



# Hoosier National Forest Happenings



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Issue 5

November 13, 2007

## **Early Successional Habitat on the Hoosier National Forest**

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### **What is Early Successional Habitat?**

There are several types of early successional habitats. Early successional shrubland habitats occur where plants colonize treeless areas that were created by river action or the abandonment of cleared land (such as farmland). These areas are comprised of vines, shrubs, grasses, and forbs. They are important for wildlife species that favor dense thickets such as prairie warblers and field sparrows. Contrastingly, events such as wind storms, timber harvest, and insect outbreaks may result in young forest habitats which are dominated by short sprouts and seedling of mature forest trees, along with some surviving shrubs and herbs from the original forest understory. Species such as the yellow-breasted chat and blue-winged warbler are common in these stands. Because tree saplings and sprouts grow up quickly, their crowns quickly form a closed canopy that shades out many plants; therefore, young forest habitats tend to be more temporary than early successional habitats.

### **Why Have Early Successional Habitat**

Early successional habitat directly affects the forging and nesting opportunities of several wildlife species, such as, the blue-winged warbler, northern bobwhite, American woodcock and Eastern cottontail. Wild turkeys like the herbaceous (grassy) openings because they provide an abundant source of insects. After breeding season, fledglings and adult songbirds usually associated with mature forests also use early successional habitat for food or cover. Native plant communities, that are more likely to harbor sun-loving plants, dominate some of the natural openings. Early successional habitat also adds visual landscape variety, and provides recreational opportunities for bird watchers and hunters.

### **The Tools Used**

There are two primary methods to create early successional habitat on the Hoosier.

- Prescribed burning

Burning helps promote warm season grasses and oak/hickory growth. Once an area becomes established with warm season grasses, such as big bluestem or

Indian grass, the native seed is harvested and used in other projects on the Forest.

- Mowing

Areas are mowed in late summer to fall to minimize disturbance to ground nesting birds while maintaining some herbaceous food and cover over winter.

### **Partnerships**

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources contributes hundreds of hours throughout the year assisting with habitat maintenance on the Hoosier. This includes mowing of the early successional areas, pond dam maintenance, putting in fire lines for prescribed burns, and constructing wetlands.

The Forest also has partnership agreements with Quail Unlimited and the Wild Turkey Federation. These partners assist with seeding early successional habitat areas on newly acquired lands, and provide grant money to purchase native seed mixes for these areas.

### **Contact Information**

For additional information about the early successional habitat program on the Forest, contact Pat Mercer or Steve Harriss, Wildlife Technicians at 812-275-5987.



Harvesting Native Seed in an Early Successional Habitat Area