

Brush Control Helps Wildlife

By: N WTF

Landowners or hunters interested in improving their land for wildlife will find creating openings or planting food plots to be the most effective way.

Unfortunately, it is also the most costly. And of those costs, brush control is the largest, most continuous expense. Despite this concern, landowners have three brush control alternatives, all which can be employed for varying costs and with varying benefits. These alternatives are mechanical methods, like roll drum chopping or mowing, prescribed burning or applying herbicides.



Using a roll-drum chopper or mowing to control brush is a common, yet costly method. Some areas require chopping or mowing every year or two, so these costs can really add up. In addition, these methods don't always encourage the growth of desirable food plants and may require you to plant supplemental food plots.

Controlled burning offers another alternative. A good burn can result in the growth of more native plant species and create more brood habitat for turkey poults and other birds and animals than expensive work with heavy equipment.

Burning is an excellent management practice in terms of financial cost and generating more beneficial plants. Despite popular, yet misguided notions, many plant species have evolved with fire and respond well to its occurrence. Not only does burning reduce the accumulation of dead plant material and recycle nutrients, it also stimulates vigorous plant growth along with fruit and seed production.

Although burning achieves only temporary brush control and must be done every few years, once a plan is in place, the most difficult part of burning is finding a day with the right weather conditions. Additionally, in some areas, burning has become less feasible because of liability and air-quality issues.

If burning is not feasible, the application of herbicides is another alternative for vegetation control and enhancing the growth of native plants. A popular choice is a selective herbicide such as Arsenal with the active ingredient imazapyr. Specifically recommended for establishing and maintaining wildlife openings, this selective herbicide controls unwanted hardwood brush and permits beneficial food plants for wildlife to prosper. Combined with periodic prescribed fire, high-quality wildlife habitat can be created and maintained.

Many legumes, like lespedeza and partridge pea, tolerate the herbicide and continue to grow. Other plants such as morning glory and wild geranium quickly regenerate after its use. Seed-bearing plants produce heavier and more nutritious seeds in the absence of competitive brush, and flowering plants are able to thrive, attracting an abundance of insects-insects which provide food for many bird species including wild turkey poults.

A one-time application can last seven to 10 years, making this a very cost-effective choice. In addition, because you're encouraging the growth of native food plants, you'll spend less on supplemental food plots. Unlike prescribed fire, however, herbicides will not reduce the amount of dead wood (a natural fuel for wild fires) in the forest nor recycle nutrients in the soil.

As one of the most environmentally compatible herbicide ingredients on the market, imazapyr works on an enzyme that exists only in plants, not in wildlife, insects, aquatic life or humans. It's available in several products available to landowners or managers.