



The Leaflet



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The Missouri Forestkeepers Network: Celebrating 25 Years!

By: Justine Gartner, State Forester, Missouri Department of Conservation

The Missouri Forestkeepers Network is celebrating its 25th anniversary! The program was launched late in 1996 and attracted 731 charter members that first year. Today the Network has grown to serve more than 3,000 members throughout much of the state. These members are everyday citizens who are turning a critical and caring eye to the state's forests. Rural and urban, young and younger, they are members who are taking a hand-on approach to caring for natural resources. Some of the most active and dedicated members have been with the program since the beginning, while others have joined just in the last year.

Since the program's inception, the Network has been coordinated by Forest ReLeaf of Missouri and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). The initial goals of forestry education and statewide outreach still hold true today with the mission of the program "to develop a network of informed citizens working to conserve, sustain and enhance Missouri's urban and rural forest resources through volunteerism, advocacy and management." While still holding firm to the core of the program, members of the Network have stretched and expanded its focus, going well beyond the original intent to simply monitor Missouri's forests.

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Woods Updates



Serviceberries (*Amelanchier* spp.) bloom

Serviceberry is one of the first woody plants to flower in spring and its fruit one of our tastiest native edibles. Folk etymology claims serviceberry's flowering time meant that the ground was thawed enough to dig and bury those who died over the winter, thus "service". This is unlikely; the older spelling of the name is "sarvis", a variation of "sorbus", a fruit-bearing tree that is common in Europe. Early settlers, when encountering new and unknown plants, often assigned them the names of similar plants they were familiar with. Hence "sarvisberry" for Amelanchier, "blue beech" for *Carpinus caroliniana*, etc.

Mayapple - the hide-and-seek plant

Countless generations of small children have taken special delight in discovering the flowers and fruit of the Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), concealed as they are underneath the huge, umbrella-like leaves of this forest floor dweller. Adults usually need to get down on their hands and knees to catch a glimpse of the small white and yellow flowers. Take your kids or grandchildren on a Mayapple hunt - they'll feel like there's a special little world just for them, hidden underneath those big green leaves.



Weed or Superfood?

History repeats itself, sort of; there was a time when harvesting wild spring greens like dandelion, poke and nettle (we usually call them "weeds" now) was a way to save money and add variety to the kitchen. One of these weedy greens, purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) is enjoying a second life as a "superfood" due to its high levels of vitamin E and C, and rich omega-3 fatty acid content. It is now popping up as frequently at farmers markets as it is between sidewalk cracks.

How Much is my Tree Worth? (continued)

“When we started Forestkeepers we were looking for ways to get the public more aware of forests and the important benefits they provide to people, by providing an opportunity to track and study the health of a forested area, or simply a group of trees, near where they live. It’s just great to see so many folks involved 25 years later,” says MDC State Forester Marvin Brown, who is responsible for the program’s inception.

Many Forestkeepers are initially attracted to the program because of the opportunity to get outside and work with Missouri’s natural resources. Tree observations and Activity Reports continue to be a staple activity in the program, but today members are doing much more than just forest health monitoring. Activities range from tree planting, to treating unwanted vegetation, completing timber stand improvement, to teaching others the value of trees. Through these activities, members logged a remarkable 18,934 volunteer hours across the state in 2021. Over the years FKN members have contributed close to 250,000 volunteer hours which can be valued at \$7.5 million using the Independent Sector’s estimated value for each volunteer hour. Those hours were spent caring for countless trees, advocating for trees, participating in the strange and unique tree hunt, surveying the mast crop in counties, teaching in formal and informal classrooms, and countless other activities.

As we look to the next 25 years, the challenges that our trees, forests, and woods face continue to be numerous. More recently the impacts of severe weather, smaller land ownership patterns, and a proliferation of invasive plants, insects and disease have created new challenges making your help even more critical. To chart our path into the future we are asking for your help. Thank you to everyone who participated in the member survey announced in the Fall 2021 newsletter. In the coming months we anticipate using tools like listening sessions and focus groups to help identify what members value and what activities could be added or changed. Your input is important! I hope you’ll take time to share your thoughts.

Thank you for your participation in the program as your efforts help assure Missouri’s forests continue to be healthy and thriving. I look forward to working with you for another 25 years monitoring and caring for trees.





