



Ironton District Grows By 670 Acres

Nearly 670 acres of forest and grassland were added to the Wayne National Forest on September 11, 2006, when The Nature Conservancy transferred the land to the U.S. Forest Service.



A view of the Cambria Tract, the newest tract on the Wayne National Forest.

The large area of forest and grassland known as the Cambria Tract has a story that reflects much of southeastern Ohio's history. The land, once forested, was part of the area's industrial past, and now will be back in forest and grassland.

The Forest has tried to acquire the land for several years and was able to secure it now only because of their invaluable partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Forest Supervisor Mary Reddan said the Forest Service is "excited about adding this new portion of public land to the Wayne National Forest. It is a beautiful area and is a great addition to the Forest."

She added the Wayne will continue to work with The Nature Conservancy, Lawrence County officials, and other partners to maintain and improve the health of the area and the benefits it is able to provide.

Richard Shank, State Director in Ohio for TNC, said they were pleased to assist the Wayne in acquiring the property and "hope that future generations of Ohioans will enjoy the environmental, economic, and recreation benefits of this land."

TNC acquired this tract as part of a 4,100 acre purchase from the former Mead-Westvaco Company in 2004 and 2005. When money became available from the Forest Service, TNC agreed to sell the 669.64 acres, in three blocks adjacent to national forest lands.

The rest of the original TNC tract is being managed as the Ironton Forest Wildlife Area through a cooperative agreement between TNC and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Hopefully the larger tract can be purchased by the Wayne in later phases.

"But 670 acres are now part of the Wayne National Forest," said Gloria Chrismer, Ironton District Ranger. "We look forward to these lands providing more quality management for wildlife habitat and recreation for visitors who come in ever increasing numbers to our area."

Before acquisition by TNC, Mead-Westvaco had owned the property since 1996. They managed it for timber resources, planting thousands of pine trees on its reclaimed areas.

Prior to Mead-Westvaco, Cambria Clay Products held title to the property for 20 years. They managed the land for its timber and mineral resources. Portions of the property were mined for coal and limestone and then reclaimed between 1988 and 1995.

Both the Forest and TNC recognize that large contiguous blocks of forest under single ownership are extremely uncommon in Ohio making the acquisition of the entire 4,116.45 acre tract a rare opportunity to protect open space.

The greatest threat to Ohio's forest is fragmentation. Consolidating public ownership of these forest lands will help sustain viable populations of southern Ohio's plants, animals, and natural communities. Consolidation also makes it easier for the public to identify and enjoy their public land and improves the ability to manage the lands.

Acquisition of the land will lead to greater efficiency when implementing hazardous fuel reduction projects and treating non-native invasive species.

The land with its rolling topography is part of the Appalachian ecosystem which represents the oldest and most diverse forest system in North America. Cambria Creek and tributaries flow through the area. Several ponds created during the reclamation process provide fish habitat and serve as wildlife watering sources.

"There are many opportunities on this tract to improve wildlife habitat, reduce invasive plants, and offer more recreation opportunities," noted Chrismer. "We are honored that Congress continues to support land acquisition and that we have partners like TNC that will work with us to procure unique opportunities like the Cambria Tract."

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