



Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative Newsletter

Working together to conserve bird populations and their habitats

Editor's Note

by Allison Vaughn

Many of our 78 partners have been busy, not only conducting natural community restoration but also community outreach. This newsletter focuses on a lot of the great things going on throughout Missouri! We'll feature updates from multiple partners about their recent activities. Included in this issue is also the list of grants that we, along with the Missouri Department of Conservation, approved during Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027.

Regarding Community Conservation grants, I had the great honor to attend the installation of MoBCI-funded interpretive panels at the East Ozarks Audubon Society's Dr. F.R. Crouch Nature Sanctuary. See a couple of these lovely panels in the group's article on page 6. The area is very welcoming for birds and hikers alike, nestled in at Engler Park in Farmington, a very urban area yet a natural setting that supports not only birds but all biodiversity with adjacent woodlands and pollinator plantings.

We'll also hear from the Mark Twain National Forest's public information officer on a new initiative that some of you may already be aware of: increasing birding on national forest lands.

And it's not only birds. Missouri conservationists in natural community management, specialists in insects, non-game fish and

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every biota in between, we all remain vigilant for the cause of conservation. We'll hear from our Steering Committee Chair, Neil Baalman, about the future of MoBCI and what the next 20 years will bring with our development of the Strategic Plan, a rollout which appears on our conference agenda. It

is critical that we stick together as partners, and to connect the next generation with nature. Please join us for our upcoming conference in Columbia, August 20–21 where we have once again invited college students in conservation fields to join us to share their ideas on bird conservation. We encourage participants at the conference to reach out to these engaged students who remain the future face of the conservation cause.

Our theme of this year's conference is

how working lands can help bird populations: *From Harrow to Sparrow-How Dual-Purpose Lands Support Bird Conservation*. Enjoy the camaraderie with other birders, share your bird photos on your phone with the person next to you, make a bid on a bird-related auction item, help support birds and be around bird enthusiasts — from hunters to backyard birders to serious listers, we're truly all in this together. 🐦

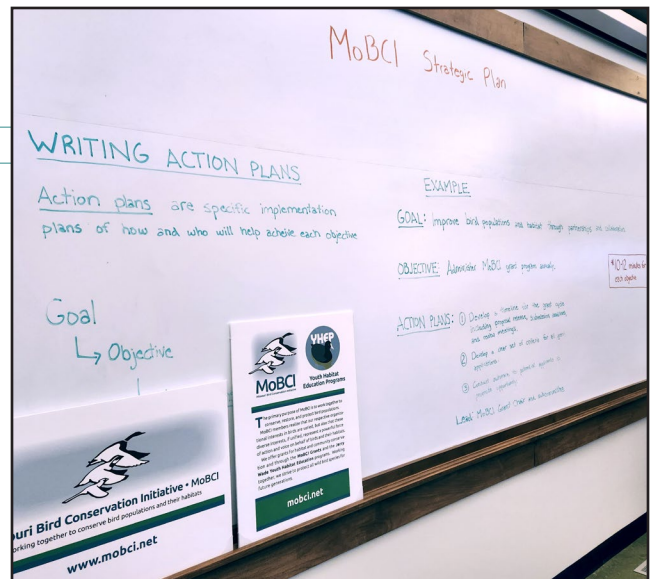
Note from the Chair

Neil Baalman

Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative Chair

Change is the one constant written into every aspect of the natural world. Landscapes like prairies, forests, wetlands, and rivers are in a perpetual state of motion. Birds, perhaps more than any other creatures, feel these currents of change intimately. Their populations rise and fall, their habitats expand and contract, and their annual migrations trace the ongoing story of adaptation.

Missouri is no stranger to change in recent years. Birds in the Show-Me State face mounting pressures: more people, more development, fewer acres of intact habitat, and a rapidly evolving agricultural landscape. Yet, despite these challenges, Missouri stands tall as a conservation leader. Decades of collaborative work across agencies, nonprofits, landowners, and passionate individuals have built a foundation of conservation successes that rivals any in the nation. Our public lands, diverse and well-stewarded, provide essential refuge for the birds that inhabit them.



Photos by Allison Vaughn

The whiteboard that the Steering Committee referred to while drafting priorities for the Strategic Plan at the meeting at Big Muddy NWR Headquarters.

However, public lands alone are not enough. With 93% of Missouri in private ownership, the future of birds and their habitats depend on working with the landowners who shape the vast majority of the state's landscape. Meaningful, durable bird conservation must happen on working lands: farms, forests, ranches, and the places Missourians call home. And while economics inevitably guide how land is used, conservation organizations across Missouri are proving that working lands can also

work for birds. This year's conference theme takes us directly into that conversation. We will explore the programs, practices, and collaborative strategies that empower private land stewardships showcasing the ways Missourians can support thriving bird populations while continuing to work the land they depend on. The goal – build a future where production and conservation strengthen one another.

Change isn't only happening on the landscape, it's happening within MoBCI too! Over the past year and a half, we have taken a deep look inward. Together, we've been redefining what success means for our organization and charting a path that ensures MoBCI remains relevant in the years ahead. Since stepping into the role of MoBCI Chair and helping lead our strategic planning efforts, I've been continually humbled by the experience, wisdom, and passion within this group. Your collective expertise has shaped a strategic plan rooted in both our history and our future.



It was a long day of strategic planning, so Neil planned a potluck. Special thanks to Dave Graber of Ducks Unlimited for bringing two fruit pies knowing that a couple of days later was Pi Day, March 14!

I am proud to share that our new strategic plan will be released this August at the annual conference to be held August 20–21 in Columbia. I hope you'll join us to celebrate how far we've come, envision where we're headed, and continue building the partnerships that make Missouri's bird conservation community so exceptional. Until then, here's to embracing change and to the shared work that keeps us moving forward! 🦆

Jerry Wade Youth Habitat & Education Program

MoBCI offers grants to promote bird habitat conservation projects that provide an educational component for youth.

These grants may be awarded to private and public organizations, or to individuals who partner with organizations. Eligible activities include projects that protect, enhance or restore bird habitats on any lands in Missouri. All projects should be habitat based and include a specific educational component for youth.

For more information or to apply for a Youth Habitat and Education Program grant, please visit:

mobci.net/yhep.



Odd Teammates? One Reason MoBCI Has Succeeded!

Dave Erickson

Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative Foundation Treasurer

Birds are known to form foraging flocks of varied species that roam their habitats as a unit. They band together for mutual interests. Certainly, more eyes help when predators are also around. Some of these birds may forage up in the canopy while others feed at mid-level or near the ground. Others search under leaves for tiny tidbits of food; still others pry into crevices of bark searching for insects or larvae. Plus, one species' foraging may dislodge or scatter prey for another. Common foraging flocks may contain chickadees, Tufted Titmice, Downy Woodpeckers, kinglets, and others.

In the same way foraging flocks work to the benefit of all the species involved, MoBCI's diversity is working to benefit a range of bird habitats. Our organization can be proud that hunters and non-hunters are working in unison to protect and restore bird habitats. One might assume that hunters and non-hunters do not get along, despise each other and could never collaborate in the common interest of birds, but nothing in Missouri supports this belief.

Surveys of Missourians conducted by the Missouri Department of Conservation show quite the opposite — regulated hunting is broadly accepted and supported in Missouri (88%), especially when hunting is for food and wildlife management purposes. Nationally, support hovers near 73%. Furthermore, when one engages with individuals, you find that many hunters are also birders, and many birders also hunt or have hunted in the past. The common ground for partnership is immense.



Photo by Dave Erickson

From the purchase of the annual duck stamp to supporting wetlands, duck hunters remain staunch bird conservationists that coincide with birders who enjoy birds through the lens of binoculars.

This common ground extends to bird habitats. It is no surprise that organizations like Ducks Unlimited, National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever and many others can team up with the Missouri Prairie Foundation, Audubon societies, the Missouri Birding Society, and others to undertake habitat projects that benefit a range of birds, both hunted and not. There are countless examples in MoBCI's 20+ year history of groups teaming up to undertake meaningful bird habitat conservation, projects that bring sound forest management forward, restore wetlands, and improve or protect native

grasslands. Since 2004, MoBCI grants have directed over \$2.13 million to bird habitat conservation in our state, and, as importantly, these MDC-funded grants have leveraged another \$3.5 million in partner funds from hunting and non-hunting groups for the same cause. If you talk about impact, these are serious numbers (over \$5.6 million), especially when you consider the cost of MoBCI's all-volunteer work force is costing \$0 to the organization, and our organization operates with annual expenditures of less than \$6,000.

Birds — game birds or non-game birds — do not care. They all depend on the same habitats, and so do the human-interest groups that care about birds. Whether over the barrel of a shotgun or through the lens of a spotting scope, our passions for birds are the same. From this, MoBCI can take considerable pride in the fact that it brokers meaningful partnerships that benefit all birds. Be proud, MoBCI members! 🦋



Photo by Dave Erickson

The author's grandson poses with his turkey harvested during the hunting season. Introducing youth to birds whether through hunting and/or birdwatching can instill a conservation ethic that lasts a lifetime.

MoBCI stands out as a unique organization that includes groups like the Columbia Audubon Society, members pictured here on a birding fieldtrip, and hunting organizations such as Ducks Unlimited.



Photo by Jon Rapp, courtesy of Columbia Audubon Society

How to Build a Meadow: Start With Building a Bird Blind

Sue Hagan

East Ozarks Audubon Society

East Ozarks Audubon Society (EOAS), a chapter of the National Audubon Society serving six rural Missouri counties centered around Farmington, is giving itself a pat on the back: we recently celebrated our 45th year as a chapter! As recipients of a MoBCI Community Conservation grant, we recently installed two sturdy interpretive panels at the site of the new meadow we are constructing. The meadow is part of our Dr. F. R. Crouch Nature Sanctuary, located within Engler Park, a large city park in Farmington, Missouri. If erecting a couple of signs doesn't sound like an ordeal, this installation has taken place across four decades. To quote Mark Twain, "The secret to getting ahead is getting started," so that's where I'll begin — the start of our nature sanctuary.

In 1983, our then-two year old Audubon chapter came up with a plan for a wildlife sanctuary on the outskirts of Farmington behind the city's sewage plant on Highway 67. Several members of the EOAS had regularly scouted the sewage plant and the adjacent area behind it for birds. The state owned that land: it had a creek, second-growth woods, old fields and dilapidated houses. In short, the lagoon and nearby woods was good habitat for many species (even if it wasn't especially scenic) and easy to access for a bit of birding at any time.

The City of Farmington and EOAS jointly approached the state legislature to transfer the property to the City, which was quickly approved, with the understanding that 15 acres would be managed as a nature sanctuary

by the EOAS. The formal dedication of the Dr. F. R. Crouch Nature Sanctuary was held in 1984. EOAS named its sanctuary for Dr. Crouch (d. 1979), a nature lover who inspired chapter founder Bob Lewis to form a birding group that would be part of National Audubon Society's broad conservation agenda: "You'd better get political if you want to have a place to watch birds in the future."

Over the next few years, members of EOAS worked to make the sanctuary friendly for visitors: we installed a short walking trail from a nearby parking lot that led to an array of bird feeders, and the first of three eventual bird blinds (Figure 1) that were constructed in the fall of 1992 — the most recent being a prefabricated model that was financed by a donation from a local business (the Centenne Corporation) which involved substantial planning, design and manual labor by members of EOAS as well as coordination with and assistance from the Farmington City Parks and Recreation Department.

Figure 1. The second bird blind.



Photo by Mick Surton



Figure 2. The first sanctuary sign.

