

MIDDLE MERAMEC CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITY AREA PARTNERSHIP

Woodlands for Wildlife

A Natural Resource Stewardship Action Plan



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PART I: Woodlands for Wildlife Project



Introduction

The **Middle Meramec Conservation Opportunity Area (COA)**, nestled within the greater Meramec River Basin, is an area which was identified in the 2004 Missouri Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy as a place where a number of Species of Conservation Concern (SOCC) are at risk. The federally listed Indiana and gray bats, and three (soon to be four) federally listed species of freshwater mussels are found in the basin. Beyond providing bat habitat, the forests of the area are also important summer habitat for several neo-tropical migrant song birds.

Multiple factors including likelihood of development, large forest patch size, public drinking water supply, and wildlife habitat resulted in portions of the Meramec Basin also being classified as a Priority Forest Landscape in Missouri's 2010 Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy (FRAS) process.

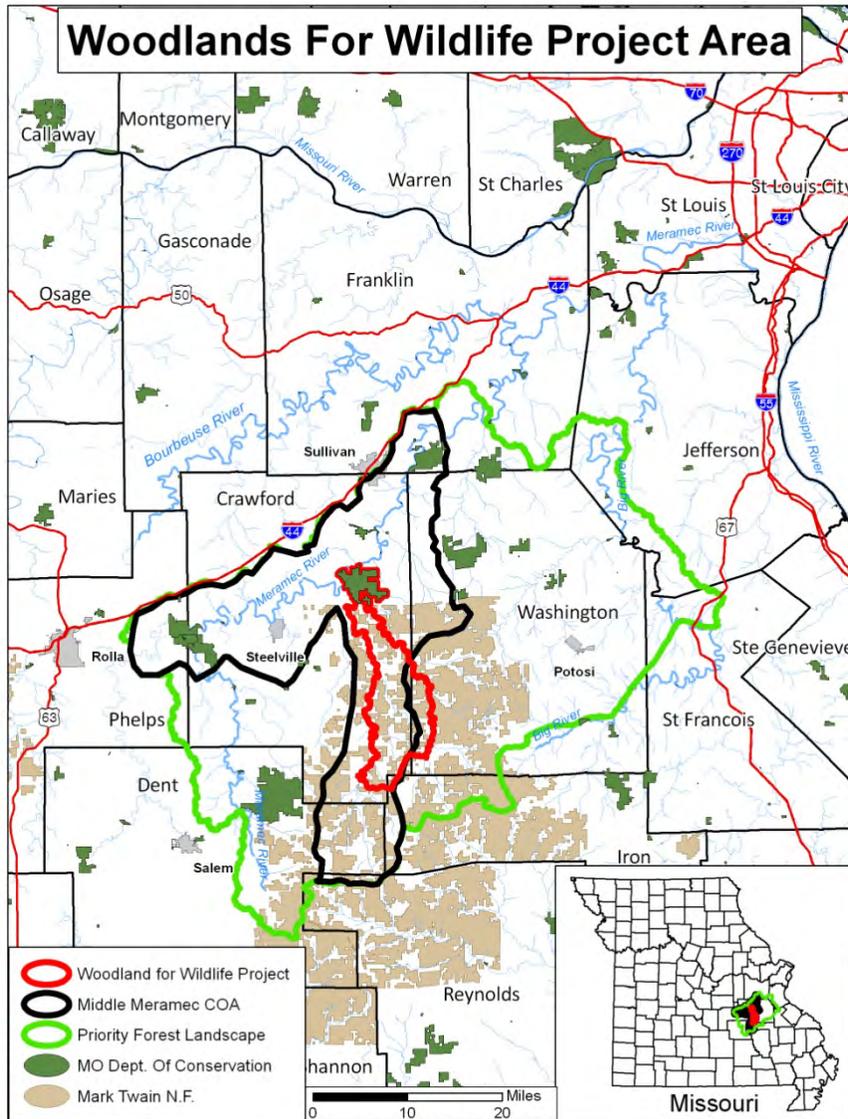
Since the majority of forested land within the Meramec Basin is in private ownership, a landscape-scale approach to forest stewardship is an important means of maintaining and restoring habitat critical for the SOCC mentioned above. The forests of the region are generally over-stocked and most are in need of thinning to remain healthy and provide the type of habitat required by several declining bird species. Forested riparian corridors help provide clean water for high quality aquatic habitat, and they also provide foraging areas for bats. Management practices carried out by private landowners in the basin will be a very important means to achieving conservation goals for the area.

