Oak woodlands need our help. These critical habitats are in trouble across the eastern United States. One factor is that oaks are not regenerating in overly shaded areas. Sub-canopy and ground layer species are also impacted by a lack of sunlight. By opening the canopy in some areas, we can encourage young oaks to grow beyond the seedling stage and improve habitat for native plants the wildlife they support.

Managing for age and species diversity increases the habitat value of an urban forest and spreads out tree losses from mortality, pests and diseases. In developed urban areas a comprehensive tree inventory and a planned planting strategy can help develop a more diverse tree community.

Prescribed fire is an efficient, economical and essential tool for managing Chicagoland’s natural communities. Without prescribed burns, invasive species can out-compete native plants and leaf litter accumulates, shading the ground.

Hydrology is the movement of water in relation to land, including how water cycles and moves through watersheds. Historically, the Chicago region had scattered wetlands and areas of standing water. As the land was cleared for agriculture, farmers buried drain tiles (clay pipes) to carry water away from their fields. Today, land managers remove drain tiles to rehydrate historic wetlands and restore a more natural flow of water across the land.

Contemporary development in watersheds has dramatically changed the pattern of flow in our rivers. Dam removal, riffle-pool restoration and reconnecting streams to floodplains are some techniques available to improve moving waters.

Invasive species are plants and animals that spread aggressively. These are often non-native species that overtake habitats. Invasive species have a negative effect on our natural areas and threaten the future of commercial, agricultural and recreational activities dependent on healthy ecosystems.

Control methods of invasive plants include early identification, mechanical removal, selective herbicide application, and periodic prescribed burns. Some invasive species, such as emerald ash borer, create unique challenges that require the cooperation of local, regional, and federal agencies to minimize the spread and reduce the damage of infestation.

Managing invasive species at a large scale is necessary to improve conditions for prescribed burns, reduce competition for native trees and shrubs, increase light levels that stimulate the ecosystem, and improve habitat for the native plants and animals that call our region home.

By developing a network of critical landscapes, everyone can work together to safeguard the natural resources and places that benefit people, wildlife and the economy.
Managing for wildlife habitat and the health of ecosystems creates vibrant communities of native species.

*It's all connected.*

Whatever happens to one parcel or woodlot influences neighboring properties.

These strategies provide food and homes to birds, butterflies and other wildlife on public and private lands alike.

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