In 2000, the Crouch Nature Sanctuary became part of the new 80-acre city park — Engler Park (Figure 2). The sanctuary has remained under EOAS management, but now the park harbors a nearby ball field, a lake, a children’s playground, paved roads, and pavilions and restroom facilities. A large walking/jogging/bicycling path surrounds our sanctuary. In short, as a result of Engler Park enveloping our sanctuary, we have a constant flow of visitors walking the trails around and within it, visiting the bird blind and, since 2012, visiting our butterfly garden.

2012 was the year EOAS lost one of its members, Lynn Winston. Lynn was a nature lover and a beginning birder when she joined EOAS just a few years prior to her passing. She was passionate about learning and photographing birds and her family wanted to construct a memorial butterfly garden within the Crouch Sanctuary: the proposal was approved by the EOAS Board with the stipulation that only native species would be planted.



Figure 3. Winston Butterfly Garden and Chimney Swift tower.

Many chapter members assisted in this new development, and a Chimney Swift tower with informational signs was added to the plans. Located near the entry to Engler Park in a large grassy area with a small parking lot at its base, the butterfly garden is a visual delight to all entering the park.

A formal garden like the Winston Butterfly Garden requires a fair amount of maintenance, and the chapter was fortunate when a relatively new member, Ann Blanchfield, stepped up to the task in 2016. In the course of her gardening work, she built strong ties with the City of Farmington personnel at all levels—park crews have helped with providing soil amendments, installing a water line that was extended to make it easy to keep the garden growing in droughty conditions, and providing heavy-duty equipment for various jobs. The Director of Parks has collaborated with EOAS when major changes have taken place, and at times even the City Council has become involved.

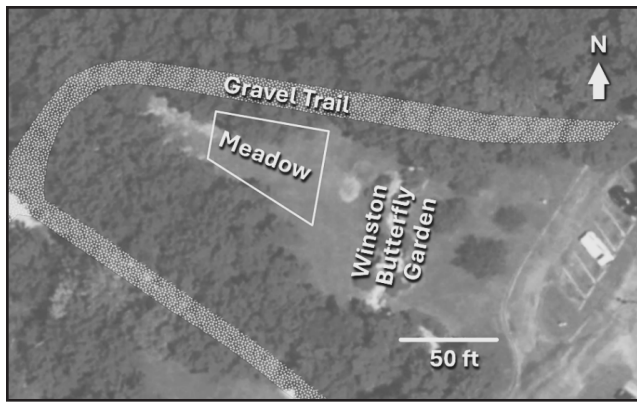


Figure 4. Map of the meadow project relative to the Winston Butterfly Garden in Engler Park.

The butterfly garden is the place where numerous beginner’s birding walks have started—a walk through the woods and a pause to watch the activity at the feeders has been eye-opener for many a classroom and scouting group (Figure 4). EOAS members spearheaded the use of the lawn space around the garden for two highly successful Pleine Aire art events. On most Earth Days (and periodically throughout the year) chapter members and interested community volunteers have come out to help Ann on “work days” — weeding the garden and a never-ending task of trying to subdue the rampant bush honeysuckle in our woods.

We are fortunate that another amazing woman, Linda Bennett, moved to our area several years ago. Linda was experienced in the benefits and joys of native plant gardening and she established a new chapter of Wild Ones, called the Wild Ones of Southeast Missouri. Not surprisingly, many of EOAS’s bird-loving members gravitated to a group promoting the use of native plants. After all, if you love birds, you want them to eat well, and that means a diet of chemical-free seeds, nuts and insects.

EOAS and Wild Ones were soon collaborating on various projects. Our groups

occasionally exchange speakers, our officers sometimes overlap, and a few years back we collaborated on a two-day fund raising tour of homes, businesses, schools and public places to showcase the beauty and value of native plant gardening.

Which finally brings me to why we are in the midst of constructing a meadow (technically referred to as a pollinator garden) adjacent to the butterfly garden. Isn’t one native plant garden sufficient? Why another so close?

Let me first emphasize that I—and our chapter and the many people who visit it throughout the year—love the beauty of the Winston Butterfly Garden. I also admire native plants wherever I see them like along a stream path, on the margins of a road, on an abandoned lot or in an intact natural community. These plants don’t get much attention except by bees and other insects that are attracted to these unkempt spots, but they also don’t require much care. A mow every year or two, or for the purists, perhaps a burn every four years will suffice. Wild Ones of Southeast Missouri includes several homeowners—my husband and I included—who are making efforts to convert old hayfields back to a more natural landscape. In short, there is beauty to be found in an unkempt garden.

So, it came to be that several of us—Audubon and Wild Ones members collectively—began discussing the notion of constructing a meadow at the Sanctuary. We wanted to heighten public awareness of the importance of native plants and insects as the basis for a functioning ecosystem and we wanted to emphasize that it isn’t necessary to have a formal, lush garden like our butterfly garden; after all, a few milkweeds along a fencerow may attract and feed Monarch butterflies.

EOAS and Wild Ones met with Kelvin Amonette, the Engler Park manager, to broach the idea with him. He was fine with the notion of us putting in a meadow, and he showed us a couple of sunny sites that could benefit from such an overhaul. We ended up selecting the large grassy area directly behind the butterfly garden, despite it being shadier than originally desired. We wanted an easily accessible location that could be visited frequently so it could serve as a means of informing the public about the value of native plants, especially their role in sustaining birds and other wildlife. As mentioned earlier, the City had extended the waterline and installed a water hydrant for our use by the butterfly garden, another benefit to this location. Finally, members agreed to illustrating the contrast between the stylized butterfly garden and a less-tended meadow as a backdrop--both are achievable for homeowners and both are desirable ways of managing a native plant garden. To each one's own garden.

A committee of volunteers formed to develop plans for how to proceed. The first step was to eradicate all existing grass and weeds followed by planting starts and seeds. It was planned to purchase native pollinator

Figure 5. Permanent interpretive panel recently installed at the meadow.

Photo by Sue Hagan



seeds and volunteers would nurture seedlings that they obtained from their own gardens. The boundary of the meadow was marked off and the first herbicide killing of the fescue grass took place in the summer 2024. Small signs were installed to explain to the public the purpose of the dying fescue. Parks and Recreation ceased mowing operations in the area.

During late summer of 2024 EOAS learned that MoBCI provided grants for Community Conservation outreach projects. With a fast-approaching deadline for submitting a grant request, committee members quickly agreed that the meadow would benefit from well-designed permanent interpretive panels about the benefits of native plants to birds. In September of 2025, we submitted our grant request for \$2,500. Several months later we learned that EOAS was awarded the Community Conservation grant. We formed another committee to design and write text for the panels. Some on the committee had expertise in artwork, some in community education, and everyone in the chapter recognized the importance of encouraging the public to use native plants at home. There are two panels, one on permanent display and the other is a seasonally rotating series of six panels that change every two months (Figures 5 & 6).

Figure 6. One of the six rotating signs.

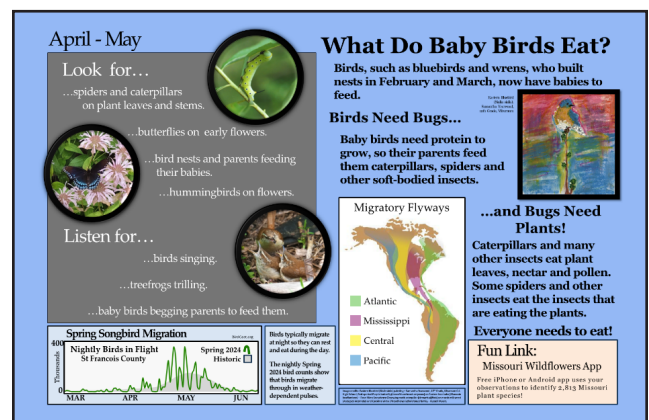




Figure 7. Celebrating the new signs, members of EOAS and Southeast Missouri Wild Ones, and the Farmington Director of Parks and Recreation came out to the installation day.

We also wanted to name the meadow. As mentioned earlier, the sanctuary is named in honor of Dr. Crouch, the trail that traverses the woodland is named in honor of Bob Lewis, and the butterfly garden honors Lynn Winston. As the meadow is a close collaborative effort of two groups, we settled on honoring the two women who had been the inspiration for the meadow: Anne Blanchfield of EOAS who has tended the butterfly garden for over a decade, and Linda Bennett who brought Wild Ones of Southeast Missouri to our region: it is now called the Bennett-Blanchfield Meadow.

In October 2025, we planted 470 donated plants representing 42 species. For much of the previous year, many people involved in Wild Ones and EOAS sowed and nurtured these native plants for the meadow and the task of planting all those seedlings was daunting as the claypan soils did not easily

yield to digging holes. The soil shoveled from each of the holes was mixed with potting soil, each plant was carefully placed in its hole, the soil mixture was added, and the plant watered. The weather was unseasonably dry but moderate and to help the new plants establish, we took advantage of the water hydrant the city installed.

Over the winter, we finalized the design of the interpretive panels that were made available through the MoBCI grant. Though we exceeded the original cost estimate and the amount of the grant, the final result was worth the added expense. The Parks and Recreation crew once again assisted by drilling the holes for the metal sign bases. Our volunteers—retirees from construction, mining, and business who seem to have a knack for hands-on laborious work- cemented the frames in the ground.



Figure 8. Bob Lewis, chapter founder.

On April 1, 2026 we hosted a celebratory event to insert the panels into the frames. 17 people came for the “Celebration of the Signs” installation day including members of both EOAS and Wild Ones of Southeast Missouri. Allison Vaughn served as the MoBCI representative and Lainee Gault, Director of the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department, joined the group and was acknowledged for all of the assistance the city has provided for the sanctuary through the years (Figure 7).

The meadow will develop through time as most reconstructions do, with the first growing season serving as the time for plants to grow deep roots. Already the meadow is drawing attention from park visitors; it is our hope that with the installation of the interpretive panels and the great care that we will continue to provide for the reconstruction, visitors will be inspired to include native

plants in their own urban yards—a patch of milkweed for the butterflies, fall-blooming asters for bees, or cardinal flowers to draw in Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds.

From the founding of East Ozarks Audubon Society in 1981, our guiding mission through the years is to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats: *We’re not just for the birds!* Our motto implies that we care about all of nature, all of wildlife, and indeed, through the years we have proudly provided public comment on multiple environmental issues. Collaboration between non-profit organizations and government entities has proven a key facet of accomplishing feats to support biodiversity. Without the countless donations of time, money and labor, the sanctuary would not exist. And just in case you’re wondering what’s next on our agenda for the Crouch Nature Sanctuary, we’re kicking around the notion of adding a bubbler... how’s that for a refreshing idea! 🐦

Special thanks for help in writing this to Ann Blanchfield, Diane Dickerson, Norma Fraser, Russell Meyers, Rose Mier, Michael Sutton and Kathy Wann for their contributions to the article. Also, thanks to the City of Farmington who has served as our partner for more than forty years, and especially thanks to Kevin Ammonetto (Maintenance Manager) and Lainee Gault (Director) of Farmington Parks and Recreation for their assistance in the planning and construction of the meadow. More than two generations of people have been instrumental in the Crouch Nature Sanctuary’s history, but one person in particular has been the “spark birder” for it all. Fond remembrance and gratitude goes to Bob Lewis without whose passion for birds and conservation none of this would exist (Figure 8).

A Biologist's Birding Adventure in Mark Twain National Forest

Justan Blair

Wildlife Biologist, Mark Twain National Forest



The chance to conduct some birding as part of my job does not happen all the time, but I thoroughly enjoy it when it does. I hope sharing this experience will encourage more people to travel over the initial hurdles to get out and enjoy birding on public lands.

