



United States Department of Agriculture



butterfly — Tracy Fidler, USFS

*Nature never
did betray the heart
that loved her.*
— William Wordsworth

2016 **YEAR IN** Review

SHAWNEE
NATIONAL
FOREST



Eastern phoebe — USFS



Forest Service

Eastern Region

Shawnee National Forest

March 2017
FS-R9-83



conservation education — USFS

PEOPLE

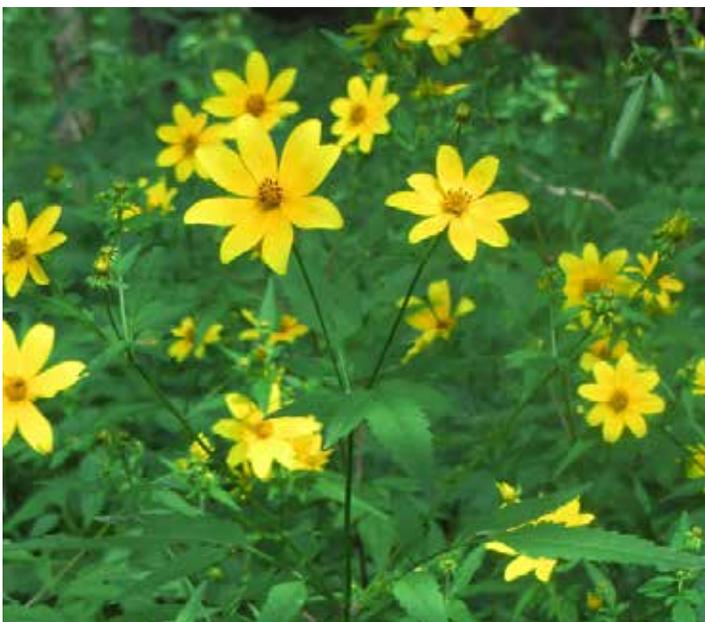
About 1 million people visit Shawnee National Forest every year.

RECREATE

You can camp, paddle, hike, horseback ride, photograph, swim, run, hunt, fish and picnic at the forest.



fishing — Danielle Rexroat, USFS



HABITAT

The forest spans more than 280,000 acres and includes glades, barrens, prairies, streams, lakes, ponds, waterfalls, woodlands, rocky outcrops — and more!



Brendan Cain — Tracy Fidler, USFS

2016

Shawnee National Forest truly is the people's forest. About 1 million Americans recreated and spent time here last year alone. It is a place that provides respite from the world – and basic necessities, such as clean drinking water.

It's also a place where people are making a difference. About 200 groups helped steward and enrich the forest in 2016. You will see some of those organizations featured in this annual review. By working together, we are making the forest a better place. Thanks to collaborative efforts, we can offer more

education programs, better manage natural resources, promote the forest as a destination and strengthen local communities.

Thanks to all of you for your support of this amazing place. May our endeavors to make Shawnee National Forest a jewel for America continue.

Sincerely,

Brendan Cain
Forest Supervisor



Kinkaid Lake — Tracy Fidler, USFS

Residents Enjoy Cleaner Drinking Water

About 30,000 people depend on Kinkaid Lake for drinking water. Yet soil erosion within the watershed and along the lake is dumping thousands of tons of sediment — enough to fill more than 2,200 dump trucks — into the lake each year.

“Most of the sediment coming into the lake is from rainwater that lifts soil and transports it downstream. It creates gullies and erodes stream banks,” said Matthew Lechner,

natural resources program manager for Shawnee National Forest. “An additional source of erosion is the lake’s shore, which is battered by waves from boats and wind.”

That’s why Shawnee National Forest partnered with others to stabilize the shore and streambanks, improve habitat through the use of prescribed fire and support landowners who want to implement best practices, such as grassy waterways.

The lake restoration is a cooperative effort among U.S Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Jackson County Board, Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District, Kinkaid Area Watershed Project, Kinkaid-Reed’s Creek Conservancy District and Shawnee Resource Conservation and Development Area.

Fire brings life to forest

Fire helps maintain healthy oak forests, according to scientists who study birds, native plants and other wildlife. That's why Shawnee National Forest used fire as a tool to restore 9,600 acres last year in Southern Illinois.

