

News from the Watershed

Connecting Corridors: What they mean to wildlife

As more and more people move to Florida, many of the natural and agricultural areas are being converted into urban development. As a result, the land that once housed many species of wildlife is now paved or developed in some way and the wildlife can no longer exist in those places. If you think about the needs of wildlife, you can well imagine that they would rather be in a wooded area of fairly large size. Also, most wild animals will move from one area to another throughout their lives in search of water, food or mates. Animals would prefer to move through protective cover, hidden from predators. That is where connecting corridors come in to play.

Connecting corridors are the strips of grass and/or shrubs and trees that connect larger habitat areas—whether they are wetlands, native grasses, woodlands, or other habitat. In recent years, interest in connecting corridors has grown because wildlife corridors are seen as ways to allow wildlife and plants to spread across natural landscapes that have been cut into pieces by roads, development, logging or other land disturbances.

This “cutting into pieces” is referred to as fragmentation. The dangers to wildlife are plentiful when this occurs. One of the negative effects of fragmentation is that it dramatically decreases the diversity of wildlife. It is critical to many species to have large areas of habitat for a variety of reasons such as migration patterns, species dispersion and gene flow. (National Wildlife Federation)

The corridors allow animals to find new resources and prevent isolation of species. Studies have shown that wild areas connected by corridors have more wildlife or greater biodiversity than disconnected fragments. There is some concern about corridors entrapping some wildlife species, since predators can more easily find their prey in a narrow strip of habitat. For that reason, the wider the corridor, the better.

In most situations, landowners creating corridors may want to consider a design that is edge feathered, which includes zones of grasses, shrubs and trees all in the same corridor. The center of the corridor would be planted with trees, with strips of shrubs on each side, bordered on the outside by zones of grasses and legumes. This combination offers habitat for wildlife that may use all three types for food and cover, as well as wildlife that needs only one of the habitat types.

Many species have either disappeared or been drastically reduced in number because of habitat fragmentation. It is important to look to the future for the purposes of including these wildlife corridors in land management planning. If we want to enable wildlife to exist along side of development, it is essential that future planning include these areas in an effort to allow wild animals and vegetation a place to travel and exist. It is critical that species are allowed to move to new areas and travel to provide for their needs regarding diet, reproduction and protection. Their survival depends on it.

For more information on wildlife habitat, check the web at <http://www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov/animals.html>, give us a call at (863) 402-6545 or stop by our office at 4505 George Blvd. For additional information about environmental issues please visit our website at www.highlandsswcd.org.

Riparian, or streamside, plantings of trees, shrubs and grasses make excellent connecting corridors. They can sometimes be a wildlife oasis in a sea of crop fields.