

February 2025

12 Months of Wildlife Management

From Joe Roy, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

February

Tree and Seed Order

Fruit Tree Check Up

Pruning

Getting to Frozen Ground

Identifying Pruning Needs

Create “Mineral Stumps” for Browse

Evaluating Winter Use

February

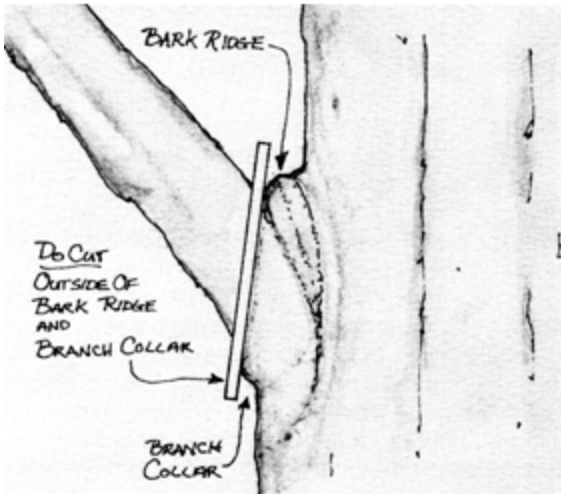
During the month of February, I spend part of everyday thinking about the previous summer. Not because I am wishing for warmer weather, I love the winter, but because that’s when I stacked my firewood. I put a lot of thought into my wood pile during the summer. I organize it to make sure that the best firewood I have is stacked so I will encounter it during the coldest part of the year. The early spring logs get stacked first. When I get to these, I am usually only running the stove a few days a week, to take the chill out of the house so I don’t need the best logs. The real good stuff gets stacked second, the stuff I know I will encounter in late January and through the month of February. Here is where I stack my crown jewels for the year, nice Oak and Ash roundwood, “all nighters”. Logs I can put in the woodstove and let them burn all night, when the temps sit well below freezing and the winter winds howl. As

“The Firewood Poem” by Lady Celia Congreve states “Oaken logs if dry and old, Keep away the winter’s cold. But Ash wet or Ash dry, A king shall warm his slippers by.”

Now you may be asking yourself, “Joe, what does this have to do with wildlife habitat?” and my answer to that is, the actions we take in one season, may not really pay dividends until well into another season. Lots of items that are on our wildlife habitat management checklist for this month, will be tasks who’s fruits (literally) won’t be reaped for several months. But, like our thoughtful stack of firewood, when we reap the fruits, we will be thankful for our labor from months past.

Tree and Seed Order

We talked about planning your tree, shrub, and seed needs for the year in January. February is a great time to get those orders in. Many nurseries and suppliers have March deadlines for ordering and have limited supply committed on a first come first served basis. You won’t regret getting your order in early. Check to see if there is a bulk discount for large orders and consider working with your neighbors to order together to save money on shipping as well. As always, make sure you are selecting native and non-invasive, site appropriate plant and seed materials. Selecting plants that bloom and fruit at different times throughout the growing season will help provide year-round benefits to wildlife. During this time of year, the browsing behavior of deer, moose, and snowshoe hare can be observed by paying attention to the tips of twigs and vegetation. If you are really lucky, you may find a ruffed grouse snow roost!



Removing hardwood tree limbs. Credit University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Fruit Tree Check Up

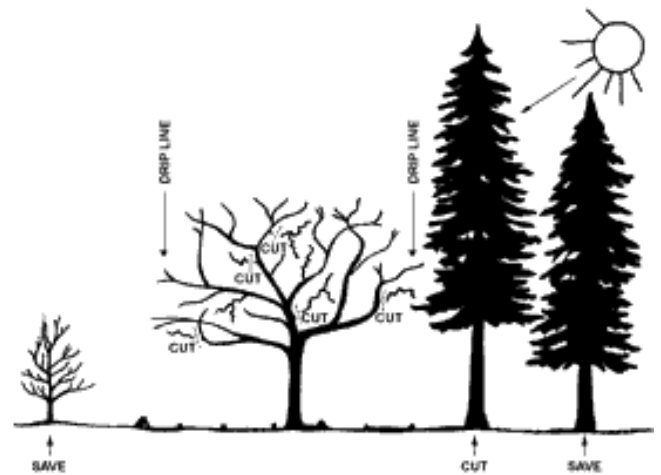
In January I am out on my woodlots checking to see what pruning needs I may need to address. As the winter snows begin to accumulate a concern I always have is subnivean rodent activity. This is the subnivean zone is the area between the top of the snow and the surface of the ground. Our rodents love to tunnel in this area and when they encounter the bark of young trees, especially my fruit trees, they like to nibble. Often this leads to girdling the tree and damaging and killing it. I place tree trunk protection tubes on all my planted trees, but I still like to go out with my snowshoes and pack down the snow around the tree to limit rodent access.

Pruning

The middle and end of February is when I begin to conduct pruning activities after identifying needs in January. There are ample guides to pruning, and this publication has covered it previously. I recommend looking back to earlier issues to get some guidance. Generally pruning the dead and dying branches is a great first step, as well as any branches growing backwards towards the center of the trees.

Getting to Frozen Ground

As the ground freezes, many of our wet areas become easier to access. Places that normally would bury a tractor or equipment in mud, are now hard and frozen. Taking advantage of this access during the month of February is important. You can get to much needed corners of your lot without rutting up and compacting your soil. If you have commercial harvests planned these frozen ground conditions can really come in handy.



Tree Pruning and Release. University of Maine Cooperative Extension

Identifying Pruning Needs

While I do not recommend pruning fruit trees in January, now is a good time to identify the trees you may want to prune later in the winter. It is good to get this task on your radar, and helps you establish how much time to budget towards this effort in the coming months.

Create “Mineral Stumps” for Browse

Create “Mineral Stumps” for browse

During the winter months, our trees are in a dormant state. This is a great time to harvest trees that are known to “stump sprout” if you want to promote some young, tender growth, within browsing height over the next few years. Stump sprouts usually grow faster than seedlings because they already have an established root system. Since these sprouts have access to a large root network, they have a denser concentration of important nutrients and minerals compared to mature buds and leaves. These young shoots are more digestible due to less lignin content in the cells and can be a target forage by whitetail deer and other browsers in the spring when they are in much need of nutrients after the long winter. Since these stump sprouts are so high in beneficial minerals, they have been given the name “Mineral Stumps” by some researchers and professionals.



Not all trees stump sprout, some of the species in Maine that do, and provide desirable forage for wildlife,

Red maple stump sprouting.

Photo: Central Pennsylvania Forestry

are our oaks, maples, and American beech. I generally stay away from cutting oaks, and sugar maples explicitly for stump sprouting, since they may have higher values when you allow them to mature, both from an economic and wildlife perspective. I do not cut beech

for stump sprouting either due to some management challenge when cutting beech, particularly if partially shaded. My preferred tree to select for creating “Mineral Stumps” are poorly formed red maple. You can often find some that are already growing in clusters out of a previous stump on your woodlot. Cutting these less than 12 inches up from the ground can help promote stump sprouting. I also generally pick trees that are 16 inches in diameter or less.

Evaluating Winter Use

In January we talked about the ability to evaluate winter use and browse on your property. February is a good time continue that monitoring activity and winter browsing on your property.



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This newsletter article was originally written for our partner Small Woodland Owners of Maine.