

## Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership

# Sustaining Pennsylvania's Oak Ecosystems Through Partnership in Forest Management



2017-2019



*Aerial view of a heavily shaded forest*

Northern Pennsylvania is home to one of the largest contiguous forested areas in the eastern U.S. The oak-hickory, oak-pine, and maple-beech-birch forest types that are found throughout the project area are also threatened by insects, disease, non-native invasive plants, fire exclusion, and deer browsing. In particular, the exclusion of fire has created a heavily shaded forest with an accumulation of woody fuels that prevents regeneration of oak trees. This Joint Chiefs' project used prescribed burns to restore oak ecosystems and reduce the risk of wildfire to communities. Regularly occurring fires have long been part of Pennsylvania's oak-pine woodlands and savannas. Many species of wildlife rely upon these fire-maintained early successional habitats. But managing fire in and around communities that are highly intermingled with the region's forests is challenging. To meet this challenge is a collaboration of partners from the Allegheny National Forest, non-governmental organizations, NRCS, landowners, and multiple Resource Conservation Districts.

### PROJECT IMPACT:

**2,000+ acres**

USFS & NRCS JCLRP funds awarded 2017-2019: \$3,851,879  
Total USDA and partner project funds: \$4,045,779

More than 2,000 acres were prepared for the next generation of oaks by creating suitable conditions for acorn establishment.

## PROJECT RESULTS



*Acorns on an oak tree*



**Forest management:**  
41 forest management plans were completed on non-industrial private forestlands covering approximately 16,500 acres.



**Oak restoration:**  
nearly 5,500 acres were treated to support healthy oak ecosystems.



**Conservation jobs:**  
18 full time job opportunities were created through this project.

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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## SUSTAINING OAK ECOSYSTEMS



*Oak leaves and acorns*

### Partnering for Oaks

Nestled in the middle of the Moshannon State Forest in Clearfield County, Pennsylvania lies 4,592-acres of forestland managed by the Punxsutawney (Punxsy) Hunting Club. The property had seen decades of growth but very little management since it was bought in the 1920's.

The landowners contacted NRCS to learn how they can manage more like their neighbors, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry and the Pennsylvania Game Commission, in order to restore the healthy diversity of their forest. The landowners, NRCS, and partner agencies worked together to develop a Forest Management Plan, which identified areas that were oak dominant and recommended conservation practices to help regenerate the forest.

Oak ecosystems have been particularly impacted on private lands in Pennsylvania. Proper ecosystem management is crucial for maintaining the health and incredible diversity of Pennsylvania's forests.

In 2018, the Punxsutawney Hunting Club received financial assistance through NRCS to help oak regeneration on 32 acres. In this area, new seedlings were suppressed by the hay-scented fern and stifled by the lack of sunlight. Targeted herbicides were applied to reduce the interfering plants, a cut was done to add desired light levels for oak regeneration on the forest floor, and an 8-foot fence was erected to protect the establishment of oak seedlings.

"It's encouraging to see the work that the Punxsy Hunting Club is doing on their property to increase oak regeneration and improve the health of their forest," said Mary Baker, NRCS Forester. "With the ferns controlled and an exclusion fence in place, there is already oak regeneration occurring. The Punxsy Hunting Club continue to work toward their goals, as outlined in their Forest Management Plan and it will be exciting to watch the changes in their forest."

"Our experience with NRCS has been nothing but good," said CQ Morrison, Punxsutawney Hunting Club co-owner. "NRCS walked us through the process and have always been very helpful."

Forest conservation and sustainable forestry are synonymous with the forestry professionals in Pennsylvania. Projects like the one with the Punxsutawney Hunting Club are helping to improve the sustainability of oak ecosystems and restore forest health and productivity.

For more information, please visit [nrcs.usda.gov/JointChiefsReports](https://nrcs.usda.gov/JointChiefsReports)



*Blackburnian Warbler*

### Key Partners

Allegheny Plateau Invasive Plant Management Area  
Millstone Township  
Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture  
American Bird Conservancy  
Ruffed Grouse Society  
Audubon Pennsylvania  
PA Game Commission  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
Foundation for Sustainable Forests  
Center for Private Forests

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