My day began well before daylight. To be in the right position at the right time to experience the first surge of avian songs, known as the “dawn chorus” by birders, I needed to be at a good listening site thirty minutes before sunrise. I say “listening” and not “watching” because much of birding is listening for the bird before knowing where to look for the bird. Birds sing unique identifying songs. Experienced birders know these songs and can recognize birds without ever seeing them. Much of the bird population research is accomplished by listening to the sounds alone, without ever seeing the bird or having one in hand. I began my career as a biologist conducting this kind of bird research, so I have a good dictionary of bird songs in my head; but don't be concerned if you are just beginning birding because there are now many great mobile apps one can download that identifies birds by sound.

Getting Prepared

To claim this trip began before sunrise is not exactly true. A successful birding excursion depends heavily on planning and equipment: “Previous prior planning prevents poor passerine pursuit.” I began preparing for this day weeks ago, checking local weather

forecasts and bird migration status updates. Gathering information such as potential location, site conditions and weather conditions is imperative. When surveying migratory birds, timing and conditions truly matter.

Possessing the right equipment will also make a world of difference. One will not capably focus on a first-ever Rose-breasted Grosbeak through the binoculars that your great-grandfather brought back from WWII. Also, do not underestimate the importance of appropriate footwear. Hiking up and down the steep slopes of the Missouri Ozarks is less than pleasant if one is more worried about the blisters forming than securing a glimpse of the cup-shaped nest of the Worm-eating Warbler hanging delicately from the lower branches of an understory tree. To reiterate, equipment matters and having the correct—and reliable—equipment will make your experience better. I usually make a list during the preparation of the equipment and other items that I choose to bring with me on a birding day.

Getting Onsite

For this outing, I had chosen Hanks Field, a 100-acre portion of the Mark Twain National Forest east of Paddy Creek Wilderness Area upon which to focus my efforts. Hank's Field is a mixture of upland hardwood forest, remnant hayfields/pastures and wooded bottomlands. All of this is bordered by the Big Piney River to the east. My reasoning for choosing Hanks Field is twofold: first, there

are multiple ecosystems, creating greater chances of seeing a wider variety of birds. Secondly, I needed to check on a recent planting of native habitat. I had recently teamed up with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) to restore the pastures and hayfields in the area to encourage native forbs and grasses. Promoting natural habitats benefits native bird species and curtails the spread of the invasive exotic species, which otherwise overwhelms the area.

Hanks Field is twenty-five minutes W/NW of Licking, Missouri, north of Hwy 32, east off Paddy Creek Rd on FS Rd 215. There is no mention of “Hanks Field” on any maps—it does not appear in Google Maps, the turn-off is unmarked, and the roads are not numbered. The best way to get there is to have already been there. In my case, between contractor visits, hunter surveys, prescribed burns, brush hogging and seeding, I have traveled to Hanks Field frequently in the past two years. Figuratively speaking, I could navigate the approach virtually blindfolded, which is beneficial, because it was still before daybreak as I rolled up to the small gravel parking lot at the terminus of the navigable portion of FS Rd 215. From that gravel pull out, I was on foot. An old roadbed leads to the open fields. But, first things first, I donned my headlamp because the old roadbed is littered with rocks the size of softballs: the road is a twisted ankle minefield. I cannot overemphasize the importance of wearing good footwear during birding adventures on the Forest. With a good pair of boots and wool socks, one’s feet will tire less, offering the ability to stay in the field longer which leads to more opportunities to see birds. Together, this ultimately makes the overall experience more enjoyable.

I walked down the road in the dark and navigated my way through the field to a high point on the western edge of the field with my back to the wooded hillside. Field edges are a great place to bird. Birds love edge habitat, areas that are neither exclusively forest nor open lands. This field edge at Hanks Field is thick with understory shrubs, small trees and blackberry vines. The edge habitat provides concealment from predators, nesting opportunities and an ample food supply. From that location, I was able to hear most bird calls from the field as well as a good portion of the forest birds behind me.

Habitat Restoration Work Paying Off

I waited patiently in the dark, enjoying the last of the night sounds. The owls and the Eastern Whip-poor-wills finally ceased calling, secretly retreating to their respective roosts to wait for the next nightfall. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, it grew lighter. I noticed I saw fewer and fewer stars as the eastern sky began to brighten.

Long before the sun actually broke the horizon, the birds began their dawn chorus. First, one Northern Cardinal called from the wood line, then another. They responded to one another endlessly, securing their respective territories with each tone, chirp, and call. Their songs are so incessant that soon they did not even register in my brain as I tuned them out and listened for other bird calls. Then, off in the distance, I heard a call that I have been waiting for, the gobble of a male Wild Turkey. NWTF has been instrumental in transforming Hanks Field into suitable habitat for birds. We purposefully chose a seed mix beneficial to turkeys. I wanted to be able to report back to the NWTF Biologist that the efforts are successful, that turkeys are indeed using the area. Later that morning, I accidentally spooked a group of hens while evaluating the field conditions.

As if on cue, prompted by the first bird's boldness, the tom turkeys began calling from their nightly roosts, announcing their presence to the world (Figure 1). I was filled with excitement as I listened to the cacophony of gobbles sounding from the ridges surrounding Hanks Field. This is the result we worked towards!

Results like this are the product of many years of successful land management, not just the land clearing and seeding that NWTF and Mark Twain National Forest have conducted during the past two years. Appropriately managing woodlands for so long, coupled with periodic prescribed fires, as well as the benefit of three recent good hatch years for turkeys, these birds are back where they belong. I can report back to the NWTF Biologist that we are on the right track!

Let The Birding Begin!

As dawn progressed, Hanks Field sprang to life. Birds called from all different directions. The Eastern Meadowlark was among the first that I heard. Their "spring-of-the-year" song is easy to recognize; they prefer open habitat, which makes them easy to see. One of the first neotropical migrants that arrive after winter, they serve as an early indicator of springtime's arrival. I then heard the "tee-tee-tsi-tsi-chi-chi-chew-chew" of the Indigo Bunting before I spotted it flitting among the brush along the road. The males like to show off their bright blue bodies by contrasting it to the white gravel found in many of our Missouri roadways. I heard the "kook-kook-kee" of the Yellow-breasted Chat as I watched a bird light on a branch in a pocket of an American plum thicket. It was too far away for visual confirmation, but the song, combined with the location provided enough information for a positive identification. Yellow-breasted Chats are



Missouri Department of Conservation file photo by Neppadol Paethong

Habitat restoration efforts on the Mark Twain National Forest, in collaboration with the National Wild Turkey Federation, has resulted in a resurgence in turkey populations at Hanks Field. These three gobblers lined up perfectly in restored autumn woodlands.

early successional birds that nest in thick, dense cover, which is another reason during the restoration to encourage pockets of thick cover like the plum thicket as a benefit to grassland-shrubland birds like the chat and Blue-winged Warbler.


Birds, like all animals, prefer certain different habitats. What is good for one bird is not necessarily what is good for another. The Eastern Meadowlark, for example, will nest in the grassland, while the chat nests in the edge thickets. Conversely, the Ovenbird builds its nest in the leaf litter on the forest floor, while the Cerulean Warbler chooses to occupy the high crown perches of the forest canopy. For each habitat type present throughout the state, a bird exists that calls it home at some point during its life history. Knowing where

to look is just as important as knowing all the distinguishing marks on a bird.

I stayed there for an hour or so. As the dawn chorus faded and the day began in earnest, fewer and fewer birds called. I took note of a few more birds as time passed. This was a great start for the year; but it was still early for full migration. As May progresses, the flood of neotropical migrants will begin to arrive.

Finishing Up

I headed back to the truck, satisfied with my visit. I was very excited to have witnessed the positive results of the NWTF/MTNF habitat improvement work. The rest of my day was spent back in the office, focusing on emails, phone calls and Zoom meetings. But while the rest of the world slept, I experienced the Mark Twain National Forest as few ever do. I experienced it as a birder. It was the type of day that every Forest Biologist looks

forward to and remembers as they go about the important work to help manage national forest system lands. 

I was lucky to have conducted this birding adventure as part of my job, as part of monitoring the restoration activities we accomplished. If you want to emulate this outing as part of your own adventure, here are some items I suggest you bring along:

- a small backpack for all the gear
- a good pair of binoculars
- a small write-in-the-rain notebook
- reusable water bottle and an extra/bigger water bottle that stays in the car
- bug spray
- sturdy shoes and wool socks
- a hat with a brim, UV protectant, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt
- snacks
- a First Aid kit
- a field guide to Missouri birds
- and one or more bird of identification apps downloaded to a mobile phone

Mark Twain National Forest Birding Opportunities

U.S. Forest Service

Press Release



Mark Twain National Forest is launching a forest-wide initiative to expand safe, beginner-friendly birding opportunities across all eleven units of its six Ranger Districts. The campaign connects visitors to Missouri's diverse birdlife, highlights the role of active forest management, and strengthens coordination with conservation partners.

The focus will be on developing a webpage on our site that will highlight areas with excellent birding opportunities (and links to places

where visitors can find more information), and highlight these opportunities via social media, news release, and partner connections.

Missouri's forests host over 400 bird species, and birdwatching continues to grow as a pathway to conservation awareness and community engagement. This campaign uses accessible birding sites, community science, and collaborative outreach to connect people with healthy habitats and the agencies that care for them.

Campaign Goals

- Expand public participation in birding on the Forest
- Demonstrate how prescribed fire, thinning, and glade/woodland restoration improve habitat quality.
- Strengthen collaboration with MDC, Audubon, World Bird Sanctuary, eBird, and Missouri tourism networks.
- Encourage participation in eBird, Christmas Bird Counts (CBC), and awareness of Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) monitoring.
- Share conservation success stories such as Brown-headed Nuthatch recovery and maintaining strong Whip-poor-will populations.

Key Components

Highlighted Birding Sites Across All Units

Each Ranger District will feature one or more locations selected for:

- Easy access and clear trail conditions
- Reliable species presence (supported by eBird, CBC, BBS)
- Visible habitat restoration work
- Seasonal diversity and photogenic habitat
- Potential for ADA-accessible options
- Examples include Glade Top Trail, Greer Spring Trail, Turner Mill, and Paddy Creek Campground—some of the Forest’s most active eBird hotspots.

New “Birding on Mark Twain” Web Hub

The webpage will centralize:

- Maps, site profiles, accessibility notes
- BirdCast live migration tools and MDC migration resources
- Ethics guidance (no nest disturbance, respectful playback, seasonal cautions)
- Management stories (Nuthatch restoration, Whip-poor-will habitat)


- Safety info (hunting seasons, weather, closures)
- Printable beginner checklists

Strengthened Partner Coordination

Partners play a central role in validating sites, sharing expertise, and amplifying outreach. A few of the partner connections we hope to maintain and build through this campaign include:

- Missouri Department of Conservation—seasonal input, co-branded materials, 50 years of Natural Areas, help share and promote Missouri Birding Challenge
 - Audubon chapters—CBC overlap, BBS insights, joint field opportunities
 - MoBCI—shared outreach and alignment with statewide conservation goals
 - St. Louis World Bird Sanctuary—educational content support
 - Cornell Lab/eBird—resource integration
 - Tourism networks—especially along the Route 66 Centennial corridor
- Communications & Public Outreach
- A Forest-wide launch announcement
 - Social media features for each Ranger District (#BirdMarkTwain)
 - Cross-promotion with World Migratory Bird Day, CBC, Missouri Birding Challenge, and local tourism events
 - Optional partner-supported events such as biologist-led bird walks

The Forest looks forward to using this birding promotional campaign as a unified platform to highlight Missouri’s bird conservation efforts and collaborate through shared messaging.

