



 **Habitat
for the Hatch**
An NWTf Conservation Initiative

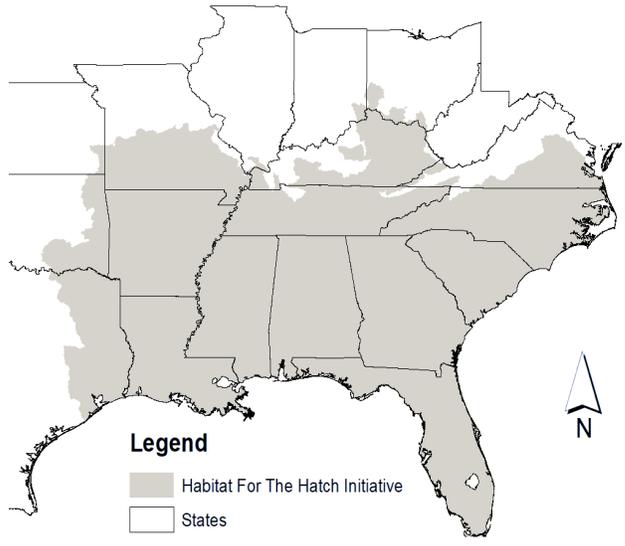
National Wild Turkey Federation Habitat for the Hatch Guide for Private Landowners

What is the Habitat for the Hatch Initiative?
The purpose of this 10-year initiative is to improve forest and open lands health and resiliency at a landscape scale across the southeastern U.S. through conserving over 1 million acres by 2033. This will ultimately lead to more robust wild turkey populations and healthier ecosystems across the Southeast.

What is nesting and brood-rearing habitat and why is it so important?
Ideal nesting and brood-rearing habitat is characterized by ground cover able to conceal nests and young poults while allowing mobility at ground level (<1.5 feet). Desirable vegetation within open fields or forest understory is often dominated by forbs (e.g., flowering plants) and brambles. Flowering plants and shrubs attract protein-rich insects which are critical to egg development for females (hens) as well as the growth and development of young poults. Insects must make up about 90% of a poult's diet in the first two to three weeks to enable their growth and develop the ability to fly into low trees or bushes. This allows them to roost overnight off the ground and escape dangers during the day. These areas also provide ample soft mast and herbaceous vegetation



that wild turkeys also require. Nesting and brood-rearing habitats are commonly found in and near transition zones between two cover types such as between grassland and shrub/forestland habitat. It is important to note that quality early brood-rearing habitat is also defined as "year of" disturbance—in other words, the growing season within which the treatment was completed. Quality nesting habitat is usually the following



The Landscape Habitat for the Hatch encompasses the NWTf's Mid-South Rebirth and Southern Piney Woods Big Six of Wildlife Conservation regions. The initiative area includes all or portions of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

one or two growing seasons on that same site. Therefore, to create and maintain quality nesting and early brood-rearing habitat, ideally, a portion ($\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$) of the property should be treated annually.

It is during the nesting and brood-rearing periods of the spring and summer when hens and young poults are most vulnerable to predators. The risk and susceptibility of depredation likely increases in areas of poor habitat that lack adequate cover and food resources. Through active habitat management aimed at improving conditions during this critical time period, managers and landowners can help offset the pressures to nesting females and poults.

Priority Conservation Practices for Nesting and Brooding Habitat

Conservation practices key to promoting wildlife habitat include: prescribed burning, timber harvest, timber stand improvement, early successional habitat development and management, chemical and mechanical treatment of invasive species and edge feathering. Landowners who implement these practices will increase the amount of suitable habitat for wild turkeys as well as other species such as songbirds, white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits and pollinators.

Outlined below are a few examples of management practices that can benefit wild turkeys:

Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning is a great way to manage for healthy forests, grasslands and transitional early successional habitat. Prescribed fire has a wide range of uses and is highly cost effective. Burning can be used to control woody encroachment, reduce fuel loads and litter and promote desirable new growth. Prescribed fire helps improve wild turkey nesting and brooding cover.



Timber Harvest

In general, timber harvest increases the amount of sunlight that reaches the forest floor, which is beneficial for wild turkeys. Timber harvest can include multiple silvicultural treatments, including: clear cut (even-aged), thinning, crop tree release, shelterwood, select openings, etc. The treatment selected depends greatly on your objectives for the stand.

Timber Stand Improvement

Timber Stand Improvement activities can be a good way to promote quality timber growth while also providing quality wildlife habitat. Activities may include: mastication, hack-n-squirt and herbicide application, among many others. These activities, when coupled with timber harvest, can increase sunlight to the forest floor, promoting new growth for nesting and brood-rearing habitats.

Early Successional Habitat Development and Management

Turkey and other wildlife seek out early successional habitat types such as grasslands, old fields or pastures, shrub thickets and young forest for the excellent cover and quality of food that can be found, such as flowering plants, browse, fruits and insects. These habitats must be continually managed with a form of disturbance, such as fire and/or mowing, in order to maintain the early successional community.



Chemical and Mechanical Treatment of Invasive Species

Invasive plant species are one of the largest threats to native biodiversity. Removing these species can be done mechanically, chemically, biologically or via a combination of methods, improving forest and open-land community health for improved nesting and brood-rearing for wild turkeys.



Edge Feathering

Edge feathering is the strategy of harvesting or felling trees along a forest edge to expose sunlight and promote an early successional plant response. The increased sunlight promotes a response from native shrubs and small trees to create thickets between the forest edge and an adjacent field. This is one way to promote habitat suitable for wild turkeys and American woodcock and bedding cover for white-tailed deer. These native shrub thickets provide nesting cover for wild turkeys, in addition to escape cover, winter cover and loafing cover for other wildlife.