



Southern Appalachian
Conservation Business Plan
Executive Summary

———— 2021 ————



Southern Appalachian Conservation Business Plan Executive Summary

Ruffed Grouse Society & American Woodcock Society

WHO WE ARE

Established in 1961, the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society (RGS) is North America's foremost conservation organization dedicated to preserving our sporting traditions by creating healthy forest habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and all forest wildlife. RGS works with landowners and government agencies to facilitate forest management for wildlife utilizing scientific management practices.

Our Mission

Uniting conservationists to improve wildlife habitat and forest health. Promoting forest stewardship for our forests, our wildlife, and our future.

Our Vision

Landscapes of diverse, functioning forest ecosystems that provide homes for wildlife and opportunities for people to experience them. These same forests clean the air, filter water, and support local communities.

Pillars

- Healthy Forests
- Abundant Wildlife
- Conservation Ethic

Threats

- Habitat quality
 - Habitat quantity or distribution
 - Climate change
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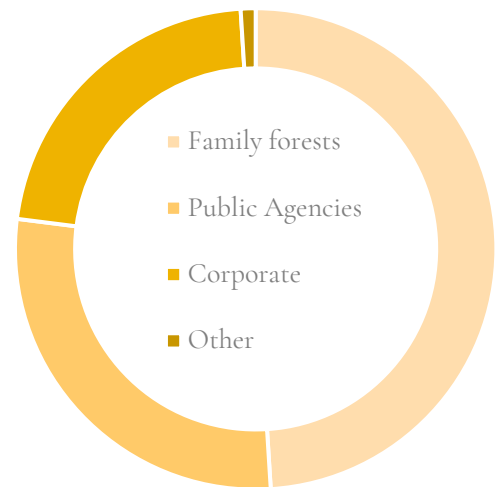
CONSERVATION NEED

RGS’ Southern Appalachian regional program consists of the mountainous regions of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Southwest Virginia. The Southern Appalachian Mountains contain some of the most biologically diverse temperate forest ecoregions in the world.

However, decades of fire suppression and a lack of responsible forest management has led to a departure from healthy forest conditions. Today’s Appalachian forests consist of an overabundance of closed-canopy, mid-successional conditions and a lack of young forests, open forests, and late-successional forests.

Across the Appalachians, the total forest area of small-diameter forests in Appalachian Mountains have decreased 34 percent since the 1980’s. This habitat degradation combined with habitat loss (conversion to non-forest) and habitat fragmentation (parcellation and development) has caused severe declines in forest wildlife populations. As a result, over the past 50 years in the Appalachians grouse populations have declined 1.5 percent annually and woodcock populations have declined 1.08 percent annually. In addition to grouse and woodcock, wildlife not traditionally considered “disturbance dependent” (e.g. cerulean warbler, wood thrush) have been found through scientific research to depend on forest age diversity.

**Southern Appalachian
 Forest Ownership**



Family forest landowners (noncorporate private) own about 49% of all forestland in the Southern Appalachians; 28% is owned by public agencies (federal, state, local), 22% is corporate (corporate private), and 1% is “other.”

National Forests in the region are particularly important because of their large acreage, unique habitats, and the public access opportunities for wildlife-associated recreation, including hunting. However, it is important to achieve desired forest conditions on private lands as well, given their large footprint in the region.

OUR APPROACH

Our program will focus on a suite of at-risk wildlife species in addition to grouse and woodcock that require healthy, resilient forests. These species also are culturally significant in the region. The life history needs of this wildlife suite vary, but each can benefit from active forest management that produces a mosaic of mixed-aged forests.

Our working forests approach is based on the intersection of sustainable forest management and scientifically supported wildlife habitat needs. We will apply the principles of forest ecology and silviculture to provide habitat for focal wildlife at both landscape- and stand-level scales while improving timber stand conditions, providing for forest regeneration, and producing forest products in an ever-changing environment.

Our plan is founded on a “shifting mosaic” approach to restore forest health and improve habitat (see Figure 1). Our goals over the next five years are to create or enhance 12,500 acres of young forest habitat, 17,000 acres of mixed and open forest habitat, and 22,000 acres of late successional forest habitat. The long-term goal is to create and maintain 10-15 percent young forest conditions (5-20 years), 30-55 percent mixed and open forest conditions (40 to 90 square feet per acre basal area), and 30-55 percent late successional forest conditions (heterogeneous structure, uneven-aged) in focal geographies.



Geographic Focus:

Efforts to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration will be targeted in Dynamic Forest Restoration Blocks that are tiered to the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture’s (AMJV) Focal Landscapes and further refined based on regional prioritizations. (See Figure 2).

Targets:

- Young Forest Birds
(Young Forest Conditions):
 - Ruffed grouse
 - American woodcock
 - Golden-winged warbler
- Mixed and Open Forest Birds
(Mixed and Open Forest Conditions):
 - Cerulean warbler
 - Eastern whip-poor-will
- Forest Interior Birds
- (Late Successional Forest Conditions):
 - Wood thrush
 - Scarlet tanager



OUR STRATEGIES

Conservation Delivery: Improve habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock, and all forest wildlife by building regional networks, partnering with public and private entities, participating in planning and implementing forest management on public lands, and strengthening delivery of forestry and wildlife programs for private lands.

Science: Take guidance and invest in programs based on best available science in forest and wildlife management by collaborating with researchers and delivering scientific findings to varied audiences.