Birds in Missouri have many stories to tell about how habitat management and partnerships can support species recovery. 

Missouri Momentum: Recent Progress from Quail Forever

Will Robinson

Biologist, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever




Across Missouri, the work of Quail Forever continues to build steady momentum, measured not only in acres, but in relationships, shared knowledge, and real progress on the ground.

Since July 2025, the Missouri Farm Bill Biologist team made 2,490 landowner contacts and conducted 2,282 site visits across the state. Each of these conversations and visits represents more than a number, they reflect time spent walking properties, listening to goals, and working side-by-side with landowners to create practical, lasting improvements. Through this hands-on approach, the team provided targeted technical guidance and planning support that contributed to work on an impressive 48,920.15 acres.

These efforts are rooted in a simple idea: meaningful change happens when people are supported with the right tools and information. Whether discussing management options in the office or evaluating conditions in the field, biologists are helping Missourians navigate available programs and make informed decisions that benefit both their land and long-term goals.

Just as important as one-on-one work is the opportunity to bring people together. During this reporting period, the team connected with 6,948 participants across 81 events, offering a range of opportunities to learn, ask questions, and see practices in action. These events included workshops, field tours, landowner meetings, and community outreach efforts that are each designed to provide practical, applicable knowledge in a setting that encourages conversation and connection.

From small group discussions to larger regional events, these gatherings continue to

strengthen local networks and expand awareness of conservation opportunities. They also create space for landowners and producers to learn from one another, building confidence and momentum that extends well beyond a single event. Together, these accomplishments highlight a growing impact across Missouri. By combining individualized support with broader outreach, Quail Forever is helping turn interest into action one conversation, one visit, and one acre at a time. 

Woody removal can be beneficial to help restore woodlands in Missouri to help biodiversity. Here, a Quail Forever stewardship crew member works to thin woodlands as part of a stewardship project.



File photos courtesy of Quail Forever

Prescribed fire on native grasslands is integral to keeping these natural communities healthy. This fire on Blazing Prairie Conservation Area (MDC) located in the Grand River Grasslands region is racing into the black. Note how fireline preparation protected the historic wooden sign.



National Wild Turkey Federation's Northern Missouri Grand Turkey Plan

John Burk

Senior Regional Biologist, National Wild Turkey Federation



It doesn't seem like it was twelve years ago that I submitted an article to this newsletter about the collaborative work that the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) was accomplishing primarily in northeast Missouri in partnership with the USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and Bass Pro Shops. This article is a follow-up to [that one](#)¹.

Oak savanna, which was once prevalent in the Midwest, has been reduced to just 0.02 percent of its original acreage. It was estimated to cover around 32 million acres in the Midwest prior to European settlement. Savannas and open oak woodlands provide vital habitat to a broad range of native plants and animals and their conservation is important to federal, state, and conservation organizations, as well as to private landowners. From the rare dwarf chestnut oak to the Eastern tiger salamander, the conservation and restoration of savannas and woodlands are critical to the survival of a wide swath of native species in Missouri.

In terms of bird conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Partners in Flight and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) have all identified restoration of savanna and open woodland habitats as a priority for rare and declining songbirds. Eastern Kingbird, Brown Thrasher, Field Sparrow, Red-headed Woodpecker, Baltimore Oriole, and Northern Bobwhite

1. MoBCI Newsletter, Volume 11, 2015. Retrieved from <https://mobci.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/missouri-bird-conservation-newsletter-2015-v4.pdf>

Quail are all bird species of conservation concern, and they all have some of the highest populations densities occurring in oak savanna and open woodland habitats.

These natural communities are also excellent for Wild Turkeys, which tend to live simultaneously at opposite ends of the successional scale. Turkeys need mature trees for roosting, trees to provide thermal and escape cover, as well as highly preferred food sources such as acorns (hard mast) and leaf buds, catkins, and berries (soft mast). But turkeys also must have access to high quality early successional grassland habitat for nesting and brood-rearing—ideally knee-high native grasses and forbs (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Wild Turkey depends on woodlands and savannas for roost spots. Here a hen and her poults line up together on a mature oak branch in a woodland.

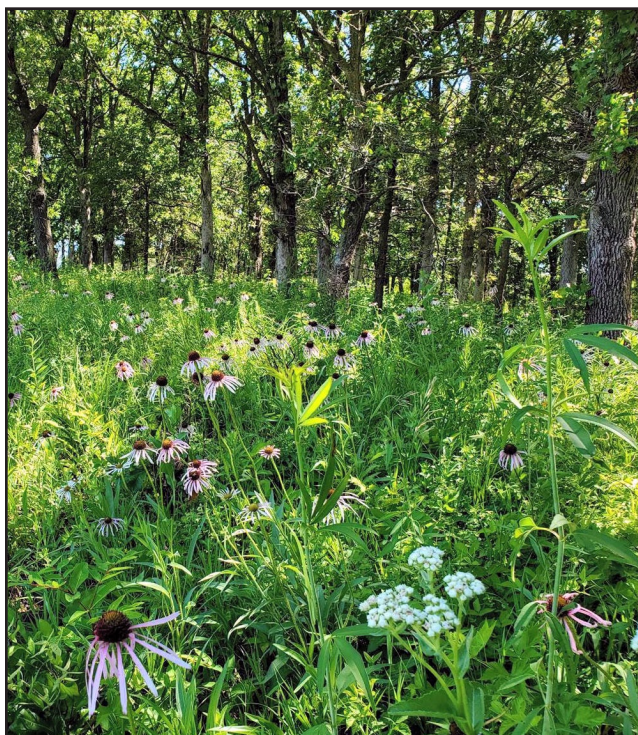


Photo by Craig Kuchennmeister / NWTF

Contemporary turkey research scholar, Dr. Michael Chamberlain, has reported that the Eastern Wild Turkey, the subspecies in Missouri and occupies most of the eastern United States, has declined by an average of 18% since the high-water mark established in the early 2000's. Of course, averages being averages, it isn't 18% evenly across the birds' range. In some areas, like the upper Midwest and portions of the northeast, turkey numbers are still on the increase, whereas in places like north Missouri, populations have declined by as much as half. Telemetry research conducted in the early 2010s identified poor poults survival as the primary reason for the decline, and quality nesting habitat in close proximity to quality early brood range as the solution. This has been the impetus for our ongoing work on private lands in northern Missouri.

Figure 2. Restoring woodlands and savannas is key to bringing back many suites of plants and animals dependent on these ecosystems for some part of their life histories. This restored woodland shows the promise of restoration with a rich grass-forb layer of little bluestem and pale purple coneflowers

Photo courtesy of Roeslein Alternative Energy



Open woodlands and savannas provide this ideal vegetative structure critical to improving nesting success and poult survival.

Savanna and open woodlands are ideal habitat for turkeys, especially in the Midwest, where creating other forms of nesting and brood-rearing habitats may require significant sacrifice from private landowners (Figure 2). Traditional cool-season pastures and row crops do not provide nesting and brood-rearing habitats because the pastures are too thick and the crops don't have adequate insect densities to feed growing baby birds. In most cases, restoring ideal habitat in forested areas in northern Missouri is just a matter of removing trees and shrubs from degraded woodland and savanna to open the stand back up. Once sunlight hits the savanna or woodland floor, the seeds of dormant native vegetation that provides cover and associated insects are already there, waiting to germinate. There is no need to sacrifice cropland or pastures to create turkey habitat under this scenario. Open woodlands may even be better habitat than savannas because the trees provide an added layer of cover that may deter some avian predators that are not as adept at flying through an obstacle course, and trees also limit how far predators can see prey.

In 2006, the collective conservation community in Missouri selected both the Union Ridge and the Thousand Hills Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) in northeastern Missouri as two of the most important areas in the state in which to conduct collaborative conservation. Oak savanna and open oak woodland restoration were prioritized as habitat goals for both of these areas. These COAs have historically, and collectively, supported one of the highest turkey population densities on the

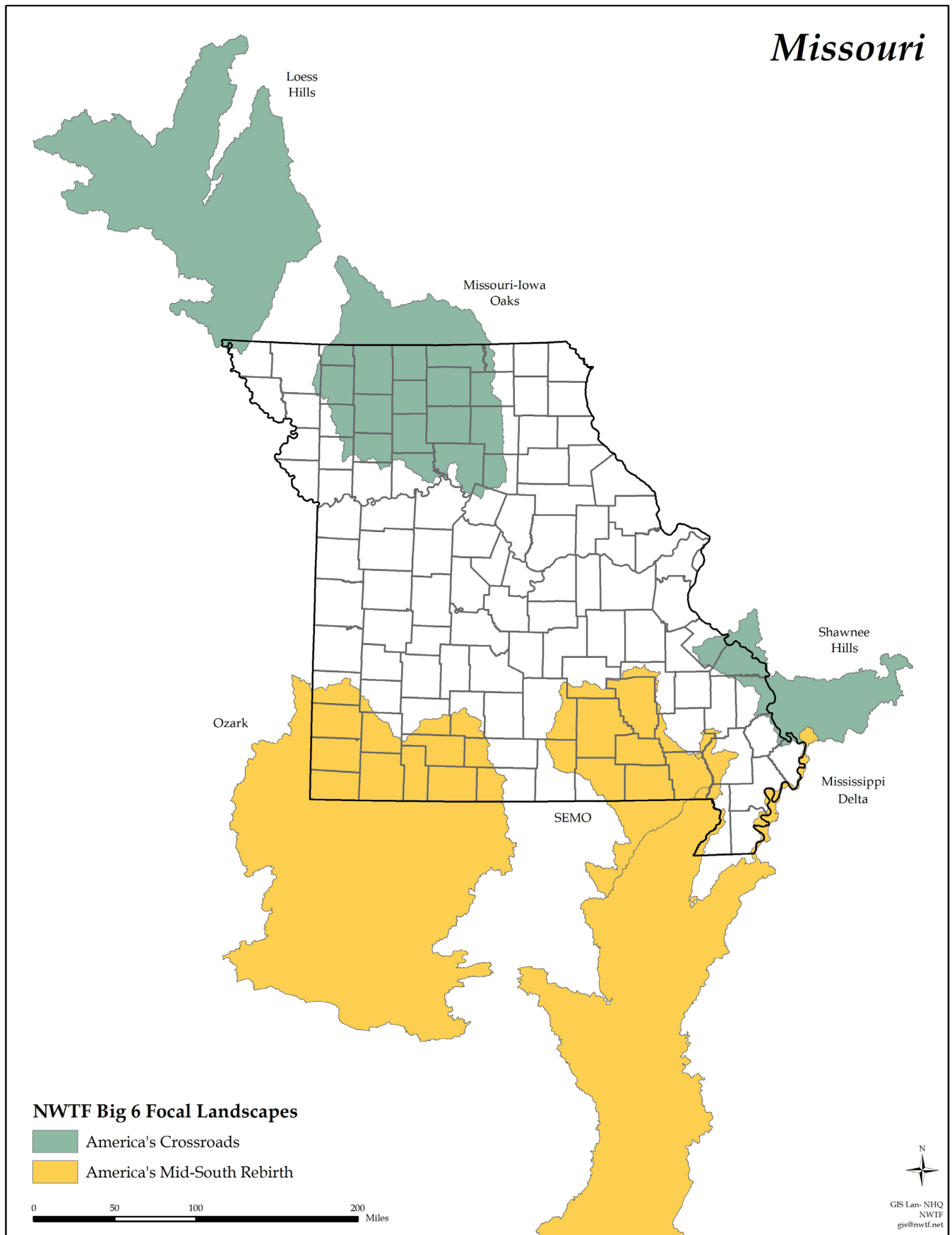


Figure 3. NWTF Focus area map spanning regions and states with the most recent focus for ecosystem restoration in north Missouri around the Thousand Hills and Union Ridge conservation opportunity areas.

globe. However, between 2005 and 2010, as previously stated, it declined by more than 40 percent. Much of the decline was attributed to successive years of poor reproduction due to unfavorable weather conditions. Heavy rainfall during nesting and hatching can be disastrous for ground nesting birds, even when habitat conditions are good. Nonetheless, the turkey decline was seen as an opportunity to accomplish good conservation work by targeting a specific area and creating excellent habitat for when more favorable weather conditions returned.

