

Growth and Development of the White Oak Initiative

by Darren Morris and Jeff Stringer

As the White Oak Initiative continues to develop and grow so does the excitement and expectations of what the Initiative can accomplish. One important goal of the White Oak Initiative is to provide knowledge, guidelines, tools, and information to forest landowners, managers, industry, stakeholders, and states that will ensure sustainable growth of white oak forests for decades to come. One of the first steps was the development of a \$2.3 million project involving 17 states and spearheaded by the American Forest Foundation and University of Kentucky and funded through the Landscape Scale Restoration program run by the USDA Forest Service. The goal is to improve white oak friendly forest practices across the region. This project has several components including a region-wide conservation plan for white oak, development of a set of technical guidelines and training on white oak regeneration and growth, development of landowner materials on white oak, demonstration areas, and web and social media platforms for landowners involved in growing white oak. The project recognizes that white oak does not grow alone, but thrives in a community with other upland oaks and associated species. As a first step in this project the 17 states are helping to determine the upland oaks that occur with white oak and that will necessarily benefit from management focused on white oak. It will be important to provide forest landowners with information on how to identify not only white oak seedlings in their forests, but also other desirable oak seedlings that may be sharing the same space. Materials on silvicultural methods and practices will be provided to the states and delivered to landowners, foresters, and managers. These practices will be assembled and developed with the assistance of oak researchers at universities and the US Forest Service. The complete set of silvicultural guidelines developed through years of research and encompassing the span of 17 states involved in the White Oak Initiative is the first of this magnitude, and will be necessary for the success of white oak (upland oak) forest management. Foresters, managers, and landowners will receive the same set of unified white oak management practices, guidelines, tools, and resources. As the White Oak Initiative progresses, the silvicultural guidelines will be developed into landowner-friendly informational guides. Web resources will be created. Organized technical

trainings for foresters and managers will be provided and carried out throughout the 17 states involved in the project. Demonstration areas will be created on both private and public forests in order to showcase the results of properly applied white oak silvicultural practices. Demonstration areas will ultimately offer visual proof that the practices, guidelines, tools, and techniques provided by the White Oak Initiative can successfully produce white oak (upland oak) forests that meet our management goals for decades to come.

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About the White Oak Initiative

The White Oak Initiative evolved from a partnership among forest and distilling industries, consultants, universities, agencies, and non-profits focused on the sustainability of white oak resources in the United States. The Initiative was born from the industries' interest in white oak and the recognition that work is needed to ensure the long-term availability of white oak timber. The Initiative is still in its infancy with interested partners actively working to build the foundations for a strong and vibrant enterprise. Initial funding has been provided by private industry and the American Forest Foundation and University of Kentucky, Department of Forestry and Natural Resources have provided personnel who are facilitating the collaboration of over 20 key partners throughout the white oak sourcing region to launch the Initiative. Initial steps include the development of a website and communications that will be open to all who want to be involved and the procurement of grant funding to facilitate white oak management.

