



United States Department of Agriculture

## JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

# Collaborative Oak Management of the Appalachian Mountains



USDA Forest Service photo

The oak-hickory forests of southeastern Ohio are part of the Appalachian Mountains, the oldest and most biologically diverse forest system in North America. From coal mining to farming, this area, which harbors almost half of the state's forests, has seen more than its fair share of natural resources degradation. At the turn of the 20th century, less than 10 percent of the land was forested and thousands of acres were neglected as their owners struggled during the Great Depression. Those historic factors, combined with current land ownership patterns, have created a unique challenge. Restoring forests at a meaningful scale across 17 counties—where the average size of private land parcels is 17 acres—and myriad of public lands, including 17 state forests and Wayne National Forest—is a daunting task. The stakes are high. These forests clean water as it flows through the headwaters of the economically important Mississippi River and local communities. The Joint Chiefs' project here set the Ohio Interagency Forestry Team, a group of state and federal agencies and other partners such as the National Wild Turkey Federation, on a new trajectory. These organizations are now combining resources and sharing expertise across boundaries to increase efficiency and scale, meaning this collaboration will improve the health of treasured and critical forests and waterways far into the future.

### PROJECT IMPACT

**10 YEARS**  
**Homes Protected**

Partners joined forces 10 years ago as the Ohio Interagency Forestry Team to address forest management needs in southeastern Ohio. The Joint Chiefs' has amplified the team's efforts to reduce wildfire risks under a shared stewardship business model.

Total awarded through the Joint Chiefs' from 2015-17: \$3.2M

USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, the two USDA agencies are restoring landscapes by reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.

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## Collaborative Oak Management in the Ohio Appalachian Mountains

### RESULTS



Cerulean Warbler.  
USDA Forest Service photo

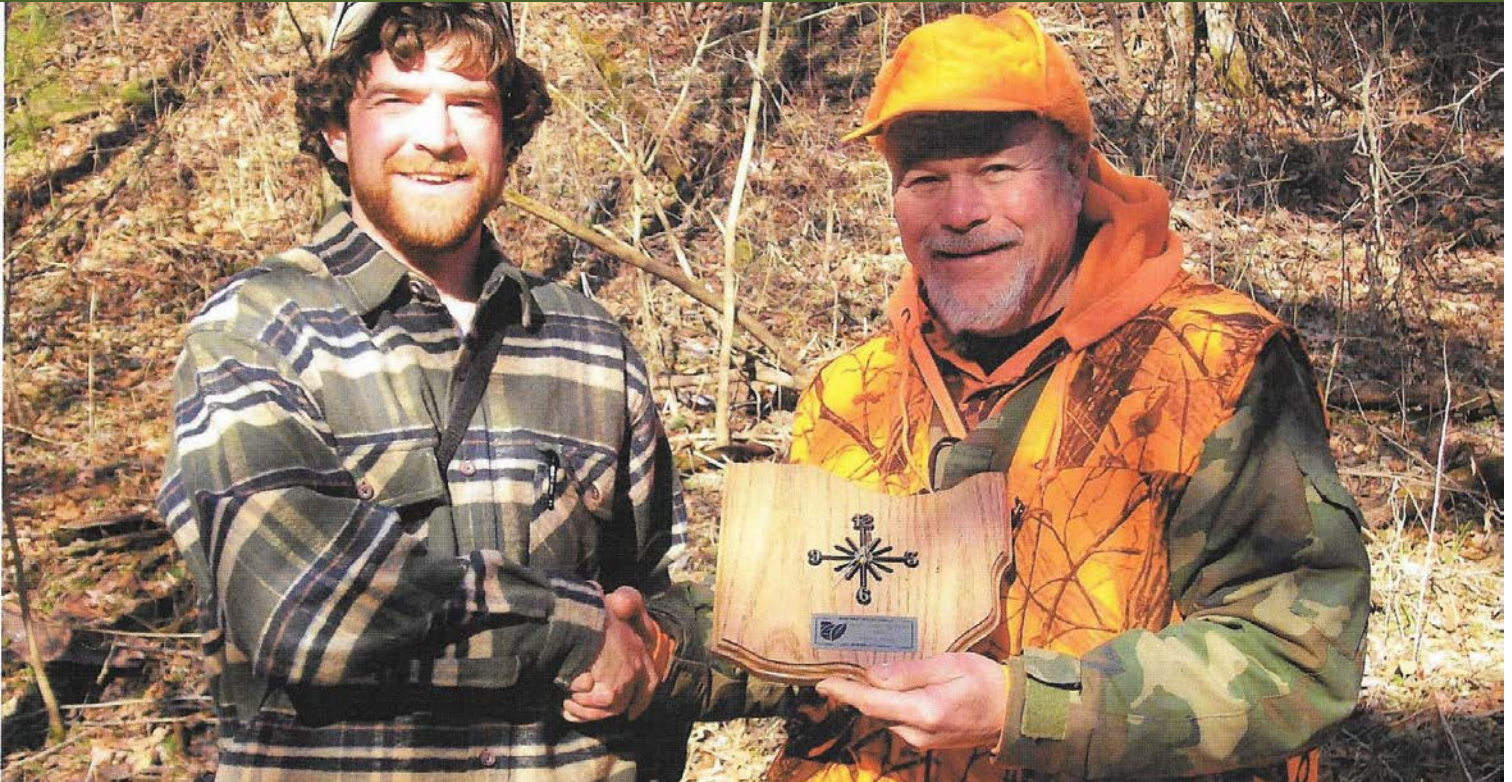
**Reduced wildfire threats:** More than 5,400 acres across the Wayne National Forest were treated with controlled burns to support native oak trees while reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners.