This opportunity also fit well with the NWTF strategic plan for Missouri (Figure 3). Under its 2008 North American Wild Turkey Management Plan, the NWTF identified the following priorities: “increasing forest management, prescribed burning, and native warm season grass (NWSG) establishment.” Goals of the NWTF’s next national “Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt” initiative included conserving 4 million acres of habitat, creating 1.5 million new hunters, and establishing access to 500,000 additional acres to hunting nationally. Each state involved in the initiative achieved a portion and the overall goal by using a focused approach with three to four focal landscapes driving delivery of the 4 million acre goal achievement. The open woodland and savanna region in northeastern Missouri was one of these focal landscapes.

The challenge was that the majority of the region is in private ownership. Nearly 93 percent of the land in Missouri is privately owned, and managing land for conservation can be expensive. Therefore, significant habitat enhancement on private lands usually does not occur without cost-share funding from state, federal, or private sources to offset implementation costs. In 2009, the

NWTF initiated a project within the Union Ridge and Thousand Hills COAs. The NWTF’s dollars were matched with an MDC Bobwhite Quail Challenge Grant (now known as Habitat Challenge Grant or HCG). Through HCGs, MDC matches NGO partners 1:1 to offer private landowners cost-share funding for practices that are considered “quail friendly” and, in our case, the focus was on implementing prescribed fire, timber thinning, and converting cool-season pasture to native warm season grasses (NWSG).

The initial impact of this effort enabled six landowners to complete more than 100 acres of timber stand improvement (TSI), more than 34 acres of burning, and more than seven acres of native warm-season grass plantings. From this humble beginning, the effort blossomed in 2010, when other partners (USFWS Missouri and Iowa Private Lands Offices, Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance (SIOSA), Audubon Society of Missouri (now the Missouri Birding Society) and the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative (MoBCI) expressed interest in what was being done and officially met to discuss expansion and define a larger landscape. The result was a collaborative Missouri/Iowa Initiative encompassing roughly 800,000 acres of restorable open woodland and savanna acres within the landscape.

In 2011, 29 Missouri landowners received an additional \$80,000 from initiative partners to implement 310 acres of TSI, 305 acres of prescribed burning, 33 acres of heavy woody cover control, 39 acres of fescue eradication, and 17 acres of native warm-season grass plantings. An additional \$20,000 MoBCI grant was utilized by 11 landowners to impact 102 acres of TSI, 98 acres of prescribed fire, and 33 acres of fescue eradication in 2012.

The goal of the NWTF and its partners when the original article was written 12 years ago was to restore 4,000 acres of this landscape in Missouri over the next 10 years. Since the initiation of this project, \$470,000 provided cost share assistance to 151 private parcels accomplishing 3,402 acres of prescribed burning, 2,191 acres of timber stand improvement, 270 acres of native warm season grass establishment, 231 acres of woody cover control, and 7 acres of invasive species treatment for a total of 6,101 acres conserved.

Restoration efforts improve habitat for savanna and woodland-dependent plant species, which in turn support countless invertebrates and other animals. The resulting vegetative structure from restoration projects provides ideal turkey nesting and brood-rearing habitat, as well as vital habitat for many declining songbirds of conservation concern. It is impossible to accurately measure the actual influence of the 89 open woodland units averaging 19 acres each resulting from our work that are currently scattered throughout the initiative landscape in terms of additional birds produced and there are a multitude of factors influencing turkey population dynamics. However, harvest is an excellent indicator of turkey abundance and we'd like to think that our collaborative efforts over the years had something to do with the clear trend reflected in Table 1.

The NWTF and our partners plan to continue this work. In fact, the \$100,000 Habitat Challenge Grant (HCG) for fiscal 2026 is in its final days and 27 landowners were able to achieve an additional 1,066 acres of prescribed burning, 441 acres of

County	Year	
	2015	2026
Adair	347	788
Putnam	407	721
Schuyler	195	340
Scotland	296	387
Sullivan	390	835
Total	1635	3,071

Table 1. Spring turkey harvest in counties where project work was completed in 2015 vs. 2026.

TSI, 13 acres of NWSG establishment, and 5 acres of woody cover control. The NWTF and USFWS have an additional \$200,000 available over the next 4 years secured through an agreement. The NWTF plans to apply for HCG grants through MDC annually, which, if successful, will enable another \$400,000 worth of private lands cost-share work to be completed in this important landscape over the next 4 years.

In addition, the NWTF launched a new initiative, Roots to Roost, which will encompass most of the Midwest. This new initiative will focus on the importance of managing private lands and include a heavy emphasis on research while providing a strong education and outreach component. If you are interested in learning more about the restoration of this important landscape, visit [Roots to Roost](#)² on the NWTF website. If you are interested in becoming more involved, contact a [NWTF Missouri staff member](#)³, MDC Northeast Region Private Lands Services at (660) 785-2424, or the USFWS Missouri Private Lands Office at (573) 234-2132. 🦃

2. <https://www.nwtf.org/programs/roots-to-roost>

3. https://nwtf.org/in_your_state/regional_directors.php

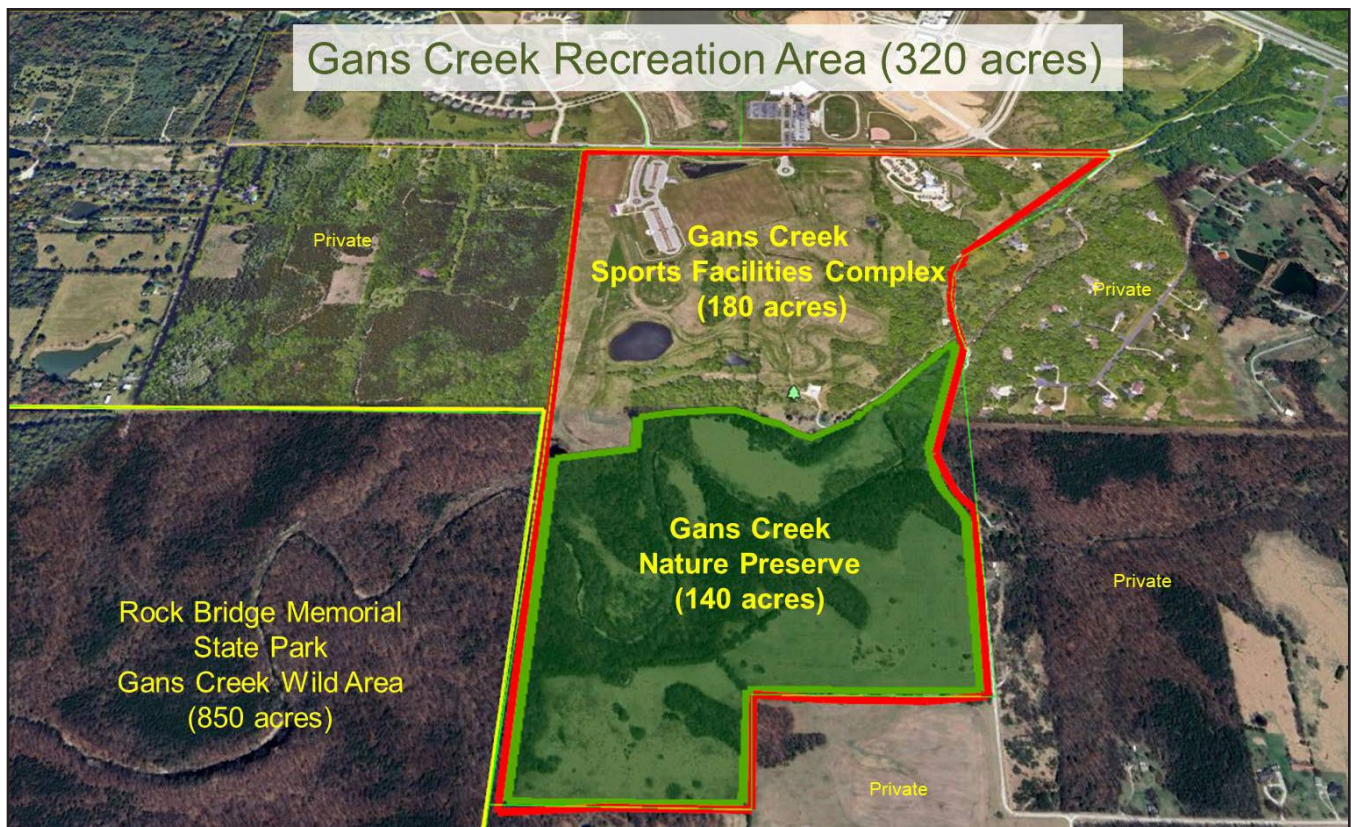


Figure 1. The proximity of the area to the Gans Creek Wild Area, a designation at Rock Bridge Memorial SP that prohibits bicycles, poses a direct threat to the integrity of the area

Gans Creek: A Nature Preserve at a Crossroads

David Diamond

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Mike Currier

Retired Resource Steward and Community Ecologist, Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Background

In the past 18 months, a conflict arose regarding the appropriateness of proposed mountain bike trails in Columbia's Gans Creek Recreation Areas (GCRA). Mountain biking started in Marin County, California in the 1960s and 1970s as an adventure sport with an 'outlaw' flavor. Ironically, or perhaps prophetically, mountain bikes are now banned from most single-track trails in Marin County due to the environmental damage caused on existing and on new, unsanctioned trails, and because of conflicts with other users

including hikers and equestrian users. The popularity of cycling in general has continued to grow over the decades, but single-track users are generally considered well below 5% of all cyclists. In Columbia, the outlaw flavor associated with mountain biking is apparent in the Facebook group where many mountain bikers post information: The Columbia Dirtbags - MTB crew.

In response to conflicts with other users and a desire to increase the availability of bike-friendly backcountry trails, a vocal moun-

tain biking contingent has developed since the 1980s. Major industry groups such as SRAM, Shimano, Trek, and Subaru of America, together with local member organizations and individual donors, fund local advocacy efforts. For example, the Walton Family Foundation invested more than \$74 million in northwest Arkansas between 2008 and 2018 to develop biking infrastructure. Tourism interests have applauded this investment.

Case Study: Gans Creek Recreation Area

Gans Creek Recreation Area is one of the more ecologically integrated urban-edge conservation landscapes in central Missouri, linking interior forest, riparian systems, floodplain processes, karst geology, and sensitive breeding fauna into a contiguous habitat adjoining a major interior forest core. It includes a Great Blue Heron rookery and a cave in which Tri-colored Bats, a candidate for federal listing, have been observed.

In the early planning documents of the City of Columbia Parks and Recreation Department, the southern part of GCRA was identified as a “nature preservation area.” Initially, the plan was to manage it as such, recognizing the significance of the riparian corridor and its nearly half-mile shared boundary with Gans Creek Wild Area, a state park designation that sets aside land for the protection of wilderness values above all else. In later plans, the “nature preservation area” was omitted, and City plans sought to convert the area into a dense network of mountain bike trails that could accommodate competitions.

