



Land Conservation

by Martina Hines

The Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves offers a wide variety of services to the citizens of Kentucky, including many that are of potential interest to woodland owners. We are your source for rare species and habitats information. As a result of over four decades of systematic surveys we now maintain records for 829 species. This data is fed into the Kentucky Natural Heritage database. Check out the Kentucky Biological Assessment tool if you are interested in learning which species occur in your area (<https://kynaturepreserves.org/>)!

Many of the most significant tracts we have identified have become State Nature Preserves, thanks to the owner's willingness to sell. Currently we own over 25,000 acres on 41 state nature preserves and 6 natural areas and an additional 7300 acres of dedicated lands on partnering agencies. However, not every landowner is able or willing to sell, though they might be interested in playing their part in protecting the biological resources on their land. For those folks we have established the Kentucky Natural Areas Registry program. This is a voluntary, non-regulatory program designed to provide recognition for sound stewardship and awareness of the ecological significance of a landowner's property. The landowner does not relinquish any rights to the property and simply agrees to protect it to the best of their ability. Over the past decades we have established 72 natural registry sites.

When asked why she decided to enroll her land in the natural areas registry program, landowner Amanda Gumbert told us, "Even though we might not see an economic benefit for all the species on our land, I feel it is important for our farm to provide ecosystem services. With good stewardship our land can provide services that are beyond my own benefit but extend into the future."

Most people assume that protecting rare species and their habitat implies a hands-off approach. While this is certainly true for some, such as old-growth forest, the opposite is often the case. Many habitats, instead, require intensive management, such as eradication of exotics, altering forest structure to allow for more light or the use of prescribed fire. However, protecting rare species and their habitats and managing land for timber or other resources are not necessarily exclusive. We have been working with private landowners and other natural resource professionals for over 40 years to help them continue to profit off their land, while limiting impacts on sensitive biological resources. Sometimes, that simply means slightly altering a mowing regime or timing of timber harvest, excluding certain acreage from grazing, creating buffers around rare habitats, etc. For many of these practices there is cost sharing available. We work closely with other natural resources agencies to help connect interested landowners with an available cost share program.

We encourage you to visit our website at <https://kynaturepreserves.org>. And follow us on Facebook Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves at <https://www.facebook.com/KentuckyNaturePreserves/>

Photos above: Left: Habitat management on a nature preserve. Top: Our partners at KDFWR helping us eradicate noxious exotics on a private registry site in Russell County. Photos courtesy: Office of the Kentucky Nature Preserves