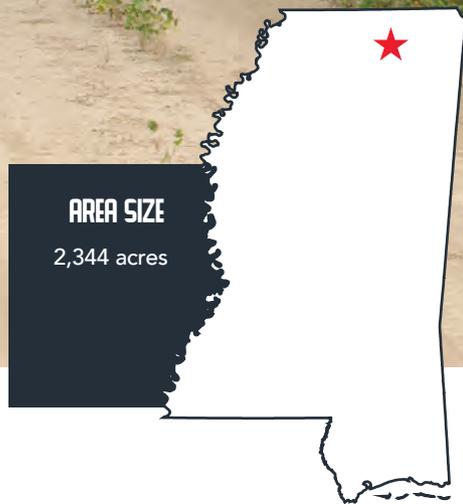


WMA SPOTLIGHT

HELL CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA



AREA SIZE

2,344 acres

LOCATION

Hell Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is in Tippah and Union counties, 5 miles northwest of New Albany. It lies in the Interior Flatwoods soil region. The soils of the 2,344-acre area are favorable to agricultural production; therefore, 1,006 acres are leased for agricultural rights. The WMA is contiguous, except for a 60-acre tract that lies slightly south of the main property. Access points are abundant throughout the WMA.

HISTORY

The land was acquired by Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) from Hell Creek Farms Inc., in 1996. Shortly before MDWFP's acquisition, eroded areas were taken out of agricultural production and subsequently planted in pine trees through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Once under state management, larger agricultural fields were broken up by planting trees and shrubs to provide woody cover and travel corridors for wildlife.

LAY OF THE LAND

The variety and patchiness of habitat types on Hell Creek make it conducive to wildlife management. Major habitat types in the area include agricultural cropland, grasslands, mixed woodlands, hardwood forest, and pine forest. Hell Creek and several of its drainages flow throughout the property.

The agricultural lands of Hell Creek are managed to provide maximum benefit to wildlife. Crops are limited to soybeans, corn, or milo because of their value as a wildlife food source. A 10-foot-wide strip of standing crop is left around all field borders. A buffer strip of native vegetation is left outside of the standing crop. These management practices provide cover and winter food along the edge of each agricultural field in the area. In addition to improving habitat, the buffers also reduce soil erosion and protect water quality by trapping field sediments and nutrients.

Hell Creek contains around 400 acres of loblolly pine forest. These pine stands were established through the CRP. Timber harvest and prescribed fire help manage the pines for wildlife habitat. During 2018, 307 acres of pine forest were selectively thinned. Thinning opens up the forest canopy, allows more sunlight to reach the ground, and stimulates the growth of benefi-



cial plants. Two tracts of loblolly pines were clear-cut in 2018 and have since been reforested with shortleaf pine. The 87 acres of shortleaf pine plantation can be managed with the use of fire earlier than loblolly pine and will produce lush browse for many years. The young shortleaf pines will also provide valuable winter cover.

Grasslands and old fields throughout Hell Creek are managed to provide early successional habitat. Small game species such as bobwhite quail and rabbits are highly dependent on early successional plant communities. Prescribed fire, strip disking, and selective herbicide applications are all management tools used to keep these habitats in a desirable state.



Prescribed fire is utilized intensively on Hell Creek to manage field borders, pine forests, and grasslands. Burning is conducted every two to four years and can significantly improve wildlife habitat. Prescribed fire helps set back mid-story plant communities while promoting the growth of herbaceous ground cover. In pines, fire helps increase the nutritional carrying capacity for deer and also improves nesting cover and brood habitat for bobwhite quail and turkey.

HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES

Hell Creek offers a multitude of hunting opportunities. Still, season dates are restrictive to minimize conflict between user groups (refer to Hell Creek's regulations for open hunting dates). The WMA is closed to hunting on special event dates, such as bird dog field trials.

Deer season begins the first week in October with a special draw-permit-only gun hunt. There are three gun hunts, spanning three to four days. These hunts provide a unique opportunity for hunters to use a rifle during archery season. The caveat is hunters must first harvest a 1.5-year-old or older doe to receive a buck permit. The buck permit is valid for the remainder of the hunt and also allows the hunter to return in December for a week-long rut hunt. Additional deer hunting opportunities exist outside of the special draw hunt. Numerous archery-only and youth-gun hunts take place throughout the season. Legal bucks must have an inside spread of at least 12 inches or one main-beam length of at least 15 inches. Youth can harvest any antlered buck.

Turkey hunting is restricted to a youth-only draw hunt, which consists of four three-day hunts in April. Although turkeys routinely travel back and forth between the WMA and neighboring lands, gobblers frequent the area during springtime and can often be spotted displaying in the fields.

The youth dove hunt is always a popular attraction. A complex of four fields spanning 12 acres is planted with a combination of millet and sorghum. The youth hunt is held on the statewide opening day of dove season. After the youth hunt, the field opens to all hunters.

Small game hunters frequent Hell Creek to take advantage of the healthy rabbit population. Squirrel hunting is also an option. Bobwhite quail exist in low-to-moderate numbers, and two weekends are open to quail hunting. Small game hunting dates, as well as bird dog training dates, are staggered throughout the season.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visitors to Hell Creek should familiarize themselves with the current regulations. Unless exempt from purchasing an annual hunting or fishing license, all visitors must possess a valid WMA User Permit. To apply for deer or youth turkey draw hunts, as well as to learn more about WMAs in Mississippi, visit mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/wma or call (601) 432-2199.

*Nathan Blount is the Northeast Region WMA biologist
For MDWFP.*