Columbia Parks and Recreation staff strongly supported the development of mountain bike trails at GCRA in its 2024 Master Development Plan. Bike advocates pledged

substantial funds and labor to help endow the trails. To date, about 6 miles of trail have been completed. However, trails on the south side of Gans Creek at GCRA were opposed by local conservation groups, and development there has been postponed for now. This area, often referred to as the potential Gans Creek Nature Preserve, has connectivity with Gans Creek Wild Area in Rock Bridge Memorial State Park (RBMSP). It is ecologically valuable as a diffuse buffer supporting forest interior bird populations in the state designated wild area, and presumably other wildlife. RBMSP falls within the Central Missouri Hills Important Bird Area (IBA) designated by the National Audubon Society.

Important Bird Areas are part of an international program, with the American Bird Conservancy and the National Audubon Society administering the program in the United States. An IBA is defined as an area or geography that supports species of conservation concern, congregations of birds (e.g. waterfowl) or landscape-scale mosaics that feature a range of habitats including large blocks of interior forest habitat. IBAs are designated after careful consideration of data collected through breeding bird surveys and by experienced ornithologists to determine areas that have both the species presence and habitat characteristics worthy of designation. The Central Missouri Hills Important Bird Area (southern Boone County) was designated in the early 2000’s recognizing habitats supporting a diverse array of birds including forest interior species. It includes a roughly 20,000 acres area including the Cedar Creek Ranger District of the Mark Twain National Forest, Rock Bridge Memorial State Park, and Three Creeks Conservation Area.

RBMSM is acknowledged as a ‘hotspot’ for birding. eBird, the web database managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is a citizen science platform for bird occurrence data useful for research, conservation and educational purposes. The online bird checklist program in state parks powered by the Missouri Birding Society, SPARKS, mines data from eBird to generate bird checklists. RBMSM ranks high in the number of bird species, 208 documented species as of November 2025. Furthermore, the park supports reproducing populations of interior forest species such as Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, Worm-eating Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanager and Kentucky Warbler. These species require relatively large blocks of interior forest habitat to successfully reproduce. They are sensitive to habitat degradation as occurs with the proliferation of invasive exotic species and habitat fragmentation including trail development which reduces the effective core habitat.

In 2007, just around the time when the Central Missouri Hills IBA was designated, the City of Columbia purchased the Crane Tract (320 acres), now officially named the Gans Creek Recreation Area. The City of Columbia requested a study of the southern half of the Crane Tract which was conducted by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. That study identified upland and bottomland woodlands, cave and karst features, limestone cliffs, an ecologically significant riparian corridor and old bottomland and upland fields – a heterogeneous mosaic of habitats. Gans Creek flows through GCRA as it winds its way into Rock Bridge Memorial State Park where it is officially designated as an Outstanding State Resource Water.

Bird occurrence and survey data from eBird provides an overview of habitat characteristics for Gans Creek Wild Area and Gans Creek Recreation Area (Table 1).

Gans Creek Wild Area in RBMSM functions as a mature interior forest system, a

Table 1. Comparison of the ecological attributes of Gans Creek Wild Area (DNR) and the Gans Creek Recreation Area (City of Columbia Parks & Recreation). The proposed Gans Creek Nature Preserve occupies the southern part of the Gans Creek Recreation Area. It is contiguous to the 850-acre Gans Creek Wild Area (RBMSM).

Relative Comparison of Ecological Attributes

Attribute	Gans Creek Wild Area (850 acres)	Gans Creek Nature Preserve* (140 acres)
Interior forest quality	High	Low
Forest-interior obligates	Multiple	Very few (migrants)
Early successional/old field birds	Low	High
Fragmentation signal	Low	High
Riparian forest integrity	Strong	Moderate
Area-sensitive breeders	Present	Few (supports heron rookery)
Human-disturbance signature	Moderate	Strong
Conservation value for forest migrants	High	Moderate (valuable as buffer)
Ecological role	Interior forest refuge	Edge/open habitat matrix
Total Species Observed	208 (RBMSM)	93

high quality migration refuge and as a diverse breeding habitat for forest interior specialists within the context of a geophysically complex landscape. As per Missouri Department of Natural Resources Wild Area Policy, bicycles are prohibited in all wild areas. The proximity of mountain biking trails in GCRA to the wild area poses a threat to the integrity of the wild area. Not only is the wild area an exceptional migratory stopover with a diverse assemblage of migratory warblers and thrushes (more than 20 species), but also the region's largest defacto wilderness resource.

GCRA serves as a diffuse buffer to the adjoining interior forest of Gans Creek Wild Area. It functions as a connector and wildlife corridor, and as a habitat matrix supporting neotropical migrants and forest interior birds during parts of their life cycles (Figure 3). Species that have been observed include: Louisiana Waterthrush, Northern Parula, Eastern Wood Peewee, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Pileated Woodpecker. In addition, it features a unique array of species that utilize old field, woodland and woodland edge habitats. These include Eastern Meadowlark, Dickcissel, Horned Lark, Prairie Warbler and Savannah Sparrow.

On the surface, it may seem that a degraded 140-acre mosaic (GCRA) pales in value in comparison to a large interior forest habitat at Gans Creek Wild Area. However, they are complementary. The riparian/woodland/old field/edge mosaic is a strong insect production zone presenting a valuable foraging opportunity important for migration and fledgling interior forest bird species. It supports the interior forest core by softening edge effects, preserving riparian connections, and by providing dispersal and post-fledging habitat. Even



Figure 3. (top to bottom) Worm-Eating Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush; (bottom row) Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Wood Pewee,

though the wild area contains high quality interior forest habitat, the lands around it influence nest success, predator pressure, Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism, microclimate stability, hydrology, migration stopover quality, and long-term forest resilience.

GCRA, historically known as the Lofty Cliff Farm, has a long history of agricultural use (like many areas in RBMSP). As detailed in the natural features inventory (Crane Report, 2007), there are a variety of woodlands spanning the moisture gradient from dry to mesic (moist), a partly intact riparian corridor bordered by cliffs and karst features, and bottomland and upland fields. Invasive exotic species including bush honeysuckle and autumn olive have expanded throughout the riparian corridor and woodlands since the City of Columbia took ownership of the property. However, the area retains the floristic elements and potential for restoration. With ecologically appropriate management including the control of invasive exotic species (riparian and woodland restoration), reforestation of bottomland fields (restored riparian corridor), and conversion of upland fescue dominated fields to native warm season grassland or savanna, the southern part of GCRA could

be transformed into a transitional landscape that better supports the Gans Creek Wild Area’s interior forest function.

BUT there is one caveat that involves recreation planning. With 4.5 miles of mountain bike trails (as proposed in the 2024 GCRA Development Plan), the area would become a high-edge, high-disturbance matrix that contributes far less to bird conservation (Table 2, Figure 4 next page). Trail development at this scale increases fragmentation, affects bird behavior and compromises its function as a buffer to the interior forest core. Birds exhibit avoidance behavior and reduced nesting success near trails. This is not restricted to the narrow trail footprint but affects a wider swath of habitat. From increased Brown-headed Cowbird nest parasitism and predator activity along trail corridors to more subtle environmental changes, overdevelopment of trails will have a quantifiable negative impact on the support function that a diverse habitat mosaic (like GCRA) can provide to a core habitat within an IBA.

Instead of GCRA being viewed as an isolated area without appreciable ecological value, it should be considered an integral part of an interconnected landscape recognized as important for bird populations

Table 2. Comparison of effects from hiking and mountain bike trails.

Hiking vs. Mountain Bike Trail Impacts

Factor	1.5 mi Hiking Trail	4.5 mi Mountain Bike Network
Total disturbance length	Low	High
Use intensity	Low-moderate	High-very high
Speed of users	Slow	Fast (higher wildlife shock)
Spatial fragmentation	Low	Moderate-high
Edge expansion	Limited	Extensive
Behavioral avoidance by birds	Moderate	Strong
Night/day recovery	Good	Reduced (if frequent use)



Figure 4. Adjacent to the GCRA is Rock Bridge Memorial SP where this often-traveled trail is showing significant signs of erosion from mountain bike use. This is an image of the Spring Brook Trail which is near Devil's Icebox Trail and can be difficult to traverse by average hikers.


and other wildlife. Overdevelopment with mountain bike trails is a dereliction of the original intent of a “nature preservation area.” It should be noted that the Columbia Parks and Recreation Department has been active in bottomland tree planting and glade restoration, and there are plans for the conversion of upland fescue fields to native grasses. It is the mountain bike trails that are at issue.

The Future at Gans Creek and Beyond

Management plans for the south side of Gans Creek at GCRA remain unresolved. City staff have said that no actions will be taken until 2027, but the City Council has approved 3 miles of multi-use trail (built for bikes, but allowing pedestrians) south of Gans Creek. Our advocacy group of natural history enthusiasts has advocated for restoration of woodlands and forests from bluff to bluff along the Gans Creek corridor, primarily to protect the creek itself and to extend the large, mostly wooded habitat patch represented by the IBA to the east. The Boone County Master Plan (2025) seeks to “Conserve, protect, and restore Boone County’s natural habitats and ecologically significant areas.” Will the City of Columbia follow suit?

National and local mountain bike advocates will continue to argue strongly for more single-track bike trails on public and private lands throughout the state and beyond, as they have in Columbia. While each dense development of trails may influence tens to hundreds of acres, they also influence adjacent lands. All ecological impacts are additive and accumulate over time. Some local business interests may see bike trail development as a good way to enhance economic activities by promoting tourism, but few will have the \$74 million from the Walton Family Foundation that Bentonville, Arkansas, received.

The increasing popularity and ready availability of e-bikes represent new challenges. These powered bikes are relatively low cost and offer a climate-friendly, low-emission form of transportation. They often require little effort from the rider. Class 2 and 3 e-bikes are usually treated as bicycles in terms of trail regulations, but they are essentially mopeds or electric motorcycles. These vehicles are heavy, often exceeding 65 pounds, and fast. ‘Unlocked’ class 2 and class 3 e-bikes can exceed 30 mph. They are dangerous to other trail users and cause more environmental damage and disturbance to wildlife than standard bicycles.

Public land managers will need to balance the need to provide recreational opportunities for mountain bikers with the need to conserve natural resources, such as breeding birds and other wildlife populations, natural communities, soils, and watersheds. Mountain bike advocates are continuing to lobby for more access to trails on public lands in the Ozarks. The presence of mountain bikes on a trail compromises the experience of other users such as hikers, birders, photographers, and those simply seeking a peaceful experience immersed in nature. Across the country, hikers and walkers tend to avoid narrow trails where mountain bike traffic is permitted. Hikers and walkers are much more numerous and varied than mountain bikers on most trails on public lands. Our bias is that the balance of environmental benefits and positive user experience clearly rests with limiting or eliminating mountain bike access to single-track trails on most public lands. Over time, this will ensure a larger trail user group who will continue to support access to, and conservation of, our public lands. 



The Horstmann Cattle Company, a 1,000 acre cattle farm in Gasconade Co. Missouri implements rotational grazing not only to provide a grass-fed beef but also to support grassland bird populations.

Missouri Ranches are Helping Grassland Birds Make a Comeback

Tara Hohman

Senior Conservation Manager, Audubon Upper Mississippi



Audubon

Nearly ten years ago, Missouri’s own Round Rock Ranch became the first in the nation to earn Audubon’s Bird-Friendly Land certification through the Audubon Conservation Ranching program. What began here has since taken flight across the country. Today, around 150 ranches from the Great Plains to the West have earned certification, together managing over 4.5 million acres under bird-friendly practices. In Missouri, nine ranches and counting are now **Audubon Certified Bird-Friendly Land**—each recognized for managing their grasslands for the benefit of birds, biodiversity, and a healthier land base.

