

Salt Fork Wildlife Area Long Range Wildlife Management PLAN SUMMARY

Introduction

Salt Fork Wildlife Area, Guernsey County is situated in southeastern Ohio, approximately eight miles east of Cambridge. The primary access to the area is from U.S. Route 22. Land acquisition for the Salt Fork Area began in the 1950's and to date 20,542 acres have been purchased. The Division of Wildlife manages 8,085 acres, the Division of Parks and Recreation manages 9,505 acres and 2,952 acres comprise Salt Fork Lake. Of the 9,505 acres controlled by the Division of Parks and Recreation, approximately 4,000 acres are open to public hunting during certain times of the year. The Division of Wildlife administers co-op farming on 186 of this 4,000 acres.

Physical features

Salt Fork Wildlife Area is located in the unglaciated region of southeastern Ohio in the low hills belt of the steep Allegheny Plateau. The terrain, dissected by numerous small streams, is steep to rolling. Elevations vary from 783 feet to 1,065 feet above sea level. Principal soil associations consist of Gilpin-Guernsey-Coshocton and Newark-Licking-Fitchville. The former being sloping to very steep, well to moderately well drained, underlain by shale and sandstone with thin layers of limestone. The latter being somewhat poorly drained soil of stream flood plains and nearly level to sloping stream terraces. Steep slopes and soil erosion are major concerns when developing long range management and annual tactical plans.

History

Prior to European settlement, this area was almost completely virgin forest. Today all of the forests are second and third growth timber. Much of the land that was cleared for farming is now reverting back to forest due to poor quality of local farmland in the area, the steep terrain and unfavorable agricultural economics. The topography, soils and history of this area make it well suited for a woodland management strategy with wetland development and management in the bottom lands near the lake.

Current Use

Salt Fork Wildlife Area is very popular for hunting, fishing and other forms of wildlife recreation. Deer, turkey, waterfowl, squirrel, grouse, pheasant, dove, and raccoon are the most sought after species for hunting. An early primitive weapons deer hunt has been conducted on Salt Fork Wildlife Area since 1969. Bass, catfish, bluegill, crappies, muskellunge and walleye can be caught in the lake and some wildlife area ponds. Hiking, bird watching, photography and sightseeing are also popular on the

wildlife area. In 1984, 1985, and 1993, state endangered barn owls nested in the barn by the area residence. Beginning in 1996, Salt Fork was one of five osprey reintroduction sites in Ohio. Bald eagles and tundra swans occasionally stop on the wildlife area on their annual migrations.

Habitat Management

Salt Fork Wildlife Area will be managed for woodland and wetland habitats. The wildlife area has 12 habitat management units totaling 3,802 acres of woodland (47.1%), 2,834 acres of brushland (35%), 987 acres of openland (12.2%), 393 acres of wetland (4.8%), 62 acres of water (.8%) and 5.7 acres of non-inventory (.07%). Of the 12 units, 7 are woodland management and 5 are wetland management. Management efforts in the woodland units will focus on increasing the percentage of the woodland component while maintaining desirable levels and distributions of the brushland and openland components. Management of wetland management units will focus on developing and enhancing individual wetland sites and managing existing wetlands through water level manipulation where possible.

Currently there are 697 acres of cooperative farming as part of the overall openland habitat component. The acreage being farmed will likely decrease in the future because of unfavorable local agricultural economics and other factors beyond our control. Farming will be retained where possible to help maintain openland habitat, with the realization that total openland acres will diminish over time. The area's overall brushland habitat component is comprised of 42.6% hawthorn, crabapple and shrubby dogwood. This plant community is desirable for numerous wildlife species and should be retained as long as possible. This also will delay the transition of the habitat from brushland to the woodland stage.