



## UPCOMING EVENTS

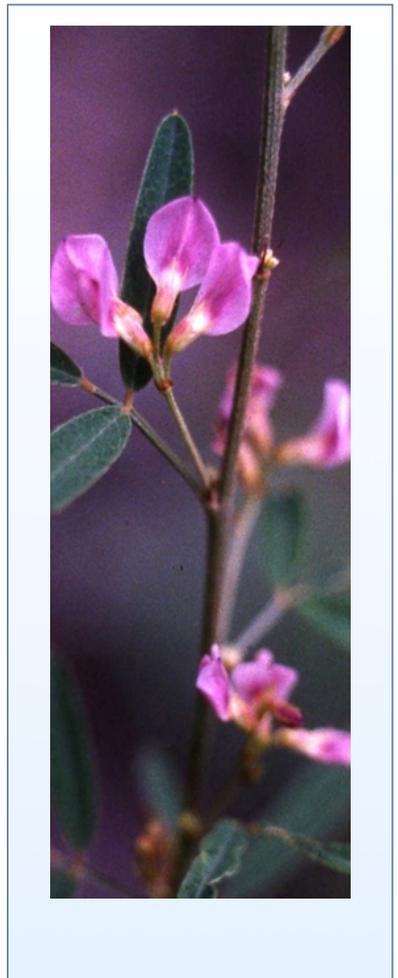
### Iowa Academy of Science Annual Meeting

April 16-17, 2010

Graceland University, Lamoni

The Iowa Academy of Science will be holding their annual meeting April 16-17, 2010 at Graceland University in Lamoni. The meeting will include lectures and topics from high school, college and post graduate research work in the field of science. Gregg Pattison, USFWS, will be presenting on natural resource management which will include the Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance restoration initiative and the patch-burn grazing project in Ringgold County. In addition, a field trip to Slip Bluff Park will be held on the afternoon of April 17 to further examine the natural history of Decatur County and see some of the ongoing savanna, woodland and prairie restoration efforts.

*SIOSA programs and activities are open to any person regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.*



## SIOSA Update

John Orvis, SIOSA President



John and Sharon Orvis

With 2009 now behind us, it's time to set our sights on making 2010 even more productive for SIOSA. This will not be easy as 2009 proved to be both extremely busy and rewarding for the group. As you know, SIOSA held a number of activities throughout the year with the highlight being the 2009 Iowa Prairie Conference held July 17-18 at Graceland University. SIOSA also resumed publication of their quarterly newsletter in hopes of recruiting new members and getting more active participation from current members.

Although the past year was filled with much excitement, it also came with a great loss. In November, SIOSA lost a valuable member when Blake Kouri passed away while on a hunting trip in Missouri. Blake was a student at Graceland University and worked as an intern for Gregg Pattison helping in all facets of prescribed burning and savanna restoration. Blake was a wonderful asset and a pleasure to work with. He will be missed greatly by everyone.



Blake Kouri observing weather before a prescribed burn.

SIOSA will hold its first meeting of 2010 at 7:00 PM on January 14 at the Decatur County Courthouse. Several of the items the Board of Directors plan to cover during this meeting include the final selection of officers, upcoming SIOSA sponsored activities, and new savanna restoration projects being planned for 2010. Monthly meetings are generally held on the 2nd Thursday of each month at the courthouse. As always, we encourage anyone wishing to learn more about SIOSA to attend.

## Land Donation Fits County's Needs

### Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation

In 2005, when the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation received a 52-acre donation in Decatur County, staff members took a good, hard look at the property.

They saw remnant prairie, healthy bur oaks, a stretch of Elk Creek and a pond that had formed in the pit of a quarry, abandoned since the 1960s. Beasley Farms, Inc., the land's donors, had no plan for the site. After a thorough exploration and consultation with local conservation interests, INHF Land Stewardship Program Director Joe McGovern decided how best to fit the property into the area's existing system of protected and restored lands.

On November 10, 2009, the Decatur County Conservation Board officially accepted the 52-acre donation from the INHF. The land, to be called the Elk Creek Wildlife Area, will open

for public recreation, fishing, hunting and other forms of outdoor enjoyment immediately, and INHF's McGovern couldn't be more pleased. "I'm really happy that the county is taking this property," McGovern said. "It definitely should be a public recreation land."

