

Taking Action for Wildlife Diversity

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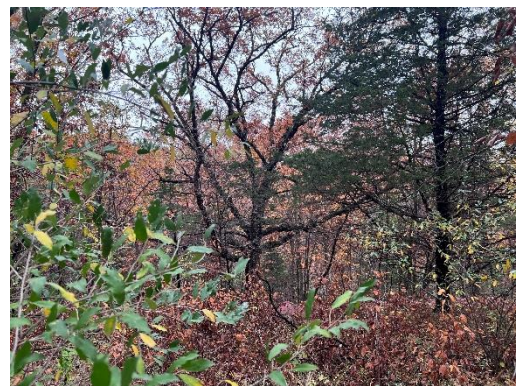
I must preface this article with an apology for the number of acronyms I am about to use. If there is one thing we can all agree on, it is that government agencies are great at creating acronyms.

Dallas County Conservation Board was recently awarded a grant through the Habitat Management Grants Program via the Wildlife Diversity Program with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). This grant program seeks to fund high-quality habitat management projects within the State of Iowa. The project must be focused on reconstruction and/or restoration of non-game wildlife habitat. The ultimate goal is to increase and preserve habitats used by Iowa's Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Steps are outlined in the IDNR's "Iowa Wildlife Action Plan" (IWAP) which, if carried out successfully, will produce cleaner water and air and create a healthy environment for people and wildlife. Within this plan is a list of SGCN and the habitats they prefer. Kuehn Conservation Area is already home to many of the species listed.

In 2022, the IDNR conducted a Multi-Species Inventory and Monitoring (MSIM) survey at Kuehn Conservation Area. The MSIM surveys aim to identify species at random locations within the property boundaries; it includes mammals, birds, herptiles (amphibians and reptiles), fish, butterflies, odonates (dragonflies and damselflies), and mussels. The 2022 findings at Kuehn included 30 SGCN, 2 species of special concern (Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon), and 2 endangered species (Northern Harrier and Pistolgrip Mussel).

The funds from this grant will be used to hire Conservation Corp of Iowa (CCI) crews to work at Kuehn Conservation Area this coming summer. These crews of four to five people are trained to use chainsaws and apply herbicide. Their primary job will be to use cut-stump with herbicide application method on many of the invasive understory species. Often, this manual method is the only way to clean out areas that specialized mechanical equipment cannot access.

In conjunction with the forest management plan that was developed for Kuehn Conservation Area, we have also targeted several areas on the southeast side of the large overflow parking lot. These areas sit atop finger ridges that stretch out towards the South Raccoon River, and they contain degraded oak savannas that have been invaded by eastern red cedar, bush honeysuckle, and ironwood (to name a few). At one time, vegetation on these ridges was diverse. They included sprawling bur oaks coupled with a wide array of grasses and forbs covering the understory.



*A targeted area for improvement at
Kuehn Conservation Area*

The first goal of this project at Kuehn is to restore these oak savannas back to their pre-settlement state. By doing so, we hope to accomplish the overall goal of sustaining and regaining some of Iowa's SGCN. I will provide updates on this project in my 2024 winter article after the first phase of work is completed.