



Researchers and National Forest Managers Discuss Oak-Hickory Management

A meeting between Wayne National Forest managers and local researchers was the first step in promoting adaptive management of the oak-hickory ecosystem.



Gary Willison and Mike Freidhof from the Wayne National Forest discuss oak management with Dr. Brian McCarthy, a forest ecology researcher from Ohio University.

The Wayne National Forest is located in the heart of the mixed-oak ecosystem. Maintaining or restoring mixed-oak communities in our landscape is vital for sustaining wildlife and plant species and communities native to the Wayne.

In June, a meeting was convened with several local researchers to discuss how managers and researchers can join together to promote adaptive management of the oak-hickory ecosystem as the 2006 Forest Plan is implemented.

The Wayne's 2006 Forest Plan includes the Historic Forest Management Area, which reintroduces fire into the landscape. Forest and fire ecologists believe current conditions of the oak-hickory forests lie outside their

historic range of variability.

These forests are now more dense than they were in historic times, and shade tolerant tree species (e.g., red maple) are becoming more prevalent today. Ecologists believe the lack of natural disturbance, such as fire, is a leading cause for this change.

Researchers from the Delaware Lab, Ohio University, Ohio State University, Ohio Division of Wildlife, and The Nature Conservancy joined us in Columbus, Ohio, for a half-day meeting to discuss the prescriptions in the Historic Forest Management Area, the idea of adaptive management, and potential research needs.

"We are fortunate to have such highly respected researchers in our backyard," remarked Forest Supervisor Mary Reddan. "We wanted to meet with them and open up lines of communication, and get them involved in the implementation of our Forest Plan."

Each of the researchers shared a brief update on their ongoing research projects. These varied from work on forest fuel dynamics, chestnut restoration, migration of non-native invasive species into forest stands, responses of birds and mammals to forest management, and effects of summer burns.

"Much oak-hickory ecosystem research has been ongoing in southeastern Ohio over the past decade," said Mike Freidhof, Forest Timber Program Manager. "Researchers from the Forest Service's Delaware Research Lab have been studying how the use of fire or fire surrogates (e.g., thinning) can be used in oak forest restoration projects, as well as studying the fire history of southern Ohio."

Gene DeGayner, the Eastern Region wildlife ecologist, also attended the meeting. He shared preliminary information on a large-scale ecosystem restoration research project that has potential to occur in the Forest Service's Eastern Region. There was a discussion on how the Wayne could play a role in such an effort.

"At the end of the day, all parties agreed the meeting was helpful, and all were happy they were able to take part in it," Reddan said. "The group wanted to continue meeting periodically to continue strengthening this manager-researcher relationship."

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