

OAK OPENINGS  
REGION:  
Discovering Our  
Natural Heritage

*Outreach Guide*

## **Oak Opening Region: Discovering Our Natural Heritage**

### **Overview:**

The Oak Opening Region of northwest Ohio includes Irwin Prairie, Secor Park, Oak Openings Park, Maumee State Forest and Toledo Express Airport – a 130 square mile area. Geographically, it includes much of Lucas, Fulton and Henry counties and is one of Ohio's most unique natural assets.

Oak Openings is a wonderful diversity of landscape that includes sand dunes, open oak woods, swamp forest, alder bogs, and wet and dry prairies. When the region was first settled, much of the wetlands were drained, the forests cut and the grasslands burned. Although reduced in size, small pockets of valuable habitat have been saved and other areas are being returned to their original state.

### **Hold a Screening Event:**

Suggested audience – Adults and children, middle school age and above; naturalists, birdwatchers, those interested in ecology and the environment. If the event is not held at the station, consider a "natural" venue – perhaps a park or other natural area that can be explored before or after the screening. Be sure to include refreshments at the beginning or close of the session.

Discussion prior to viewing: Invite a local park ranger or environmentalist to help introduce the program, and ask him or her to compare and contrast your local region to that of the Oak Openings.

Follow-up activity: Assign the reading of "The Oak Openings (aka) The Bee Hunter" by James Fenimore Cooper (available as an e-book). Although this is a work of fiction, it focuses on life in the Oak Openings Region in 1812. Agree to reconvene a month later to talk about the book. At that time, compare and contrast the description of Oak Openings in the book and what we know of the region from the film, nearly 200 years later.

### **The Last Great Places on Earth**

The Nature Conservancy (<http://nature.org>) has declared the Oak Openings Region one of the Last Great Places on Earth. These areas

are described as unique areas that harbor a concentration of rare species and offer excellent examples of endangered ecosystems. Here is a list of the others. If one is in "your neck of the wood," plan to visit.

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Alabama     | Bibb County Glades<br>Grand Bay Savanna                                       |
| Arizona     | San Pedro River<br>Verde River  |
| Arkansas    | Big Woods   |
| California  | Cosumnes River<br>Lassen Foothills  |
| Colorado    | Arikaree River<br>San Luis Valley   |
| Connecticut | The Berkshire and Taconic Valleys<br>Tidelands of the Connecticut River       |
| Delaware    | Delaware Bayshores of New Jersey and Delaware<br>Nanticoke River              |
| Florida     | Apalachicola River and Bay<br>The Florida Keys<br>St. Marys River/See Islands |
| Georgia     | Altamaha River<br>Conasauga River<br>Cumberland Island                        |
| Hawaii      | The Hawaiian Forests  |
| Idaho       | Upper Henry's Fork River<br>Vanishing Rivers                                  |
| Illinois    | The Illinois River Valley   |
| Indiana     | The Blue River  |
| Kansas      | Sunset prairies   |
| Kentucky    | The Green river Bioreserve  |

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| Louisiana      | Black Bayou<br>Persimmon Gully<br>Lafitte Woods at Grand Isle  |
| Maine          | Upper St. John River<br>Cobscook Bay   |
| Maryland       | Sideling Hill Creek<br>Nanticoke River   |
| Massachusetts  | The Berkshire and Taconic Valleys<br>the Sandplains of the Massachusetts Islands   |
| Michigan       | Ives Road Fen  |
| Minnesota      | Tallgrass Aspen Parkland   |
| Mississippi    | Grand Bay Savanna  |
| Montana        | Rocky Mountain Front   |
| Nebraska       | The Platte River   |
| Nevada         | Pyramid Lake and Stillwater Marsh  |
| New Hampshire  | Great Bay Estuary<br>Ossipee Pine Barrens  |
| New Jersey     | Delaware Bayshores   |
| New Mexico     | Gila River<br>Mimbres River  |
| New York       | Adirondack Park<br>Eastern Shore of Lake Ontario<br>French Creek<br>Neversink river<br>Peconic (Eastern Long Island)<br>The Shawangunk Mountains<br>Southern Lake Champlain Valley |
| North Carolina | The Jocassee Gorges<br>The Green Sea Wetlands  |

