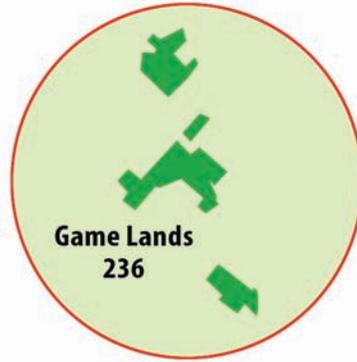
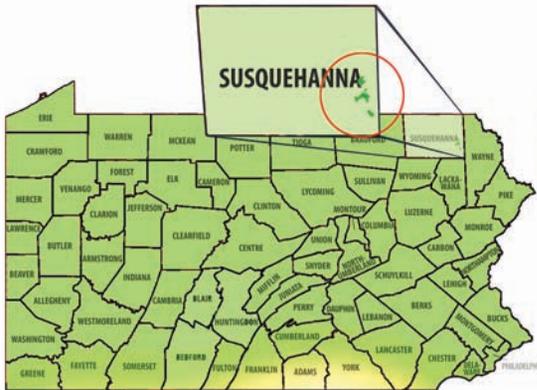


# State Game Lands 236

Opportunities abound in its woods and wetlands



STATE Game Lands 236, located in Susquehanna County's Ararat and Herrick townships, offers hunters a wide variety of game choices combined with unparalleled scenic beauty. The four parcels that make up this game lands were purchased by the Game Commission in the early 1960s, with the last acquired through condemnation in 1963. SGL 236 contains 2,010 acres of mostly rolling hills with northern hardwood forest covering about 74 percent of the holding. Nearly 15 percent of the land is classified as palustrine, a designation for wetland areas, often created by beaver activity. The wetlands are centered on stream channels and expand outward, depending on topography. Shrub-land plant communities, such as high-bush blueberry, extend farther away from the watercourses before transitioning into forest.

The old stone walls and apple trees found throughout SGL 236 are rem-

**By IES William Williams**

nants of the small family farms that dotted this land around the turn of the 19th century. Some of the former pasture areas, abandoned decades ago, reverted to forest, while others have been maintained as herbaceous openings. This mosaic of mature woodlots, open fields and fencerows creates an "edge effect" that promotes wildlife diversity and provides ideal conditions for deer, turkey, rabbits and a host of nongame species. The numerous wildlife openings found throughout SGL 236 provide wildlife benefits that include singing grounds for woodcock, nesting and summer brood cover for grouse and turkeys, and foraging and bedding areas for whitetails.

Land Management Officer Robert Johnson and Food and Cover Corps Maintenance Supervisor Jay Sporer handle the local management responsibilities for SGL 236. Headquartered at the SGL 159 maintenance building

near Rileyville, Sporer's Food and Cover Corps crew has completed a variety of habitat improvement projects that have transformed SGL 236 into first-class wildlife habitat that has benefited a multitude of species and people in northeastern counties.

Many of the fields are planted in switchgrass, a perennial bunch grass that grows 3 to 5 feet high. It provides excellent cover for turkeys, woodcock, pheasants and rabbits. Switchgrass seed also provides food for wildlife. Strips of clover that provide food for deer and attract insects for wild turkey poults can be found throughout SGL 236. The Full Fan Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation provides funding and manpower annually to help agency personnel improve habitat conditions by planting and maintaining several herbaceous openings. These openings are treated to control invasive species such as autumn olive and multiflora rose.

The Food and Cover Corps crew also improves wildlife habitat conditions on SGL 236 through pruning and creating more space for the many crabapple and apple trees found there. Pruning removes dead or diseased wood and stimulates increased productivity. Competing trees and canopy are removed around the immediate area of the fruit trees to increase sunlight. A recent habitat improvement undertaking involved "topping" hundreds of

younger-aged evergreen trees in and around open fields. Removing the tops of these trees promotes outward growth and maintains low-hanging branches. The lower branches provide cover for small game, and make the area especially attractive to cottontails.

SGL 236 is a historic breeding ground for woodcock and is being managed to conserve and enhance their residency through active forest management. Woodcock need young forests with openings, so natural succession is a contributing factor to habitat loss for these birds.



Another is cover lost through human development. In early spring, male woodcock establish singing grounds in clearings as small as a half-acre to entice a female by making an unusual *peenting* call and conducting an extraordinary aerial ballet. As its calls grow more rapid, the male bird takes to the air in a spiral ascent that grows wider and wider until it reaches about 300 feet. A chirping and twittering sound can be heard as the bird falls back to earth. With any luck, an interested female is lured to the site and chooses the male as a mate.

Woodcock require small clearings for singing grounds, as well as stands of young hardwoods, such as aspen, for nesting and brood-rearing. The birds also require moist soil that holds invertebrates, especially earthworms, which make up a sizeable portion of the woodcock's diet. Woodcock prefer



aspen stands, because they offer the stem density needed to provide protection from the elements and predators. They prefer young, recently harvested aspen stands, where soils are moist and earthworms are plentiful.

The Food and Cover crew works closely with agency forestry personnel and private noncommercial contractors to plan and execute aspen regeneration operations. “The overall goal for SGL 236 is to manage for early successional habitat that benefits the woodcock and many other game and nongame species,” explained Northeast Regional Forester Brian Williamson. “An integrated forestry approach of maintaining permanent early successional aspen stands, interspersed with mowed wildlife openings over moist, deep soil types, is providing ideal woodcock habitat in many areas of this game lands. These areas also have the potential to meet the needs of certain species of greatest conservation need, such as the golden-winged warbler. Six

separate 5- to 10-acre blocks of aspen, totaling more than 42 acres, were cut in 2012 to stimulate and expand existing stands on SGL 236.”

There are more than 24 acres of wetlands on SGL 236 that provide nesting and breeding grounds for waterfowl, ideal habitat for beaver, and exceptional recreational opportunities for hunters and trappers. The Food and Cover Corps crew places and maintains wood duck nesting structures around all of the impoundments and some waterways. It monitors the boxes for nesting success.

Hunters who visit might find ring-necked pheasants or cottontails in the hedgerows or fields of native grasses, or ducks and geese in the wetlands. Big-game hunters also have plenty of opportunity here; just get your scouting in before season. This unique game lands offers wonderful opportunities to hunters looking for adventures afield. So make time to stop by and check out SGL 236. It’ll be time well spent. 🍄