

## What can you expect to see after a prescribed burn

-The oak woodland understory will briefly look black and barren. Because prescribed burns are controlled ground fires, expect to see only the bases of trees blackened.

-In the long run, the oak trees again dominate the canopy and understory grasses and flowers will grow back, invigorated by the release of nutrients.

### Prescribed Burns: Before and After



Lulu Lake Preserve hillside in 1991.



The same photopoint in 2000, after three biennial prescribed burns.

Photos courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

### Oak Woodland Plants and Animals:

#### Understory:

- Silky wild rye
- Large leaf panic grass
- Poke milkweed
- Hog peanut

#### Trees:

- White oak
- Red oak
- Black oak

#### Animals:

- Turkey
- Fox squirrel
- Eastern wood pewee

### For more information:

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

WI-DNR publication

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

The Endangered Resources Program of the Wisconsin DNR.

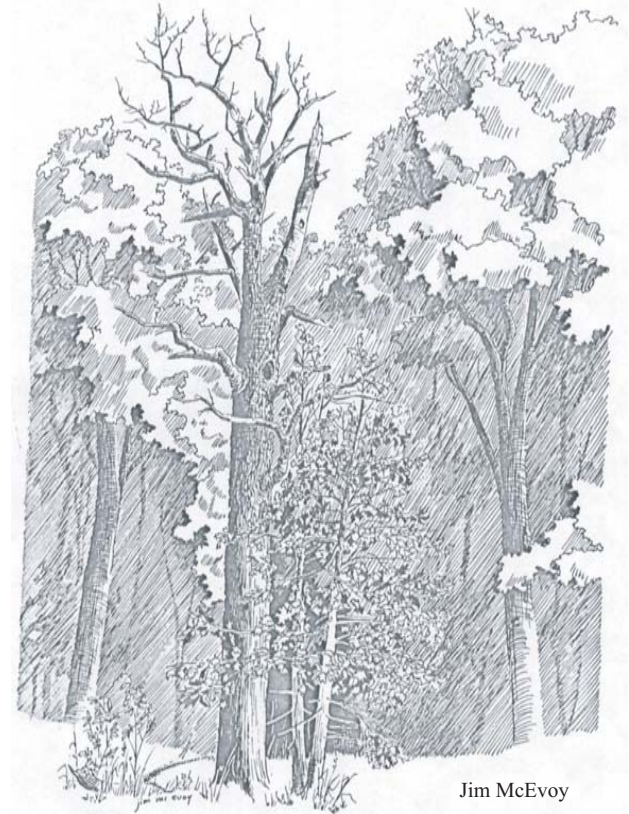
<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/>

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

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# Wisconsin's Oak Woodland

Large areas of Wisconsin were once covered with open woodlands dominated by fire-tolerant oak trees. After settlement and subsequent fire suppression, many of these oak woods became too thickly populated with trees, shading out sun-loving understory plants. Because oak trees depend on open, sunny areas for regeneration, lack of fire inadvertently led to the decline of oak trees in favor of shade tolerant species like maples and black cherries.



Jim McEvoy

## What characterizes an oak woodland ecosystem?

- Canopy dominated by white, red, and black oaks with a few understory trees.
- Ground cover composed of grassy turf and some forbs, especially in early spring.
- Commonly found in Southwest Wisconsin's Driftless Area, especially on northern slopes.

## What role did fires play in maintaining oak woodlands?

- Before European settlement, regular fires set by lightning or Native Americans burned through oak woodlands at least every three to five years.
- These low intensity ground fires incinerated dead vegetation, promoting plant growth by returning nutrients to the soil.

## How is this situation improving?

- Citizens increasingly value the importance of oak woodlands for hunting opportunities, local scenic beauty, and the preservation of rare plants and wildlife.
- Many public and private organizations at local, state, and federal levels have programs to help private landowners pay for and execute oak woodland restoration on their property. (Please see the end of this flier for further information).

## What happened to Wisconsin oak woodlands?

- Early settlers cleared oak woodlands for pastures. Later generations logged woodlands for timber.
- The large amounts of slash left by clearcutting created fire hazards that led state officials to enact strict fire suppression policies. Without fires, suitable habitat for oaks diminished.

## What role can prescribed burns play in oak woodland management?

- Regular prescribed burns are a key component of a comprehensive oak woodland management plan.
- Regular burns create open areas for oak regeneration.
- Burning has been shown to reduce the presence of many invasive species.
- Regular burning also reduces fuel loads in oak woodlands, decreasing the chance of a property damaging wildfire
- Oak trees have very thick bark and other adaptations that make them fire-resistant. Brush species and trees like the maple are not fire-resistant, and over time are suppressed by regular burning.
- Fire creates openings in the canopy cover, allowing oak seeds to germinate.

