

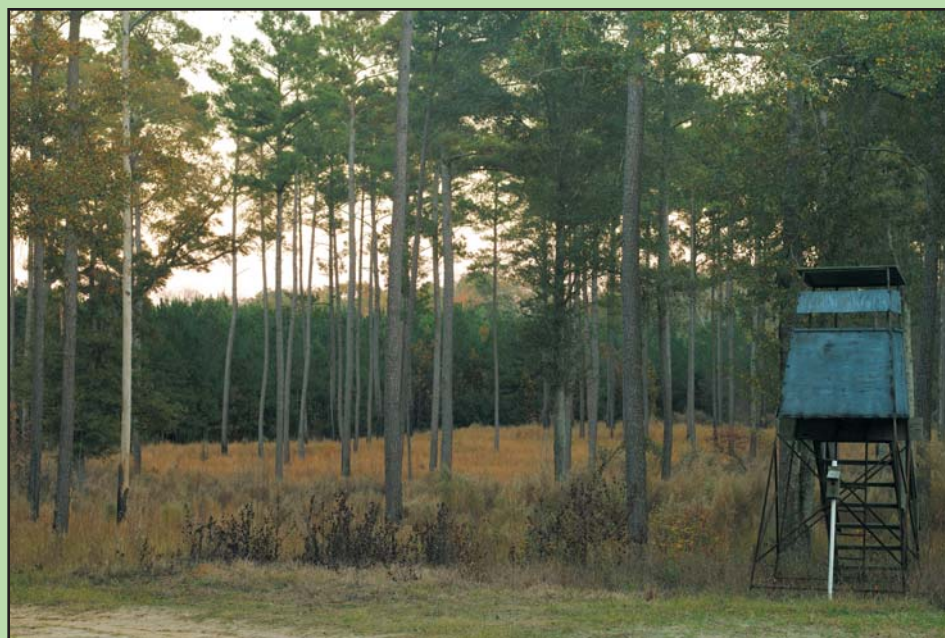
The Hunt for Forestland Revenue: Improved Wildlife Habitat Boosts Hunting Lease Premiums

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While timber production can be a profitable venture for Southern landowners, those with an especially enterprising nature always watch for new ways to maximize revenue from their land.

According to a survey conducted by the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences at Auburn University, fees from hunting leases in Alabama annually range from \$5.00 to \$12.00 per acre statewide¹. This means a forest landowner could potentially make up to \$6,000 each year from 500 acres of leased hunting land. Over a ten-year period, such hunting leases could potentially yield a net of around \$60,000.

However, simply owning potential hunting land doesn't mean checks come flying in overnight. The amount forest
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Courtesy of BASF

To command premium hunting lease rates, forest landowners must invest in wildlife habitat improvements through proper forestland management practices.

The Hunt for Forestland Revenue

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landowners can charge for a hunting lease varies greatly depending on the quality of the habitat and the number of desirable wildlife that live on a property. To command premium hunting lease rates, forest landowners must invest in wildlife habitat improvements through proper forestland management practices.

Using Quality Vegetation Management™ to Improve Nature

Knowledgeable hunters know that deer, turkey and other game animals survive on nutritional vegetation like forbs, grasses, legumes, rubus, and various

seeds and berries – all of which are shade-intolerant, low-level vegetation. However, many forest landowners fail to recognize that in the Southeast, this type of wildlife-preferred vegetation faces an uphill battle to thrive unless the forestland is properly managed.

One of the most beneficial ways to manage land is to follow the principles and practices of Quality Vegetation Management™ (QVM). QVM helps landowners create and sustain healthy habitats through professional, ethical, and responsible practices. It also supports using trained professionals as needed for timber consulting and application.