The Meramec River Basin is very large, covering approximately 2.5 million acres, and is comprised of 3 8-digit watersheds: the Meramec, the Big, and the Bourbeuse. The entire basin provides important habitat for the SOCC mentioned above. Where should management activities begin? The Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy helps in this regard by identifying the Middle Meramec COA, a subset of the Meramec watershed. However, the COA covers about 440,000 acres – still too large an area to begin working effectively with landowners in. The project team made up of conservation professionals has identified a 63,000 acre landscape within the COA to address first. The project to be developed in this area has been named ***Woodlands For Wildlife*** (WFW).

The Woodlands For Wildlife Project will rely on interested partners that share in the project objectives, participating on a voluntary basis. The project will involve interested government agencies, conservation NGOs, and most importantly private landowners within the project area who wish to participate. Where appropriate, the project will also seek to work with the Meramec Regional Planning Commission, the Crawford County Commission, and local interested businesses.



Project Area



The project area is bounded on the west by Huzzah Creek and on the east by Courtois Creek. The southern boundary of the area is at Hwy. 49 and Hwy. C. The northern end of the project is, and includes, the 6,225 acre Huzzah Conservation Area.

The majority of the project area falls within Crawford County, with a small portion in Washington County.



Vision Statement

Our vision for the *Woodlands For Wildlife* project is to improve the native plant and animal communities on public and private lands for people to enjoy today and into the future. We believe landowners want to make good land use choices and they should have a voice in shaping their conservation program. By working with each other and sharing knowledge, we can create a flexible and voluntary program that respects and reaches our common goals.



Project Goals & Objectives

The project partners created an initial list of goals for WFW. The team then worked to combine and eliminate different goals according to how a particular goal related to the WFW vision statement.

Goal #1: Improve and maintain healthy ecosystems.

The project’s first goal is to restore, protect and manage forests that contribute to the rehabilitation and enhancement of SOCC which occur in the COA.

Major emphases for the initiative are the adoption of woodland and glade restoration practices in upland forests, and protection and restoration of riparian corridors and bottomlands.

Objective #1:

Improve/restore open woodlands and glades on 5000 acres of public/USFS land and 1000 acres of private land to benefit woodland focal species Blue-Winged warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Eastern Wood-Pewee by 2015.

Measures: 5000 acres of public land would include 1116 acres of Timber Stand Improvement, 1640 acres of shelter wood cuts, 624 acres of thinning, and 1564 acres of seed tree harvests.



Eastern Wood-Pewee



Prairie Warbler

Objective #2:

Create and maintain 150 acres of intact riparian corridors/buffers on private land and complete 2228 feet of stream bank stabilization on public land by 2015.

Measures: A focal species for buffers has not been identified, and the partnership will look to MDC leadership as statewide Aquatic Conservation Opportunity Area monitoring protocol is established.



Pink Mucket

Objective #3:

Restore 100 acres of bottomland forest and 2 wetland sites on public land and secure funds to successfully meet all demand for bottomland forest, mesic forest, and wetland restoration projects on private land by 2015.

Measures: A measurable objective for acres of bottomland hardwoods, mesic forests, and wetlands on private land has not been identified, but information on how to restore these habitats is to be major part of the outreach effort in Woodlands for Wildlife.



Cerulean Warbler

Objective #4:

Remove invasive species from 175 acres of private land, 500 acres of USFS land, and 25 acres of MDC land by 2015.

Measures: Targeted species are to include but not be limited to sericeia lespedeza, spotted knapweed, bush honeysuckle, and feral hogs.



Bush Honeysuckle



Feral Hogs

Goal #2: Engage private landowners.

Objective:

Develop a landowner advisory committee by March 1st, 2010, and have at least one landowner workshop and one landowner tour specifically for key landowners each year until 2015.

Measures: Direct mailings will be sent to all landowners with 10 or more acres, inviting them to each event.

Goal #3: Share forestry information and offer management assistance to landowners.

Objective:

For the 292 landowners in the project area who own more than 10 acres, double the statewide average who have Forest Management Plans and who have received advice from the state forest agency by 2015.

Measures: This equates to 4.2% of landowners (12 individuals) having a Forest Management Plan and 15.4% (45 individuals) having received advice from the state forestry agency.





