

Allegan Conservation District's Oak Savanna Restoration Project Concludes

In 2017, The Allegan Conservation District received a grant to restore oak savanna habitat in the Allegan State Game Area. Oak savannas are an ecosystem half-way between a forest and a prairie, with mature oaks scattered across a grassy area creating a patchwork of sun and shade areas. This allows the oak trees to grow large, producing better nesting habitat and more food. The open areas below the oaks also receive enough sunlight to support a variety of grasses and wildflowers. This unique combination of large oaks, grasses, and wildflowers provides ideal habitat for game species like deer and turkey, and is vital for many bird and insect species like the endangered Karner Blue Butterfly.

Unfortunately, without occasional disturbances like wildfire, oak savannas tend to become overgrown. This crowds out the native grasses and wildflowers and restricts tree growth. These areas tend to become forests if they are not



carefully managed, and for this reason many of Michigan's oak savannas have disappeared. The Allegan Conservation District used funds from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Habitat Grant Program, in addition to donations from Whitetails Unlimited, to restore three oak savanna sites in the State Game Area. Trees and saplings that were young, undesirable, or crowded together were removed to leave openings for grasses and wildflowers to reclaim the area. Now that these areas have been restored, they can be more easily maintained using techniques like prescribed fire.