

## RUFFED GROUSE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR HABITAT IN BIRD CONSERVATION REGION 14

### Introduction

The ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) is categorized as fairly common in BCR 14. It is strongly associated with the aspen type but its ideal habitat includes a mix of forest types and brushy edges and openings with fruit bearing shrubs. Forest openings of various sizes are also required for brood rearing. Sapling and pole stage hardwoods and aspen are particularly important for escape and brood cover. Since the amount of young forest is declining in BCR, this species is listed on the “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” list in at least one state Wildlife Action Plan in BCR 14. It is also a highly sought after game species in this BCR.

### Habitat Needs

This species inhabits brushy mixed-age woodlands, both hardwood, mixed wood and conifer. It uses all the stages from successional to mature. Aspen and birch are present in the best habitat. Catkin bearing trees or shrubs, such as yellow or paper birch aspen and alder are important habitat components. Mature coniferous forest is important for winter roosting until the snow gets deep enough for roosting in that. Drumming sites in dense sapling/pole hardwood, birch or aspen stands are also important. These can be large fallen tree boles, rocks or stone walls.

Its territory size in BCR 14 ranges around forty acres. It will travel further to seek out certain food supplies such as yellow birch catkins or beech nuts.

### Habitat Management Practices

There have been volumes written about grouse management. Just the highlights will be discussed here. The key habitat component is aspen so the habitat management objective for this species would be to provide a significant aspen component in each management unit. Management units should be around 100 acres with about ten percent in openings located within aspen/ hardwood and softwood stands. The aspen/hardwood component should contain at least four usable age/size classes. The seedling/sapling stage for brood rearing, the sapling/pole stage for drumming and escape cover, the pole stage for nesting and the mature stage for feeding and nesting. The softwood component should contain stands of relatively mature trees for winter cover along with smaller size classes for feeding and escape cover.

When assessing properties for habitat potential look for soils that will provide aspen as an early successional component. Some of these soils will lead toward hardwood as a later successional stage while others will head toward softwood. Since both of the late successional types are part of the bird’s habitat requirements. Examples of these soils include Lyman, the well drained Bernardston, Canterbury, Chichester, Marlow,

Monadnock, Paxton, Plaisted and the moderately well drained Dixfield, Gilmanton, Howland, Peru, Pittstown, Skerry, Sunapee or Woodbridge. There are others depending on where in BCR 14 you are working.

Recommended Silvicultural Treatments include:

Set up 100-acre management units if possible, consider the existing land use practices on neighboring properties if the property you are working on is smaller than that.

Aspen – even-age management. Set up a rotation age of 50 to 70 years and schedule entries at seven to ten year intervals. Cut units should be five to ten acres in size. Freshly cut areas will be used as openings until they fill in. These birds feed on the buds of mature male aspen. Make sure that some of these remain in uncut units.

Northern Hardwoods/Mixed wood – even-age management. Set up a rotation of 120 to 150 years and schedule corresponding entries at ten-year intervals. Cut units should be five acres or more. Freshly cut areas will be used as openings until they fill in.

Conifers - manage by either group selection or patch cutting keeping the groups to about two or three acres.

Openings – maintain around five percent of the area in permanent openings. These should be one to three acres in size. They should be set up on a mowing rotation so that some of them are in the berry production stage and others are grassier for insect production. The edges of larger openings such as hay field or pastures should be managed for a combination of berry producing shrubs interspersed with groups of larger trees.