Community Of Interest

There are many groups which have interests in the Meramec River watershed. The following agencies and organizations place importance on the Middle and Lower Meramec River, and have enlisted as planning and implementation partners:

- American Bird Conservancy
- American Rivers
- Audubon Society
- Crawford County Government
- Ducks Unlimited
- Franklin County Planning & Zoning Department
- Friends of La Barque Creek
- Great Rivers Greenway
- Meramec Regional Planning Commission
- Meramec River Greenway
- Meramec River Recreation Association
- Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District
- Missouri-American Water Company
- Missouri Coalition for the Environment
- Missouri Department of Conservation
- Missouri Department of Natural Resources
- Missouri Department of Health
- Missouri Smallmouth Alliance
- Missouri Stream Team (a program of MDC)
- The Nature Conservancy of Missouri
- Northern Ozark Rivers Partnership
- The Open Space Council of the St. Louis Region
- Ozark Outdoors Riverfront Resort
- Ozark Regional Land Trust
- The Trust for Public Land
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- USDA Forest Service
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

The team members involved in the implementation of the Woodlands For Wildlife project include representatives of:

- Ozark Regional Land Trust
- Mark Twain National Forest
- Missouri Department of Natural Resources
- American Bird Conservancy
- Missouri Department of Conservation (Forestry, Private Land Services, Outreach & Education, Protection, and Fisheries Divisions)

PART II: Implementation Considerations



Biophysical Baseline Conditions

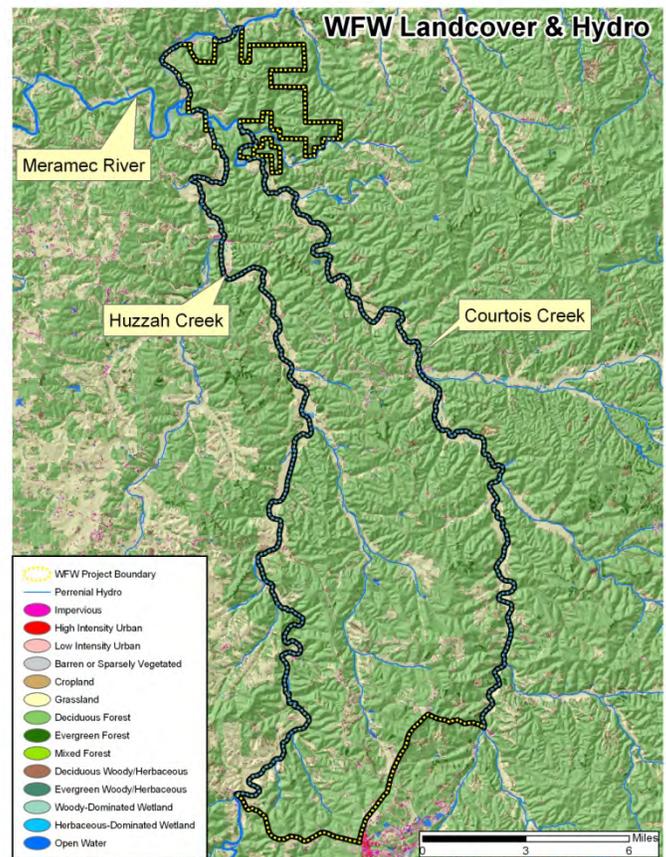
A large amount of resource inventory data has been collected for the WFW project area, and is summarized below. Data is available for relevant topics ranging from current land cover, to species of conservation concern (SOCC), to public land ownership.

1. Landcover Data

Oak-hickory forest and woodlands dominate the rolling hills in the Meramec River watershed. Oak-pine woodlands are scattered among the deciduous forest throughout the southern and eastern portions of the watershed. Caves are abundant and play a critical role in providing habitat for numerous cave-dwelling species.

The WFW project area covers approximately 63,000 acres, of which 85% is forest, 11% pasture, and 3% woodland, with the remainder mixed among cropland, urban development, water, and other minor land uses.

