



United States Department of Agriculture

JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Missouri Ozark Highlands Restoration Partnership



Pool at head of Rocky Falls in the Lower Ozarks Ecoregion of Missouri. Photo credit: Harold Malde

The rolling hills of the Ozark Highlands look verdant and undisturbed from afar, but their recent history is one of destruction. Grassy, open woodlands of shortleaf pine covered six million acres until clear-cutting in the early 1900's changed everything. When a landscape is altered so drastically and so quickly, the ripple effects go on for decades. The mostly hardwood forests that grew back are less diverse, and natural fire has been suppressed. Land ownership patterns have shifted and today, properties are broken up into smaller and smaller parcels. The increased number of landowners, many of whom don't live in the area year-round, creates a challenge when trying to implement systems that will restore the landscape. Furthermore, it is difficult to help people understand that seemingly destructive practices, like logging and controlled burns, are necessary to save the million acres of old-growth forest that remains. This Joint Chiefs' project unified the priorities of public agencies, partners and landowners to broaden the reach of conservation. In the end, this project helped reduce the threat of wildfires, improve water quality and protect habitat and sustain forestry on public and private lands, which supports local economies and recreation values.

PROJECT IMPACT

20,000
Acres Treated

20,000 acres of prescribed fire treatments to restore shortleaf pine and pine-oak woodlands were applied in the Current River watershed.

Total awarded through the Joint Chiefs' from 2015-17: \$2,268,350

USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, the two USDA agencies are restoring landscapes by reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.

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Ozark Highlands Restoration Partnership RESULTS



Eastern collard lizard
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Reduced wildfire threats: Working with private landowners in 27 counties, 85 forest management plans were developed. A range of strategies, from controlled burns and timber harvesting to invasive species removal, helped reduce wildfire threats and soil erosion.



Enhanced habitat: The native pine woodlands of the Ozarks are home to rare and treasured wildlife, such as the federally endangered Ozark hellbender and Indiana bat, freshwater mussels and the Eastern collared lizard. Non-native and invasive plants were mapped and inventoried on 800 acres, and 523 acres were treated to reduce the impacts of invasive plant species and enhance wildlife habitat.



Doolen talks with landowners, US Forest Service photo

Improving Forest Ecosystems Support Local Economies

From the murky folklore of pilgrims and Native Americans feasting over a turkey dinner to the rumor that Ben Franklin preferred the turkey to the bald eagle as a symbol of America, turkeys are an important part of our country's cultural heritage. Hunting this popular game species is a way of life for many who live around the Ozarks. As logging removed open pine woodlands and faster-growing hardwoods grew, the birds had to adapt. And they have—but keeping up with extreme weather inconsistencies and increasing development is a critical concern.

That's why this Joint Chiefs' project invested in strategies that improved the outlook for a suite of species—including wild turkey. Funding allowed the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Forest Service to partner with the National Wild Turkey Foundation (NWTf) to hire a forester to collaborate with landowners and partners.

Chad Doolen, NWTf Project Forester, was just the man for the job. "My parents are biologists and botanists," said Doolen. I grew up with a gun in one hand a fishing pole in the other." He has led field trips to talk to landowners about forest management plans. He also worked with partners, including The Nature Conservancy to develop materials and workshops to explain funding opportunities to help landowners better manage their land. "This area is a checkerboard of public and private land, so no matter how well we manage the National Forest, we have to try to do the same elsewhere."

According to Doolen, the most important outcome of the Joint Chiefs' project was a commitment to shared goals across agencies and partners. "We all came together, and that means good things for turkey—and everyone like who loves this landscape."



Wild turkey
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Key Partners

Central Hardwood Joint Ventures
Missouri Department of Conservation DC
Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Missouri Forest Products Association
Missouri Forest Resource Advisory Council
National Park Service
National Wild Turkey Federation
The Nature Conservancy
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USDA National Agroforestry Center