

# Information and Environmental Education Session

## Wildlife and Forestry Shortcourses in South Carolina: A Success Story

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*Abstract:* A landowner shortcourse entitled "Wildlife and Forest Management for Profit and Recreation" was developed to teach South Carolina landowners the basics of forest management that can be used to improve wildlife habitat. Between 1991 and mid-1994, 9 shortcourses were held throughout the state. Over 260 landowners and resource managers attended who owned over 40,000 ha or managed over 190,000 ha of land, respectively. Ninety-one percent of the respondents rated the shortcourses favorably. In addition, shortcourse participants indicated that they believed the knowledge gained as a result of the shortcourse will help them earn a total of \$2,282,500 on their lands in the future. Plans are being made to expand the shortcourse in response to clientele suggestions.

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Seventy-two percent of South Carolina's 4.96 million ha of forestland is owned by nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) landowners (Connor 1993). This land provides for the bulk of the demand for the state's outdoor recreation experiences, especially those relating to wildlife. Landowners in South Carolina have become more interested and aware of managing their forests for wildlife values, and in response to that interest, the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service (CUCES) developed educational programs to meet those needs.

Prior to 1989, most Extension Service educational programs in South Carolina in wildlife management for landowners consisted of short, 1- or 2-hour meetings designed to create awareness of the benefits of managing land for wildlife (Lamar Robinette, pers. commun. 1994). By 1989, however, educational needs of forest landowners and managers had moved beyond the awareness stage to a level where more advanced education was needed. In response, the CUCES, in cooperation with the South Carolina Forestry Commission and South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department, developed a 5-

week shortcourse entitled, "Wildlife and Forest Management for Profit and Recreation."

Sessions for the shortcourse were introduction to forestry and wildlife relationships; Life history, biology, and habitat management of deer and turkey; life history, biology, and habitat management of small game (up to 3 of these species could be covered: bobwhite quail, rabbits, squirrels, and mourning dove); life history, biology, and habitat management for waterfowl in woodlands; and economics of wildlife and forestry. A field trip, which visited in-the-field land management operations, was also offered as part of the shortcourse. The CUCES with cooperating agencies developed 5 2.5-hour shortcourse sessions complete with a set of teaching objectives, program slides for each session, and a reference manual.

Once the shortcourse material was developed and peer reviewed, 2 in-service trainings were held to familiarize county extension agents with the course. During in-service trainings for extension agents, the actual sessions were presented as well as sessions on how to coordinate and conduct the program. County agents were encouraged to coordinate the shortcourse on a multi-county basis. A speakers' bureau of qualified natural resource professionals including extension natural resource specialists, forestry commission personnel, wildlife department biologists, and consulting foresters was developed to select resource instructors for the shortcourse.

The first shortcourse was held in January 1991. Between January 1991 and March of 1994, 9 shortcourses were held in an area covering 27 of South Carolina's 46 counties with over 260 people attending. We report here the results of an evaluation that was conducted on 8 of the shortcourses. The authors would like to thank the speakers and county extension agents who were involved in conducting the shortcourses. Teamwork involving numerous state agencies, private industries, and natural resource consultants contributed to the program's success.

## Methods

At the end of each shortcourse, participants were asked to complete a 2-page evaluation to rate: (1) the effectiveness of speakers, (2) the suitability of the information presented, and (3) the value of the information and shortcourse. Evaluation response rates ranged from 28% to 89%. In the 8 shortcourses in which evaluations were given, enrollment totaled over 220. More than 180 of the participants were landowners who owned an excess of 40,000 ha of land. In addition, 41 of the participants were natural resource professionals (foresters, wildlife biologists and plantation managers) who managed over 30,000 ha of land in South Carolina.

Shortcourse participants were asked to "indicate the degree to which the information presented will be useful to you in managing wildlife and timber." On a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high), 91% of the responses were either a 5 (51%)

or a 4 (40%). Seven percent of responses were a 3, and 2% of respondents rated the shortcourse a 2 or a 1.

Shortcourse participants were also asked, "Do you feel that this workshop will help you to earn more money on your land holdings?" Eighty-four percent of the responses were "yes" and 16% were "no." In addition, respondents who answered "yes" were asked, "How much do you feel it will help you earn in the future?" The majority of these responses were "uncertain" or "I don't know"; however, 45 participants indicated that they expected to earn a total of \$2,282,500 in the future as a result of the knowledge gained in the shortcourse.

## **Discussion**

The overall ratings for the 8 shortcourses were good. Comments ranged from "excellent course," "well prepared," "presentations were good," "this is great! Should be more of its kind!" As can be expected, natural resource professionals who attended were more demanding of the shortcourse content, as this comment reflects: "Note: Respondent is a registered forester. Course taken as a refresher, overall seemed excellent for laymen."

Suggestions for improving were mainly with improving facilities and equipment. There was interest in covering endangered species, nongame wildlife, aesthetics, outdoor recreation, and additional featured game species. Surprisingly, there were a number of suggestions to lengthen the course to more than 6 sessions. Plans are underway to upgrade the program and modify materials. Currently the shortcourse is being expanded into a "stewardship shortcourse" that will cover the elements being promoted in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service's Forest Stewardship Program. By expanding the program into this format, there will be more choices of sessions to offer and the shortcourse can be localized to fit the interests and needs of clientele in different parts of the state.

As a result of this project, over 220 forest landowners and managers have a better understanding of forest management that can be used to improve wildlife habitat, making them better stewards of the lands they own or manage.

## **Literature Cited**

- Conner, Roger C. 1993. Forest statistics for South Carolina, 1993. Resour. Bul. SE-141. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv. Southeastern For. Exp. Sta., Asheville, N.C. 52pp.