

## Supporting Land, Supporting Wildlife

When you think of Kentucky's natural treasures, what comes to mind? Perhaps it's our abundance of valuable limestone under our feet, world-class horses, or maybe our picturesque national parks. Within these national parks and beautiful landscapes of Kentucky live our native wildlife, from black bears and white-tailed deer to eastern chipmunks and our state bird, the vibrant northern cardinal. But how can we protect these vital species and the land they reside in? Through land restoration and preservation practices, including firescaping, population management, and the efforts of the Kentucky Nature Preserves, we can protect and support Kentucky's native wildlife.

One land restoration practice used here in Kentucky is firescaping. Through centuries of practice, indigenous communities mastered the art of using fire to do everything from preparing land for planting to driving game. In the case of reviving the grasslands of southeastern Kentucky, biologists looked to this method to restore the vegetation for reintroduced native Elk populations. In the "Keeping it Wild" tabloid, their research shows that "Replenished grasslands touched by fire can help retain elk in the area. By tracking their movement with radio and GPS collars, studies show freshly burned areas concentrate elk." By burning poor-growth areas, the regrowth that springs up provides lush vegetation for wildlife to graze on. Kentucky's work to restore native elk to the grasslands of southeastern Kentucky was in no small part helped by biologists' efforts to restore the land to its former, green glory.

Another practice used to protect land is population management. When a population of animals gets too high and too concentrated in an area, it can cause damage to native flora and the health of the animal population. This is where population management comes in- keeping the numbers of a population to a sustainable amount for the health of both plant and animal wildlife. One instance of this is with the white-tailed deer. As explained on the National Park Service website, "Research has shown that vegetation damage occurs when deer populations

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exceed 20 per square mile. Reducing the deer population is needed to allow regeneration in a healthy, diverse forest that supports native vegetation and wildlife, including deer." The tabloid, *Keeping it Wild!* explains our similar situation here in Kentucky. However, this isn't an issue with the right management of native deer populations. By keeping the numbers of white-tailed deer under control, the natural plants of Kentucky's woodlands are better protected and able to thrive. Additionally, deer populations are healthier and better managed.

One final instance of land protection and restoration is the efforts of the Kentucky Nature Preserves, or the KNP. The KNP is a state organization dedicated to choosing natural areas of land to preserve its resources and wildlife. According to KNP's website, "A state nature preserve is a legally dedicated area that has been recognized for its natural significance and protected by law for scientific and educational purposes." KNP's work to restore and preserve the valuable land of Kentucky is a crucial part of maintaining ecosystems and preserving our heritage. With methods such as invasive species management, fire management, and rare species restoration, KNP can create a landscape where native species can survive how they should.

Given the information above, there are several ways in which we can further our efforts to sustain Kentucky's wildlife in the context of land. With the proper land restoration and preservation practices, we can protect and support Kentucky's native wildlife. To review, a few practices used here in the Bluegrass are firescaping, population management, and the work of the Kentucky Nature Preserves (KNP). While all of these things are important, you may be thinking- what am I supposed to do? Though you may not be a certified fire technician or a land management official, you can still make a difference in protecting the land. Conservation of our land and in turn our wildlife is important to all aspects of life- from food and water to our social-emotional health. So, taking the time to inform yourself on the impact you're making and the impact you *can* make is a small, but powerful action for both yourself and your community.

Works Cited

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