

What characterizes an oak woodland ecosystem?

- Canopy dominated by white, red, and black oaks with a few understory trees.
- Ground cover composed of grassy turf and some forbs, especially in early spring.
- Commonly found in Southwest Wisconsin's Driftless Area, especially on northern slopes.

What role did fires play in maintaining oak woodlands?

- Before European settlement, regular fires set by lightning or Native Americans burned through oak woodlands at least every three to five years.
- These low intensity ground fires incinerated dead vegetation, promoting plant growth by returning nutrients to the soil.

How is this situation improving?

- Citizens increasingly value the importance of oak woodlands for hunting opportunities, local scenic beauty, and the preservation of rare plants and wildlife.
- Many public and private organizations at local, state, and federal levels have programs to help private landowners pay for and execute oak woodland restoration on their property. (Please see the end of this flier for further information).

What happened to Wisconsin oak woodlands?

- Early settlers cleared oak woodlands for pastures. Later generations logged woodlands for timber.
- The large amounts of slash left by clearcutting created fire hazards that led state officials to enact strict fire suppression policies. Without fires, suitable habitat for oaks diminished.

What role can prescribed burns play in oak woodland management?

- Regular prescribed burns are a key component of a comprehensive oak woodland management plan.
- Regular burns create open areas for oak regeneration.
- Burning has been shown to reduce the presence of many invasive species.
- Regular burning also reduces fuel loads in oak woodlands, decreasing the chance of a property damaging wildfire
- Oak trees have very thick bark and other adaptations that make them fire-resistant. Brush species and trees like the maple are not fire-resistant, and over time are suppressed by regular burning.
- Fire creates openings in the canopy cover, allowing oak seeds to germinate.