At its core, the Audubon Conservation Ranching program is a habitat, certification, and science initiative rolled into one. The goal is to improve habitat for grassland birds, which, as a suite has declined by 43% in the last 50 years, according to the most recent [State of the Birds Report¹](https://www.stateofthebirds.org/2025/), making them the fastest-declining bird species guild in the United States. Each participating ranch works with Audubon to develop a custom habitat management plan with some form of rotational grazing at the heart of the strategy. This approach provides flexibility for

1. <https://www.stateofthebirds.org/2025/>

ranchers while creating the conditions birds need to thrive. The collaboration between ranchers and Audubon’s range ecologists is a cornerstone of the program—pairing local knowledge with conservation know-how to restore grassland health, soil function, and wildlife habitat.


At the Haubein family’s Round Rock Ranch in southwest Missouri, rotational grazing has boosted habitat for Northern Bobwhite quail—a species that depends on a mix of short and tall grass cover. Across the state at North River Ranch near Shelbyville, newly certified in 2024, owners Peter and Bess Allen are watching for Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Henslow’s Sparrows as the birdy indicators of their management success.

You might ask, “How can cattle help birds?” The answer comes down to management. In what has become a virtual gospel in regenerative grazing circles: “It’s not the cow, it’s the how.” By moving cattle in a way that mimics the historical grazing of bison—allowing pastures

periods of rest and recovery—ranchers create a mosaic of grasses and wildflowers that supports a diversity of wildlife, including birds. It is a system rooted in nature’s own blueprint for the tallgrass prairie.

And yes, it’s working for birds! Audubon’s Science Team developed a Bird-Friendliness Index to measure the abundance, diversity, and resilience of grassland and arid-land bird communities on Audubon Certified Bird-Friendly Lands. The results are striking: bird-friendly ranches have shown an 8.4% annual increase in the Bird-Friendliness Index and a 76% overall increase from 2016 to 2023.

From its start on Missouri’s prairies, the Audubon Conservation Ranching program continues to prove that conservation and cattle can go hand in hand—benefiting birds, ranchers, and the lands we all depend on.

To learn more about Audubon Conservation Ranching or explore certification opportunities in Missouri, contact Tara Hohman at tara.hohman@audubon.org. 

In Appreciation of Anne Johnson

Edge Wade

Missouri Birding Society

Editor’s Note: The Missouri Birding Society lost not only a longtime member but a lynchpin to Missouri’s birding community. The Missouri Birding Society, formerly Audubon Society of Missouri, is a founding member of MoBCI. Please read the In Memoriam to Ann from her friend and colleague in MBS, Edge Wade.

Few people, perhaps none, have had as much impact on the successful operations of state ornithological and other nature-related organizations in recent years as Ann Johnson of Indianola, IA. With her death March 23, 2026 at age 76, the Missouri Birding Society, including the sister organizations of Iowa, Arkansas, Colorado, Nebraska, South

Dakota, and North Dakota, and many more NGO’s including the Missouri River Bird Observatory—approximately 125 organizations, overall, lost a dynamic champion of natural history and a major facilitator in their delivery of services and communications with membership and the public.

In Ann’s career with the Iowa Department of Social Services, she became the intermediary between the IT department and field staff, taking classes and then self-teaching coding skills to improve communications between them.



Ann was a lifelong birder. In 1995, as an active member, she brought those skills to the Iowa Ornithologists' Union to develop a basic, static website that required her input for updating. In 2000, she became secretary of the Iowa Rare Birds Records Committee and moved committee operations from a paper, photocopy, and mail system to a transactional on-line process. This ability to work through a web browser became the model for other activities and the IOU site was expanded to include membership management, meeting registration, and even board of directors motions and discussions between official meetings.

Word of her skills spread as birders noted the quality and breadth of the IOU website. She answered several pleas for website help before forming ajEndeavors, LLC, her small web development company in 2009, before retiring from her state job in 2010. ASM (now MBS) was one of the first to seek Ann's help.

In 2002, Mike Beck, a past president, took on the job of creating the first version of the ASM website. In 2003, Patrick Harrison became editor of *The Bluebird* and assumed the duties of webmaster. Consulting with Ann, Patrick created the first ASM interactive version and, when in late 2005, ASM entered into the agreement with the Missouri Department of Conservation to conduct bird surveys in the program that came to be known as CACHE, Patrick designed the first-in-the-nation statewide bird occurrence database (pre-eBird) with on-line entry directly by the observers, going live in February, 2007.

The Missouri Bird Records Committee MBRC was starting to evaluate the idea of putting the documentation process on line in 2005. MRBC Secretary Bill Rowe began corresponding with Ann to tap into her experience as the Iowa records committee secretary and her web design for the IOU site. The product of Ann and Bill's collaboration with help from Patrick went live in December 2007.



Missouri Birding Society file photo

Longtime MBS member Ann Johnson passed away March 23, 2026

That began 19 years of work back and forth, debugging the system and (according to Bill) debugging the secretary, as well.

"I'm sorry I never met Ann, but she was a great correspondent, always prompt to reply to my questions, always keenly interested making things work properly, and always candid, with replies ranging from "Oops..." to "Not sure what's going on...get back to you tomorrow" to a patient explanation (perhaps for the third time) of what I was supposed to do at my end to make something happen. No matter what the problem was, I knew I could count on her to get on it right away and to fix it—and I always appreciated her sense of humor. I will miss her." — Bill Rowe

By late 2008 the complexity of the CACHE/SPARKS concept had grown immensely, and both the ASM and IOU websites had been hacked. Patrick contacted Ann and discussed what she was going to do about the hack. She was beginning to convert her websites to a different format. Patrick asked her about converting the ASM site at the same time, as well as addressing the increased complexity of the CACHE/SPARKS

system. That began the collaboration of code writing for the new version of the website, a working acquaintance that continued in Patick's tenure as webmaster into 2017, and developed into a personal friendship with shared birding experiences.

"Ann acted as a generous and giving person throughout our association. She was more than a mentor to me. She was a springboard from which new ideas were created and improvements to our website took place."

– Patrick Harrison

Kevin Wehner became ASM/MBS webmaster in 2017. During Kevin's time in the job, Ann totally re-built the website to modernize it and make it mobile device friendly. It was her idea to use MailChimp for the membership renewal notices.

"Ann was always very quick to respond to requests to fix bugs and/or make enhancements to the website." – Kevin Wehner

In my role as ASM/MBS Conservation Partnership Coordinator during nearly 20 years working with Ann, I hardly missed a week communicating with her--most of it via emails beginning with, "How do I..." or "Where is x on the website?" Alas, some of the same questions were posed more times than I'd like to admit. She never chided or commented on the limitations of my ability or memory. Again and again, she would walk me through the process with kindness and humor.

When the birding site guide series was added as a deliverable in the CACHE/SPARKS agreements, Ann added that section to the website and we worked to make it input and user friendly.

As a component of the SPARKS agreement ASM/MBS took on the responsibility to maintain and update the bird checklists for every Missouri state park hosted on our website. Ann created that feature and the required links to make them available on the individual park websites.

It took a while (years), but Ann finally convinced the folks at Cornell that the CACHE/SPARKS data could be transferred into eBird. With minimal help from me, she identified and connected all C/S contributors to the sites, converted entries to eBird format, and transferred the data into the eBird dataset. This effort put Missouri among the top states for eBird data.

Bird identification workshops have often been included as elements of our obligations within CACHE/SPARKS. We began delivering some on-line via Zoom, especially as a response to the COVID-19 epidemic. Ann made the recorded sessions available on our website.

In recent years, she was quick to see the potential of the privately developed Birding Hotspots website, connected it to the MBS website, and with Kevin Wehner and me, served as editor, as she did for her home state, Iowa. [The Hotspots website as of 2026 has been absorbed by eBird, largely because of the value of the site as demonstrated by Ann and various webmasters].

In her overview of ajEndeavors, Ann listed three financial goals in working with non-profits:

1. Assure that the organization gets a quality product for their money. In this vein, I assume all risk except for hosting costs
2. The application should be self-sustaining and manageable by members of the organization with little to no on-going development costs
3. To be at least minimally compensated for my time for my birding travel fund.

The members of the Missouri Birding Society, and by extension, all birders of Missouri will continue to benefit from Ann's work, done with very modest compensation for her considerable skills and time.

And, I, along with the many people she mentored and shared birding adventures with will miss Ann Johnson's empathy, humor, and reassuring presence. 🐦

Fiscal Year 2026 and 2027 MoBCI Grants Update

Allison Vaughn

Editor, MoBCI Newsletter

MoBCI's fiscal year runs as state government fiscal years run, so in 2024, MoBCI awarded both Habitat and Community Conservation grants to applications with funds available July 1, 2025 with funds expended by June 30, 2026. Similarly, in October 2025, MoBCI awarded both Community Conservation and Habitat grants to organizations that begin July 1, 2026 and must be expended by June 30, 2027. The following tables show which important projects our Steering Committee and the Missouri Department of Conservation deemed worthy of funding. The funding amount listed is funding generated from MDC and does not include the partner match amount which must be 1:1 but usually exceeds this amount of match. In FY26, MDC funded \$63,883 in grants and in FY27, a grant activity cycle that begins July 1, 2026, MDC funded \$24,835 in grant dollars.

MoBCI remains immensely grateful for all of the support MDC has provided us through the years to support bird habitat and conservation projects. MoBCI has reached out to our partner organizations as we try to build a fund to help support our important grants program. With over 70 partners, as well as participation in the CentralMoGives campaign that begins in December, our entirely voluntary organization has great hopes we can help support our grants program that has, over 22 years, supported so much incredible and meaningful work to help birds and biodiversity. 

Fiscal Year 2026 MoBCI Grant Awardees

Ducks Unlimited \$25,000 Habitat grant

Funding for early detection Strike Team in 2025 for early detection, rapid response, and control of invasive species in Tier 2 areas. Big Muddy NWR: Johnson grass, common reed, Sericea lespedeza, common teasel, cutleaf teasel; Swan Lake NWR: common reed, reed canary grass, Sericea lespedeza; Loess Bluffs NWR: Johnson grass, common reed, Sericea lespedeza, common teasel, cutleaf teasel.

Missouri Prairie Foundation: Bird Habitat Enhancement in the Hi Lonesome and Golden Grasslands Priority Geographies \$25,000 Habitat grant

Bird habitat enhancement in the Hi Lonesome and Golden Grasslands priority geographies. Funding for tree and undesirable brush removal and tall fescue (Morton Family Prairie) tree and brush removal (Coyne Prairie and Snadon Prairie); and Japanese honeysuckle removal across the properties.

Dark Sky Missouri \$2,500 Community Conservation grant

Continue outreach programs highlighting the importance of maintaining and restoring the natural level and color balance of lighting at nighttime. Nighttime nature walks and stargazing, improve lighting around local pollinator gardens and residential areas. Implementing mitigation strategies to reduce bird collisions. Includes Tier 1 and 2 communities.

Wild Bird Rehabilitation \$8,500 Community Conservation grant

Support and promote activities that foster greater care, appreciation, concern and conservation of native songbirds. Creation and acquisition of educational resources and materials, support expert-led birding trips and guided tours of rehabilitation hospital. Includes Tier 1, 2, and 3 communities.

East Ozarks Audubon Society

\$2,883 Community Conservation grant

Accelerate timeline of the conversion of a turf area into a pollinator meadow and establish high-quality interpretive panels explaining the project and benefits to birds in a project at high profile Engler Park in Farmington, MO. 2,250 square foot project area.

