



RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Spotlight on the South Region Wildlife Habitat Management Opportunities

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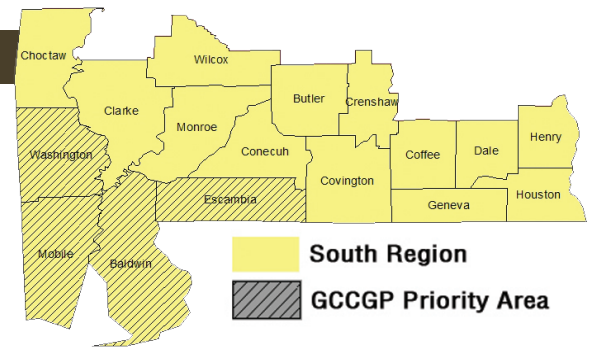
In the Winter 2016 issue of *Alabama Wildlife*, Kyle Marable discussed AWF's Land Stewardship Assistance Program and wildlife habitat management opportunities in the north region. In this article I will briefly describe a few opportunities for managing wildlife habitat on private lands in the south region.

Exotic plants generally out compete native plants for space, consequently, native plants and wildlife that depend on native plants for food and cover resources are displaced. Exotic plant species that are commonly found in south Alabama include: cogongrass, Japanese climbing fern, Chinese privet, kudzu, and Chinese tallowtree. Countless acres in south Alabama are occupied by these and other exotic species. Removal and replacement of exotic species with native species is critical to prevent further spread and sustain wildlife habitat.

Opportunities abound in south Alabama to enhance or establish wetlands such as moist-soil habitat, shallow water/mud flat habitat, and forested wetlands (e.g. cypress, tupelo gum, etc.). When properly managed, wetlands provide excellent habitat for a host of game and nongame wildlife species. Additionally, wetlands provide environmental services that benefit wildlife and humans alike by ensuring clean water.

Creation of early successional habitat in south Alabama is an excellent means to establish wildlife habitat. Agriculture landscapes, forested ecosystems, old fields, utility right-of-ways, etc., offer opportunities to create early successional habitat for game and nongame wildlife on thousands of underutilized acres. Early successional habitat consists of a heavy grass and forb component with a scattering of the occasional shrub/small tree. Native warm season grass (NWSG) grasslands make great early successional habitat and can be created naturally where a viable native seed bank exists or artificially (i.e. planted) where the native seed bank has been depleted. Once established, these habitats can be easily maintained through periodic disturbances (i.e. fire and/or grazing), providing essential habitat for a suite of species and pleasing aesthetics for many years.

Longleaf pine forests provide excellent opportunities to create and maintain wildlife habitat. The canopy structure of longleaf pines allows for more direct sunlight to reach the forest floor than other southern yellow pine species. Abundant sunlight stimulates growth of NWSG and a diverse community of forbs, providing early



Japanese climbing fern is one of many invasive exotic plants in Alabama. This plant is especially problematic in pine plantations due to its tolerance of shade and propensity to act as a vertical fuel during prescribed burning operations.



This three-year-old stand of planted longleaf pine provides early successional habitat beneficial to wildlife. With proper management longleaf stands like this one can provide wildlife habitat for the entirety of its lifespan.

successional habitat preferred by many game and non-game species. Longleaf can be burned early and often, providing landowners and managers great flexibility to create and maintain wildlife habitat. However, longleaf pine might not fit into your current management scheme due to site conditions or property objectives. No need to worry though as many southern yellow pine species can equally provide quality habitat if managed properly with prescribed fire and proper thinning regimes.

Hopefully, I have given you insight into some opportunities available to incorporate into your land management objectives in south Alabama. If you are located within the south region of the state and are interested in managing your property for wildlife habitat or incorporating wildlife habitat into your current management, contact Drew G. Arnold by phone 334.399.1798 or email Darnold@alabamawildlife.org.

This backwater hardwood slough provides excellent habitat for an array of wildlife species, especially waterfowl and migratory shorebirds.

