



SUCCESS STORIES

REPORTING EXAMPLES OF OUR PROGRESS IN CARING FOR THE LAND AND SERVING PEOPLE



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Ozark Trail Grows Thanks to Volunteers

A wide assortment of volunteers were busy May 3 through 7 building a new section of the Ozark Trail that winds through Mark Twain National Forest near Bixby, Missouri. The new 1-mile trail section is now part of the Middle River Section of the 350-mile long Ozark Trail.

“The goal is to have a 500-mile trail through scenic areas of the Ozarks from St. Louis to the Arkansas border, where it will connect to the Ozark Highland Trail in northern Arkansas,” according to Kris Swanson, resource staff officer for Mark Twain National Forest. “When completed, the two trails will total 700 miles.”

The new trail section was constructed by hand by members of the Ozark Trail Association and American Hiking Society. The trail had to be built by hand to prevent damage to a unique wetland nearby, said Acting Potosi District Ranger Janet Fraley.

Gwen and Dave Fuehring of Maryland Heights, Missouri, organized the working vacation. Volunteers camped at the Council Bluff Recreation Area near Potosi. Members from American Hiking Society came to south central Missouri from six states and Canada to join forces with members of the Ozark Trail Association.

Volunteers included a 78-year old man from California, a woman from Ontario, Canada, and one couple from Indiana who have volunteered more than 40 weeks building hiking trails.

“Almost every weekend we have volunteers out working on the Ozark Trail,” said John Roth of the Ozark Trails Association. “Besides building new trails, volunteers maintain and reconstruct existing trails. It was great that volunteers from the American Hiking Society chose to come to the Missouri Ozarks and spend a week building a trail.”

“We enjoyed hosting this working group from the American Hiking Society and Ozark Trail Association,” Swanson said. “The section of trail is restricted to hiking, but many sections of the Ozark Trail are open for horseback and mountain bike riding. Some of the volunteers who worked on the trail haven’t been to this part of Missouri before and were surprised by the beauty of the Ozarks.”

Individuals or groups interested in volunteering to help with the Ozark Trail can contact the Ozark Trail Association or Mark Twain National Forest at 573-364-4621, or visit the Ozark Trail Website at <http://www.ozarktrail.com>.



Michigan volunteer David McDonald works on a section of the Ozark Trail in the Mark Twain NF.

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For more information contact Charlotte Wiggins at (573) 341-7405



Owl Rescued During River Cleanup



The rescued screech owl quickly warmed up to Wayne dispatcher Michele Stephens.

During the National River Clean Up May 15 on the Marietta Unit of the Wayne National Forest, an amazing event occurred. In addition to all the trash picked up and the volunteers recruited—and the good times had—a baby owl was rescued.

Wayne Recreation Technician Pam Blackburn describes it as a unique opportunity of being in “the right place at the right time” to provide some timely assistance to the wildlife along the Little Muskingum River.

As the group stopped to remove a couple of tires embedded on the bottom of the river, one of the canoes moved slightly ahead to wait for the rest of the group. That canoe contained Wayne SO employee Connie Roberts and her husband David Hoxworth, a volunteer. As they were waiting, Roberts and Hoxworth noticed a disturbance in the trees overhead: squawking birds and rustling limbs.

The next noise they heard was a splash, as an object hit the water about 20 feet in front of them. Curious, they paddled over to see what had fallen into the water, and found a baby owl struggling to stay afloat. Roberts quickly scooped the fledgling out of the river.

Blackburn said Roberts had asked for another member of the group, Michele Stephens, to come quickly. Michele had been a wildlife rehabilitator in previous years, but now works for the Wayne National Forest as a dispatcher.

Stephens quickly examined the owl and determined it to be a grey-phased screech owl. He was in shock and undernourished. She placed the owl inside her shirt in an attempt to warm him and provide comfort. She estimated the owl to only be 3 weeks old.

As the group continued down the river collecting trash, the owl became more active. By the end of the trip, the owl was riding on Stephens’ shoulder.

When they arrived at the pull-out point, Stephens asked some fisherman camped at the area if they could spare a worm or two. They agreed, and she fed the owl two worms. He swallowed them quickly and without hesitation.

Stephens took the owl home with her and contacted the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. As she had previously held a raptor certification for rehabilitation, the Ohio DNR officer told her that she could keep the bird until it could be released.

Since then, the owl has been an occasional visitor to the Wayne NF’s Supervisor’s Office.

Stephens worked with the owl to teach him to hunt. Some of his favorites meals are mice and fishing worms.

After four weeks of being cared for, the owl was ready for his return to the wild. Some employees gathered June 16 in the area near where he was found, and watched as he flew away on his own strength—and the many well wishes of his friends on the Wayne.



