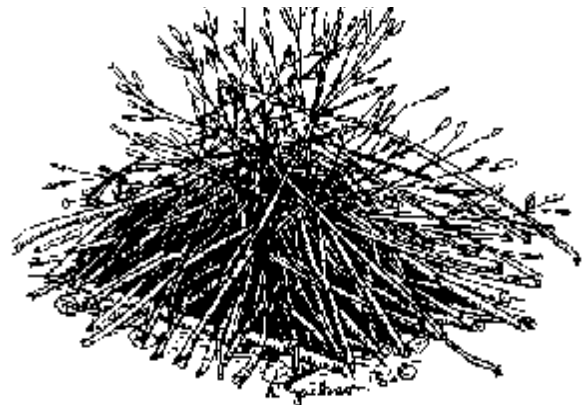
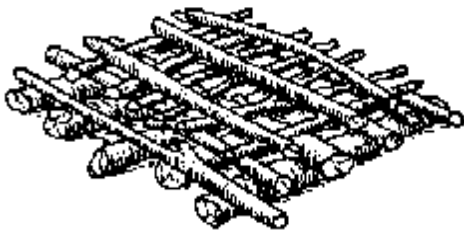


# WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

## WILDLIFE HABITAT SERIES

No. 2

### Brush Piles for Wildlife



#### General Information

Wildlife have four basic requirements: cover, food, water and living space. Each must be present in an animal's habitat. Cover is the protective element within the habitat which may come in different forms for various wildlife species. It may be a hedgerow for rabbits, a young hemlock thicket for deer, a spruce tree for a golden-crowned kinglet or a brush pile for small mammals and birds. Whatever form cover takes, it contributes to one or more of the necessary functions in the lives of animals: breeding, nesting, hiding, resting, sleeping, feeding and traveling.

When natural cover is limited in wildlife habitat, brush piles may be provided. If possible, brush piles should be a by-product of other land management activities, rather than a specific practice. Timber harvest, timber stand improvements, pasture or cropland clearing, and firewood cutting all provide woody limbs suitable for brush piles.

#### Location of Brush Piles

Brush piles benefit wildlife most when they are located at the edges of forest openings. They should not be further than 10 feet from the woodland border. Other suitable locations for

brush piles are along road edges, streams, marshes and yard borders within or next to woodlands.

Four to eight brush piles per acre, spaced 100 to 150 feet apart, is a sufficient amount and will supply the needed cover requirements for most wildlife species.

#### Construction of Brush Piles

Materials used in brush piles will depend largely on what is available. Oak, locust and other hardwoods which are rot resistant make durable bases. Other suitable materials include large stumps, cull logs, old fence posts and stones. The largest material should form the base and layers of smaller limbs and branches should be added as filler.

Brush piles are usually mound- or tepee-shaped. Ideally, they should be six to eight feet high and 15 feet in diameter. An alternate method of providing cover is to windrow the brush along a stone wall or woods' edge. In this case, brush should be piled in one direction with the tops facing the edge of the woods. Covering brush piles and windrowed brush with evergreen boughs will provide wildlife with additional cover.

Brush piles are short lived (six to eight years). In order to provide continual cover, new ones should be developed periodically.

## Benefits

When properly constructed and located, brush piles can benefit many species of wildlife, including bobwhite quail, cottontail rabbits, ruffed grouse, wild turkeys, skunks, raccoons, opossums, woodchucks, chipmunks, mockingbirds, white-throated sparrows and juncos. Predators such as foxes, bobcats, hawks, owls and coyotes benefit from the small mammal and bird populations found in or around brush piles.

Grasses, forbs and vines, which are highly valuable to wildlife, will grow up through brush piles and add density and permanence to the piles.

Caution should be taken when creating brush piles in densely populated areas, for they may lead to nuisance wildlife problems. Skunks, opossums and raccoons will, on occasion, live in or under these brush piles and may cause a nuisance situation for nearby homeowners.

## Glossary

**Cull** trees, logs or lumber which have been rejected because they do not meet certain specifications.

**Forb** any herbaceous plant species other than those in the grass, sedge and rush families; fleshy leaved plants.

**Stand** plant communities, particularly of trees, sufficiently uniform in composition, constitution, age, spatial arrangement or condition to be distinguishable



from adjacent plant communities; may delineate a silvicultural or management entity.

**Timber stand improvement** the use of methods, such as thinning, firewood cutting and selection cutting, to improve the growth and condition of a stand of timber.

## References and Further Reading

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