Fiscal Year 2027 MoBCI Grant Awardees

Missouri Prairie Foundation Bird Habitat Enhancement in the Hi Lonesome Priority Geography

\$20,000 Habitat grant

To fund management activities to enhance prairie and native grassland for grassland birds on two MPF properties: Reconstruction and restoration of a portion of Morton Family Prairie, specifically prescribed burning and native seed planting; and reconstruction and restoration of a portion of Lordi Marker Prairie, specifically invasive species treatment and native seed planting. Tier 1 habitat

Bird Habitat Enhancement at Audubon Trails Nature Center, Rolla, MO

\$2,335 Community Conservation grant

To fund a prescribed fire including fireline installation and implementation to enhance and maintain habitat for savanna, woodland, and grassland birds at Audubon Trails Nature Center.

DarkSky Missouri Reducing Bird Collisions and Improving Bird Habitat

\$2,500 Community Conservation grant

Funding to develop and implement educational programs and sustainable practices that benefit bird habitats in three Missouri cities along US highway 63 in the Mississippi Flyway: Columbia, Kirksville, and Springfield. The proposed programs will focus on implementing window-treatments, improving outdoor nighttime lighting, and on creating educational materials and opportunities to advocate for best practices in minimizing bird-window collisions in community conservation Tier I zones.

Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative 2025 Annual Conference Business Meeting Minutes

- **Columbia Country Club, Columbia, Missouri.**
August 22, 2025
- **Call to Order – Allison Vaughn at 08:02 am**
- **Introduction of members of the MoBCI Steering Committee**
- **Approval of MoBCI 2024 General Assembly minutes—minutes taken by Ethan Duke**
Moved by Dave G. and seconded by Tara H: passed by vote.
- **MoBCI Foundation Treasurer’s Report**
—David Erickson
Dave explained that the MoBCI Foundation manages all the financial accounts for MoBCI.
Nine 2025 MoBCI conference sponsors
Aug. 1–July 31 = fiscal year

Financial accounts: checking (operating funds), PayPal and two investment accts

Checking balance: July 31, 2025 = \$12,514.71

PayPal balance: July 31, 2025 = \$191.78

YHEP fund: July 31, 2025 = \$53,236.00

MoBCI Reserve Fund: July 31, 2025 = \$8,682.15

- Total investment accts: July 1, 2025 = \$61,918.15

Total MoBCI Assets: July 31, 2025 = \$74,624.64

CoMoGives: <https://www.comogives.com>

- First year tried as a fundraiser –\$930.90 raised.

MoBCI partnered with Wildlife Society, Missouri Birding Society and Conservation Federation of Missouri to sponsor student support stipends for the MoBCI conference - funding from MoBCI = \$1,640.00

- **Committee Reports:**

- **Grants Review Committee Report—Jean Favara**

6 grant applications received and reviewed.

- 2 Natural Community/Habitat grants – total requested = \$50,000 – both recommended for funding and fully funded
 - Ducks Unlimited
 - Missouri Prairie Foundation
- 4 Community Conservation Engagement Grants – total requested = \$28,883
- 3 out of the 4 applications recommended for funding – total funded = \$13,883
 - East Ozarks Audubon Society: Pollinator Meadow in the Crouch Nature Sanctuary Engler Park, Farmington, Missouri
 - Wild Bird Rehabilitation: A Bird's-Eye View
 - Dark Sky Missouri: Natural light and darkness as a Natural Resource

Grand total funded = \$78,883

Thank you to MDC partnership.

FY2027 RFP currently posted: mobci.net.

- Applications Due by Sept. 30th
- Both Natural Community/Habitat Grants and Community Conservation Engagement Grants accepted
- RFP includes examples of successful grant applications from both types of projects.

- **Old Business**

CoMoGives fundraiser (see above) – will participate again this year.

MoBCI conference silent auction – supports conference costs.

YHEP funds, Missouri Birding Society and The Wildlife Society sponsored students attending MoBCI conference – working towards the goal of increasing participation of young conservationists in the organization.

Students attending introduce themselves.

- **New Business**

Steering Committee Election:

- MoBCI bylaws stipulate a maximum of 18 Steering Committee members. Each serving a two-year term. Up to ten members shall be elected for two-year terms each year at the MoBCI General Assembly. The Steering Committee will serve as a nominating committee and will submit a slate of candidates to the membership at the General Assembly.
- Slate for Election to Steering Committee:
 - Doug Helmers—Missouri Prairie Foundation
 - Jean Favara—St. Louis Audubon Society
 - Bill Mees—Columbia Audubon Society
 - Dave Graber—Ducks Unlimited
 - Steve Heying—Missouri Falconers Assoc.
 - Tara Hohman—Audubon Riverlands
 - Stephanie McLerran-Missouri Department of Transportation

Steering Committee Chair: Neil Baalman (2024–2026), Missouri Private Lands Office, USFWS

Steering committee Elections: Moved by Rick? and seconded by Edge Wade. Passed by vote.

- **Special Thanks:**

Neil Baalman of the USFWS and Michelle Gabelsberger of CFM for securing meeting spaces and online options for our bimonthly Steering Committee Meetings

John Burk (NWTF) for chairing the annual MoBCI conference committee and all the work behind establishing the topic, agenda and speakers for the annual conference.

- **Meeting adjourned by vote at 8:30am**



Annual Conference • August 20–21, 2026
 Columbia Country Club, 2210 Country Club Dr., Columbia, Missouri
 Online registration and schedule at <https://www.MoBCI.net/registration>

CONFERENCE THEME

**From Harrow to Sparrow:
 How Dual-Purpose Lands Work for Birds**

SPONSORS

Marge Lumpe



Plus additional support from anonymous members

THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

5:00 pm	Registration
6:00–7:30 pm	Social time, with buffet dinner
7:30–8:00 pm	Welcoming remarks/housekeeping John Burk (MoBCI Steering Committee) Open Silent Auction.
8:00–9:00 pm	Keynote speaker: Karl Malcolm As human populations expand simultaneously with increasing quality of life standards, pressure on natural systems to meet these demands likewise increases. Over time, as administrations and their respective philosophies swing from carrot to stick and back again, achieving a healthy balance is increasingly challenging yet, at the same time, imperative. “Stick people” demand that state and federal governments draft restrictive regulations and employ an army of enforcers intent on doling out excessive penalties to ensure compliance. However, in most cases, the livelihoods and quality of life of the people drafting and supporting these regulations are not directly impacted by them. “Carrot people” prefer that “doing the right thing” doesn’t cost them a bunch of money and, preferably, might even make them some. Our speaker will cover the importance of incentivizing good behavior and explore examples of how working lands can provide landowners and managers with a “cake and eat it too” scenario. Karl Malcolm is Vice President of Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society with Ruffed Grouse Society.
9:00–10:00 pm	Continue social time



Annual Conference • August 20–21, 2026

Columbia Country Club, 2210 Country Club Dr., Columbia, Missouri

Online registration and schedule at <https://www.MoBCI.net/registration>

FRIDAY, AUGUST 21

7:15 am	Coffee and tea for conference registrants
8:00 am–9:00 am	<p>Welcome and highlights of the year Neil Baalman (Chair, MoBCI Steering Committee) General Assembly Meeting</p>
9:00 am–10:15 am	<p>3, 20-minute examples of wetland-related projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mo Ag Wetland Initiative.</i> Neil Baalman, USFWS • <i>Rice Partnership.</i> Tony Jaco, MDC • <i>Great Rivers Habitat Alliance: How clubs and agriculture in the confluence can benefit birds.</i> Mike Checkett, Executive Director, Great Rivers Habitat Alliance
10:15 am–10:30 am	Break
10:30 am–11:30 am	<p>3, 20-minute project examples of forestry related tie-ins:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Regenerative Agriculture.</i> Zack Miller, TNC • <i>Independent Stave: The spirits industry and the White Oak Initiative.</i> Hank Stelzer, MU Extension • <i>Sustainable Forestry Pays: Ecological management for bird conservation and working lands.</i> Dana Morris, PhD Chief Ecologist Pioneer Forest
11:30 am–12:30 pm	<p>Lunch with presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Avian Influenza.</i> David Marks, APHIS
12:30 pm– 1:50 pm	<p>Four, 20-minute examples of grassland related tie-ins:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Penciling out the conservation conversation with farmers.</i> Jason Jenkins, Crops Editor for DTN/Progressive Farmer • <i>Conservation Ranching and Regenerative Grazing.</i> Dave Haubein, cattle producer • <i>NRCS Grassland and other conservation related programs available to landowners that benefit birds.</i> Nate Goodrich, NRCS State Conservationist • <i>Partners for Native Grasslands.</i> Bill White, Conservation Federation of Missouri Grassland Coordinator
2:00 pm–3:00 pm	Update on MoBCI Strategic Plan
3:00 pm–3:30 pm	<p>Wrap-up and closing comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Summarize ways we can make a difference for birds.</i> Neil Baalman (MoBCI Chair)

MoBCI Member Organizations

As of July 2026, the following 78 organizations have signed a Memorandum of Agreement to participate in the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative:

Academy of Science of St. Louis
American Bird Conservancy/
Central Hardwoods Joint Venture
Audubon Center at Riverlands
Audubon Society:
• Chariton Valley Chapter
• Columbia Chapter
• Grand River Chapter
• Greater Kansas City Chapter,
Burroughs Audubon Society
• Greater Ozarks Chapter
• Midland Empire Chapter
• River Bluffs Chapter
• St. Louis Chapter
Avian Conservation Alliance
Bellefontaine Cemetery & Arboretum
City of Des Peres Parks & Recreation Department
Clay County Dept. of Parks,
Recreation & Historic Sites
Coldwater Outing and Game Preserve
Conservation Federation of Missouri
Ducks Unlimited
Eleven Point River Conservancy
Forest Park Forever
Forrest Keeling Nursery
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance
Greenbelt Land Trust of Mid-Missouri
Kansas City Wildlands/Bridging The Gap
L-A-D Foundation
LaBarque Watershed Stream Team Association
Litzsinger Road Ecology Center
Mark Twain National Forest, USDA Forest Service
Massasauga Flats, LLC
Missouri Army National Guard
Missouri Bird Conservation Foundation
Missouri Birding Society
Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation
Missouri Department of Conservation
Missouri Department of Natural Resources,
Division of State Parks

Missouri Department of Transportation
Missouri Falconers Association
Missouri Master Naturalists:
• Boone's Lick Chapter
• Great Rivers Chapter
• Hi Lonesome Chapter
• Loess Bluffs Chapter
• Osage Plains Chapter
• Osage Trails Chapter
• Springfield Plateau Chapter
Missouri Native Plant Society:
• Hawthorn Chapter
• Osage Plains Chapter
Missouri Native Seed Association
Missouri Park and Recreation Association
Missouri Prairie Foundation
Missouri Quail & Upland Wildlife Federation
• Grouse Chapter
Missouri River Bird Observatory
Mussel Fork Legacy Marsh LLC
National Wild Turkey Federation, MO Chapter
North American Grouse Partnership, MO Chapter
Ozark Land Trust
Ozark National Scenic Riverways
Pheasants Forever
Platte Land Trust
Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation Inc.
Quail Forever
Sierra Club, Ozark Chapter
The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Field Office
Truman State University
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service:
• Big Muddy National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Ecological Services
• Great River/Clarence Cannon National
Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Loess Bluffs National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Mingo National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Missouri Private Lands Office
• Swan Lake National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
Watershed Institute, Inc
and The Watershed Land Trust
Webster Groves Nature Study Society
Wild Birds for the 21st Century
Wild Bird Rehabilitation Inc.
Wildcat Glades Conservation & Nature Center
Wings Over Weston
World Bird Sanctuary

To find out more about the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative and how you can participate as a member organization, visit our website: www.mobci.net 