One month after its rescue, the owl received a soaring sendoff.

For more information contact Teena Ligman at (812) 277-3579



A Perfect Day For a Burn



The prescribed burn reduced hazardous fuel buildup in two critical areas on the Forest.

A “textbook” combination of wind, humidity, and temperatures April 24 on the Washburn Ranger District created perfect conditions for conducting a prescribed burn on 86 acres within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

It’s not often that weather cooperates for controlled burning in northern Wisconsin. Generally, small windows of opportunity occur in mid-spring and late summer to early fall, when vegetative conditions and weather are most ideal for burning.

“In order to achieve the objectives for these areas, we needed certain weather conditions in place,” said Chris Worth, the Washburn District Ranger. “Excessive winds out of the wrong direction or overly dry conditions would have cancelled plans to conduct the burn. We won’t take the risk of letting a fire get out of control.”

“Thirty people were involved in the burn—that included cooperators from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Park Service,” according to Jerry Jaskowiak, the Washburn District Fire Management Officer and Fuels Specialist.

Two areas—once part of a timber sale—were burned to meet specific objectives. The first area surrounded buildings and structures used to house a pipeline facility that pumps crude oil or liquid natural gas. Reducing excess fuels in this area has provided safe and effective structure protection in the event of a wildfire.

The second area, located south of the Moquah Wildlife Management Area, was burned to reduce conifer slash left from the former timber sale; this burn restored the area to barren conditions, and significantly reduced hazardous fuels that may have contributed to wildfire. What was once a pile of logging slash is on its way to becoming a mosaic of grass, shrubs, and savannah.

Safety is always at the forefront before the torches are ever lit.

“A pre-burn briefing is held to review the logistics of the event, with a considerable emphasis on safety issues,” Jaskowiak said. “We also conduct a briefing following every prescribed burn, where we review what went right or wrong, identify any specific safety issues, and determine if the objectives of the burn have been met.”

And, what would happen if a controlled fire broke out into a wildfire?

“The Forest always maintains its initial attack forces to respond to a wildfire. The 30 personnel on hand for this burn were above and beyond those needed resources,” according to Worth.



Thanks to ideal weather conditions, the Forest was able to successfully and safely burn 86 acres.

For more information contact Holly Kulinski at (715) 362-1354





Pennsylvania Ospreys Get New Nest Site

This past February, Pennsylvania ospreys got a new nest site, courtesy of the Forest Service and the Army Corps of Engineers. In a cooperative effort that also includes the USDI Fish & Wildlife Service, State Game Commission, and Penelec, a new osprey nest pole was raised in Sugar Bay of the Allegheny Reservoir on the Allegheny National Forest.

This is the second pole installed in an effort to provide nesting areas for ospreys along the reservoir. Ospreys like to nest in high, open places that are not easily accessible to predators. The Reservoir, which is heavily forested down to the shoreline, has few natural nesting trees and only one is known to be occupied by ospreys.

The donated former electric pole was hauled to the site with a Forest Service backhoe, which was also used to dig the hole that the nest pole was set in. Corps of Engineers biologists brought the round metal nest frame and Forest Service biologists assisted in attaching it to the pole, weaving a few branches through it to encourage ospreys to build a nest there.

Then, the end of the pole was guided into the hole and it was raised upright while the backhoe filled in around it. When the Reservoir is at summer pool level, this nest pole is surrounded by approximately 15 feet of water, giving potential residents a secure site to raise young and a great field of view for spotting predators and prey.

This program started in 2001, with the first nest pole raised in the Kinzua Arm of the reservoir. The nest pole was occupied in the summer of that year, but no young were noted. The pole nest was occupied again the following year, and young were fledged from the nest. This second nest pole was occupied by a breeding pair in late April, and as of June, biologists had noted two nestlings.

Biologists from all the partner agencies are looking for new opportunities to place nest poles around the reservoir.

“Ospreys seem to prefer the nest poles over naturally occurring dead trees around the reservoir,” said Forest Service wildlife biologist Alan Wetzel. “The poles are more isolated and we think that makes the birds feel more secure.”



Forest Service and Corps of Engineers biologists work to erect the osprey nest.

For more information contact Stephen Miller at (814) 723-5150

Forest Employees Receive Prestigious State Awards



Bill Culpepper flanked on left with FEA President Robert Bell and on the right by Chris Casey.

On May 11, the Federal Executives Association of Vermont acknowledged members of the Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests as Outstanding Employees of the Year. The honors occurred during the annual FEA awards luncheon.

Forest Management Program Manager Bill Culpepper received the award in the Managerial/Supervisory category for his leadership in program management in the restaffing, rebuilding and recharging of the GMFL Timber Program at a time when some critics said it could not be done.

