

We're Raising the Bar on Annual Meetings

Together with our sponsors, the Illinois Forestry Association and Illinois Chapter of the Society of American Foresters are combining forces to offer an outstanding program focused on the latest developments around oak forest restoration and management. You may be aware that the decline of the oak component in oak-hickory forest types is a major concern throughout Illinois and the Central Hardwood region - not just for foresters, but for anyone who values the products, wildlife and native plant communities that these ecosystems support. At this conference you'll learn what it takes to grow and sustain healthy and productive oak-hickory forests in Illinois.

Not so fast. Do your eyes start to glaze over when you hear a lot of technical jargon and acronyms related to forestry? Get one step closer to understanding and speaking the same language as your forester by attending our new introductory course just for landowners on Thursday afternoon, September 29th. The ABCs of Forestry is an optional pre-conference session that will cover "the basics of forestry for landowners" in 4 hours. That won't be easy - come and watch us try! Topics highlighted will include everything from how a tree grows to how forests are managed. Learn the meaning behind commonly used terms. Hear from a variety of presenters, and ask the questions that might seem silly, but will help everyone understand what forestry is all about. Been at this a while? Take it as a refresher course so you can explain it better to a neighbor or friend. Participation in this optional course will be a great lead-in to the main event. From 1 to 5 p.m. on Thursday - with free time to explore the area that evening. Did someone say Wine Trail?

On Friday, September 30th, we'll begin with an optional morning "Walk in the Woods" walking tour at Touch of Nature. Activities will include basic plant and tree ID, measuring trees, assessing forest conditions and advance regeneration, reading the signs of past land use, and wildlife considerations. Consider this the field component for the ABCs session. You'll also learn about efforts underway to begin managing the forests associated with the Touch of Nature Center. Participants will enjoy a box lunch upon return to the main building.

Our Friday afternoon program will feature a panel of leading experts covering the practices of forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, and invasive species control. Each will cover their respective topic, and then the discussion will turn to what they have learned in terms of an optimum sequence for the best results. Does it work best to burn first and then treat invasive plants the next year or season - or vice versa? Land managers are working together now more than ever to figure out how to help oak trees thrive, from seedling to saw timber and beyond.

Speaking of working together, the Forest Service is playing a key supporting role in this year's annual meeting. Tracy Boutelle Fidler, newly minted Public Affairs Officer on the Shawnee National Forest will facilitate the panel session: Let the Sun Shine In! In her former roles in the private and non-profit sectors, Tracy has been actively involved in bringing disparate interests together to study and manage a large demonstration area at nearby Trail of Tears State Forest. (Conference participants will get to see the latest results of this cooperative work when we tour the Trail of Tears State Forest Demonstration Area on Saturday.)

Following the panel discussion, we'll hear from Brendan Cain, the new Forest Supervisor in charge of the Shawnee NF. He'll talk about the importance of working together across public and private property boundaries to carry out forest management activities. Whether you're a private landowner or agency steward, it pays to cooperate on practices like controlled burning and invasive species control - if you want lasting results.

Our keynote presentation will feature Bob Gillespie, IDNR Natural Resources Coordinator at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, calling upon his combined experiences in forestry, wildlife and heritage to offer his unique perspective.

If that sounds like a lot of information in a short period of time, don't worry. We have breaks factored into the schedule so you can rest your brain, visit with each other, take a look at the exhibits, and browse the Silent Auction!

After the keynote, we'll enjoy a social hour before being treated to the storied tradition of the [Buffalo Tro](#) dinner. Later in the evening we'll gather around a bonfire and talk "Fireside Forestry" - a new way to spread the word about forestry to your neighbors and friends. Our theme will be Managing Forests for Wildlife. We've invited the National Wild Turkey Federation to partner with us on the Fireside Forestry project.

We'll kick off Saturday morning with concurrent business meetings of the IFA and IL-SAF on site at Touch of Nature. All members are encouraged to attend - it's a great way to stay informed and do your part as a member to keep these two important organizations on track and moving forward.

Saturday's field tour at Trail of Tears State Forest near Jonesboro will highlight strategies underway to determine the best sequence of management practices to enable native oak trees - and their associated ecosystems - to flourish. See the results of different management practices and sequences first hand, and learn what they are planning to do next. We'll enjoy lunch in the field at the appropriate time, and you'll be free to depart or continue exploring the area's many attractions no later than 2 p.m.