

MAINTAIN AND RESTORE FOREST HABITATS IN THE EAST THROUGH PROACTIVE NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT

Eastern deciduous forests are largely middle aged; few very young or very old forests exist in this region. This lack of diversity negatively affects wildlife and renders these forests susceptible to insects and diseases. Proactive management on national forests in the South and East—necessary for wildlife such as maintenance of openings, timber harvest with wildlife objectives, and prescribed fire—has substantially decreased over the last eight years. Compounding the problem, the USFS has been sued for many accepted natural resource management activities that enhance wildlife habitat by removing mature trees and converting sites to earlier successional stages. These activities have been approved during public review processes and described in plans for individual forests. Unfortunately, the USFS has often failed to aggressively defend approved management plans against obstructionists challenges (e.g., Allegheny, Shawnee, Wayne, and Hoosier National Forests). As a result, necessary proactive wildlife management has been severely restricted on the national forests to the detriment of many plant and wildlife species. ■

RECOMMENDATION

The Administration should clearly state a high priority for proactive management of national forests for wildlife purposes. It should also direct the Washington Office of the USFS to work closely with Regional and Forest-Level Offices to reduce the likelihood of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) based lawsuits. Language should be developed within the NEPA process that reduces the likelihood of litigation. The Department of Justice and the USFS should be directed to aggressively defend management project proposals that are consistent with plan objectives and science-based management methods from challenges that are primarily obstructionist in nature.

