

Grant to Kettle Moraine Oak Opening Natural Area

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The Natural Resources Foundation recently received a \$15,000 grant from the John C. Bock Foundation to control invasive species within the Kettle Moraine Oak Opening State Natural Area (SNA) in Jefferson and Walworth counties.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' SNA crew in the region will use the funds, which were disbursed in November, to control, monitor and map the invasive species that harm the rare native vegetation at the site.

“Kettle Moraine Oak Opening is a shining star among remnant savannas,” said Barb Barzen, the Natural Resources Foundation’s programs and grants coordinator. “It is one of the Midwest’s largest and highest-quality oak savannas. We are excited to play the role of attracting financial resources to this ecological treasure.”

Oak savannas are among the rarest habitats in the world. They once covered much of the southern two-thirds of Wisconsin and now less than 1 percent of those savannas remain.

Kettle Moraine Oak Opening, a 600-acre property located off County Highway H, southeast of Blue Spring Lake in the Town of Palmyra, was designated a state natural area in 1991. Fire suppression and a lack of conservation resources had allowed the area to become overgrown with a dense understory that crowded out oaks and native grasses.

Since 1991, the Department of Natural Resources has worked to restore a core area of 180 acres back to savanna and open oak woodland. The DNR will work over the next several years to restore the rest of the SNA. Part of that expanded restoration has been funded through the Bock Foundation and the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.

In 2014, the Natural Resources Foundation received a \$10,000 grant from the Bock Foundation, which the SNA crew used to control oriental bittersweet and black locust and conduct a prescribed burn. The two targeted invasive species are difficult to eliminate with prescribed burns, and they



Oak opening

The Kettle Moraine is home to one of the few original oak openings in Wisconsin.

have been shown to compete with existing oaks and decrease the likelihood that new oaks will grow.

The 2015 grant will help to continue fighting oriental bittersweet and black locust, and to help DNR conduct more prescribed burns to control other invasive species. The ultimate goal is to improve conditions for large oak trees in the area.

“Prior to European settlement, oak savannas covered more than 5 million acres in Wisconsin,” said Nate Fayram, field ecologist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

“Remaining examples are dependent on active management, especially including frequent prescribed fire, or they will cease to exist. Many rare species benefit from oak savanna restoration, and savannas are known for having a diverse ground layer comprised of plants that can be found in both prairies and oak forests.”

Kettle Moraine Oak Opening is one of several state natural areas within a long-term, landscape-scale restoration project conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and The Nature Conservancy. This area has been designated as an area of ecological and conservation significance by several organizations.

In addition, the Ice Age Trail runs through the Kettle Moraine Oak Opening, making it easily accessible to visitors who want to learn about restoration work.

The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin provides sustainable funding for Wisconsin’s most imperiled species and public lands, while helping citizens connect with our state’s unique natural places. Learn more at www.wisconservation.org.