

NEWS RELEASE

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Electric Transmission Rights-of-Way Provide Valuable Wildlife Habitat

It's a place where wildflowers and butterflies flourish, where salamanders feed on insects, and where turkeys build their nests. "It's a mecca," says Richard Yahner, Penn State Professor of Wildlife Conservation. Yahner's research has found that electrical rights-of-way, the corridors that carry power lines across the nation, provide a valuable contrast to the wildlife habitat of the surrounding forests. "The rights-of-way create an early successional habitat," Yahner says, "and in many areas of the state, particularly in the north, early successional habitats are at a premium."

Since 1987, Yahner has served as the wildlife specialist on the State Game Lands 33 Research and Demonstration Project, a 52-year old study that examines right-of-way management methods and their effect on wildlife. He has conducted two bird nesting studies, a small mammal study, an amphibian study, and a butterfly study. Yahner's work concerns electric transmission rights-of-way, not buried pipelines or the strips of vegetation between highways, which are also known as "rights-of-way."

According to Jay Jordan, coordinator of a program called Energy for Wildlife, there are about three million acres of high-voltage electric transmission rights-of-way in the United States. Energy for Wildlife, a program of the National Wild Turkey Federation, works with electric companies to help manage rights-of-way for wildlife. Since its inception two years ago, almost two million acres have been enrolled. Energy for Wildlife helps companies write and implement a vegetation management plan that

focuses on wildlife habitat, soil erosion, water quality, and streamside buffer zones, while still providing safe, reliable energy.

Jordan encourages private forest landowners who have a right-of-way on their property to work with their electric company as well. “Many of these companies have cooperative programs. If you agree to control high-growth vegetation, the utility usually provides some kind of monetary assistance,” Jordan says. “The landowner gets to manage the right-of-way for their goals, and the energy company has help controlling the vegetation. However, if the electric company doesn’t know where you are or what you’re doing, the next time the vegetation crew comes along, your right-of-way is probably going to get mowed or sprayed. That’s been a problem, people are doing it on their own and not telling the company.”

Nancy Baker, a private forest landowner in Bradford County, says that she values the service her rural electric cooperative provides, but she also wants to make sure the right-of-way is being managed properly. Before each cycle of management, Baker walks the line with the cooperative’s right-of-way manager, her Bureau of Forestry service forester, and the sub-contractor. “As a landowner, you might not want them to use herbicides. Some do, some don’t. You can mandate that. Several years ago, the cooperative asked to spray a portion of the right-of-way with a tank truck. Since my land is very steep I said—no—but you may come through with a backpack sprayer and spray individual plants. On this subject I’m standing my ground; it is within my rights to do this.”

Richard Yahner advises landowners who have high-voltage rights-of-way on their property to make sure their electric company uses the wire-border zone method

recommended by the Research and Demonstration Project. Yahner explains, “The wire zone includes the width of the power line plus ten feet on each side. If you have the ability to manage your own right-of-way, keep anything above the waist out of the wire zone. In the border zone, big trees will eventually be a problem, but not low-growing shrubs like mountain laurel, or small trees like dogwood, crab apple, and hawthorne. These plants are beautiful and beneficial for wildlife.”

“From an aesthetic, wildlife, and economic perspective, why not leave plants that are unlikely to pose a problem in the border zone? Why mow twice as many acres as you need to mow? Why do more than what you have to?”

Yahner’s preferred method of management is a combination of mowing and selective herbicide use on woody vegetation. Mowing should be done rarely and never during the spring breeding season—from March to July—when nesting wildlife and their young could be harmed. Herbicide use should be restricted to one of the seven types approved by the Environmental Protection Agency for rights-of way.

To learn more about Energy for Wildlife call 1-800-THE-NWTF, or email Jay Jordan at jjordan@nwft.net, or visit the National Wild Turkey Federation Web site at www.nwtf.org/conservation/energy_for_wildlife.html

The Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program provides publications on a variety of topics related to woodland and wildlife management for private landowners including *Forest Stewardship Bulletin #5: Wildlife*. For a list of free publications, call 1-800-235-WISE (toll-free), send e-mail to RNRExt@psu.edu, or write to: Forest Stewardship Program, Forest Resources Extension, The Pennsylvania State University, 7 Ferguson Building, University Park, PA 16802. The Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry and USDA

Forest Service, in partnership with the Penn State's Forest Resources Extension, sponsor the Forest Stewardship Program in Pennsylvania.

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