

Conclusion

Availability of quality early succession habitat is a limiting factor for many wildlife species. Throughout the Mid-South, quality habitat has been destroyed by suburban development and degraded by various land-use practices (such as establishment of tall fescue pasture/hayland, “clean” farming and allowing fields to develop into closed-canopied forest). Converting perennial cool-season grass acreage to nwsg and associated vegetation and establishing nwsg around field borders and “odd” areas that are not cropped will improve conditions for wildlife and positively affect wildlife populations dependent upon early-succession habitats. Existing areas of early-succession habitat must be maintained if benefits are expected to continue.

Dependable production of quality forage is critical for livestock producers. Nwsg can be used to provide an abundance of high-quality forage during a period when production of cool-season forages is inadequate. For those producers interested in wildlife, nwsg are a much better alternative than non-native warm-season grasses, such as bermudagrass, sorghum-sudan and the Old World bluestems.

Management of nwsg (as with other habitats) is absolutely necessary for wildlife and is different from that recommended for cool-season forages. Prescribed fire is highly recommended to maintain and improve wildlife habitat and stimulate nutritious forage growth. Timing and intensity of haying and grazing should be considered carefully to ensure quality forage and maintenance of the stand and provide wildlife habitat.

Landowners should not be skeptical about nwsg. The advantages for wildlife and the quality of forage produced have been proven time and again throughout the Mid-South and in other regions as well. With the recent technological advancements in equipment and herbicides, establishment is no longer a concern. And cost of establishment is much reduced, especially with the cost-share opportunities provided through USDA programs. Technical assistance is as close as the county NRCS office or Extension office. Advice and assistance is also available through state wildlife agencies and land-grant universities.



Fig 7.1
The value of native grasses and quality early succession habitat goes beyond wildlife populations and cattle weight gains. Passing on family traditions as pure and wholesome as quail and rabbit hunting is immeasurable.

nately, is disappearing as quickly as the habitat is destroyed. Hence the need to reverse this trend!

Nwsg should not be construed as a panacea for wildlife or forage management. However, there should be no doubt that nwsg can be used to benefit the landowner who desires quality early-succession habitat for wildlife and/or improved forage for livestock.

Finally, another real benefit of nwsg that cannot be underestimated is the aesthetic beauty of a field dominated by native plants. Getting a glimpse of what early explorers might have seen centuries ago as they traveled through the Mid-South region is most pleasing. The beauty of the plants, coupled with the presence of the associated wildlife, provides real satisfaction for many landowners. For those who enjoy quail, rabbit and deer hunting, the benefits go beyond aesthetics and enable many landowners to pass down a tradition that, most unfortu-

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