The Sale Preparation Team—Matt Bienkowski, Hal Bell, Chris Casey, Bill Culpepper, Frank Hagan, Brian Keel, Jay Klink, Frank Thompson, Rebecca Wright and recently retired Sylvia Fici—received awards in the Outstanding Customer Service category for high quality improvements made in the field work, and in office contract preparation for the N 1/2 Overstory Removal Timber Sale project.

For more information contact Chris Casey at (802) 388-4362



LaRue-Pine Hills Welcomes Visitors

On April 16 and 17, the public was invited to visit the LaRue-Pine Hills Research Natural Area and learn about the special qualities in and around the area. Of the more than 200 attendees, some learned why LaRue-Pine Hills is so special by participating in guided field trips.

Guides talked about the area's birds, wildflowers, reptiles, aquatic life, geologic features, plant communities and more as they hiked the LaRue-Pine Hills.

This unusual area is recognized nationwide for the diversity of plant and animal communities, including many threatened and endangered species. On Friday evening, April 16, at the Trail of Tears State Forest leaders gathered to guide visitors on field trips to learn about nocturnal frogs and toads.

Visitors to the office were shown a slide presentation about the Conservation Corp Camps, Camp Union and Camp Hutchins, located in the Pine Hills area during the 1930s.

The following day, morning tours started just after sunrise. Visitors meeting at Winters Pond and Otter Pond learned about birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Others took the opportunity to take a guided canoe tour of the La Rue swamp to see and hear about the area's wetland sites.

Trail of Tears State Park activities scheduled throughout the day included a variety of nature hikes, a birds of prey exhibition, Smokey activities, animal fur identification and several environmental information booths.

John Muir, portrayed by John Wallace of Southern Illinois University's Touch of Nature outdoor education facility, told about Muir's life and adventures. He explained how Muir came to love the wild outdoors enough to devote his life to protecting it.

Smokey, played by Suzanne Hirsch, greeted the children while Linda Hauser talked about the dangers of fire and how to keep the forest green. Marlene Rivero portrayed Harriet Tubman and talked about the environment and search for freedom for her and countless others.

Dr. Andy West, Site Superintendent at the Trail of Tears State Park, commented "LaRue-Pine Hills Appreciation Day is always positive experience for both the specialist and the environmentalist that come out for a day in nature. Local people, SIU students, the adults and young people alike all enjoy a day of learning in nature."

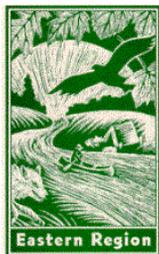
Many thanks to the Trails of Tears State Forest, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, Shawnee National Forest, The Nature Conservancy and the many Volunteers all made LaRue-Pine Hills Appreciation Day possible.



More than 200 people turned out to learn more about La Rue-Pine Hills and to take a guided canoe tour of the nearby swamp.

For more information contact Marlene Rivero at (618) 833-8576





Hoosier NF Hosts Second Annual International Migratory Bird Day



Hannah Bird learns how large her eyes would need to be to match the eyes of an owl.

The Hoosier National Forest hosted its second annual International Migratory Bird Day Celebration, “Habitats on the Hoosier,” on May 8. With over one hundred participants and dozens of volunteers, the day was a great success.

The goal of the celebration was to foster an appreciation for the nearly 350 species of migratory birds that travel between nesting habitats in North America and non-breeding grounds in South and Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and the southern United States.

Hoosier National Forest staff designed a variety of programs to increase knowledge of these important species and the habitats that are necessary for their persistence.

Cynthia Basile, the Hoosier’s IMBD Coordinator, designed the event so that there were activities for all ages. There were opportunities to build nest boxes, create bird feeders, design

binoculars, identify birds from a birding blind, and participate in a number of games.

“When you have adults playing migratory tag, and children learning about the importance of wetlands to bird species, you know you’ve been successful,” Basile said.

A highlight of the day was a skit put on by employees at lunch. The skit kicked off a bird call competition. Two teams of employees tried to out-call each other mimicking their favorite birds and challenging the other team to better their calls.

The skit had the audience in awe one minute, laughing the next as some clowned, and some masters demonstrated the art of bird calling. After the skit, several members of the audience, representing a spectrum of skills, got up and gave their best calls.

Prizes were awarded to different age groups.

“We had a great time with it,” Basile said. “And so did the crowd.”

Over twenty agencies including The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Monroe County Parks and Recreation, Sassafras Audubon Society, and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources partnered with the Hoosier National Forest to make this event remarkable.

“Finding quality time outdoors that everyone can enjoy and learn from can be difficult,” said Sean Bird, who attended the event with his wife and three children. And yes, their last name really is bird.

Hoosier National Forest Volunteers are already developing new ideas to make next year’s celebration even better.

