



How Are Your Woodlands Changing?

Each forested area is a dynamic and ever-changing mix of plants and animals. The kind of forest that exists today did not just happen. It is there as a result of past events. Some of those events were natural occurrences, but many of them were man-made. If you own or control a tract of woodland, you have the opportunity and, I believe, a duty to make a positive difference in the kind of forest that will be there in the future. Every decision that is made regarding your woodland, every action that is taken, and every action that is not taken will have an impact on what the forest of the future will be. Some events that affect our forests--ice storms, high winds, plant diseases, and even changing climate--are clearly beyond our control, but each of us can do many things to enhance the future of our woodlands.

Invasive species pose a significant threat to the future value of Kentucky forests. Some non-native plants can become invasive because of their high reproductive capacity and their ability to out-compete the native vegetation. They are often free of the natural enemies that kept them in check in their native habitat. The best time to deal with potentially invasive species is before they become widely established. We have an unfortunate tendency to overlook alien plants until they become an obvious problem, and by then they are difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. Because the mixed forests of Kentucky are hosts to such a wide variety of species, it can be challenging to know which plants are native and desirable, and which plants are potential invaders. It is useful for a woodland owner to develop a working knowledge of the plant species that grow on his or her land.

Photo courtesy: Diana Olszowy

Participation in educational events such as the Kentucky Woodland Owners Association annual meeting, the Woodland Owners Short Course, and local Cooperative Extension Service field days can help you learn to identify the plants that grow in the forest. Several good field guides that list most of the native plant species are available at your local bookstore or online. It is a good practice to carry one of them with you when you walk in the woods. If you find plants that you cannot identify, check with your county Extension agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources. Extension agents can help identify the plant or can utilize resources at the University of Kentucky for further assistance. Once you become familiar with the native plants in your woods, you will have a better chance to identify potential invaders and deal with them early while they are more easily controlled. If you discover, as many of us have, that some invasive plants have already become established on your land, you may want to talk with your Kentucky Division of Forestry Service forester about applying for financial assistance to help pay the cost of controlling them. Management of invasive plants can have a major effect on the future of your forest.

The Kentucky Woodland Owners Association is devoted to the better management of woodlands and advocating for policies that promote good forestry. Everyone with woodlands in Kentucky is encouraged to consider joining and becoming an active member of KWOA. For more information, please visit www.kwoa.net.

-- Frank Hicks, KWOA President

For more information log on to www.kwoa.net