

Wild Turkey Habitat Evaluation Worksheet 1

This habitat evaluation worksheet rates a property's current habitat condition for wild turkeys based on certain habitat-type categories and descriptions. The results will express a point total for each of the three important habitat components — forest/woodland, nesting habitat and brood-rearing cover. Once each of the habitat components has been assessed, sum the total point value for each to obtain a habitat rating for the property. In addition, a cumulative point value for the overall habitat quality rating of the property can be obtained.

Condition of the forest/woodland habitat and its proximity to agricultural land uses (14 points maximum)

1. Percent of the forest/woodland comprised of mast producing trees (food) (5 points maximum)

Less than 25% (0 points) _____

25% to 50% (3 points) _____

Greater than 50% (5 points) _____

The availability of hard mast provides a valuable food source and woodlands/forests provide an important habitat component.

2. Diversity of hard mast producing trees (food) (5 points maximum)

Red and white oak species present (5 points) _____

Mast producing trees are primarily of one oak species (3 points) _____

No diversity of oak species (0 points) _____

Oaks are certainly the preferred species for producing hard mast and having both red and white oaks is beneficial. White and red oaks flower at different times during the spring and drop their acorns at different times during the fall, thus it is advantageous to have a diversity of oak species as an insurance policy against a mast failure.

3. Proximity of forest and woodland habitats to fields of large-seeded grain crops with at least 5 acres of the crop left standing (food) (3 points maximum)

1 mile or less (3 points) _____

Greater than 1 mile (0 points) _____

Crop fields provide a favorable winter food source; pastures used for forage and hay also provide important sources of foods.

4. Percent of the property in mature trees (roost sites) (1 point maximum)

Greater than 25% (1 point) _____

Less than 25% (0 points) _____

Trees provide important roost sites and, although they are seldom a limiting factor in Missouri, they are still an important habitat component to consider.

Habitat quality rating for forest/woodland habitat and proximity to agricultural land uses

Excellent: 11 to 14 points | **Good:** 9 to 10 points | **Poor:** 0 to 8 points

Availability and condition of nesting cover (31 points maximum)

1. Percent of the property forested (thermal cover, nest sites) (5 points maximum)

Less than 25% (1 point) _____

25% to 75% (5 points) _____

Greater than 75% forested (2 points) _____

A mixture of woodland, forest and open land distributed across a large landscape provides optimal conditions for wild turkeys.

2. Percentage of the open field acres that is in row crops, a food plot, or a cool-season or sod-forming grass, such as tall fescue or brome pasture (cover) (5 points maximum)

Less than 25% (5 points) _____

25% to 50% (2 points) _____

50% to 75% (1 point) _____

Greater than 75% (0 points) _____

Open field habitats include pastures, grasslands, fallow areas and old field habitats that do not contain trees and shrubs. Row crop fields are not included in this designation.

3. Percentage of open field acres that have a woody vegetation component (cover) (3 points maximum)

Less than 25% (2 points)

25% to 50% (3 points)

50% to 75% (1 points)

Greater than 75% (0 points)

4. Percentage of field edges that transition directly from forested to open habitat (hard edge) versus transitioning from forest to shrubs or brushy habitat and then to open habitat (soft edge) (cover) (3 points maximum)

Less than 25% in a soft edge (0 points)

25% to 50% in a soft edge (1 point)

Greater than 50% in a soft edge (3 points)

Turkey nests are often located near field edges and diverse early successional vegetation in these areas is beneficial.

5. Percent canopy cover within the forested area (3 points maximum)

Less than 25% (1 point)

25% to 75% (3 points)

Greater than 75% forested (0 points)

Canopy cover directly impacts the amount of sunlight that reaches the forest floor. More sunlight leads to a more robust and diverse plant community on the forest floor, which is generally beneficial to turkeys and poults.

6. Time since disturbance within forested or woodland acreage (cover)

Includes practices such as timber stand improvement and prescribed fire in forested areas and disking, herbicide application, prescribed fire and haying and grazing in open areas.