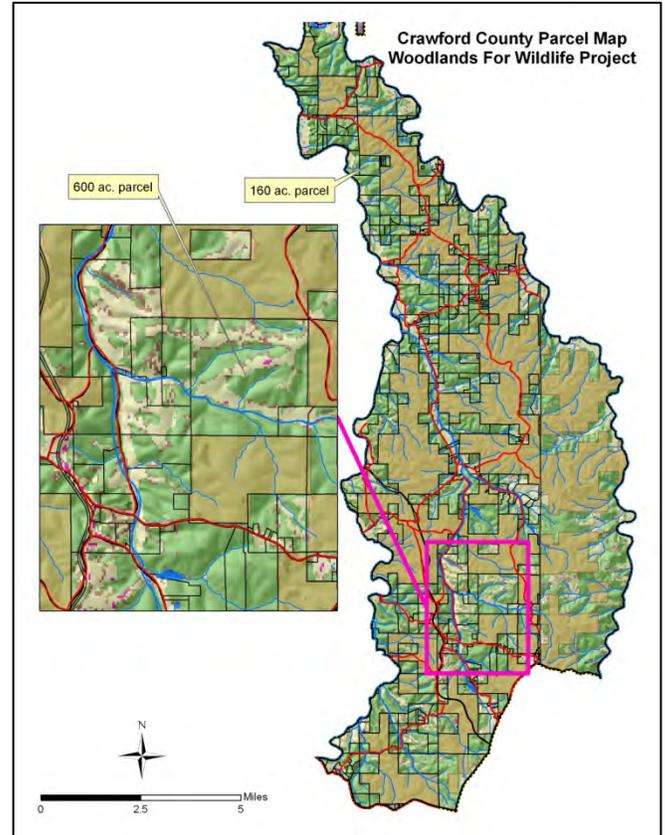
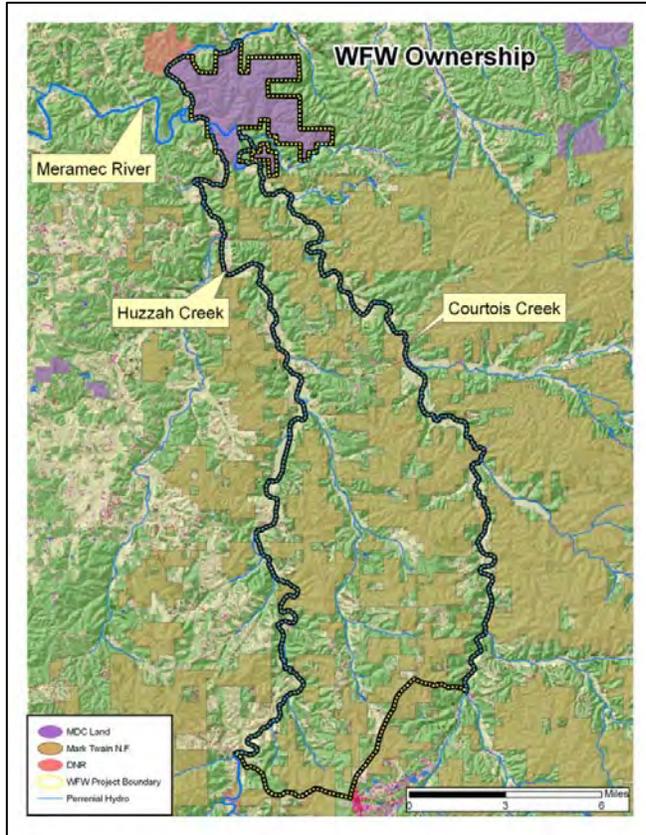
- Courtois Creek watershed is 90% forested and 83% forested in the 100ft riparian corridor.
- Huzzah Creek watershed is 78% forested and 72% forested in the 100ft riparian corridor.



2. Ownership Characteristics

- 48% or 29,829 acres in is public ownership (39% federal, 9% state).
- 52% or 32,889 acres are in private ownership.
- 468 landowners in Crawford Co. portion of project area.
- 114 landowners own tracts larger than 100 acres of land and together own 73% of the private land.
- 195 landowners own tracts larger than 50 acres of land and together own 88.2% of the private land.

- 52 landowners live locally and own >100 acres; and together own 43% of the private land.
- 33 landowners live in state but not locally and own > 100 acres; and together own 27% of the land.

