

**“What’s in YOUR Woodlands?”**  
**A Workshop for Landowners on Woodland and Riparian Establishment and Management to enhance Wildlife Habitat**

**WATERSHED GOALS:**

**Educate rural and urban landowners in programs to improve the diversity of natural plant, aquatic, and animal communities within the watershed.**

**Promote agricultural practices to limit flooding, runoff, pollution, top soil loss, and streambank erosion.**

**Increase percent of watershed in forest, focusing on historically wooded areas, riparian zones, or highly erodable lands. Promote management in existing woodlands for timber production, soil protection and natural habitat; plant additional acres with trees to expand forested area.**

**Identify and enhance or restore natural plant areas compatible with soil type and historical use. Establish, restore, or widen riparian zones where desirable.**

**Enhance landowner awareness of wildlife and habitat improvement programs.**

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The Mackinaw River watershed contains relatively few woodland acres compared to agricultural acres (5% vs 75%), however most of the forested land is concentrated in areas directly adjacent to the Mackinaw River and its’ tributaries. This makes these areas important in the overall ecological health of the watershed, and quite important to migrating birds and other wildlife. Over the years, these areas have become increasingly fragmented due to changes in land use, primarily an increase in homebuilding in smaller 5-10 acre tracts of land. Many of these new landowners have little or no knowledge of timber management, but view their timber as highly valuable for privacy, beauty, and wildlife habitat. Unfortunately, the result has been a decline in woodland quality, if not quantity. Many areas have become highly infested with exotic plants such as Buckthorn and Autumn olive, and have seen an explosive increase in trees such as sugar maple. There has been a decline in important understory plant species and regeneration of mast trees such as oaks, hickories, and walnuts. In order to address these problems, this project would provide targeted small landowners in Woodford County an educational opportunity via a workshop on woodland and riparian establishment, restoration, and management. Topics covered in the workshop would include tree identification, tree planting and thinning techniques, prescribed burning, eradication of exotic species, and other practices that enhance woodland and riparian areas for wildlife habitat. The workshop would include speakers and displays from IDNR, NRCS, and other professional organizations or businesses, and also provide for a tour of properties where management strategies have been utilized. Each participant would receive a packet of educational materials (IDNR publications, handouts, contact information) and one 2-4 ft. tree of their choice (oak, hickory, walnut, etc) to plant on their property. Promotion of the IDNR ForestWatch and RiverWatch programs would also be a part of the workshop.

Phase II of this project would include contract hiring of specialists who would assist IDNR Foresters in providing woodland and riparian assessment and specific restoration

and management guidelines to those landowners indicating an interest at the workshop. In addition, the Phase II of this project would provide funding (or referral to other funding sources) for such services as tree thinning, tree girdling, and tree plantings which would allow for a faster and more efficient restoration of these important woodland tracts, as many of these landowners simply lack the time, physical ability, and/or equipment to implement these plans themselves.