

Habitat that has been recently site prepped or reforested is generally characterized by an abundance of forbs, legumes and grasses that provide food and cover for wildlife adapted to early successional forest communities. As pine seedlings grow, however, their expanding crown shades out plants beneficial to wildlife adapted to these conditions. In addition, rapidly growing seedlings out-compete herbaceous plants for water, nutrients, and space. Eventually, the pine canopy will completely close and shade out herbaceous vegetation except along stand edges.



Recently daylighted roadside adjacent to a pine plantation. Photo Credit: Claude Jenkins, AWF

Landowners can maintain wildlife habitat throughout the rotation of a pine stand by implementing a roadside management program. Trees and brush within 30-60 feet of both sides of the road should be removed (called day-lighting). Initial clearing of roadsides can be done during a scheduled timber harvest. Once roadsides are cleared, mow or disk them every 2 – 3 years to maintain a diversity of weeds, grasses, and vines beneficial to wildlife.

Early successional roadside habitat is very beneficial for many species including turkeys, deer, quail, rabbits, as well as various songbirds, insects and small mammals. Roadsides provide essential brood habitat, food, and travel corridors for turkeys. Unsuitable habitat can be avoided by walking on roads or roadsides that link better habitat. Deer are attracted to roadsides due to an increase in forage production. Quail and rabbits are drawn to roadsides by an increase in early successional habitat and edge.



Daylighted roadside adjacent to a thinned pine plantation. Photo Credit: Frank Allen, ADCNR

Increased utilization of roadsides by wildlife can create unforeseen problems such as vehicle/animal collisions and illegal hunting activity. Installing gates on roads where needed should minimize unwanted vehicular traffic. Limiting and controlling access is an important feature to any roadside management program with wildlife population enhancement and management objectives.

In addition to wildlife management benefits, daylighting roads can reduce road maintenance cost. Increased sunlight and wind reaching the road surface reduces drying time, decreasing damage by vehicles. A dry road surface can be safely navigated by more vehicles with very little impact.



This information is provided by the Alabama Forestry Commission
For more information please visit: www.forestry.alabama.gov