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
|                | The South Mountains   |
| North Dakota   | Missouri Coteau   |
| Ohio           | Darby Creeks<br>Edge of Appalachia<br>Oak Openings                          |
| Oklahoma       | Cucumber Creek Preserve   |
| Oregon         | Upper Klamath Basin Wetlands  |
| Pennsylvania   | Pocono Mountains  |
| Rhode Island   | Block Island  |
| South Carolina | The Jocassee Gorges<br>Winyah Bay Bioreserve                                |
| South Dakota   | Missouri Coteau<br>Northern Hills Spring Creeks                             |
| Tennessee      | The Clinch Valley<br>Conasauga River<br>The Hatchie river                   |
| Texas          | Clymer Meadow<br>Laguna Madre<br>Lower Rio Grande Valley<br>Edwards Aquifer |
| Utah           | Bar J Ranch Macrosite<br>Dugout Ranch<br>Great Salt Lake                    |
| Vermont        | Southern Lake Champlain Valley  |
| Virginia       | The Clinch Valley<br>The Green Sea Wetlands<br>Virginia Coast Reserve       |
| Wisconsin      | Lulu Lake   |
| West Virginia  | Smoke Hole/North Fork Mountain  |

### **Native Species/Invasive Species**

The Oak Openings Region: Discovering our Natural Heritage film talks about the importance of re-introducing native species in the area to restore one of the Midwest's rarest ecosystems – allowing native insects, birds and butterflies and animals who depend on the native plants to live. For example, in Oak Openings, the wild lupine is the only food source for the rare Karner Blue butterfly. Find out what species are native to your region and use these to beautify your garden instead of bedding plants.

Invasive species may or may not be what we think of as weeds. Although many are weeds, invasive species are those which are not native to the region, (usually introduced by humans) reproduce rapidly, and take up space or “choke out” native plants. Find out about invasive species in your region and join volunteer groups to help control these invaders.

### **Conservation Easements**

Among the fastest growing method of land preservation in the United States today, conservation easement is a restriction placed on a piece of property to protect its associated resources. The easement is either voluntarily donated or sold by the landowner and constitutes a legally binding agreement that limits certain types of uses or prevents development from taking place on the land in perpetuity while the land remains in private hands. Many times, property owners are provided tax benefits for agreeing to a conservation easement.

Find out about the use of conservation easements in your community. Find a speaker from a local environmental agency to speak on the topic.

### **Take a Family Nature Walk**

Find a natural area to visit – perhaps by a river or other body of water, a woods, or forest. It is important to take young children out of doors in natural surroundings while they are young, when the world is full of discovery. Be sure children understand rules about staying close to

adults and not touching plants that are not safe (like poison ivy and Virginia creeper). Children, who have heard stories like Goldilocks and Red Riding Hood may be frightened of wild animals being in the woods. It would be good to have a conversation about this prior to the visit.

Here are some things that you will need for your walk:

- boots or waterproof shoes
- a pencil and a piece of white paper
- a magnifying tool
- a piece of yarn
- wear long pants and shirt and use mosquito repellent, if needed.

- ❖ As you walk along, stop several times. Drop a piece of yarn or string. Pretend to be an insect and the string is your path. Use your magnifier to explore things from an insect's point of view. Do you see any signs of animal or insect life? Any footprints or tracks?
- ❖ In spring and summer, lie on your back in a grassy area. Do you see anything you haven't noticed before? What animals have this same view?
- ❖ In any season, squat down so that you are in a low position, much like that of an animal. What do you see you haven't noticed before?
- ❖ Find a plant growing on the ground. Put some paper under it to capture its shadow. Trace around it. (You can color it at home.)
- ❖ Be very quiet. What sounds do you hear? Insects? Birds? Animals? Water? Wind?
- ❖ Pick up a leaf or seed. Can you find the tree it came from?
- ❖ Touch the ground. How does it feel? Soft? Rough? Wet? Dry? Frozen? Damp? Has it rained or snowed recently?
- ❖ Find a puddle. Do you see any signs of insect or plant life in the puddle?

- ❖ If it hasn't rained recently. . . make a puddle prediction. If it rained or snowed melted which way would the water run?
- ❖ Touch the bark of two different trees. Are they rough? smooth? bumpy? damp? Put another piece of paper on one of the trees. Rub your pencil gently over it.
- ❖ Find a rock. Look through your magnifier. Do you see anything alive on the rock?
- ❖ Remember:
  - Do not disturb anything on your visit to natural areas. If you examine something, put it back where you found it.
  - Do not take flowers or nuts or other things growing out of the woods. The seeds for those flowers must stay there so that there are flowers for the next year. The nuts may be what are needed to keep alive the animals that live there.
  - The next time you visit, take along a trash bag. Pick up trash that you see and help the environment.

### **Volunteer Opportunities to help Ohio's Environment**

*Ohio's Scenic Rivers Stream Quality Monitoring Project* trains volunteers to monitor macro invertebrates which live in the rocks and cobbles of a riverbed. by monitoring their presence, the Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources can assess stream quality and note changes. For more information: [www.dnr.state.oh.us/odnr/dnap](http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/odnr/dnap)

*Ohio's Scenic Rivers Program* involves citizens in litter cleanups removing trash from riverbanks and channels, planting of trees and stream bank stabilization projects. For more information: [www.dnr.state.oh.us/odnr/dnap](http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/odnr/dnap)