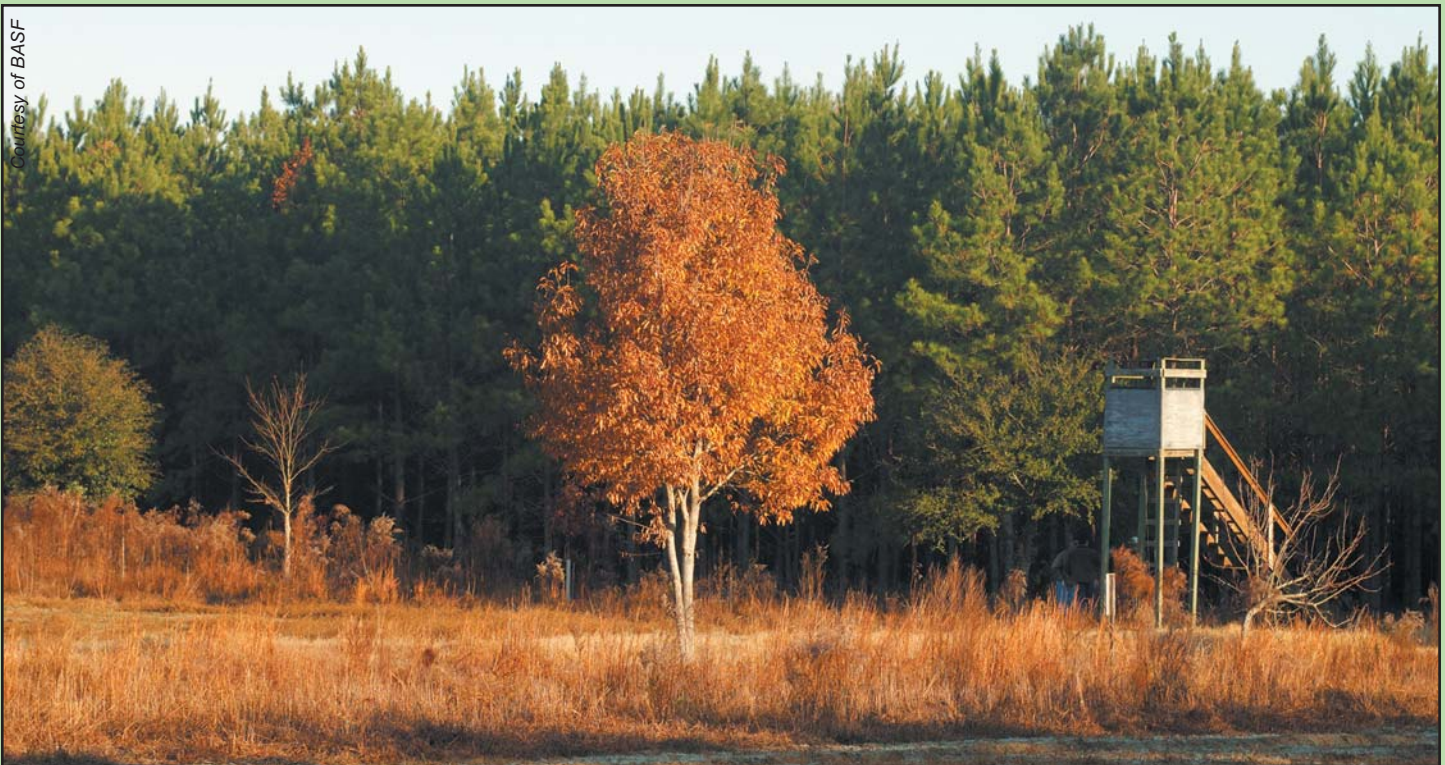
Many southeastern pine systems have dense undergrowth and are dominated by thick mid-story hardwood trees such as water oak and sweetgum. Over time, this developing mid-story shades preferred wildlife plants by preventing sunlight from reaching the forest floor and stealing valuable nutrients and moisture from the soil. As the food sources disappear, so too do the animals and birds.

Applying the principles and practices of QVM can help recapture pine stands and allow wildlife food plants on the forest floor to flourish. Landowners should work with a consultant or applicator to devise a plan for controlling competition



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Active forestland management creates a win-win financial situation – both from a wildlife and timber production standpoint.

from mid-story hardwood brush and trees. This type of control can increase pine tree growth, maximize revenues, and enhance forest aesthetics and accessibility.

Landowners can increase the nutrients, moisture, and sunlight available to their pine stand by using herbicides to eliminate competing vegetation. In addition, the combination of herbicides followed by a cool season prescribed burn in late winter or early spring has multiple benefits. In addition to enhancing pine growth, this management technique enhances habitat for wildlife species, such as Northern bobwhite quail, white-tail deer and turkey, as well as many non-game bird species.

Practical research by Mississippi State University on privately-owned forestland near Macon, Mississippi, reports the positive effects of Arsenal herbicide Applicators Concentrate and fire on preferred wildlife food plants. The study took place on 1,800 acres composed of 92% pine and mixed pine-hardwood stands, as well as diverse plant communities. Approximately 100 acres of mature pine forests were treated with herbicide in October 1998 at a rate of 16 ounces per acre using a skidder-mounted sprayer. A prescribed burn followed the sprayed areas in March 1999. Adjacent forestland was not treated with herbicide and fire.

Pine stands treated and then burned in March exhibited much higher wildlife food and cover plant abundance than untreated stands. The study recorded more than 90 different native plant species in the treated pine stands – 75% of which consisted of preferred food sources for upland game birds, non-game birds, rabbits, and white-tailed deer.

In addition, browse, seed and fruit-producing plants such as panic grasses, wild grape, blackberry, beauty berry, common ragweed, beggarlice, partridge pea, and lespedezas comprised more than 50% of the ground cover. Shade-intolerant grasses, forbs, and legumes increased approximately eight-fold in two growing seasons following treatment.

In contrast, leaf litter and downed logs populated the forest floor in the untreated stands. In fact, less than 10% of the forest floor featured plant cover. The stands featured only 38 different plant species, mostly young hardwood trees, such as oak, hickory, and maple, as well as shrubs, such as blueberry. Why the difference in ground cover vegetation? The difference, in part, can be attributed to the shading effects of the mid-story woody plants. Treated stands exhibited less than 10% mid-story, while untreated stands exhibited more than 60% mid-story plant coverage.

A Bountiful Hunt

Many forest landowners mistakenly give little or no consideration to wildlife habitat as a byproduct of proper land management practices. In fact, there are still many who do not practice any type of forestland management. Some simply harvest, sell timber, and hope their next stand of pines reaches healthy maturity naturally.

But enterprising and ecologically perceptive forest landowners realize that active forestland management creates a win-win financial situation – both from a wildlife and timber production standpoint. And for forest landowners seeking a viable way to generate annual income from their land, a hunting lease is an obvious choice.

Those looking to maximize lease premiums should be willing to make an upfront investment in proper forestland management. It pays off in the long run. For more information on how you can improve your forestland, visit www.vanswers.com. Always read and follow label directions. ☞

Source:

¹Hussain, Anwar, Daowei Zhang, and James B. Armstrong. "Willingness to Pay for Hunting Leases in Alabama." School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University. Reprinted from *Southern Journal of Applied Forestry*, Vol. 28, No.1, February 2004.