Forested and woodland areas (7 points maximum)

1 to 2 years (7 points)

3 to 4 years (3 points)

5 or more years (0 points)

Grassland fields, pastures and other open areas (5 points maximum)

1 to 2 years (5 points)

3 to 4 years (3 points)

5 or more years (0 points)

Management practices that create a disturbance help maintain an early successional plant community which provides habitat for nesting.

Habitat rating for nesting cover

Good: 26 to 31 points | **Fair:** 12 to 25 points | **Poor:** 0 to 11 points

Availability and condition of brood cover (55 points maximum)

1. Percentage of property in a woodland or forest (thermal cover, escape cover) (5 points maximum)

Less than 25% (3 points)

25% to 75% (5 points)

Greater than 75% (1 point)

Recent research indicates that wild turkey hens may seek forested areas as thermal refuge from heat, more so than cold weather. If unmanaged, however, forested areas provide relatively poor brood cover.

2. Average percentage of forest canopy cover (food, cover) (5 points maximum)

Less than 25% (3 points)

25% to 75% (5 points)

Greater than 75% (0 points)

3. Percentage of open field acreage that have a woody vegetation component (cover) (5 points maximum)

Less than 25% (5 points)

25% to 50% (2 points)

Greater than 50% (0 points)

4. Median vegetation height within the open field acreage (cover) (5 points maximum)
- Less than 10 inches (2 points) _____
 - 10 to 36 inches (5 points) _____
 - Greater than 36 inches (0 points) _____

5. Time since disturbance within the forested and open land acreage (cover)
- Disturbance with a forested area, such as timber stand improvement, timber harvest, prescribed fire, etc. (10 points maximum)
- 0 to 1 year (10 points) _____
 - 1 to 2 years (2 points) _____
 - 3 or more years (0 points) _____
- Disturbance within open acreages, such as herbicide application, disking, prescribed fire, livestock grazing etc. (10 points maximum)
- 0 to 1 year (10 points) _____
 - 1 to 2 years (2 points) _____
 - 3 or more years (0 points) _____

The plant community that provides the greatest quality brood-rearing habitat typically occurs during the year after a disturbance, thus given the highest rating.

6. Percentage of property accessible, within 100 meters, by road/path (connectivity) (5 points maximum)
- Less than 25% (1 points) _____
 - 25 to 50% (2 points) _____
 - 50% to 75% (3 points) _____
 - Greater than 75% (5 points) _____

Trails, especially those that are covered in grass and forbs (see No. 7 below), provide safe travel routes between nesting and brooding sites. They also function as fire breaks, which will help facilitate future habitat management.

7. Percentage of trail system covered in grass/forbs (cover, food) (5 points maximum)
- Less than 25% (0 points) _____
 - 25 to 50% (2 points) _____
 - 50% to 75% (3 points) _____
 - Greater than 75% (5 points) _____

8. Habitat features found at the landscape level (5 points maximum)
- Percentage of the 3,000 to 5,000 acres surrounding the property in a woodland or forest habitat.
- Less than 25% (1 point) _____
 - 25% to 75% (5 points) _____
 - Greater than 75% forested (2 points) _____

Habitat quality rating for brood-rearing cover

Good: 45 to 55 points | **Fair:** 22 to 54 points | **Poor:** 0 to 21 points

Overall habitat quality rating

Sum the ratings of the three habitat components. _____
 Forest/woodland/ag land uses + Nesting cover + Brood-rearing cover

Excellent: 75 to 100 points | **Good:** 41 to 74 points | **Poor:** 0 to 40 points

In this worksheet, the value of the **brood-rearing cover habitat** component carries the greatest weight in terms of point value because brood-rearing cover has been found to be a critical habitat component and is often the most limiting across many landscapes in Missouri. The value of the **nesting cover habitat** component is next in terms of importance. **Roosting cover** is important but is not usually a limiting factor in most locations.