Featured Species

Yellowwood

Cladrastis kentukea

Yellowwood (*Cladrastis kentukea*), is one of the rarest trees in the wild in North America. In Missouri it is found only in a few of our southern counties, though it is cold hardy as far north as zone 4. The flowers are pendulous white racemes, fragrant, and reminiscent of wisteria. They typically open in late April or early May. The leaves are pinnately compound, composed of several smaller leaflets on a central stem (rachis). They turn an attractive yellow-orange in the fall. The name 'yellowwood' refers to both the color of the wood and the dye that can be made from its roots. In winter the yellow coloration of the wood can be seen in the leaf scar.

The bark is smooth and light gray, and as the tree matures horizontal wrinkles and darker gray and white colored bands give it an 'elephant's leg' appearance that almost looks painted on. The branches are slender, typically forming an open, multi-stemmed crown that is graceful and delicate.

Source: Mark Halpin, Forest ReLeaf of Missouri



The Leaflet . Spring 2022

Q: My pin oak is covered in galls. In the past I've been told that galls are nothing to worry about, but there are so many that I'm starting to get concerned. What should I do?

A: Pin oak (*Quercus palustris*) is highly susceptible to both gouty and horned oak galls, both of which are caused by wasps in the *Callirhytis* genus. There are currently no treatment options with robust scientific backing.

Pin oak galls have exploded in recent years, and while this is certainly concerning it's important to see it in terms of the bigger forest health picture. For one thing, gall wasps are native insects whose populations ebb and flow, with large outbreaks often following years of small numbers. The host, pin oak, was severely overplanted in the 20th century. Many specimens are showing severe stress in planted landscapes, with iron chlorosis being particularly prevalent. It's also a short-lived oak, with 120 years being a long lifespan in ideal conditions - urban trees typically decline in 60-70 (many pin oaks were planted during the housing boom of the 1950's, putting them right at the end of their lifespans).

So we have a convergence of factors - an overabundance of susceptible hosts, under stress and nearing the end of their useful life, their natural defenses weakened. We have increasingly unpredictable weather events and climate change to aggravate plant stress. And we have a native wasp taking advantage of this situation. As for what can be done? The answer is frustratingly, very little. For healthy specimens, plant health care is recommended; reduce soil compaction, apply mulch and compost, alleviate stress however possible.

(Source: Mark Halpin,
Forest ReLeaf of Missouri)

FOREST BULLETIN

St. Louis County Parks Improves Forest Health with Prescribed Burns

By: Mark Halpin, Forest ReLeaf of Missouri

The use of fire as an ecological management tool has been earning public acceptance in recent years, but still faces significant hurdles, particularly near population centers. Such areas' forests and woodlands tend to be under tremendous pressure from pathogens, invasive species, and general environmental stressors – urban areas are often the epicenters for forest health issues that then spread into rural areas. As such it is extremely important to manage them effectively. Earning the public's trust in use of prescribed burns is a crucial step in this endeavor. Jason Pratte, Forestry Manager for St. Louis County Parks, has been working hard at forest and woodland restoration in Edgar M. Queeny Park for years but without fire, progress has been slow. "We're not seeing oak regeneration in Queeny," Pratte laments. "The leaf litter is too thick. The only regeneration we're seeing much of is shade tolerant stuff like hickory, maple and paw paw. Don't get me wrong, I love paw paw and hickory," Pratte adds. "But this is Missouri; we need our oaks."



Before and during the burn at Queeny Park

Pratte received Fire Management Training through the Missouri Department of Conservation and recently became a Certified Prescribed Burn Manager. He and his team have burned a number of prairie plots with excellent results, and this March received clearance to perform the first woodland burn in St. Louis County Parks. With major thoroughfares and homes surrounding the area, planning was meticulous. "Smoke management is my major concern," Pratte said. "With major roads and million-dollar homes nearby, I need to watch wind patterns carefully." The chances of a well-managed fire going out of control are very low, but large smoke clouds wafting in the wrong direction can create their own hazards. Furthermore, such accidents can reinforce many peoples' fears that controlled burns are too dangerous.

On March 3rd the wind moved as predicted, and the burn was a success. Pratte and his team are optimistic for the future of Queeny's natural areas. "With that heavy duff layer reduced and broken down, I'm excited to see what comes up from the seed bank," Pratte says. Oak regeneration won't be the only benefit; a cascade of positive effects often follows a burn. Spring ephemerals return along with other understory plants, insect activity increases and bird populations rebound.

