

Forest Landbird Legacy and the William Jenkins Tract

Imagine taking a large mature forest and fine tuning it to benefit forest dwelling songbirds. It's a challenge alright, but exactly the challenge for which the Forest Landbird Legacy Program was designed. And speaking of challenges, no one likes to take them on better than Rufus Brown, son-in-law of William Jenkins and caretaker of the Jenkins family property. Put these two together and you have a success story on 117 acres of mixed hardwood and pine forest in the southeast corner of Granville County.

After walking over the property and discussing land management practices with wildlife biologists and foresters, the family's consulting forester developed a Forest Stewardship Plan. With the collaborative plan in place, Rufus Brown requested funds from the Forest Landbird Legacy Program to help accomplish some of the plan's goals.

Then the fun stuff... Over the next two years Brown worked diligently to establish firebreaks along property boundaries and around each burn block and followed up by conducting a prescribed burn. He'll continue to conduct prescribed burns on a regular basis.



In addition to containing prescribed burns, firebreaks make great hiking and access trails, good shooting lanes for deer hunting, and perfect places to be planted as food plots for turkey.

Prescribed fires enhance the wildlife habitat along the forest floor, particularly in pine stands. Fire improves the growth and composition of the understory vegetation and benefits many species of forest dwelling birds including brown-headed nuthatches and black and white warblers that search for insects nestled in the tree bark.



Partners on this project met with Rufus Brown to tour the property and present the Jenkins family with a recognition sign and plaque.

He also created half acre forest canopy gaps every 3 to 4 acres by simply harvesting the trees in a few small areas and allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor. Soon vegetation filled in the gaps, adding to the diversity of the forest and making feeding places for such birds as scarlet tanagers and hooded warblers.



The scarlet tanager is one type of songbird that needs relatively open space within the forest to forage on insects. Using its tweezer-like beak, the scarlet tanager flies through the open air to grab flying insects. It also will hover over the ground in search of insects and earthworms.

Simultaneously he had the density of the pine forest reduced to a basal area between 50 and 70 square feet. A reduction in basal

area relieves the crowded conditions in the forest. The released trees usually grow larger crowns which produce more mast and provide greater habitat potential for canopy dwelling birds.

One bold strategy of Brown's forest and songbird management plan was the creation of snags. Snags are standing dead trees that woodpeckers, owls, and other cavity-nesting birds use. Insects burrow into the trees, simultaneously helping with the breakdown of tree fibers and serving as a source of prey for woodpeckers, nuthatches and other animals. Many other critters, such as raccoons and possums, use snags to find shelter and food. To create snags, Brown girdled four trees within each five acre block.



Snags and den trees are a vital component of all forests, providing a significant microhabitat within the forest. To some wildlife species, a snag is more usable than a living tree.

In addition to benefitting so many high priority bird species, the family's opportunities for outdoor recreation, including turkey and deer hunting improved with the management actions they chose to take.

Another strong desire of this family was to protect it from development. Today, the entire Jenkins tract is protected with a working forest conservation easement held by the Tar River Land Conservancy. The family will continue to conduct prescribed burns, harvest timber, hunt, and hike there, and take comfort knowing the land will remain intact in a natural condition...forever.



Forest gaps were created to provide diversity in the forest.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in North Carolina collaborated with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to establish the Forest Landbird Legacy Program in 2003. This voluntary program that promotes the conservation of forest-dependent migratory birds on non-industrial private forest lands is available to interested landowners. See http://www.fws.gov/raleigh/pdfs/partners/FLLPFact_Sheet.pdf for more information.

