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Wildlife Considerations in Red Pine Management

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Red pine provides thermal cover, visual cover, nesting habitat, and food for a variety of wildlife.

Red pine plantations have often been criticized as being detrimental to wildlife. This is primarily because older plantations were allowed to reach extremely high numbers of trees per acre. These density levels limit the development of vegetation under the pine trees. This reduces the amount of cover and food available to wildlife. Large plantations also decrease habitat diversity. Habitat diversity is the number of different types of plants available to meet the needs of wildlife for food and cover.

There are a variety of management practices that can alleviate these problems and enhance the overall wildlife value of red pine stands:

Moderate sized plantations (20 - 50 acres) surrounded by other types of vegetation will increase the habitat diversity. It is also beneficial to have plantations of different ages mixed throughout the area. Do not locate red pine plantations of different ages near each other.

Alter the shape of the planting - When plantations larger than 50 acres are desired, alter the plantation's shape to increase the amount of edge. This can be done by: 1) planting in long, narrow blocks; 2) leaving small areas not suitable to red pine, such as frost pockets, in their natural vegetation; or 3) designing plantations with irregular-shaped edges. If plantations are to be established along bodies of water, leave 30 - 50 feet of the natural vegetation on either side of the water.

Maintain fewer red pine trees per acre to allow more sunlight to reach the ground and encourage the development of food and cover vegetation for wildlife.

Red pine does not need to have the reputation it has earned as being detrimental to wildlife. If proper consideration is given when managing red pine, it can be an important contributor to wildlife habitat.