



# NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION

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Tennessee Fish & Wildlife Commission  
5107 Edmondson Pike  
Ellington Agricultural Center  
Nashville, TN 37211

16 September, 2021

## **RE: Forest Conversion to Early Successional Habitat on the Bridgestone-Firestone WMA**

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of the National Deer Association (NDA), I am writing to state our support for the proposed project intended to convert forest to early successional habitat on the Bridgestone-Firestone Wildlife Management Area (WMA). We are a national non-profit conservation organization with the mission to ensure the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. We represent 30,000 members nationwide, including hunters, landowners and natural resource professionals.

As you may know, the Bridgestone-Firestone WMA was designated as a Quail Anchor Area by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) to be managed specifically for northern bobwhite, to create source populations and provide emigration potential to neighboring properties. TWRA released its *Northern bobwhite quail restoration plan* in 2019, which outlines numerous management strategies to maximize the quality and quantity of quail habitat. Included among these strategies are habitat enhancement strategies to increase the quality and quantity of quail habitat by converting forest land to early successional plant communities through timber harvest.

Progress on Bridgestone-Firestone has been made with increased prescribed burning activity and eradication of nonnative invasive plants. The Farm Unit (where the initial cuts are planned) has only 650 acres of existing quail habitat – well below the estimated 1,500 acres necessary to sustain a viable population. However, there is potential on the WMA to convert a total of about 2,000 acres of existing closed-canopy forest to early-successional plant communities. If realized, this conversion would impact 10% or less of current forest acres. The first phase of forest conversion has already been completed on the Farm Unit where approximately 380 acres were converted from loblolly pine forest to early successional habitat. The current project at the Farm Unit is to convert approximately 340 acres of existing closed-canopy forest to 245 acres of 'light' savannahs and 95 acres of woodlands. This initial 340-acre project is adjacent to approximately 1,070 acres that has been identified for forest conversion in the future.

The NDA is dedicated to ensuring the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. The Bridgestone-Firestone WMA project advances the future of all three by enhancing and providing quality habitat for game and non-game species, removing nonnative plant species from the landscape and enhancing hunting opportunities for multiple game animals. Through our extensive work on deer and habitat management across North America, we know that the actions proposed on the Bridgestone-Firestone WMA will benefit quail and other species, including wild deer, by enhancing the varying habitat requirements, critical habitat components and ecosystem preferences of the region's fauna. The region's white-tailed deer require varying habitat types and structures, and the proposal's inclusion of wildlife habitat enhancement measures such as encouraging successional diversity, managing non-native species and expanding the ecological role of fire will create these necessary habitat variations.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with questions or for more information.

Sincerely,

Torin Miller, *Director of Policy*