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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION



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Build your 40-acre dream

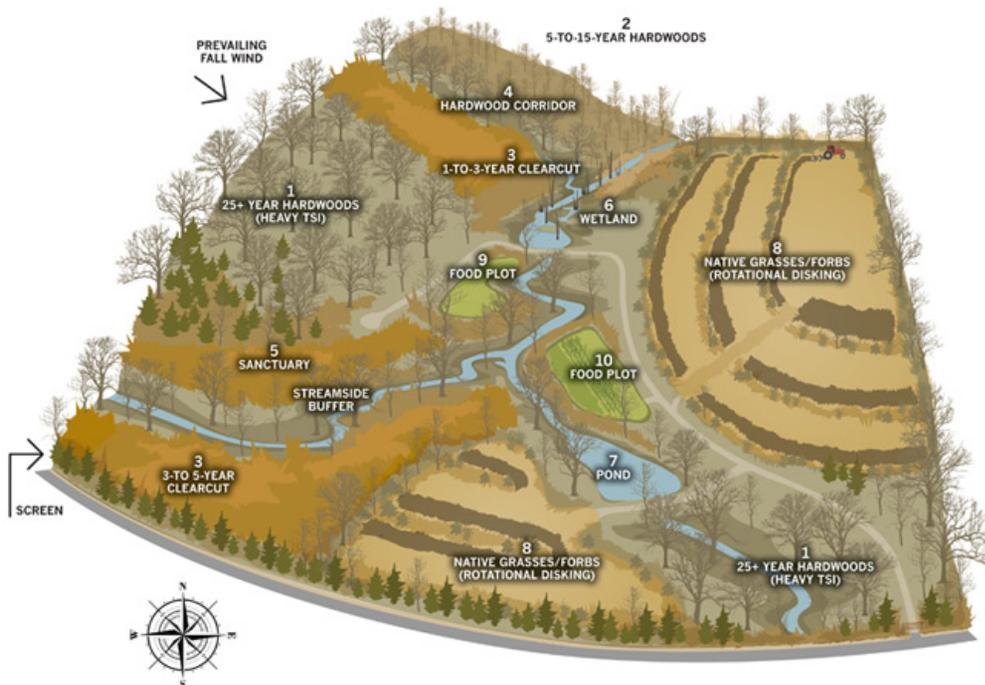


Illustration by Ryan Kirby



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The dream property: 300 acres of hardwood ridges, bubbling creek bottoms with patches of grassy upland meadows that you own debt-free from the bank.

The reality: a less than 40-acre lease that you re-up annually in hopes a little hard work pays off with at least one big buck or gobbler.

I bet most of you are living in the same reality as I am when it comes to the land you hunt. But my philosophy is to make the most of what you have.

I've seen it work on my friend's property. He only owns 20 acres but consistently harvests mature bucks and scale-busting gobblers from his small tract of land. His place is perfectly situated between two major creek drainages, but that's not his only secret. He's done extensive work to improve timber, provide year-round food sources and takes advantage of a neighboring refuge.

No matter your circumstances, you can turn your place into a property that attracts and holds game. Here are some ways to make your small property a wildlife hot spot. — *Scott Vance, NWTF assistant vice president for conservation programs*

WOODS

Managing woodlands is the cornerstone of any solid habitat program. Use uneven timber stand management on a 15- to 20-year harvest rotation to make the most of a small tract of land. It ensures consistent diverse habitat that provides wildlife with its many needs for survival.

1. Mature hardwoods, or stands older than 25 years, provide food for wildlife in hard and soft mast crops. They also provide excellent roosting sites for wild turkeys, squirrels and woodpeckers. You can ensure a quality mature hardwood stand through heavy timber stand improvement, or TSI as foresters like to call it. TSI consists of selecting the best trees based on species, structure, location and health, and removing less desirable trees.

A skilled wildlife biologist or forester can help you mark the trees you want to leave, then you can remove the remaining trees by using "firewood" cuts, herbicide treatments or even profitable timber harvesting in some cases.

2. Forested areas between 5 and 15 years old provide good nesting and brood rearing areas for woodcock and grouse, bedding cover for white-tailed deer, as well as excellent habitat for rabbits and songbirds.

3. Clearcuts (forested areas less than 5 years old) provide browse and cover for white-tailed deer, as well as excellent nest and brood habitat for wild turkey, bobwhite quail and many songbird species.

4. Many wildlife species, especially white-tailed deer and wild turkeys, spend more than 75 percent of their time in hardwood corridors along streams and creeks, which are vital for their movement through the property. They are great places for intercepting a trophy buck during the rut.

5. A sanctuary is vital for deer management on small properties. Either leave an area totally undisturbed or take advantage of a neighboring refuge to keep mature bucks in your harvest zone. Pick the thickest, most inaccessible place and stay out of it.

WETLANDS and WATER

6. Wetlands are great for waterfowl hunting, but they're also important for water quality on your property. Wetlands are nature's filtration system, keeping bodies of water downstream clean for wildlife year-round.

7. Ponds, or any water source for that matter, are vital for an animal's survival. Use them to your hunting advantage. Water that sits close to a sanctuary is a prime spot for harvesting mature bucks, especially early in the season, prior to the rut.

FIELDS

8. Turn flat areas into high-quality meadows and fields by planting native grasses and forbs. Maintain them in early successional stages through prescribed fire and disking. Strip disking one-third of the field at a time keeps the area's ground cover diverse, with the grasses at various stages of growth. Every 100 feet or so, break up the field with a native shrub row that will provide cover and food in the fall and winter, as well as protection from snow and wind.

FOOD PLOTS

Food plots are like dessert for wildlife, if the rest of your property provides the overall nutrition and cover they need to survive.

9. I would call the food plot nearest the sanctuary area a harvest plot. Plant foods that are palatable to deer during your primary hunting season. Annual plantings like brassicas and radishes for fall and cowpeas for the early season are irresistible. A perennial clover-chicory mix, like the NWTF's Triple Threat Clover is unbeatable just about anywhere.

10. The larger food plot, which would be at least 3 acres, provides a year-round food source. Plant it in a three-part, three-year rotation of Turkey Gold chufa, a RoundUp ready corn and soybean mix, and a Durana clover mix like Triple Threat Clover. You can buy all of them

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