Communication: Enhance understanding of sustainable forest management and working forests for wildlife by engaging in regional marketing and communications, establishing communication channels to engage, inspire, and motivate members, donors, and partners, communicating RGS' approach to fellow conservationists, creating or promoting demonstration areas that showcase forestry best practices for wildlife.

Advocacy: Collaborate, and where appropriate, take a lead role in promoting initiatives that facilitate forest wildlife conservation and the hunting lifestyle by amplifying RGS' voice in collective policy groups, building state and regional policy networks, supporting initiatives to recruit hunters and hunter conservationists, engaging with key influencers, and considering legal action.

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation: Implement programs to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to adapt our forests and wildlife to changing conditions by piloting the carbon offset potential of wildlife-focused working forests, decreasing barriers to small landowner enrollment in carbon markets, increasing public land enrollment in carbon markets, and increasing resiliency of forests across ownerships.

Land Acquisition: Own and manage our own forestland as an investment and to demonstrate best practices in wildlife and forest management by identifying focal areas and opportunities for acquisition, purchasing strategic properties within focal areas, and implementing active forest management to showcase best practices and to generate revenue.

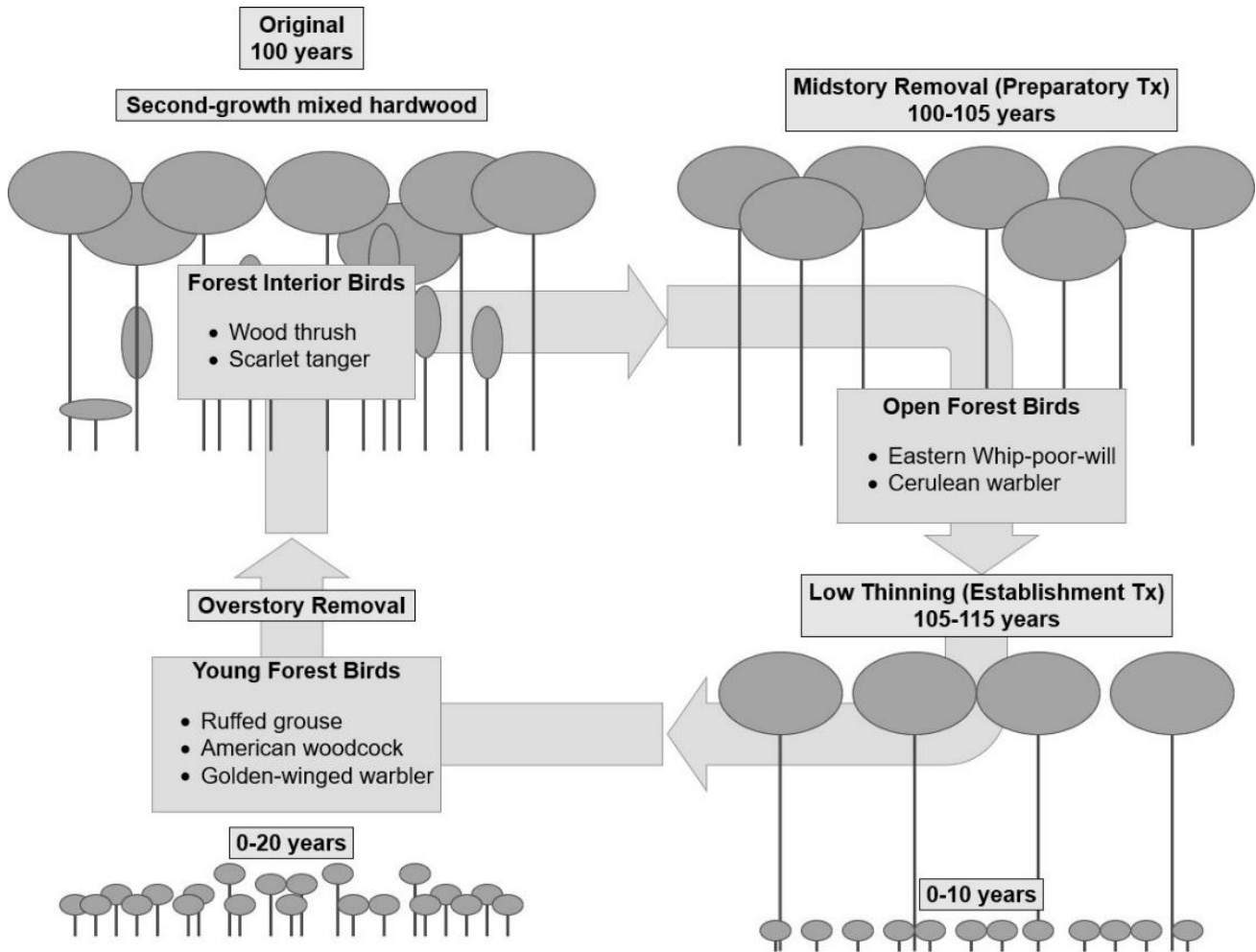


Figure 1: A shelterwood treatment is a regeneration treatment with the goal of establishing and then releasing desired seedlings. A shifting mosaic approach to forest management and wildlife habitat enhancement works to achieve landscape-scale desired forest conditions and provide for the life history needs of focal wildlife species at different times during a stand’s silvicultural rotation. At any one point in time, the goal is to maintain desired forest conditions across the landscape, but those conditions vary spatially and temporally.

RGS AWS

RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY | AMERICAN WOODCOCK SOCIETY