**Protected water quality:** Partners improved 21,304 acres of public forests and 5,919 acres of woodlands. Restoring the health of these lands better protect water quality locally and to the Gulf of Mexico by filtering water through the removal of pesticides and fertilizers that cause algal blooms, which harm the Gulf's wildlife habitat and the fishing and tourism economy.

**Enhanced wildlife habitat:** Restored native oak-hickory woodlands to support bird species, including the Cerulean Warbler, Kentucky Warbler and Wood Thrush. The Wayne National Forest is a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts, including birdwatchers and hunters, so healthy wildlife habitat in and around the forest supports the local economy.



# COLLABORATIVE OAK MANAGEMENT OF THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS



Robert A. "Doc" Rhodes (right) receiving the 2006 Monroe County Soil and Water Conservation District Forest Manager of the Year award from forester Chad Hammond

## A Legacy of Collaboration

Oaks are keystone species in much of the eastern United States and have enormous ecological, cultural and economic importance. This forest type has covered southeast Ohio since prehistoric times but over the last few decades this trend is slowly changing. Reasons for this change include lack of prescribed fire, some timber harvest methods, as well as invasive species. These factors have contributed to a lack of new oak trees and are accelerating the conversion of oak forests to other forest types.

The purpose of the Joint Chiefs' project in Ohio was to catalyze coordination of oak management across Federal, state and private lands within a 17- county area. Part of this collaboration includes providing cost-assistance to private landowners for woodland improvement projects that promote oak.

The Rhodes family has owned and actively managed their 251 acres of woodlands for over 50 years. They have worked with various foresters to promote sustainable forest management practices on their land like planting and pruning trees, controlling grapevines and non-native invasive plants, and making timber stand improvements. Their latest project was to mechanically treat maple, beech and other undesirable tree species directly competing with oak and hickory seedlings. Essentially, this treatment mimics the effects of prescribed fire. The work was completed in 2017 by Ted Rhodes and his sons, with the assistance from consulting foresters Chad Hammond and Tom McDonald. This is one example of how woodland owners in southeastern Ohio can help keep oak on the landscape for future generations to enjoy.



Red Bat. Photo by Katrina Schultes

### Key Partners

- Wayne National Forest
- Forest Service Northern Research Station
- Forest Service Northern Area State and Private Forestry
- Ohio Department of Natural Resources Divisions of Forestry and Division of Wildlife
- The Ohio State University Cooperative Extension
- Central State University
- The National Wild Turkey Federation.