

What role can prescribed burning play today in oak savanna management?

- Regular prescribed burns are a key component of a comprehensive oak savanna management plan.
- Together with controlled grazing and mowing, prescribed burns mimic the original environment of oak savannas.
- Burning has been shown to reduce the presence of many invasive species.
- Regular burning also reduces fuel loads in oak savannas, decreasing the chance of a property damaging wildfire.

What can you expect to see after a prescribed burn?

- The oak savanna understory will briefly look black and barren, with the bases of trees blackened. Typically, treetops will not be affected because these fires will not reach that high.
- Eventually, oak trees will dominate the canopy and have more outstretched branches when not crowded by other species. Understory grasses and flowers will also grow back, invigorated by the release of nutrients.

Oak Savanna Plants and Animals:

Understory:

- Little bluestem
- Black-eyed susan
- Wild geranium
- Purple milkweed (WI endangered)

Trees:

- White oak
- Bur oak

Animals:

- Red-headed woodpecker (declining)
- Orchard oriole
- Southern flying squirrel
- Ornate box turtle (WI endangered)

For more information:

WI-DNR publication

"Getting the Help You Need", advice and funding sources for restoration and habitat management activities. <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/publ/gettinghelp.pdf>.

C.F. Mutel and S. Packard's The tallgrass restoration handbook: For prairies, savannas, and woodlands. Published by the Island Press in 1997.

The Endangered Resources Program of the Wisconsin DNR.
<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/>

Conservation Programs for Wisconsin Landowners. Information at
<ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/WI/Pubs/Progs2003.htm>

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer

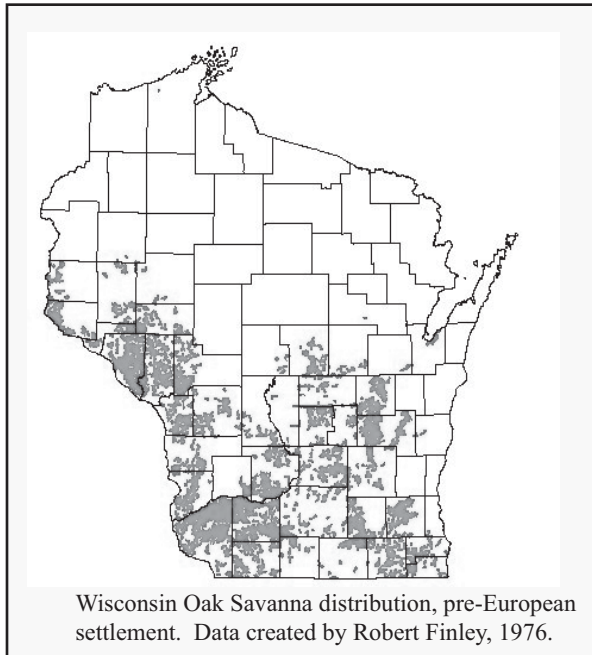
Wisconsin's Oak Savannas

Settlers traveling through Wisconsin often encountered an unusual ecosystem when moving from the grassy south to the forested north. These oak savannas were distinguished by the widely spaced, gracefully arching oak trees that shaded a distinctive understory of grasses and flowers. This ecosystem once covered over five million acres in southern Wisconsin, but less than one thousand acres exist today. In order to maintain our savanna legacy, a number of local organizations and state and federal agencies are working together to restore degraded savannas and to preserve and manage our remaining oak savannas.



Where were oak savannas historically found?

- Oak savannas can be found in flat areas. But, more typically, they were found in hilly areas, often in ravines or at the base of slopes.



What are the characteristics of oak savanna ecosystems?

- A canopy dominated by scattered open-crown oaks, with cover ranging from about 10% to 50%.
- An understory that receives dappled sun and shade, permitting the growth of a wide variety of grasses and flowering plants.

What happened to Wisconsin oak savannas?

- The fertile soil and abundant game associated with savannas led settlers to convert many acres to agriculture or homesteads.
- Fire suppression led to an overgrowth of brush and denser canopies in remaining savannas.
- Today, original oak savanna is the rarest plant community in the state. Less than 0.01% of intact, high quality oak savanna ecosystem remains in Wisconsin.



What role did fires play in maintaining oak savannas?

- Before European settlement, regular fires set by lightning or Native Americans burned through oak savannas at least once every three to five years.
- These low intensity ground fires incinerated dead vegetation, promoting plant growth by returning nutrients to the soil.
- Oak trees have very thick bark and other adaptations that make them fire-resistant. Weedy trees and brush species are not fire-resistant and are suppressed by regular burning.
- Fire maintains openings in the canopy cover, allowing oak seeds to sprout within gaps left by trees suppressed by fires.

How is this situation improving?

- Citizens increasingly appreciate oak savannas local scenic beauty, and preservation of rare wildlife and plant species.
- Remaining parcels of degraded oak savanna are being identified in areas less altered from their original composition-woodlot edges, roadsides, and breaks in forest canopies-leading to restoration and preservation opportunities.
- Many public and private organizations at local, state, and federal levels have programs to help private landowners pay for and execute savanna restoration on their property. (Please see the back of this flier for contact information).