

Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership

USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry



Description: The mission of the Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership is to improve water quality and migratory bird habitat in the Upper Mississippi River watershed by restoring bottomland forests and improving the condition of existing forests throughout the watershed.

Key Issues:

- Dams and levees have changed the hydrology of the Upper Mississippi, leaving a bottomland hardwood forest lacking in diversity and regeneration.
- A “hypoxic zone” in the Gulf of Mexico, a condition characterized by low oxygen levels in the water, threatens marine life. The cause is an excess of nutrients entering the Gulf from the Mississippi basin. About 39 percent of the nitrogen and 26 percent of the phosphorus in the hypoxic zone come from the Upper Mississippi. A lack of riparian buffers along the river and its tributaries, both forested and wetland, contributes significantly to this problem.
- Many birds that depend on the Mississippi River as a migratory flyway or for breeding and nesting habitat are in decline, including the northern pintail, greater scaup, and the cerulean warbler.

Accomplishments:

- The National Great Rivers Research and Education Center and the Nature Conservancy sponsored a conference called *Visions of a Sustainable Mississippi River*, culminating in a policy forum hosted by the Honorable Congressman Jerry Costello. Attendees recommended actions needed to improve water quality in the Gulf, which included developing ecosystem services markets, promoting floodplain connectivity, and producing sustainable biofuels.
- The U.S. Forest Service and the University of Minnesota have created a Web-based bottomland hardwood forest management guide for the Upper Mississippi River System, which contains sections on ecology, silviculture, forest health, economics, and management examples. The guide is available on the Web at http://nrs.fs.fed.us/fmg/nfmg/bl_hardwood/index.html.
- The Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership updated its Action Plan to cover the years 2009 to 2013. It focuses on sustainable forestry to protect, maintain, and restore healthy forests; improving water quality to support healthy, productive aquatic ecosystems; and improving the amount and quality of migratory bird habitat to stabilize or increase forest bird populations.
- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s (NFWF) Upper Mississippi Watershed Fund has funded 25 projects since 2006. Roughly \$1.5 million in NFWF funds drew \$3.9 million in matching funds for a total conservation investment of nearly \$5.4 million.
- The Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership helped complete an application nominating the Upper Mississippi River watershed as a National Fish Habitat Action Plan project watershed. The proposed partnership, called the *Fishers and Farmers Partnership*, will target agricultural producers, encouraging them to install conservation practices to benefit fish habitat.
- The Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership continues to focus on strategic locations, including the Meramec watershed in central-eastern Missouri. Projects in this area include targeted riparian conservation, conservation easements on high-priority lands, innovative conservation marketing, and a focus on drinking water protection.

Budget History: In FY 2006, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry entered into a cooperative agreement with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to manage the Upper Mississippi Watershed Fund. Habitat improvement projects are funded with carryover funds and State and Private Forestry Redesign Funds.

Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership <i>(\$ in thousands)</i>				
	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009
U.S. Forest Service				
Watershed Coordination	50 (NFWF)	50 (NFWF)		50 (NFWF)
Habitat Improvement Projects		85	600	300
Totals	\$50	\$135	\$600	\$350
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Upper Mississippi Watershed Fund				
Habitat Improvement Projects – FS \$	194	161	500	313
Projects funded with other sources	280	40		
Match provided by recipients	1,207	501	\$1,029	\$1,171
Total Funds to Projects	\$1,681	\$702	\$1,529	\$1,484

Future Direction:

- Expand the partnership to other Federal agencies and nonprofit organizations
- Coordinate partnership activities with the Forest Service Middle Mississippi River Partnership and the Midwest Natural Resources Group (11 Federal agencies)
- Continue to use Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis to target Upper Mississippi Watershed Fund projects

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