

# WILDLIFE TRENDS

SOUTHEASTERN EDITION

February 2002

Volume 2, Issue 2

## Burning for Wild Turkeys

by Dr. Dan W. Speake



Use of fire for wild turkey habitat should be restricted to late winter and early spring.

**B**urning as a tool for control of vegetation for food and cover, if used correctly, has several advantages. It is cost-effective, a natural force that plants and animals are adapted to, and it can be used over large areas in a short period of time. These are especially good reasons for using fire in the management of wild turkey habitat.

Many studies show that the sizes of turkey home ranges vary greatly according to the quality and distribution of preferred habitat types. Controlled burning, along with other habitat controls, can be used effectively to decrease these movements.

In pine forests that are kept open by the use of fire for bobwhite management or for other reasons, it is important to leave scattered areas of 2 to 3-year old unburned areas or "roughs" for turkey nesting sites. Acceptable brood habitat can be produced in pine woods by burning annually or every 2 years. The best burning frequency for brood habitat is dependent on such factors as climate, past burning history, soil type and fertility.

Most pine plantations lose their value to turkeys after 1 to 3 years from planting, and this can continue until the stands are opened up by thinning and burning. Most loblolly and slash pine plantations can be burned when the trees are about 12 feet tall if care is used. Long-leaf pine plantations can be burned much earlier after 2 or 3 growing seasons. If the planted rows are far enough apart for farm equipment to be used, such greens as clover and wheat or chufas can be planted between the rows, producing good turkey habitat.

Older pine woods that are annually burned are used especially well after spring green-up by both hens and gobblers. If these older stands are not burned, it is likely that turkeys will leave for other burned areas or pastures and fields perhaps on other properties.

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