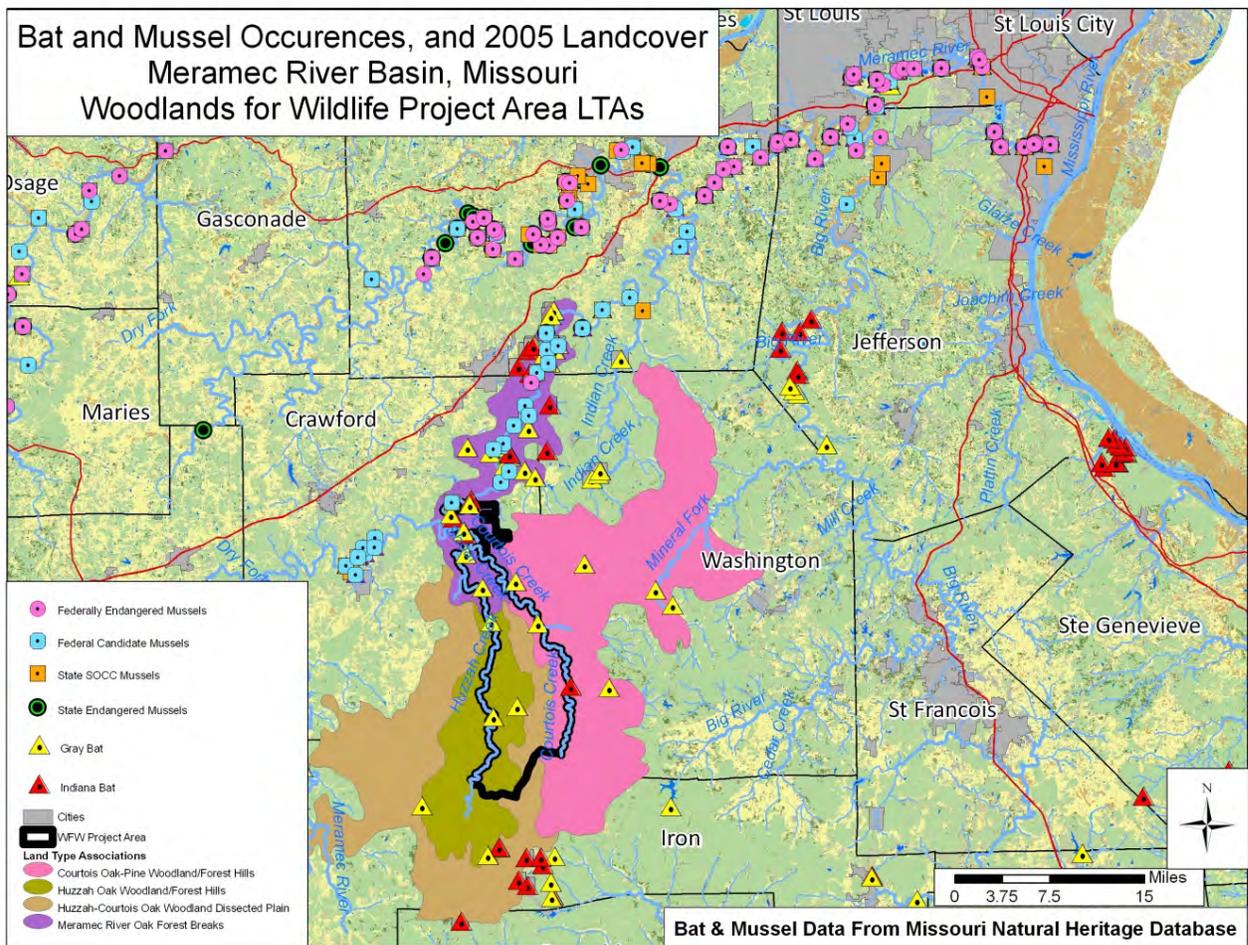


3. Heritage Points and SOCC

- The WFW project area supports gray and Indiana bat populations. It also serves as excellent migratory bird habitat, and contributes high quality water to the Meramec River to support its mussel populations.

4. Land Type Associations (LTAs)

- The WFW project area contains 4 of the 7 LTAs that are found in the upper Meramec Basin, thus offering the opportunity for work on the ground to affect a diverse range of habitats and a their associated species.



5. Priority Bird Species in the Middle Meramec COA

- Central Hardwoods Joint Venture modeling indicates that efforts to restore savanna and woodlands in the initiative area would improve habitat conditions for high priority bird species such as Prairie and Blue-winged warblers and Field Sparrows; habitat quality for those species at the scale of the Meramec River Hills ecological subsection appears to be relatively low compared with habitat for mature forest bird species. Models for three species of mature forest-breeding birds suggest that the habitat quality and population sizes were relatively stable from 1992 to 2001.

6. Resource Assessment Monitoring (RAM) - fish community data

- RAM data collected in the Shoal Creek Aquatic Conservation Opportunity Area (ACOA) in 2007 shows a healthy fish community. Shoal Creek ACOA is contained within the Woodlands for Wildlife management area. Sampling will take place again in 2012.

7. Mussel data

- There have not been a lot of surveys for mussels in the Huzzah or Courtois Creeks and thus there is not a lot of mussel data. However, there are many species of conservation concern and federally endangered species beginning at the confluence of the Huzzah and Meramec and going downstream. The spectaclecase mussel will soon be federally listed by the FWS, and some of the best remaining spectaclecase beds in North America are in the Middle Meramec COA downstream of Huzzah Creek.



Socio-Economic Baseline Conditions

A large amount of socio-economic information has been collected for the Middle Meramec COA and adjoining areas and is summarized below. Information specific to the WFW project area is not available. Data ranges from land ownership size, to landowner attitudes of woodland restoration work, to public land ownership percentages.

1. Demographics

- As of the 2000 census, there were 22,804 people, 8,858 households, and 6,351 families residing in Crawford County. The population density was 31 people per square mile (12/km²). The average density of housing units was 15 per square mile (6/km²).
- The median income for a household in the county was \$37,554, and the median income for a family was \$45,059. Males had a median income of \$28,005 versus \$18,736 for females. The per capita income for the county was \$18,203. About 12.70% of families and 16.30% of the population were below the poverty line, including 23.30% of those under age 18 and 14.10% of those age 65 or over. The national average in 2000 was 11.3% of total population living below poverty level.