Deer overpopulation has become another major issue, and one that fits into the larger picture of forest health. St. Louis County Parks works to restore population balance with carefully monitored bow hunting permits. "Every deer I see here, I can see its ribs," notes Pratte, an avid hunter. "They're malnourished." Reducing their populations to a sustainable level, balanced with mast from a healthier forest, will make for healthier deer. It will also reduce damage to small trees, something for which deer are notorious. The high visibility of controlled burns may be an obstacle to public acceptance, but it has a hidden benefit: it draws attention to forest health issues. Safe, properly conducted burns not only assuage fears and edge the general public towards acceptance, burns also get people thinking about our natural areas and the management they require. St. Louis County Parks' efforts are helping to advance the cause of ecosystem management in urban areas where it is too often neglected.

Take a Hike!



Ashe Juniper Natural Area

See Missouri's rarest conifer

Ashe juniper (*Juniperus ashei*), also known as Ozark white cedar, is limited to only a small section of southwest Missouri, which constitutes the northeastern extremity of its range. Although common and still harvested on the Edwards Plateau of Texas, the only old-growth stands that remain in Missouri are to be found at Ashe Juniper Natural Area, where trees ranging from 350-500 years old can be seen.

Located on a peninsula in Table Rock Lake, visitors can see these ancient, stunted trees clinging to the rocky cliffs that line the lake's shore. Remember that old trees are not necessarily large; Ashe juniper typically matures at 30 feet and is slow-growing. Its foliage is a darker green than the more common eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and it stays green into the winter, whereas *J. virginiana* turns reddish-brown.

While visiting, keep an eye out for the great roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*), another rarity in Missouri. Beep beep!

Acreage: 31.3

County: Stone

Owner: MO Dept. of
Conservation

Region: Southwest

Address: California Ln, Blue Eye,
MO 65611

Featured Events

Discover Nature: City Nature Challenge Kickoff

Date: Friday, April 29 & Saturday, April 30, 2022 | 10:00am - 2:00pm

Location: Anita B. Gorman Conservation Discovery Center, Kansas City, MO

The Discovery Center is joining multiple Kansas City area conservation partners in the City Nature Challenge, an international effort for people to find and document plants and wildlife in cities around the globe. Our kickoff is Friday, April 29 and Saturday, April 30. Participants will make observations by taking photos and uploading their observations using the free mobile app iNaturalist. The objective is to create a snapshot of the biodiversity that can be found around the metro area! Naturalists will be at the Discovery Center on Friday and Saturday to assist you.

Wildflower Hike at Glassberg Conservation Area

Date: Saturday, May 7, 2022 10:00am - 1:00pm

RSVP: mdc.mo.gov/events

Location: Rockwoods Reservation, Wildwood, MO

Spring has arrived! Join an early Mother's Day hike at Glassberg CA and enjoy the gift of wildflowers courtesy of Mother Nature. You will hike the natural trail that winds through the woods, hills and meadows, and along streams examining the flowers along the way. A short rest stop will be made at the platform that overlooks the Meramec River valley where hikers can turn back or continue to complete the 3.5 mile trail. Dress for the weather with appropriate footwear; bring water and a snack. Meet at Glassberg parking lot.

Concert in the Trees

Date: Thursday, May 27, 2022 6:00pm - 8:00pm

RSVP: moreleaf.org/events

Location: Forest ReLeaf's Nursery, Creve Coeur Park, Maryland Heights, MO

Forest ReLeaf of Missouri is excited to host the Fifth Annual Concert in the Trees! Held at CommuniTree Gardens Nursery in Creve Coeur Park, you'll enjoy the music of Janet Evra surrounded by over 20,000 trees that are cultivated at Forest ReLeaf's nursery before they're given away to nonprofits and community groups. All proceeds will help us distribute more trees in the region!

Welcome Members!

Melinda Binns
Wesley and Carol Boshart
Sage Chiles
Kayla Cisneros-Pineda
Sally Cohn
Abby Cyr
Darcy Gill
Lawrence Hubbman
Rebecca Keen
Helena Manczuk
Nicholas Marrocco
Summer Stadler
Cliff Wilkinson

The Leaflet is produced by the Forest and Woodland Association of Missouri and the Missouri Forestkeepers Network in partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation and Forest ReLeaf.

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**Spread the Word -
Stop the Spread!**