover is not available in the area, planting some berry producing shrubs in clumps or rows can provide it. Shrubs such as blackberry, shrub dogwood, elderberry and sumac provide both food and cover for a wide variety of wildlife species. Brush or rock piles constructed at varying intervals will provide cover for reptiles, songbirds, quail and small mammals.

A riparian buffer along a ditch or stream could be planted with some trees or shrubs and herbaceous cover. This buffer would filter out sediment before it reaches the water, improving the quality of the stream, stabilize the ditch or stream bank, and provide excellent cover for wildlife along a source of water. Streamside buffers benefit a variety of riparian species including mink, otter, woodpeckers, kingfishers, reptiles and amphibians. If placed on the south and west side of the stream, the shading effect to the water will also improve the aquatic life in the stream. Livestock should be kept out of all corridors to minimize erosion and lessen habitat destruction due to grazing, but especially domestic animals should be kept out of streams to prevent erosion and maintain better water quality.

A wildlife corridor can be used to filter sediments to improve water quality.

Roadsides offer one of the best opportunities for habitat management. These areas are used by a wide variety of wildlife species including pheasant, quail, mourning dove, cottontails and many songbirds. While the acreage of roadsides may seem small, there are a number of acres of roadside habitat in rural Indiana and collectively they can provide substantial habitat. One way roadsides can be improved is by planting native warm season grasses and wildflowers or shrubs to offer nesting and escape cover. As with other corridor areas, mowing and spraying should not be performed during the nesting season. Mow only after August 1, and then raise the mower to a height of 10 – 12 inches to leave some winter cover and spring nesting cover available.

Management objectives should be prioritized and be specific to target species, while maximizing the potential use by other wildlife species. The more variety provided, the greater the number of species that will use the corridor. Research studies show a great number of songbirds, game birds, small mammals and other species of wildlife use corridors as a regular part of their life cycles. By providing well-placed and managed corridors, the wildlife on private lands can be greatly enhanced for wildlife use.

Advantages of providing corridors for wildlife:

1. Increase movement between isolated populations
2. Increase genetic variability
3. Increase food availability for a variety of wildlife species
4. Provide escape cover from predators and shelter during bad weather
5. Provide habitat variety for species requiring various cover types
6. Establishes "greenbelts" in urban areas for recreation, aesthetics, improved land value, and other benefits
7. Can decrease heating and cooling costs when used as windbreaks

Related *Habitat Management Fact Sheets*:

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Strip Disking
Riparian Zones
Woodland Edge Enhancement
Legume Food Plots
Wildflowers

Prepared by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife. For up-to-date information concerning the Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife, or for information on the location of your District Wildlife Biologist, visit our website at www.wildlife.IN.gov
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