



Marrowbone Creek State Forest

A Wealth of Resources

by Lynn Brammer

Marrowbone Creek State Forest recently became Kentucky's seventh state forest. The newly acquired property is located on the Metcalfe and Cumberland county line and is centrally located to other natural areas including Mammoth Cave National Park, Green River Lake State Park, Lake Cumberland State Park, Dale Hollow Lake State Park and Barren River Lake State Park. Visitors to the forest will find a wide variety of habitats that support diverse plant and animal communities.

The tract is located in a transitional area and has a diversity of forest types. Tree species that are typical of mixed-mesophytic forests, including oak, hickory, elm, walnut, tulip poplar, white pine, and hemlock are common to the area. The variety of habitats—from grasslands to early-successional woods to mature forests—provide forage and nesting sites for many bird species including wild turkey, ruffed grouse, red-cockaded woodpeckers and broad-winged hawks. Neotropical songbirds likewise benefit from the different successional stages of the forest and are prevalent in the area.

The property also contains over nine miles of tributaries in the Green River and Cumberland River watersheds. Riparian areas, the buffer zones along these watersheds, are critical to the survival of many species located in this area. The Green River watershed is the fourth most biologically diverse aquatic ecosystem in the United States and is home to 151 species of fish and 71 species of mussels. The presence of two federally-endangered bats, the Indiana bat and the gray bat, add further significance to this property and the need for conservation and proper management.

The quality of resources on the property has a great deal to do with a long history of forest stewardship and wildlife management. The land has been an active stewardship forest since the 1970s and was the Tree Farm of the Year in 2003. The previous landowner, Judge Daryl Coffey, worked extensively with the Kentucky Division of Forestry, the Kentucky Department

of Fish and Wildlife Resources, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service for over 30 years. The division manages state forests and stewardship properties, like Marrowbone Creek, using the ecosystem management approach. This approach ensures the health and diversity of forest resources while allowing sustainable use by humans. Various conservation techniques include planting trees and wildlife food plots, providing wildlife habitat with non-invasive plant species, and maintaining healthy riparian zones. The division also protects forest resources by suppressing forest fires, conducting surveys for potential insect and disease threats, monitoring for invasive plants, and inspecting timber harvesting practices for water quality.

Education is perhaps the most important aspect of the state forest program. Proper stewardship practices and best management practices are demonstrated on the properties for the purpose of increasing landowner, logger, and public awareness of the benefits of forests. The division's history with Marrowbone Creek, for example, shows how proper management has improved the production of timber. This is seen in the maturing pine plantations and converted fields. Further evidence is seen in the early-successional woods where timber stand improvement techniques, such as thinning overcrowded trees and removing damaged and undesirable tree species, have allowed more desirable species of trees to thrive.

All of our state forests contain outstanding resources including timber, terrestrial, and aquatic habitat and biological diversity. Fortunately, through federal and state funding, the Kentucky Division of Forestry has been able to acquire and purchase these properties. The purchase of phase I (1,125 acres) of Marrowbone Creek was completed in December 2007, and the purchase of phase II (625+ acres) is planned for 2008 in conjunction with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. With the addition of Marrowbone Creek, the division now owns and manages seven state forests totaling 38,210 acres.

Funding for the purchase of Marrowbone Creek was made possible through the USDA Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program and the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund. The Forest Legacy Program is a federal program that works in cooperation with state foresters to acquire property, secure conservation easements, and protect environmentally sensitive forest lands. The Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund is financed through the sale of nature license plates in which funds are used to purchase natural areas and protect them from development.

Marrowbone Creek State Forest will officially open to the public in spring 2008. The Division of Forestry is currently marking boundaries, setting up trails, and preparing parking areas for public use. The forest, like all state forests, will be open to the public for hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, and regulated hunting.

For more information about Marrowbone Creek and other state forests, visit the division's Web site at www.forestry.ky.gov/programs/stateforest



Marrowbone Creek State Forest

About the Author:
Lynn Brammer is an Environmental Education Section Supervisor with the Kentucky Division of Forestry.

Kentucky Division of Forestry, 627 Comanche Trail, Frankfort, KY 40601; E-mail: lynn.brammer@ky.gov; Phone: 502.564.4496; Fax: 502.564.6553.