

## PLANNING PROCESS: NEED AN OVERVIEW



### Planning Process

- key terms
- evaluating the land
- setting goals
- considering alternatives
- writing the plan
- implementing the plan
- working with neighbors

### Careful Planning Equals Success

People value land for many different reasons. The housing developer and the farmer have a different perspective on what a certain property can or cannot do for them. A family who plans to build a house on their land but who also want to attract wildlife may have a different point of view. No matter how you intend to use your land, you should always have some kind of plan or

strategy. When the family is ready to build that house, for example, they would not have a builder order materials without first deciding what kind of house they want to build. An accurate plan helps the builder know what kind of materials and how much of each are needed. It also helps to determine the cost of materials and labor. Through careful planning, you will have a good idea if your project will succeed even before you begin.

When managing your land for wildlife, the planning process should involve five steps: (1) evaluating the land, (2) setting goals, (3) considering alternatives, (4) writing a management plan, (5) implementing the plan and monitoring the results. This chapter introduces the overall process to you, and the chapters in this section will explain in greater detail how to accomplish the process, step by step.

### Key Terms

Before the planning process begins, you should be familiar with a few key terms that will aid in understanding your land and its potential for wildlife. These terms are briefly explained here as an overview of the factors involved in providing habitat.

### Habitat Components

There are four basic habitat components needed for a species to survive. These are food, water, cover, and space. Even though all species need these components, the amount and type of each differs by individual

species. Knowing the specific needs of each species will allow you to provide the correct habitat components. For more information on specific species refer to the section on **Species Management**.

### Limiting Factors

When one or more habitat components is lacking and insufficient, this component is considered a limit to the amount of wildlife that can exist there, or a limiting factor. Each species has specific habitat component requirements, and therefore will have different possible limiting factors. Being aware of the limiting factors present on your land may help in providing better quality habitat.

### Carrying Capacity

All habitats have a maximum carrying capacity; that is, they will only support or carry a certain number of a wildlife species within a particular area. Usually, a limited supply of one component will control how many animal species the habitat will support. Thus, when there are no longer habitat components that a species can use, the land has reached its carrying capacity. Land managers, by providing or removing key habitat components, can affect carrying capacity thus increasing or reducing wildlife populations.

### Trade-offs

It is important to understand that you may not be able to manage for all of the goals that you may have in mind. When managing for specific species, there will always be other





species that habitat is not provided for. Therefore, when managing for certain species you will eliminate other species from your land. However, when planned properly, managing for a group of species, instead of one particular species, will most likely provide the least amount of trade-offs. Managing for a diversity of species, however, will reduce the number of any one species.

## Planning Steps

### 1. Evaluating the Land

Before you manage your land for wildlife, it is important to learn as much as possible about the animals that live on your property, and their specialized habitat needs. It is also important to determine the kinds and amount of habitat on yours and surrounding properties. The best way to obtain this information is to become familiar with your property by studying it during different seasons and making separate inventories of the plants and animals you are able to identify. Also, look for physical changes that may vary by season. For example, where is it sunny or shaded; are there seasonally wet areas, what happens after a major rainfall or snowstorm? Additional information that may help in managing your land is available from many sources, including chapters in this guide, local libraries, videos and tele-

vision programs, adult education courses, and individual experts. Some of these experts may be neighbors, former owners of your property, or local people such as biology teachers or naturalists who have specialized knowledge. Further, consider consulting with a professional land manager, such as a wildlife biologist.

In addition, think about how your property fits into the local landscape. Do your woods, for example, merge with your neighbors'? Do fencerows connect your land to other properties? What land-use practices are occurring on land around yours, and what impacts do they appear to have on local wildlife? Finding answers to these questions will help you to decide what you'd like to do with your property and whether or not your expectations are realistic. For more information, see the chapter on **Evaluating the Land**. You may also find the following chapters, within this Habitat Planning section, to be helpful: **Presettlement/Past Vegetation Types; Edges and Fragments; and Knowing Your Soils**.

### 2. Setting and Prioritizing Goals

Setting management goals is an exciting part of the planning process because you are now thinking about what measurable differences you can make for wildlife. Problems will occur, though, when landowners do not think the process through to a logical conclusion. For example, the desire to attract pheasants, which are grassland birds, is not realistic if the land you wish to manage is a 40-acre woodlot. You should become familiar with the habitat needs of the desired species, and be realistic in your appraisal of whether you can meet those needs. Think, too, about the values you ascribe to your land. Do you want it to produce income,

provide hunting or other recreation, or are you more interested in aesthetic returns such as creating natural beauty, providing wildlife habitat for viewing pleasure, or protecting rare species?