The Decatur CCB has already been working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on habitat improvement and methods to promote native vegetation. Some cedars and honeysuckle are being cleared from the area to maintain the site's health and encourage the growth of native red oak.

Rich Erke of the CCB thanked INHF and the original owners for the donation, citing its benefits. "It's a great asset to Decatur County to have this area," Erke said. "It will make a very nice addition to our public land."



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When Steve Beasley and the Beasley family donated the property to INHF, they had no set plan—they just knew they wanted their land to be protected. Foundation staff worked with the landowners to come to a welcome solution, and the family is pleased with the result. “This is something we’re glad to be able to do, and we hope the community enjoys the site and has benefit from it,” Steve Beasley said.



A pond that has formed in the pit of the abandoned quarry.

INHF is a nonprofit, conservation group that works with private landowners and other partners to protect Iowa’s land, water and wildlife. Since its founding in 1979, INHF has helped protect more than 100,000 acres of Iowa’s wild places.

Past INHF projects in southern Iowa include the Rathbun Wildlife Area Addition, Boone Woods and the Kellerton Wildlife Area Addition.

For more information, visit [www.inhf.org](http://www.inhf.org) or call 515-288-1846.

## Bird Conservation Areas Help Protect Declining Species

Gregg Pattison, US Fish & Wildlife Service

Many bird species have declined dramatically in Iowa over the past several decades. The main cause of the decline is the loss, fragmentation or degradation of habitat. To combat the declines in bird populations, several national initiatives were established to build comprehensive landscape solutions to the problem. The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) and Partners in Flight (PIF) are two examples of these initiatives. Through collaborative efforts a model for landscape efforts to conserve bird population was established called Bird Conservation Areas (BCA).

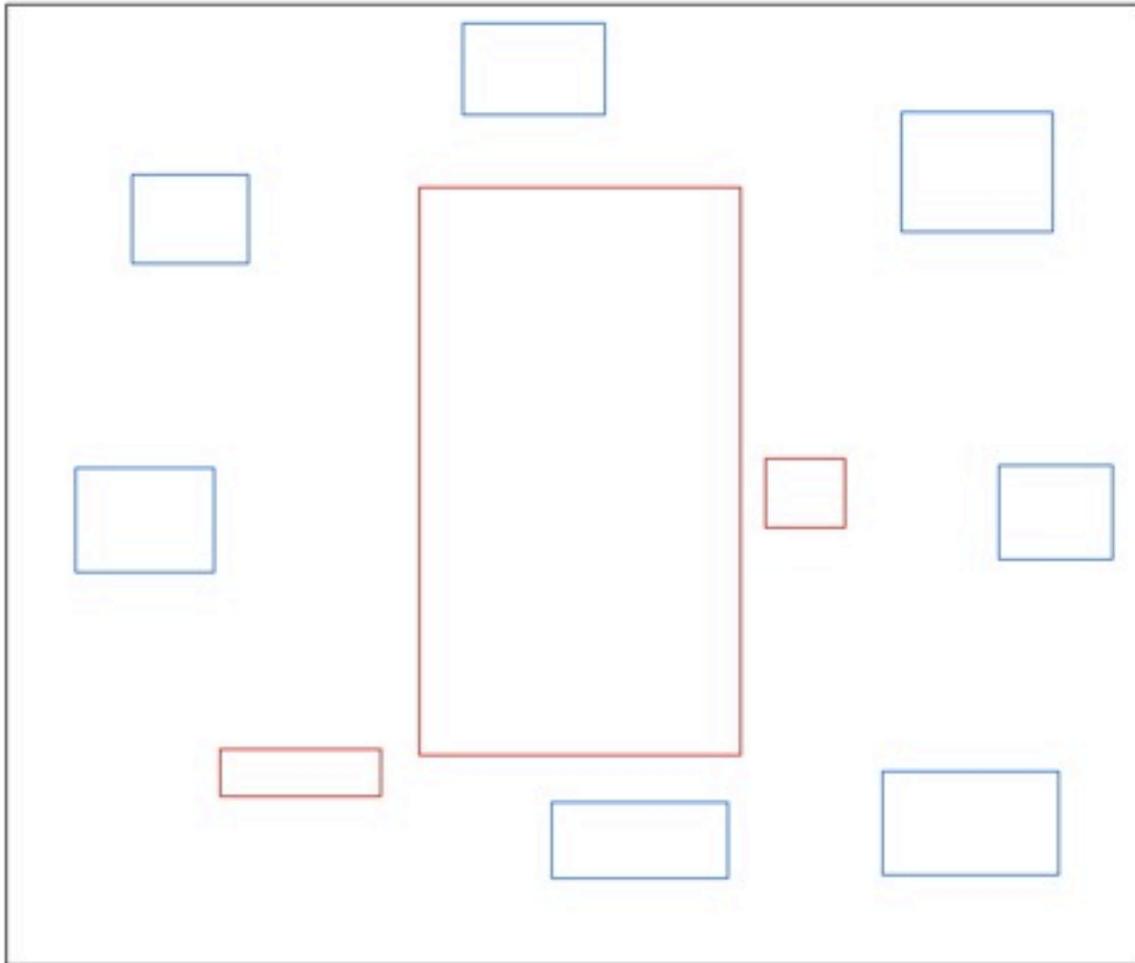
The model for a BCA landscape is fairly simple, but does require a core area of the desired habitat to be permanently protected by public ownership or conservation easement. The minimum size for a BCA is 10,000 acres of which a minimum of 25% of the area must be high quality habitat of the desired suite of bird species. For example, grassland BCAs must have at least 25% of the landscape as high quality grassland habitat. This can include high quality areas that are currently degraded, but restorable. In addition, the BCA must have at least 20% of the area in permanent protection with a core area of 2,000 acres of high quality of habitat. The land surrounding the core area should have several small high quality habitat units that are around 100 acres or more in size. The remaining land in the BCA should be “neutral” in how it affects bird life within the high quality areas. This matrix of a large core of quality habitat and surrounding small units of quality habitat should create an ideal situation for a suite of bird species to flourish. (See Diagram 1)

The Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program runs the BCA program in Iowa. The first BCA established in Iowa was the Kellerton BCA in Ringgold County in 2001. It was the first grassland BCA in the nation. The keystone species for the Kellerton BCA is the greater prairie chicken, but work to restore habitat for the greater prairie chicken also improves conditions for other grassland birds such as the Henslow’s sparrow, bobolink, dickcissel, short-eared owl, northern harrier and the upland sandpiper. Iowa has now expanded to 13 BCAs across the state and target grassland, wetland, and forest habitats.

A new BCA has been proposed for the northwest portion of Decatur County around the Sand Creek and Dekalb Wildlife Management Areas. This will be the Sand Creek Woodland/Savanna BCA with an emphasis on woodland and savanna bird species. This BCA will fit well into the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan and should protect quality habitat for mockingbird, loggerhead shrike, Bell’s vireo, long-eared owl, Swainson’s hawk and many more species including game species such as the bobwhite quail and wild turkey. Not only does this area have high potential for savanna and woodland species, but the area also has very high proportion of grasslands that will benefit from good savanna and woodland management activities.

BCAs can also have a very good affect on local economies. The US Fish and Wildlife Service estimated over \$300 million were spent on wildlife observation in Iowa in 2006. Ecotourism and bird watching are very popular activities and with the new Sand Creek BCA, there will be a series of BCAs in south central Iowa from Ringgold County northeast to Lucas County. A very attractive draw for bird enthusiasts looking for new areas to observe wildlife. (See Map 1)

