



Management of Natural Areas

Why do conservation groups remove trees?

In this area of Illinois (Lee County) there should be open woodlands and vast savannas and prairie. The main difference between a forest and a woodland is the amount of tree cover. Forests have the most dense tree cover letting little to no light through the canopy, while woodlands are more open and let a more light through. Savannas are a mix between woodlands and prairie—there is still some canopy cover but large trees like oaks have plenty of room to grow and thrive. And, of course, prairies have very little to no canopy cover (<1 tree/acre). With management practices such as tree thinning and prescribed fire, our woodlands and savannas will remain open with decent shade and an enjoyable breeze.

Aren't natural areas supposed to be natural, not managed?

Unfortunately, due to the quick spread of honeysuckle and previous lack of prescribed fire across Illinois our natural areas **NEED** management. If you would like to learn more about restoration methods used, join us for a workday.

What about the animals that live here?

Deer like a mixture of open and canopied habitat! They frequently leave their fawns alone hidden in the tall grass. (Please do **NOT** remove them.) While bush honeysuckle looks like a prime hiding spot for deer it is a great place for ticks to breed and attach to hosts such as deer, rabbits, and our other woodland critters. Animals that bed in bush honeysuckle are more likely to catch to tick-borne illness.

Opening our woodlands also creates a better habitat for owls, turkey vultures, and hawks. Pollinators benefit from clearing our natural areas of invasive and weedy monocultures as well. Adding native plants creates a more diverse food source for our butterflies, bees, and other pollen feasting insects.

Will you plant more trees?

Trees that are removed are typically cherry and boxelder, while native, they become increasingly weedy without management. Once they have been removed from an area, oaks and hickories that belong in a native savanna and woodland ecosystem will be able to regenerate more easily with little competition from the faster growing boxelders and cherries.

Restoration *can* be a slow process, but it is well worth the time spent working to improve our beloved natural areas.