“Fire rejuvenates the forest. It increases nutrient availability, favors some plants over others, and can remove some litter and smaller trees and brush. This lets more sunlight into the forest floor, which is important for oak trees, the dominant tree in

Illinois' forests, and many sun-loving plants,” said Scott Crist, the forest's expert on prescribed fire.

A more open forest is critical to a group of birds on the decline. The Central Hardwoods Joint Venture says that long-term fire suppression has caused a significant loss of structural and plant diversity within forests and is one of the top threats facing birds, particularly those that depend on grasslands or a more open forest, often called a woodland.



Our research shows that these rare and declining birds could benefit from having fire back on the forest. Fire suppression became popular in the 1950s, and it allowed an unnaturally dense growth of trees to occur in woodlands. This shaded out native grasses and forbs, thereby reducing the insects that were food for many of these birds.
—Larry Heggemann,
Central Hardwoods
Joint Venture

© David Allen, IDNR



© Tracy Fidler

LET THE SUNSHINE IN

Oak trees support more than 100 different kinds of animals.

Oaks are slowly disappearing from Southern Illinois forests, says a group of scientists who study the region's forests.

They blame its loss on the lack of sunlight in our forests.

Without more sunlight, Southern Illinois forests may be the first in central North America to convert completely from a forest dominated by oaks to one dominated by shade-loving species, such as maple.

A darker forest means fewer songbirds, waterfowl and other wildlife. That's because sunlight

gives life to wildflowers, grasses and shrubs. Bees, butterflies and other pollinators feast on these flowers, while the forest floor provides cover for birds and other wildlife to raise their young.

Shawnee National Forest hopes that by making our forests sunnier we can save the diversity of life that depends on them. Using fire and selective removal of trees are two management techniques that can open a forest, and both are being used in the national forest.



Open forests contain wildflowers and grasses for pollinators, such as butterflies and bees.

Tracy Fidler, USFS

About 7,000 acres of the forest's most biologically diverse places, often called natural areas, are the focus of a new conservation effort.

“Barrens, glades, seeps and springs are just a few of the rare and unique places that we strive to conserve,” says Matthew Lechner, who oversees management of natural resources at Shawnee National Forest.



swamp milkweed — USFS

NATURAL AREAS



ARE BIOLOGICAL

USFS

Often called biological hot spots, natural areas support so many species that scientists call them genetic banks. Illinois surveyed its lands and waters to identify its rare places. This effort, called the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, documented 1,200 such places. Of these, about 80 are found in Shawnee National Forest.

HOT SPOTS

The Forest Service is working with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Shawnee Resource Conservation & Development to develop and implement management plans for these sites. A new grant provides on-the-ground support.

Additional conservation partners working on natural areas include Native Plant Society, River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area, Sierra Club, Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association and Southern Illinois University.



beaver — USFS



Forest
helps
train
Chicagoans
for nature-based
jobs

FROM THE CITY TO THE COUNTRY

Eight Chicagoans — who had never camped or been to a national forest — took part in a summer job-training program in Southern Illinois.

“This has changed my life. I never knew anything like this existed!” said 45-year-old James Chalmers. The Greencorps Chicago program trains inner-city adults for jobs that restore and maintain natural places.

Under the guidance of Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy staff members, participants learned how to inventory invasive plants, maintain trails, and monitor and rehab wilderness campsites. Each day was a new adventure. They saw huge rock formations, amazing views, diverse plant species and even a rattlesnake. They inventoried 10 miles of trails and eight miles of waterways, and they recorded more than 300 locations of invasive species.

This project was made possible with funding from the Wilderness Stewardship Project. Thanks to Southern Illinois University’s Touch of Nature Environmental Center for providing cabins.



Cooling off from a hot day's work — USFS

Greencorps Chicago's mission is to promote environmental stewardship and improve the quality of life in Chicago by establishing, maintaining and restoring natural and public spaces that are safe, healthy and sustainable through hands-on involvement with program participants.



