

## Oak Savanna Restoration and Fuels Reduction in Northwestern Indiana

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

Of the estimated 126 million acres of savanna that once stretched across North America, Midwestern oak was the most extensive, covering between 2.7 and 3.2 million acres from Texas to Manitoba. Today, less than one percent of the Midwest oak savanna and native prairie remains. Both ecosystems are considered more endangered than tropical rain forests.

In the past, oak savannas (often called barrens) were maintained by frequent disturbances, primarily fire. In Indiana, most savanna remnants escaped agriculture because of their sandy soils. Many of these sites have converted to oak woodlands and forests.

Tallgrass prairies have suffered an even more dramatic decline. Nearly every acre of tillable Midwestern prairie has been converted to agricultural use. Native remnants are generally restricted to areas that were not easily drained.

The 80-acre restoration will take place on a 530-acre parcel of Nature Conservancy land, which is adjacent to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources 1,100-acre Tefft Savanna Nature Preserve. Because of its size and the presence of globally rare species, the project area supports one of the most ecologically significant oak barrens/savanna/prairie complexes in the Central Tall Grasslands Ecoregion. The potential for restoration is high, given the number of small remnants that persist.

### Location

Jasper County, Indiana, between the Kankakee and Iroquois river watersheds in the Upper Mississippi drainage

### Goals

- Re-create a healthy savanna/prairie mosaic
- Restore oak woodland to savanna
- Demonstrate restoration of savanna/prairie landscapes
- Create and improve habitat for species in peril, such as the plains pocket gopher

### Results

The project is using a two-phased approach to restoration: 1) mechanically and chemically thinning the canopy and shrub zones, and 2) applying prescribed fire to rapidly launch savanna restoration.

### Outcomes/Accomplishments

The project will increase the acreage of young, high-quality savanna habitat. Structure will be restored and fire will be reintroduced into degraded habitats. A 5-year assessment of results will lead to a better understanding of restoration and management of oak savannas in northwestern Indiana.

### Partners

The Nature Conservancy

### Grant Amount

\$ 75,075



For more information:

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