For more information contact Teena Ligman at (812) 277-3579





The Right Tool for Many Jobs

Wind, water, and fire have the power to change the landscape like no other. For a millennia, Native Americans used fire to manipulate habitat for their needs.

Today, after years of suppression, we know that fire can be the right tool to accomplish many resource management jobs. This spring, staff of the Monongahela National Forest (the Mon) are using fire to restore and maintain vital ecosystems and heritage sites.

The Mon is fondly referred to by some as the 'asbestos' forest because of the high precipitation that occurs on the west-side of the mountains. In fact, natural fires caused by lightning strikes account for roughly 5% of the fires that occur on the Mon; this is an extremely low percentage especially when compared to western forests.

However, much has been learned in recent years about the Forest's oak-hickory forest type, as well as some tree species (aspen, pitch, and table-mountain pine), were historically maintained by Native Americans setting low-intensity surface fires.

Researchers now believe that fire plays a key role in perpetuating Appalachian oak forests. The area of the Forest that supports these fire-dependent species exists on the east-side of the forest, inside the rain-shadow of the mountains. This represents about 40% of Forest lands.

This spring, the Forest staff jumped into action to keep up the ecosystem restoration efforts that began in 1998. In addition to restoring the oak-hickory forest type, fire will also be used to maintain a number of openings.

One of these openings dates back to the Civil War. The Cheat Summit Civil War fortification is one of the highest east of the Mississippi. Over time, shrubby vegetation has taken over this historically valuable site. Using hand-tools for removing large vegetation and fire to maintain the opening, the site will be available for public enjoyment for many years to come.



A low-intensity fire in an oak hickory forest on the Monongahela NF.

For more information contact Hilary Chapman at (304) 636-1800

Wayne NF Welcomes Family Member Home



Zeke Austin turns out the candle that burned during his year-long tour in Iraq.

Another candle was extinguished on the 3rd floor vestibule at the Wayne National Forest Supervisor's Office here to celebrate the return of a family member from military duty in Iraq.

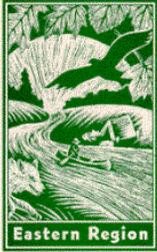
Returning was Army First Lieutenant Zeke Austin, son of Forest Supervisor Mary Reddan, an Athens resident. Austin, a regular Army member of the 4th Infantry Division's 299th Engineer Battalion, spent most of his time in Iraq working as a scout.

Austin participated in the mission dubbed Operation Red Dawn that captured former Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein last December.

Austin is now stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, and is assigned to G Troop, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. Zeke is Mary Reddan's second child to return from a hostile military area this year. Zeke's sister, Army Captain Alissa Austin, returned from a year's deployment with the Army Reserve in Afghanistan earlier this year.

Three additional Wayne NF family members, all part of an Ironton unit of the Army National Guard, are still in Iraq. The Forest will continue to burn candles in the window with the American flag to remind us of their service and sacrifices until all Forest family members have returned.

For more information contact Gary Miller at (740) 753-0862



Forest Service to Study Long Term Effects of Fire on Fish



The Forest Service will use the grant money to study the impact of fire on fish mercury levels.

Led by staff from the Superior National Forest and the North Central Research Station, a team of scientists, including partners from the University of Minnesota, and US Geological Survey, were awarded \$423,000 over three years from the Joint Fire Sciences Program to study whether fire contributes to the level of mercury in fish tissue.

Mercury in fish is a public health concern across the U.S. due to the dangerous levels widely seen in game fish. Fish consumption advisories have been issued in Minnesota and in most states across the U.S. regarding potentially dangerous levels of mercury contamination.

The major source of mercury to the ecosystem is from the atmosphere. Once it is deposited on the land, mercury is fairly stable. Upland areas often hold a considerable burden of mercury from many decades of atmospheric deposition.

Wildland fires can both release a portion of this stored mercury to the air and also enhance the erosion of what's left on the land into wetland or lake ecosystems where it can be eventually incorporated into fish tissue.

The study will take place in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in the Superior National Forest. A prescribed burning program was developed on the Forest in response to a major blowdown event that occurred in July 1999.

About 75,000 of the 1.1 million acres of the BWCAW will be burned as strategic patches in the blowdown area over the next 5 to 7 years to reduce fuel loads, providing a rare opportunity to study mercury in a wilderness that is dominated by lakes and wetlands and relatively unaffected by human activities.

In this study soil, water, and fish chemistry information will be gathered before and after burns in lakes that are both inside and outside of watersheds where prescribed burning activities are taking place. The goal of the study is to determine if there is an affect on fish mercury from fire, and if so, to suggest mitigation strategies.

For more information contact Kris Reichenbach at (218) 626-4393

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