



Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Adequate Winter Cover a Must for Wildlife

With the passing of the season's first major snow storm and bitterly cold temperature comes a reminder that pheasants and other wildlife need a secure place to seek shelter when old man winter shows up and drops a foot of snow and the temperatures plummet to below zero. Without quality winter cover and a reliable food source, pheasants and other wildlife are susceptible to winter weather and predation.

The primary function of winter cover is to have surviving birds in the best possible condition going into the spring nesting season. By protecting wildlife from drifting snow, reducing wind chill exposure, and providing escape cover from predators, one can achieve this goal. Quality winter cover is recognized as a cattail slough 10 acres or greater in size or a well designed woody cover planting consisting of conifers and shrubs.

Landowners are encouraged to evaluate existing winter and nesting cover to truly enhance their wildlife populations. Areas where winter cover and food are located within a close proximity are known as Core Wintering Areas (CWA's) and should be established within 2 miles of quality nesting cover and within 3 miles of another CWA.

When creating winter cover for wildlife, it is better to try and enhance what is already established. Perhaps you can start by enhancing an existing field windbreak by adding one or two additional tree rows of conifers or planting a strip of native grass alongside a windbreak. Providing a reliable food source near your farmstead windbreak or other quality habitat will also benefit wildlife. There are several government programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program that will help you establish high quality winter and nesting cover.

If you are interested in learning more about the Conservation Reserve Program or providing quality wildlife habitat on your property, please contact your local USDA Service Center.

All programs and services of the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District are available without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status.