

Restoring Oak Woodland and Savanna in Iowa

Background

Stephens State Forest is the largest publicly owned forest in Iowa totaling over 15,000 acres. It is located in the Lower Des Moines River watershed, which is listed as a priority watershed for conservation by the Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership. The Stephens State Forest is also part of a larger unit, the Stephens State Forest Bird Conservation Area totaling over 41,000 acres. This project focuses on restoration of important oak savannas on both public and private lands within and adjacent to the Stephens State Forest.

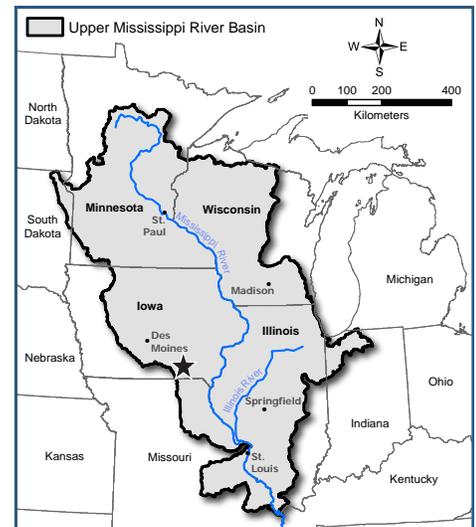
Oak savanna restoration will help meet the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry, five goals for the Stephens State Forest Management Plan:

1. Managing for healthy, sustainable, and diverse public forestlands;
2. Creating forest management demonstration and research areas;
3. Developing and expanding wildlife habitat for game and nongame species;
4. Enhancing low-impact recreational opportunities such as bird watching; and
5. Improving water quality by protecting watersheds and preventing soil loss.

In addition the Iowa DNR Wildlife goals for the property focus on facilitating conservation actions described in the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan. The Wildlife Action Plan focuses on a critical woodland/savanna/grassland restoration. The project will restore oak savannas on both the public and private forest lands within and adjacent to the Stephens State Forest.

Location

Stephens State Forest is located in south-central Iowa and is divided into seven units totaling over 15,000 acres (star on map). The forest is dispersed over five counties: Lucas, Clarke, Monroe, Appanoose, and Davis.



Goals

The goal of the project is to restore oak woodland and savanna on public and private land within and adjacent to the Stephens State Forest.

Expected Results

The project includes restoring 43 acres of savanna, completing stand improvement on 10 acres of timber, and conducting prescribed fire on 18 acres of native warm season grass. These management areas will serve as demonstration sites for landowner field days and other public education. An outreach program will be developed for nearly 250 private landowners, along with educational materials, workshops, free technical assistance, and cost-share assistance for oak woodland management and savanna restoration.

Reestablishing a fire regime will be a high priority. Key partners will be the five local volunteer fire departments. A prescribed fire workshop and training session will be conducted for these departments for the purpose of developing prescribed fire services for their constituency, greatly expanding the use of prescribed fire by local landowners. Ninety percent cost-share assistance will be provided to landowners, along with detailed management



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

USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry
www.na.fs.fed.us
April 2011

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plans that include a prescribed fire regime for their site. Development of forest stewardship plans for an additional 750 acres of woodland is planned. Cost-share assistance is sought from two U.S. Department of Agriculture incentive programs (WHIP for wildlife habitat and EQIP for environmental quality) and from Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District funds for managing these additional acres.

Expected Outcomes

The long-term desired outcome is to provide technical and cost-share assistance aimed at improving oak forests and restoring remnant savannas on the private land within the Bird Conservation Area.

Partners

- National Wild Turkey Federation, Inc. (grantee)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- Simpson College
- Agren, Inc.

Grant Amount

\$49,450
