

Kentucky's State Forests

by Eric Gracey

To demonstrate proper forest stewardship practices, the Kentucky Division of Forestry manages six state forests with a combined total of 37,696 acres. The state forest properties are managed using the ecosystem management approach to ensure biological diversity and sustainable use.

Recent additions to the state forestry property have been provided by the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund. Revenue from the fund comes from a percentage of the state's portion of the unmined minerals tax, environmental penalties, and state nature license plate sales. The division continues to seek new properties to add to the state forest program. The state forests are open to the public for hiking, wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing subject to state fish and game regulations, and other activities. Off-road vehicle use is prohibited on all state forest land. See the table at the bottom of this article for a complete breakdown of uses at each state forest. For more information and directions, visit www.forestry.ky.gov/programs/stateforest



Green River State Forest -- Henderson Co.

The Green River State Forest consisting of 1,106 acres is located just a few miles east of the city of Henderson, where the Green River empties into the Ohio. Much of the Green River State Forest is periodically flooded, creating a rich and diverse bottomland hardwood forest. Nearly half of the 1,106-acre forest was reforested in 2003-2004 in an effort to restore the drained agricultural fields back into native forest. The diversity of the forest with its cypress swamp, bottomland hardwoods, loess bluffs, and fertile uplands creates a unique opportunity for visitors. It is managed for multiple uses and is open to the public for most recreational uses.



Knobs State Forest -- Bullitt Co.

Our newest state forest is Knobs State Forest consisting of 1,539 acres that were purchased as two contiguous tracts in the summer and fall of 2006. The forest is near Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest and Crooked Creek Boy Scout Camp. The property's distant past has shaped today's forest. Timber was extensively harvested from the area to make charcoal to feed a stone iron furnace that still stands on the adjacent property. Upland hardwoods now dominate the property. In recent times, the property has been actively managed for agriculture, timber production, and wildlife. The exemplary management work has not gone without notice; it was the 2000 Kentucky Tree Farm of the Year. This property was uniquely qualified to enter our state forest program as a working model demonstrating the potential contributions that private woodlands hold for the greater good of the commonwealth. The forest is open for day-use only.



Pennyrile State Forest -- Christian, Hopkins, Caldwell counties

The Pennyrile State Forest consists of 14,648 acres located in western Kentucky near the city of Dawson Springs. The Pennyrile State Forest has weathered ridges, dramatic sandstone cliffs, some healthy, productive streams, and thousands of acres of forested rolling hills. Hundreds of families have had a part of the evolution of this special forest. Remnants of homesteads can be found along traces of old roadbeds. Demonstration areas and interpretative trails provide an outdoor classroom for the casual user or organized trainings. Healthy populations of whitetail deer, wild turkey, and small game provide excellent hunting opportunities. Winter snows, spring flowers, and spectacular autumn colors attract hikers, horseback riders, and other outdoor enthusiasts. The Pennyrile State Forest is truly an outstanding highlight of the western Kentucky landscape.



Tygarts State Forest -- Carter Co.

Tygarts State Forest consisting of 874 acres lies within the karst rolling hills of western Carter County and borders Carter Caves State Resort Park. Kentucky Master Logger training is conducted in the forest several times a year, and a timber harvesting best management practices (BMP) demonstration trail was developed to show proper water control structures utilized during timber harvesting operations. The forest is blessed with deep soil ridges and hollows, making it a highly productive upland oak forest. Limestone rock outcroppings, sinking streams, caverns, and majestic oaks make Tygarts State Forest a truly unique experience. Public campsites are available at the state park.



Kentucky Ridge State Forest -- Bell Co.

Kentucky Ridge State Forest consists of 15,251 acres in Bell County and was acquired by lease in 1930 as part of the Land Use and Resettlement Program. The lease was sustained until 1954 when the property was deeded by the U.S. government to the commonwealth. Pine Mountain State Resort Park is located within the state forest and is bordered on the south side by Pine Mountain and the north side by Log Mountain. Kentucky Ridge State Forest is two forests in one. On the north-facing Log Mountain side, the forest is moist and cool, allowing for towering yellow-poplar and hemlock coves; as the elevation increases, the forest becomes mixed with sugar maple and cherry, more typical of those found in the north central Appalachians. On the Pine Mountain side, the upper slopes and ridges are a rocky, dry environment blanketed with mountain laurel, and only the hardiest of tree species survive.



Kentonia State Forest -- Harlan Co.

The oldest state-owned forest is Kentonia State Forest totaling 4,277 acres atop Pine Mountain in Harlan County. It was acquired in 1919 as a gift from the Kentonia-Cantron Corporation. The rugged terrain of Pine Mountain provides unique habitat and resources found nowhere else in Kentucky. The forest is composed primarily of upland oaks and cove hardwoods. With huge rock outcrops and sandstone cliffs, its views of neighboring Black Mountain and the Cumberland River Valley offer a panorama of what most consider Kentucky's most rugged and wild state forest.

Public Use of Kentucky's State Forests

State Forest	Hiking	Wildlife Viewing	Primitive Camping	Picnicking	Hunting	Fishing	Off-Road Vehicle Use
Green River	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Kentonia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Kentucky Ridge	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Knobs	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Pennyrile	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Tygarts	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO

Author:
Eric Gracey

Eric is the State Forest and Land Acquisition Section Supervisor with the Kentucky Division of Forestry. He is responsible for the oversight and management of KY's six state forest and the division's land acquisition efforts.

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