2. Geo-Political Jurisdictions

- The major political entity within the project area is Crawford County, with Steelville (pop. 1,500) as its county seat, though Steelville is not in the Woodlands For Wildlife project area. The town of Viburnum (pop. 825) is immediately adjacent to the southern boundary of the project area. The project area lies within the jurisdiction of the Meramec Regional Planning Commission.

3. Political Culture

- Like most rural areas, voters in Crawford County generally strongly support socially and culturally conservative principles and therefore tend to vote Republican. Despite Crawford County's longstanding tradition of supporting socially conservative platforms, voters in the county have a penchant for advancing populist causes like increasing the minimum wage. In 2006, Missourians voted on a proposition (Proposition B) to increase the minimum wage in the state to \$6.50 an hour—it passed Crawford County with 76.78 percent of the vote.

4. Landowner Attitudes and Objectives

- Many feel there was no economical benefit for them in managing shortleaf pine.
- A majority of landowners have objectives for their land involving hunting of game species such as deer, turkey, and quail.
- A majority of landowners cite aesthetic reasons for growing and managing shortleaf pine.
- [Source: Missouri Shortleaf Pine Focus Groups (MDC)]

5. Family Forest Ownership

- Forest ownership is dominated by people over age 60 and large changes in forest ownership are about to occur.
[Source: Changes in family forest ownership (USDA)]

6. Human Development Potential

- The Upper Meramec watershed along the I-44 corridor has the highest potential for development and change compared to any other area in the state.
[Source: Forests on the Edge (USDA)]

7. Land Values

- The Upper Meramec region has the lowest land values in the state for pastureland and timber/hunting/recreation land.
[Source: 2008 University of Missouri Extension Land Values Opinion Survey]

8. Forest Industry

- There is a strong and active wood products industry in the area including pallet, stave, charcoal, etc.
[Source: Economic impacts of MO forest products industry]

9. Employment

- Current unemployment in the counties is at the top of the state and country.
[Source: Unemployment in Crawford/Washington Counties]

10. Woodland Owner's Survey Findings

- Important Ownership Concerns
 - Trespassing or poaching
 - Keeping land intact for heirs
 - Misuse of forest land
 - Insects or plant diseases
 - Fire
- Reasons for Owning
 - Beauty/Scenery
 - Privacy
 - Pass land on to heirs
 - Nature Protection
 - Part of home or cabin
- Forest Health Concerns
 - Insects or plant diseases
 - Air or water pollution
 - Fire
 - Wind or ice storms
 - Undesirable plants
- Important Statistics
 - 2% of MO forest landowners have a forest management plan
 - 14.5% of MO landowners have received advice from a state forest agency, extension, other state agency, federal agency, or private consultant. (7.7% from state forest agency)
 - 6.2% of MO forest landowners have received cost-share assistance (2.4% in the last 5 years).
 - 63% of MO forest landowners are > 55 years of age.
 - 72.6% of MO landowners have a household income of less than \$100,000.

[Source: USDA 2006 Survey of MO Forest Landowners]



Land Management Issues & Strategies

This section addresses the bio-physical baseline conditions, with recommendations on general management practices that will contribute to meeting plan objectives such as riparian restoration, buffers, stand treatments, etc. This information should be technically sufficient to “streamline” individual landowner plans as they come forward for this level of assistance.

1. Significant Issues to be Resolved:

- **Lack of diversity in the uplands**

There is a concern that the upland habitats no longer support the diversity of plants and animals that were historically present.

- **Prescribed fire on private land**
There is concern that a lack of prescribed fire on private lands precludes any attempt at restoring or maintaining diversity in the uplands.
- **Potential for land fragmentation**
There is concern that lands will continue to be fragmented as development increases along the I-44 corridor and as land ownership changes in the future.
- **Need for additional forestry expertise**
There is a concern that private landowners are not being adequately reached by professional foresters and other resource professionals who can help them make informed conservation-based decisions.

