



# Moist-soil Wetlands in the Southeast for Waterfowl

*Moist-soil wetlands provide plant and animal foods that contain nutrients critical to the diet of wintering and migrating waterfowl.*

National Wildlife Refuges in the Southeast contribute to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) by managing for annual grasses and forbs that provide seeds, tubers, and substrate for invertebrates that are eaten by migrating and wintering waterfowl.

- Annual plants found in moist-soil wetlands, such as grasses, sedges, and smartweeds, produce seeds and tubers that provide nutrients and energy for waterfowl to survive the winter and help fuel migration to the breeding grounds.
- Moist-soil vegetation also provides a home for aquatic invertebrates, which are an important protein source.



credit: Heath Hagy



credit: Clayton Ferrell

Historically, moist-soil vegetation was found in openings of bottomland hardwood forests, along river and lake margins, and in small seasonal wetlands that dried up during the summer. However, most seasonal wetlands have been drained or converted to other land uses in the southeastern U.S. leaving little natural food for waterfowl.

When managed intensively, moist-soil wetlands can produce more than 2,000 pounds of seed per acre.

- Management begins in the spring and early summer when land managers begin a water drawdown. Generally, water levels should be drawn down slowly over a 4-6 week period to encourage a diversity of species.
- The summer months are the time to manipulate the soil to set back succession if necessary, because of thick thatch or abundant woody or perennial species. Soil disturbance is often done using disking, tilling, or rolling with a cleated roller.
- If soil manipulations are not possible, herbicides, burning, or mowing may be used alone or in combination to help set back succession and control undesirable species.
- Following these periodic disturbances, annual vegetation that grows during the summer and early fall can be shallowly flooded between October and December to allow migrating and wintering waterfowl access to these food resources.

Approximately 156 species of birds are known to use moist-soil vegetation including waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds. Grassland-nesting birds may also nest in moist-soil vegetation in the spring and summer, such as dickcissel. Reptiles, amphibians, and other wetland species can also find food and shelter in moist soil wetlands.

**For more information, contact**

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