WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT & WILDLIFE PART III – DAVE DECALESTA

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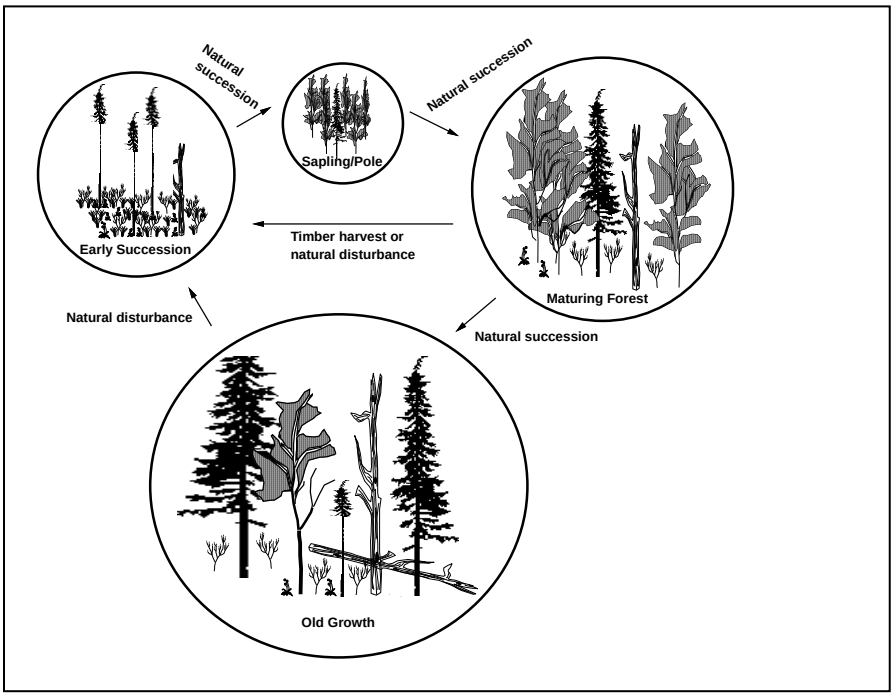
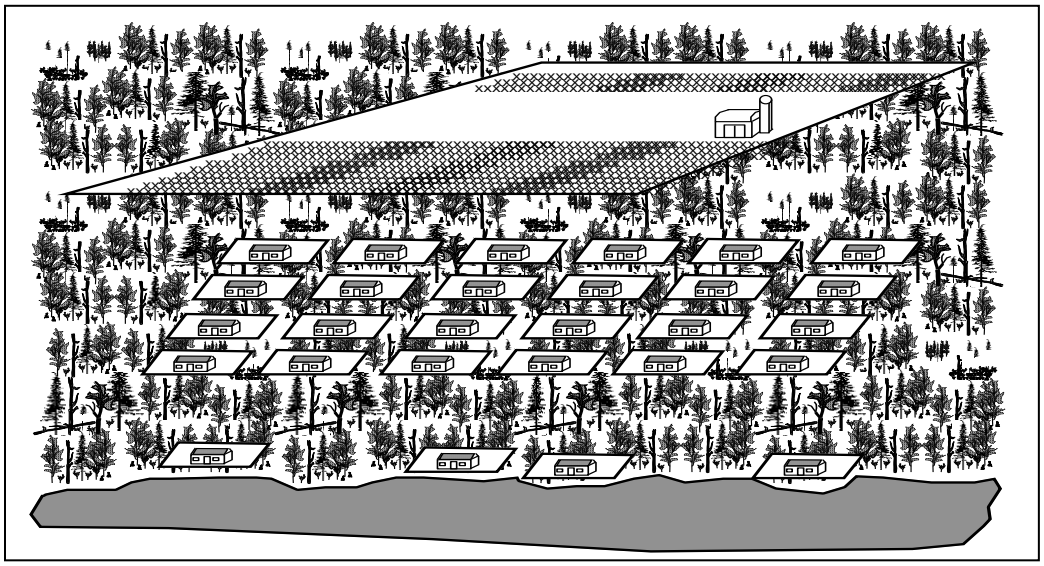
Parts I & II described wildlife habitat requirements. This installment relates to spatial and size requirements of habitat for wildlife within the Keuka Lake watershed.

Forests in different stages of development provide different kinds of habitats, which are utilized by different wildlife species. To provide the most diverse and species-rich wildlife community, it is necessary to provide a diversity of habitats. Old growth forests and maturing forests provide requirements for a great variety of wildlife species. When these successional stages are impacted by natural disturbance (primarily large and small windstorms) or timbering, many of the trees are knocked or sawn down, creating early succession shrub fields, often with a few residual large trees still standing. This new habitat – early succession – provides essential habitat for a different suite of wildlife species. Time passes and seedlings in early successional sites grow into thickets of larger trees 2-10 inches in diameter, resulting in sapling/pole sites with a different suite of wildlife species. More time passes and these sites grow into maturing and then into old growth forests, completing the cycle. Although few if any wildlife species in the Keuka Lake area require true old growth, vegetation in old growth forests, especially mosses and fungae, is more abundant and diverse in old growth forests. So the greatest diversity of plant and animal wildlife occurs in watersheds with the full complement of forest successional stages.



Some wildlife species require multiple successional stages (e.g., deer feed in early successional sites, hide from hunters in sapling/pole sites, and rest and reproduce in maturing forests; many forest songbirds nest in maturing forests but forage in early succession sites). So, it is critical to have all stages of forest succession in close proximity (within ¼ mile) to provide for all needs of

all wildlife species. In addition, it is necessary to have enough of each successional stage to support large enough populations of wildlife species over the long haul. One small patch of forest, even if it contains all habitats, will not support enough deer or songbirds or salamanders to maintain enough individual animals to maintain a breeding and sustaining population. Without enough habitat, individual wildlife species either will chose not to live in small forests, or will dwindle and die because their numbers are too low. Current development of Keuka Lake Watershed (depicted below) retains enough different forest habitats in sufficient amount to support a healthy wildlife community. The addition of farmlands and agricultural crops also benefited a large group of wildlife (deer, bear, rabbits, grouse, and many songbird species).



Currently, the Keuka Lake watershed more closely resembles the first scenario – limited numbers of homes above the lake and limited amount of agriculture. However, without careful planning for land use in the watershed that will benefit wildlife, habitat, the health of Keuka Lake and responsible development of the watershed, Keuka Lake may come to resemble Lake Como, a beautiful but terribly polluted lake in Italy.

The last article in this four-part series will explore ways in which the Keuka Lake watershed, habitats, and wildlife may be protected and preserved to maintain the health of the watershed and lake while being responsive to multiple use needs and landowner concerns,

Keuka Lake

Lake Como