2. Management Strategies:

❖ Upland Forest Management Oriented Strategies

- **Continue work to eradicate invasive species.**
 - Learn to identify locally important invasives.
 - Follow established control measures for invasives that are present.
 - Identify and eliminate potential transmission routes of invasives.
- **Maintain and increase forested habitat for high-priority bird species.**
Increase the diversity of wooded natural communities present in the focus area.
 - Maintain healthy, vigorous woodlands by reducing over-stocked areas through use of TSI.
 - Manage for site-appropriate natural communities.
 - Increase the use of prescribed fire where appropriate and feasible.
 - Restore/enhance riparian buffers and corridors.
 - Fence cattle out of riparian buffer zones.
 - Establish alternative watering sources.
 - Establish cedar tree revetments and other structures to increase bank stabilization where necessary.
 - Discontinue crop field cultivation right up to the stream bank
 - Plant trees in riparian buffer zones.
 - Manage landscapes for a mosaic of forest communities, age classes, and density classes.
 - Restore oak – shortleaf pine forest communities on appropriate sites.
- **Conserve glades, fens and other natural communities.**
 - Glades
 - Learn to identify what degraded glades look like.
 - Learn to identify native glade vegetation.
 - Cut redcedars, elms, and other woody plants, and treat stumps of cut trees with herbicide to prevent resprouting.
 - Use prescribed burning to maintain open condition and stimulate growth of glade natural community plants.

- Fens
 - Cut invasive woody vegetation and treat stumps with aquatic-friendly herbicide (like Rodeo) to maintain an open condition.
 - Use prescribed burning to maintain open condition and stimulate growth of fen natural community plants, and limit the spread of invasives.
 - Conserve or restore the fen recharge watershed to maintain water quality and quantity entering the fen.
- Other Natural Communities
 - Restore oak – shortleaf pine forest communities on appropriate sites.
 - Manage for site-appropriate natural communities.
 - ⇒ Increase the use of prescribed fire where appropriate and feasible.
 - ⇒ Explore the use of other silvicultural methods such as TSI, and commercial thinning to achieve elevated levels of sunlight on the forest floor as an alternative to prescribed burning.
 - Manage landscapes for a mosaic of forest communities, age classes, and density classes.

❖ **Aquatic System Oriented Strategies:**

- **Improve water quality for drinking water, and to protect and restore existing mussel and native fish populations.**
 - Use BMPs during forest management activities, especially timber harvests.
 - Construct graveled cattle crossings in smaller creeks.
 - Limit gravel mining activities, or when gravel mining is absolutely necessary follow established guidelines to minimize impacts.
 - Restore/enhance riparian buffers and corridors.
 - Fence livestock out of riparian buffer zones.
 - Establish alternative watering sources for livestock.
 - Establish alternative shelter from the weather for livestock.
 - Establish cedar tree revetments and other structures to increase bank stabilization where necessary.
 - Discontinue crop field cultivation right up to the stream bank
 - Plant trees in riparian buffer zones.



Marketing Strategies

This section is aimed at influencing and engaging landowners using social marketing techniques. What methods & messages are most likely to improve awareness and increase attitudes?

1. Conservation Through Marketing

Many citizens and natural resource professionals assume the term “marketing” has the same meaning as the word “advertising”. However, these two terms have two clearly different meanings.

Conservation marketing is a *planning process* that works to understand customer needs and values in order to develop products and services that they need, want, and trust, and which produce a “conservation profit”. Advertising, on the other hand, is simply “promoting” programs, products, and services that have already been created by agencies and non-profit groups. The Middle Meramec COA partnership aims to team with local landowners to create “win/win” programs that meet landowners’ needs and values through products and services that help landowners create and maintain plant and animal communities for future generations to enjoy.

2. Significant Issues to be Resolved:

- **Sharing resource management information with landowners**
There is a concern that landowners are not being reached with information that can help them make informed decisions regarding how best to manage their lands for conservation purposes.
- **Landowners’ distrust of government respecting private property rights**
There is concern that partnerships between government agencies and private landowners will not be successful due to a lack of trust between the two.

3. Audiences

There are three broad audiences for marketing communications within the COA:

- Landowners
- Businesses
- Organizations

4. Messages for Landowners

- A managed forest is a healthy forest, with less threat of wild fire.
- Woodland and Forest Management improves your land for future generations.
- Woodland management improves the beauty and scenery of your property while protecting nature.
- This voluntary program is designed by landowners like you, for you.
- Streamside forest restoration and alternative watering systems bring additional income to the farm and increase the value of your land.

5. Messages for Businesses

- Best Management Practices protect your investments and future profits.
- Potential demand and income is right around the corner, get trained and be ready for it.
- Lots of opportunity and demand for the services you provide is concentrated in this small area, close to home.
- Lots of conservation funding is available to benefit both local businesses and local landowners, and wildlife populations.
- We are interested in win/win/win deals, in which a “conservation profit” is produced and benefits are seen by local residents and businesses.

