



Water for Wildlife



The Tennessee River Valley is renowned for the impressive flocks of waterfowl that visit the valley each winter. The hard work and management that goes on during the rest of the year to support those waterfowl is less well known. While an unmanaged wetland can produce an average of 200 pounds of plant seeds per acre, a managed wetland actively planted with seed-producing crops and carefully managed water levels can produce over 1000 pounds of seed per acre. These seasonally flooded wetlands can support substantially more waterfowl than those left unmanaged.

Certain species of waterfowl, especially geese, will feed directly off of waste grain in agricultural fields and use the wetlands primarily for roosting. These flooded fields also provide important habitat for wintering and migrant shorebirds such as Greater Yellowlegs and Wilson's Snipe. When the wetlands are not holding water during the summer months, the vegetation provides cover for nesting songbirds. The wetlands also support frogs, crayfish, fish, and insects, that in turn attract predators such as the Great Blue Heron and Raccoon. When water levels are managed and food sources enhanced, all wildlife benefits.



Moist Soil Management

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources manage thousands of acres and millions of gallons of water throughout the Tennessee River Valley. An elaborate water control system, combined with carefully planned wetting and

drying cycles are used to increase the availability of food for area wildlife. Each summer, wetlands are drained and planted with millets, oats, and other food crops which go to seed before the arrival of fall migrants. These areas are then flooded, providing a feast for wintering wildlife.



Common Goldeneye/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Mike Hopiak

Wetland Diversity

Waterfowl are a diverse group of birds and each species has its own habitat requirements. "Dabbling ducks" prefer shallow water where they dabble for seeds while "diving ducks" favor deeper waters to feed on fish and other plant and animal matter. Managing a variety of wetland types benefits more waterfowl species and makes for better waterfowl watching.



Hunters/ADCNR Photos

Paying for the Privilege

Hunters and anglers contribute millions of dollars annually to the conservation and management of wildlife habitat through annual user licenses and excise taxes levied on hunting and fishing equipment. These consumptive users of wildlife have long accepted the need to pay for the privilege of using wildlife resources. Other programs, such as the state nongame wildlife tax-checkoff, allow all users to voluntarily contribute funds for wildlife and habitat conservation.