NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service
OREGON

OAK HABITAT RESTORATION

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Oak Habitat

THROUGH A NEW COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE, landowners with oak habitats in Southwest Oregon can get financial and technical assistance to enhance wildlife habitat, reduce wildfire risk, and improve grazing lands productivity

Overview

Oak woodlands and savannas are richer in biodiversity than any other terrestrial ecosystem in Oregon. Oak habitats provide some degree of food or cover for more than 200 species, such as, the acorn woodpecker, Columbian white-tailed deer, and western gray squirrel. They are also among the most threatened ecological communities in the Pacific Northwest — current estimates indicate that less than 10% of the historic oak habitats remain in Oregon. Remaining oak habitats face a variety of stressors and will be unable to persist but for a few more decades under such conditions.

Since most federal and state lands in western Oregon are unsuitable for growing oaks, the future of oak habitats is highly dependent upon active conservation by private landowners. The NRCS and other partners in conservation have incentive programs available that provide financial and technical assistance to help landowners make a difference on their lands.

Threats to Oak Habitats

More than 90% of pre-settlement oak habitats have already been cleared to make way for farms, urban areas, and other human developments. In remaining oak habitats, active fire suppression has altered the natural disturbance process of frequent, low-intensity fires that historically helped maintain oak habitat structure. As a result, stands have become greatly overstocked reducing habitat quality, building fuel loads, and increasing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Major threats to oak habitat quantity and quality include:

- ***Conifer encroachment.*** Fire suppression has allowed conifers, like Douglas-fir, to encroach and outcompete oak trees. Oak trees will not tolerate shading.
- ***Loss of habitat structure.*** Large-diameter oak trees with mushroom-shaped canopies that provide the limb structure, cavities, and acorn production required by many wildlife species have been lost. Remaining oaks are not developing the same structural traits due to overcrowding by young oaks and other trees.
- ***Exotic invasive species.*** Exotic plant species like Scotch broom, Armenian blackberry, and English hawthorn, have invaded the understory communities, increasing fuel loads and degrading habitat.
- ***Land use conversion.*** Oak habitats continue to be converted to other uses, such as, cropland, vineyards, and residential development.

What's at Stake?

If our rare oak habitats are not restored, protected and maintained, important ecological functions could be lost forever. With over 200 species of wildlife using oak habitats during their life cycle, continued habitat loss and degradation will result in more of these species becoming imperiled. Currently, 45 of those oak-associated species are already considered to be 'at-risk'. Additionally, overstocked and unmanaged oak stands present an increased risk of catastrophic wildfire. Unnaturally intense wildfires not only result in habitat loss but threaten

Acorn Woodpecker

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residences and rural communities. Finally, overall watershed health will continue to decline resulting in reduced hydrologic function, productivity and erosion. Because oaks are an extremely slow-growing species, recovery of lost habitats may take several generations. It is critical to act today to reverse these trends.

What can landowners do and how can NRCS and its partners help?

The NRCS and partners including the Lomakatsi Restoration Project, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and others can bring funding and technical resources together with the singular goal of helping landowners restore, protect and maintain oak habitats. This can include developing a tailored management plan, project implementation, contracting, and monitoring.

Restoration practices typically include thinning to reduce encroaching vegetation and tree densities, exotic brush control, and native grass seeding to promote the development of healthy, structurally-diverse oak habitats over time.

Financial assistance programs

Central Umpqua-Mid Klamath Oak Habitat Conservation Project

The Central Umpqua-Mid Klamath Oak Habitat Conservation Project is promoting conservation practices that help restore declining oak habitats on private lands. The project is a strategic, landscape-scale effort to focus partner resources on restoring priority oak habitats. Financial assistance for landowners is being provided primarily through the NRCS' Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI). Landowners who agree to participate and are selected for funding may receive assistance from NRCS and partners to develop restoration and management plans. Participants are eligible for funding to offset 50 to 75 percent of the costs of implementing needed practices.

Focus Areas: Priority oak habitats in Douglas and Jackson Counties, OR, and Siskiyou County, CA - (see map above)

Funding Programs: NRCS Farm Bill Programs: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP); USFWS: Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

For more information or to apply for Farm Bill programs

Contact an NRCS representative at your local USDA service center, or go to **www.or.nrcs.usda.gov**

Jackson County, Oregon
Medford USDA Service Center
(541) 776-4270

Douglas County, Oregon
Roseburg USDA Service Center
(541) 673-6071

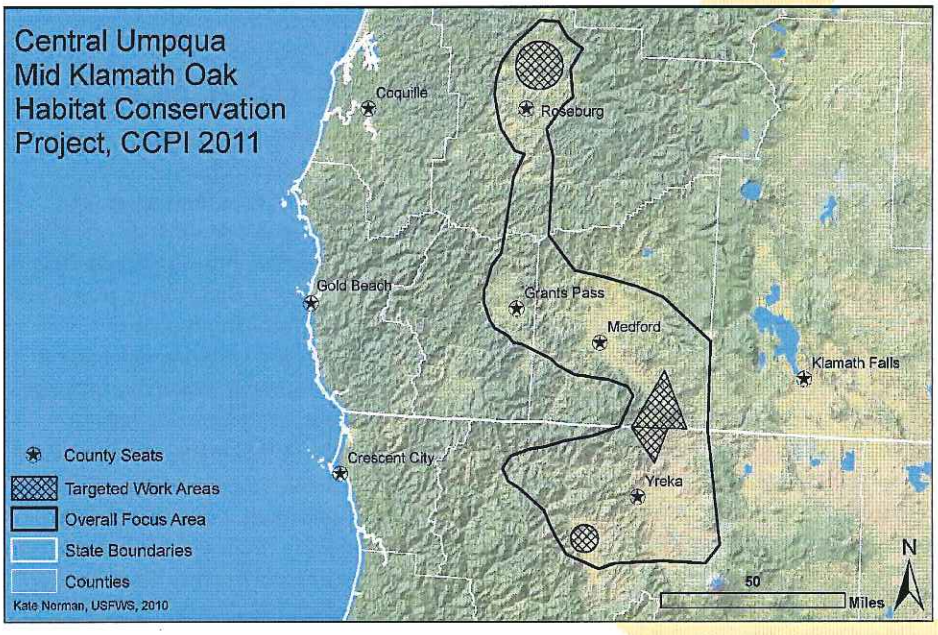
Siskiyou County, Oregon
Yreka USDA Service Center
(530) 842-6123

USDA NRCS

U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Partners for Fish & Wildlife

Lomakatsi Restoration Project
Restoring Ecosystems, Sustaining Communities



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