6. Specific Marketing Strategies

- **Products and Services**

The following products are currently offered in WFW:

- o FSA CRP programs (include annual rental rate payments)
- o NRCS EQUIP and WHIP programs
- o ORLT \$200/acre signup bonus for CRP CP-22 contracts
- o MDC 75% cost-share on a wide range of conservation practices
- o Forest Service Partnerships to burn on adjoining private land
- o Conservation Easements through ORLT, including fair market value payment
- o General Landowner workshops (forestry management, materials, etc.)
- o Prescribed fire workshops (technical workshops)
- o On the ground technical assistance from MDC and NRCS
- o Limited supply of equipment to complete conservation projects with
- o *Call Before You Cut* campaign to help landowners log timber property
- o Increased opportunity for wildlife law enforcement support
- o Opportunity for wildlife law enforcement support

The following are possible products to offer in WFW as part of Marketing Action Plan:

- o MDC 90% cost-share on a wide range of conservation practices
- o 90% cost-share on Woodland restoration projects greater than 15 acres in size
- o Detailed soils mapping
- o Incentive for landowners to use certified loggers
- o Incentives to implement management plans
- o Leveraged incentives (water hole deal maker)
- o 3rd party independent information
- o Tips sheet for landowners on landowner recommended conservation contractors to use
- o USFS “good neighbor relationship”



Action Steps

Action Steps Task	Marketing Goal	Accomplishment Date	Responsibility
Target funds to implement USFS projects (there are little to no funds currently available to fund projects on private land)	1	Continuous	Adam/Lynda/Abigail
Form a landowner committee (this committee will be vital to the success of the partnership as the program is tailored to landowner needs and values)	2	3/1/2010	Mark/Rob/Abigail
Conduct a winter landowner workshop (invitations will be mailed to all WFW landowners with >10 acres of land)	3	2/1/2010	Adam/Mark/Nate/Lynda
Integrate forest bird monitoring into WFW action plan	1	1/1/2011	Jane/Lynda/Mark
Integrate vegetation response monitoring into WFW action plan	1	1/1/2011	Lynda/Mark/Nate
Work to revise CP-31 (Bottomland Timber CRP) qualifications to include marginal pastureland (currently, CP-31 is limited only to bottomland fields)	1	1/1/2011	Jane/Adam/Rob

with 3 years of crop history from 1995-2001)			
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Funding Sources

The partnership currently has funds enough to implement conservation projects on private land within our limited capacity through 2011. The timeline of this action plan goes through 2015, so funds will need to be targeted to complete projects in years 2012-2015. However, funds are extremely scarce to implement funds on public land. The projects listed in this plan to be completed on National Forest are approved and ready to implement, but very few of them have the funding to get them accomplished. For example, a 100 acre bottomland hardwood restoration project has been approved for National Forest along Courtois Creek, but no funds are available to implement the project. Several mid-story treatments to enhance open woodland habitats on National Forest are also ready to be implemented but lack funding. The only activities that the USFS consistently funds are prescribed burning and timber stand improvements following commercial harvests.

The partnership has acquired two grants this year with the goal of being able to offer high cost-share rates in WFW which more easily allow private landowners to implement restoration projects. The following is a summary of funding sources available to private landowners in WFW.

- *NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG)*: \$60,000 is available over the next three years for woodland restoration, riparian restoration, and alternative livestock watering sources.
- *Upper Mississippi Watershed Grant*: \$15,000 is available in fiscal year 2010 for woodland restoration.
- *MDC Cost-share docket*: MDC has a small amount of funds available to private landowners for a variety of projects. Although these funds are relatively small in size, they are extremely important in the matching funds which are required by the grants that the partnership wants to bring to Woodlands for Wildlife.
- *Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)*: This Farm Service Agency program is a continuous signup program which pays 90% of costs associated with riparian restoration, bottomland hardwood restoration, wetland restoration, alternative livestock watering systems, etc., and includes an annual rental rate for many of its practices.
- *ORLT CP-22 Signup bonus*: ORLT is currently offering a \$200 per acre signup bonus for acres within the Huzzah watershed that are enrolled into CRP Conservation Practice 22.
- *Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)*: These programs through NRCS are awarded annually on a competitive basis. Cost-share rates vary but are usually around 75%.

The current funding gap for the partnership is for funds to implement projects on National Forest and MDC lands. The partnership aims to work with governmental agencies and NGOs to obtain funding for these public land projects. The implementation of these public land projects will be necessary for the partnership to meet its goals set forth in this document. Not only are these projects a large portion of the acres set forth in the goals of this document, these projects are necessary to show local citizens that

public land is being managed in the same manner that the partnership is recommending private land owners to manage their lands.



Supplemental Information

Appendices and reference materials to strengthen the plan and guide implementation. Include linkages to financial and technical resources for the client to draw upon. A glossary of terms.