Greencorps members take a break — USFS



Field work — USFS



Exploring Panther's Den — USFS



USFS

Learning about fish at Hutchins Creek, doing a BioBlitz at Rim Rock and a group photo at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers (left to right) – photos USFS

Kids in the woods

Visiting the streams, valleys and hills their ancestors once walked is important to Oklahoma's federally recognized tribes.

"We're basically six generations removed from these areas, so a lot of people think of Oklahoma as home, not realizing this is their original homeland," explained Joseph Blanchard of the Absentee Shawnee Tribe.

Last summer, the Shawnee and Eastern Shawnee sent 20 teenagers and their chaperones to Southern Illinois. They created sound maps at Garden of the Gods, identified plants and animals at Rim Rock, canoed the Cache River Wetlands, and assisted in shocking and netting fish for research. They also snorkeled the crystal clear water of Hutchins Creek in Clear Springs Wilderness.

"I was in awe of our Creator's handiwork in the magnificent things I viewed," said Eastern Shawnee's Kathleen Moore.

The trip is part of an effort to establish a regional connection. It is something the tribes have wanted for some time – a way for their children to link with the past.

Thanks to U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Southern Illinois University's Touch of Nature Environmental Center.





New
grant a
boon to
waterfowl
and
migrating
birds

MISSISSIPPI RIVER FLYWAY

Waterfowl and songbirds find refuge at Shawnee National Forest wetlands as they migrate along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. That's why conservation partners recently celebrated a \$1 million North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grant that will benefit wetland conservation projects in Illinois, Kentucky and Missouri.

"North America has lost about 90 percent of its wetlands, making conservation partnerships critical. By restoring wetlands and improving the health of these places, we increase the number of waterfowl and other species that depend on wetlands," said Paul Widowski, a wildlife biologist with Shawnee National Forest.

Ducks Unlimited led the effort to work with 20 partners to develop the project. With this grant, Shawnee National Forest will expand the Big Muddy Wetlands Complex and restore an oxbow to the Big Muddy River and 320 acres in the Oakwood Bottoms Greentree Reservoir.



Michael Sertle — Tracy Fidler, USFS



These habitats are increasingly important for migration and wintering waterfowl, and we need to provide the kind of landscape they need.

— Michael Sertle
Ducks Unlimited
regional biologist



Shawnee National Forest — USFS

Citizens work with forest to reduce wildfire risk.

People are reducing the threat of wildfire by studying where they live and determining why they are at risk and what they can do about it.

“Each community’s wildfire risk is unique, so it’s important for community leaders to work with fire professionals and land managers to analyze risk and collaborate to

find locally supported solutions,” said Shawnee National Forest Supervisor Brendan Cain. The national forest and other conservation partners worked with the Township of Makanda and Pope County to create Community Wildfire Protection Plans.

About \$500,000 in resources and jobs have been brought into Makanda Township for wildfire risk reduction activities since adoption of its plan. Community leaders hope the Pope County plan, which was completed in December, also will be a tool for bringing resources to its communities.



Forest Service staff person installs interpretive sign — USFS

The Forest Service recently started tracking whether its offices are saving energy, reducing water use and recycling. It's part of an initiative to reduce the agency's ecological footprint – its impact on nature. Each national forest received a score that indicated whether its operations were sustainable. In 2016, Shawnee National Forest earned a bronze rating for purchasing sustainable goods, reducing the impact of its vehicles and its leadership.

GREEN BUSINESS

HONOR

Garden of the Gods' Camel Rock can now fit inside your pocket – as a quarter in the *America the Beautiful* series. It's featured alongside other iconic sites in America, such as the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone. More than 1,300 people celebrated the quarter's release, including Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell and leaders from the Shawnee Tribe and Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma.



Then Forest Supervisor Allen Nicholas hands out quarters — USFS

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2016 BY THE NUMBERS

23,410

the number of people who attended a conservation education event or training

9,600

the number of acres in the forest treated with prescribed fire

200

the number of organizations Shawnee National Forest worked with in Southern Illinois

28

the number of miles of the forest's boundary that staff maintained, such as through surveys

54

the number of acres added to the forest at Lusk Creek Wilderness

90

the number of miles of trails that staff repaired

3,400

the number of volunteer hours people gave to the forest last year



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