To accomplish a goal, it is often useful to break it into smaller sub-goals or objectives, and then identify actions to be completed. While a goal is generally broad in scope, objectives are more specific measurable outcomes and actions are very task-oriented. Your goal, for example, might be to attract bluebirds to your property. A review of your property suggests nesting structures and foraging habitat are lacking. One objective might be to have enough nest structures to attract three nesting pairs within three years. The action needed to achieve that objective may include constructing and placing six nest boxes in suitable locations within the next two years. A second objective might be to pro-

Setting goals involves breaking your ideas into goals, objectives, and actions. Below is a flow chart outlining how to accomplish your goals.

Ideas

└─> Goal

└─> Objective 1

└─> Action 1

└─> Action 2

└─> Action 3

Objective 2

└─> Action 1

└─> Action 2

└─> Action 3

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vide two acres of high quality foraging habitat within three years. Specific actions, such as mowing a portion of an old field, might be used to achieve the objective.

By thinking about goals in a broad sense, and then moving through objectives and actions, you can focus your efforts into smaller, timely pieces that fit well together. Too often you may want to take action without thinking adequately about an overall goal or the "big picture." The result is often a set of mismatched pieces that have to be redone or eliminated. On the other hand, you may be overwhelmed by the "big picture" and do not know where to begin. Moving from broad goals to specific actions is a good way to avoid wasted time, effort, and financial resources.

Once your goals are set, prioritize their importance and determine whether they can be realistically achieved. Prioritizing your goals is a way to view the "big picture" in small, organized pieces. This will help you to plan accordingly and complete the most important goals first. For more information on this and the following step refer to the chapter on **Setting Goals and Considering Alternatives** in this section.

### 3. Considering Alternatives to Meet the Goal

There is usually more than one way to achieve a goal, and wildlife managers in particular often have to sort through many options to find the best method. Every decision made will affect wildlife and wildlife habitat in some way, but some impacts may be beneficial to your goal while others are harmful. The successful manager is one who tries to anticipate how each decision will make a difference and which decision is the best one to meet the goal.

There may be many alternatives to choose from. Once you have determined an array of alternatives that would meet your goal, you must decide which one is the best for your situation. You must consider cost, time involved, and impacts on neighbors and on other forms of wildlife before choosing an alternative. In other words, choosing the alternatives with the least amount of trade-offs is usually the best option. Consider how much time and money you have to spend, what kind of equipment might be needed, and the impacts your decisions will make on your neighbors, the local landscape, and other kinds of wildlife besides the types you wish to attract.

### 4. Writing a Management Plan

Once you have decided on your goals and examined all possible alternatives, it is time to write a management plan. The purpose of this plan is to outline the steps that will be taken in order to reach your goals. These steps include creating a project map (that will highlight types of habitat and management projects), determining management actions, and creating a timeline to implement these actions. For more information on this and the following step refer to the chapter on **Writing a Management Plan**.

### 5. Implementing the Decision, Monitoring the Result

Once you have finished writing the management plan, you will implement the decisions you outlined. Monitoring the results of those decisions, is a way to determine if your goals have been met, or if the management project needs to be altered. Do not expect the results to occur instantly; be patient as sometimes it takes two or more years for results to become apparent.



However, conditions may change, and it may be necessary to revise a goal. For example, in the planning process, a landowner decides to establish a 40-acre field of warm season grasses, beginning in three years. When it comes time to start, seed prices have risen and the landowner can only afford to prepare and seed 20 acres. Twenty acres of warm season grasses are planted, and the other 20 acres revert to an old field. This decision allowed the landowner to stay within the set budget, but did not provide the amount of grassland cover for pheasants that was originally planned. However, the landowner was pleased with the number of rabbits that used the 20-acre old field.

## Working with Neighbors

Working in partnership with other landowners is often an exciting alternative to doing everything yourself. As Michigan wildlife habitats become more fragmented due to the selling and dividing of land, small property owners sometimes find themselves wondering what they can reasonably expect to do with their

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backyard, part of a former pasture, or sliver of woods. The answers may lie in providing one component of wildlife habitat and letting your neighbor provide another component. For example, the wetland on a neighbor's property and the upland field on your land can be co-managed for the benefit of birds and mammals that rely on these habitats. The chapter on **Working with Neighbors** offers more information and examples.

In summary, the planning process for land management begins with an evaluation of the property and a personal appraisal of what you would like to do with it. Establishing realistic goals will help you to choose specific objectives for meeting the goals. Along the way, a constant evaluation of the progress made and the alternatives that appear will assure that the goals remain realistic, even though they may have changed. Once the goals are achieved, you must decide whether to maintain the project, alter it in some way, or start a new cycle of management. Although this entire planning concept may appear complicated, it is in reality a logical, step-by-step way to assure that your land lives up to the expectations you have for it.

## FOR ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS CONTACT:

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**Private Land Partnerships:** This partnership was formed between both private and public organizations in order to address private lands wildlife issues. Individuals share resources, information, and expertise. This landowner's guide has been a combined effort between these groups working towards one goal: Natural Resources Education. We hope this guide provides you with the knowledge and the motivation to make positive changes for our environment.

FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE: CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT