

Middle Meramec River Conservation Opportunity Area

The Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation jointly initiated the Upper Mississippi River Watershed Fund. The Foundation funds projects that benefit the forests of the Upper Mississippi while improving wildlife habitat and water quality.



Background

The middle and upper Meramec River watershed was once a lush mosaic of woodlands, plains, and savannas. European settlers cleared much of the area and converted it to pasture and grassland, especially in the most fertile bottomlands. Clearing and livestock grazing caused streambank instability, excessive sediment, nutrient loading, and poor riparian corridor conditions across much of the watershed.

In the upland forests, woodlands, savannas, and glades that remain, humans have disrupted natural fire cycles that kept the land more open, diverse, and rich with herbaceous growth.

Dry Fork Creek and the Upper Meramec River are especially in need of restoration and management. GIS analysis and field observations reveal degraded streambanks with riparian corridors that are too narrow to protect water quality or provide sufficient aquatic habitat.

Several species of freshwater mussels that once thrived in the watershed are no longer present. Of the remaining species, 10 appear on State or Federal endangered lists, with several others under consideration.

In addition, Partners in Flight has identified a number of bird species that need management attention, including the blue-winged warbler, prairie warbler, and Eastern wood-pewee. The cerulean warbler needs immediate attention.

In addition to its ecological value, the river's proximity to St. Louis makes it an important recreation area.

Location

This area, which includes portions of the Dry Fork and Upper Meramec River watersheds, covers approximately 99,425 acres.

Goals

The project is working with watershed landowners to:

- Improve conditions in oak/hickory woodlands, savannas, and bottomlands to benefit birds and other wildlife
- Restore riparian corridors to improve water quality and aquatic habitat and fisheries
- Establish a landowner watershed committee to stimulate and maintain interest in watershed management

Results

The project expects to:

- Improve, restore, and protect 20,000 feet of riparian corridor
- Improve 150 acres of private land and upland forest
- Exclude cattle from streams, provide other water sources, plant trees, and stabilize streambanks
- Install Best Management Practices
- Protect 550 acres of forest habitat with a conservation easement

Outcomes/Accomplishments

The availability of cost-share funds is expected to increase the number of landowners who are able to install and maintain Best Management Practices. Restoring and maintaining riparian buffers will greatly reduce the amount of sediment that reaches the water, which in turn will improve water quality and aquatic habitat.

Using incentives for livestock fencing and alternative watering systems will also improve instream water quality and reduce streambank erosion, helping to maintain or increase populations of native fish, mussels, and aquatic invertebrates. Incentives will supplement the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service cost-share programs.

The condition of the riparian corridor and upland forest cover will be re-evaluated every 2 years starting in 2008 to monitor project progress and land use changes.

Partners

Ozark Regional Land Trust, American Bird Conservancy, St. Louis Open Space Council, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Service, National Wild Turkey Federation, Farm Service Agency, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation

Grant Amount

\$ 75,000



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