

PURPOSE: Agricultural producers are often interested in developing wildlife habitat if it will not compromise their agricultural production goals. Buffer practices such as field borders, filter strips, grass waterways and riparian corridors will benefit wildlife while removing marginal cropland from production and minimizing impacts on production capabilities.

FIELD BORDERS: Field borders are herbaceous, non-crop buffers used around the entire field margin to remove low producing areas from production and provide wildlife habitat. Well-managed field borders provide winter cover for grassland birds, food and cover for cottontail rabbits, improve nesting and brood rearing habitat for bobwhite quail and wild turkeys, and provide foraging opportunities for white-tailed deer.

Field borders can be established by planting a small grain or legume (kobe lespedeza, partridge pea) cover crop, and then allowed to succeed naturally. They should be at least 20 feet wide and left undisturbed during the growing season. Periodic disturbance (3-4 year rotation) such as disking or prescribed burning is necessary to prevent invasion of woody vegetation and maintain suitable habitat. No more than 50% of all field border habitats should be disturbed in the same year.



FILTER STRIPS AND GRASS WATERWAYS: Filter strips and grass waterways provide cover and food resources for a variety of wildlife species. In addition, they provide links between forests and field interiors, increasing the amount of usable space for wildlife. Like field borders, the width of filter strips and grass waterways should be a minimum of 20 feet and left undisturbed during the growing season. Periodic disturbance (every 3-4 years) is necessary to stimulate growth of desirable vegetation and prevent invasion of woody vegetation. No more than 50% of all filter strip and grass waterway habitat should be disturbed in the same year.

RIPARIAN CORRIDORS: Riparian corridors are areas adjacent to linear bodies of water, such as rivers and streams. These areas enhance water quality and aquatic habitat quality by preventing sediment, nutrients, and pesticides from running off agricultural fields. They help maintain the biological integrity of aquatic environments by stabilizing streambanks and reducing sedimentation, which improves light penetration and productivity of aquatic systems. Woody debris that has fallen into the stream stabilizes the stream channel and provides a substrate for aquatic invertebrates and cover for fishes.

Photo Credit: Dr. Wes Burger



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