



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

St. Croix Wetland Management District
1764 95th Street
New Richmond, Wisconsin 54017



FWS/NWRS-St. Croix WMD

July 12, 2023

Dear Neighbor:

As a neighbor to Bass Lake, Ten Mile, and Clapp Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA) managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's St. Croix Wetland Management District (WMD) Office, I am sending this letter to inform you of a management activity that will be, or is occurring on, portions of each of these three WPAs. The management activity I wish to inform you about is brush and undesirable tree removal as a continuation of the WMD's oak savanna and prairie restoration program. Our restorations began in 2009 and continue today on WPAs in southern Polk and St. Croix Counties. Oak savanna is one of the more endangered habitats found within the United States. When restored, savanna and prairie habitats provide space and food for migratory waterfowl and other resident wildlife species to thrive. Below is further information about the oak savanna and prairie restoration process.

What is a Waterfowl Production Area (WPA)?

WPAs are parcels of land purchased to preserve and protect habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds through funds derived from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps. Though these stamps are purchased as a requirement for hunters who wish to pursue waterfowl, they are also increasingly popular with many who enjoy wildlife art, photography or those who wish to help protect wildlife habitat for future generations through fee acquisition.

Though WPAs are purchased and managed to provide high quality habitat for migratory waterfowl, waterfowl are not the only wildlife to benefit from these lands. Unlike common species of wildlife such as the Canada Goose, white-tailed deer, and Ring-necked Pheasant, the populations of many grassland and wetland dependent migratory birds have declined dramatically due to the loss of their grassland breeding habitat. Some of these species include meadowlark, bobolink, upland sandpiper, blue winged teal and Henslow's sparrow. Many of these species evolved in a landscape of prairie and wetlands with scattered patches of oak savanna that were maintained through historic wildfires. This mix of prairie, wetland and oak savanna was historically found across much of St. Croix County.

How do we restore oak savanna habitat?

Oak savanna habitat consists of scattered burr and white oaks with an understory of grasses, sedges, wildflowers and some brush. With the suppression of naturally occurring wildfires over the past six decades and the spread of invasive species such as buckthorn and Siberian elm, these savannas are gradually being taken over by undesirable woody species. This summer and into the fall, we will be removing many of the undesirable trees such as box elder, Siberian elm, green ash, cottonwood, buckthorn and brush from the fencerows, field edges, savannas and

grasslands on these three WPAs to create larger blocks of grassland habitat with brush cutting and grinding, mechanical equipment. Many of the burr and white oaks and a few other scattered trees will be left behind to help regenerate the savanna plant community. Most of the woody material ground up during the mulching process will be left behind and burned during future prescribed burns. Some larger trees that are downed are available to private citizens, like yourselves, for use as firewood through the issuance of a Special Use Permit. If you are interested in cutting firewood for personal use, please feel free to reach out to me.

Over the next several years we will be managing these sites and the adjacent grasslands intensively with a combination of mowing, chemical spot treatment and brush grinding in an effort to discourage the growth of shrubs and trees and encourage the growth of native grasses, flowers and burr oak trees. In subsequent years, we plan to use prescribed fire to manage for an open understory while also stimulating growth of young burr oaks. The growth of burr oak saplings is encouraged to replace the existing oaks, many of which are well over 100 years old as they die through natural succession. Controlled burning also reinvigorates native grass and flower species which have been suppressed by the shading of the invasive woody tree species. Without this type of management, these open grown burr oaks and native grassland plant species would eventually disappear from the WPAs. We have found that after a couple years of slowing the brush growth, we are able to maintain the areas through prescribed fire treatment every four or five years to maintain this grassland and oak savanna habitat.

Why do we manage for oak savanna and grassland habitat?

Managing to restore oak savanna and grassland habitat on WPAs is important because some waterfowl and grassland dependent bird species simply avoid areas that have become infested with undesirable trees. Trees often are used as perches for predatory birds or raptors while they search for nesting birds and vulnerable young or nest invaders like Brown-headed Cowbirds that lay their eggs in the nest of other bird species who then raise the cowbird chicks at the expense of their own offspring. Eliminating undesirable and invasive trees and shrubs leads to healthier grassland and oak savannas thereby providing high quality habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds, a main objective of the St. Croix Wetland Management District.

If you have questions, are interested in habitat restoration on your property, or if you would like to discuss tree removal along common fencerows, please give us a call. Feel free to contact me at 715-246-7784 Ext. 116 or by email at Chris_Trosen@fws.gov.

Sincerely,

Chris Trosen
Deputy Manager