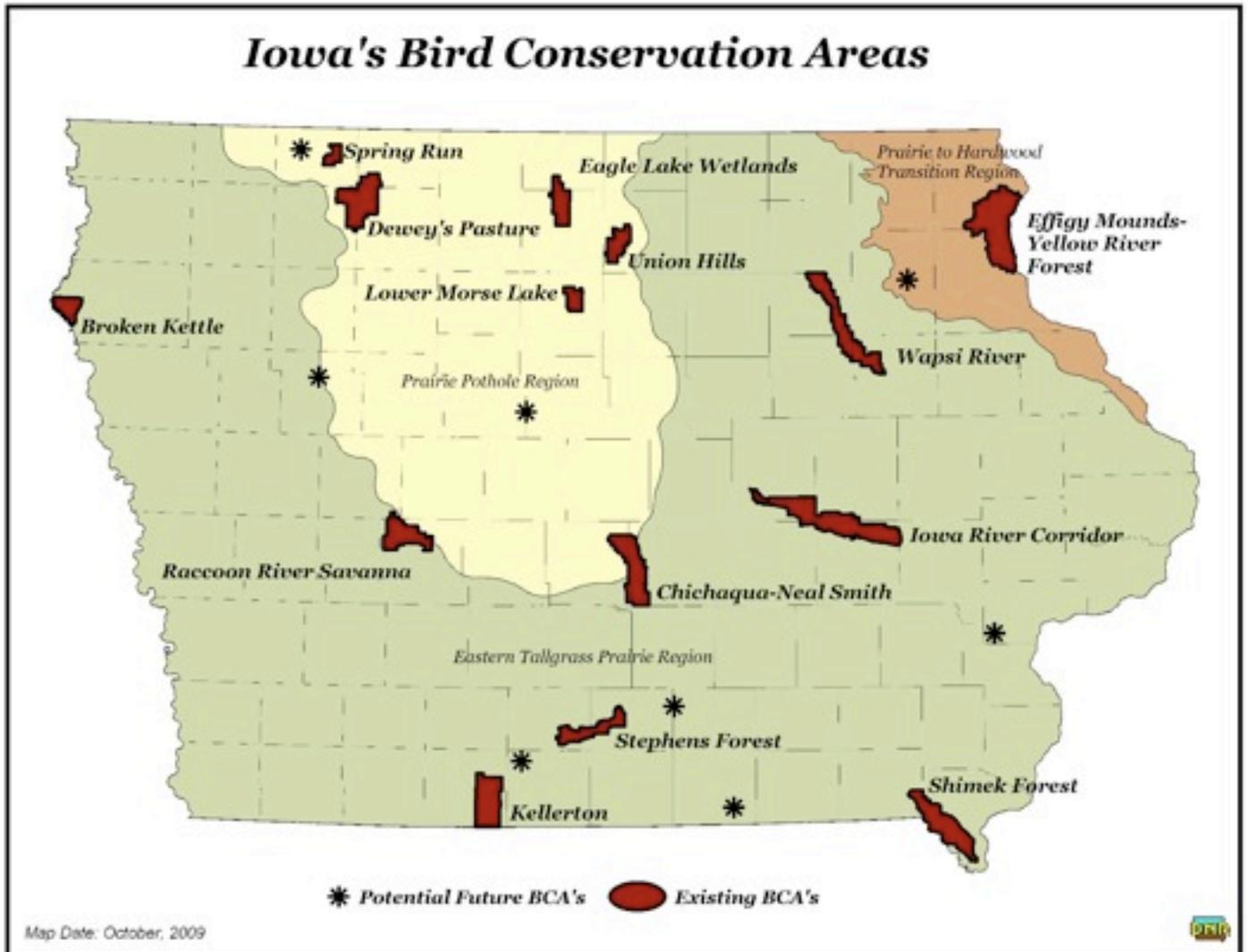
Diagram 1: Bird Conservation Area Model



-  BCA Boundary (minimum 10,000 acres)
-  Core Habitat Area (Minimum 20% of BCA - can be in parcels but needs to be in permanent protection)
-  Quality Habitat Units (public or private)

The core habitat area and quality habitat units should be high quality habitat that supports the desired suite of target species. For example: if the BCA is managing for savanna species the habitat units should have high quality savanna habitat.

# Map 1



## Oak Woodland and Savanna Restoration on Public and Private Land

Jessica Flatt, Area Forester  
Stephens State Forest, Iowa Department of Natural Resources

In tight budget times, land managers must seek out alternative funding to complete prescribed forest management and to assist private landowners in their forest management. One place that Iowa DNR Bureau of Forestry can apply for funding is through the USDA Forest Service's Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry Program. In 2007, the Forest Service decided to take 15% of the "net available" state and private forestry funds and make them available in a competitive grant process. This process is called the State & Private Forestry "Redesign Competitive Initiative." States compete for allocations and the funding is focused on important projects that meet the Forest Service's stated goals, objectives, and strategic plans. This past funding year Iowa DNR Bureau of Forestry (including public and private lands foresters) teamed up with Iowa DNR Wildlife, National Wild Turkey Federation, Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance, Lucas County Conservation, Clarke County Conservation, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to author a grant that focuses on oak woodland and savanna restoration on public and private land in south central Iowa.

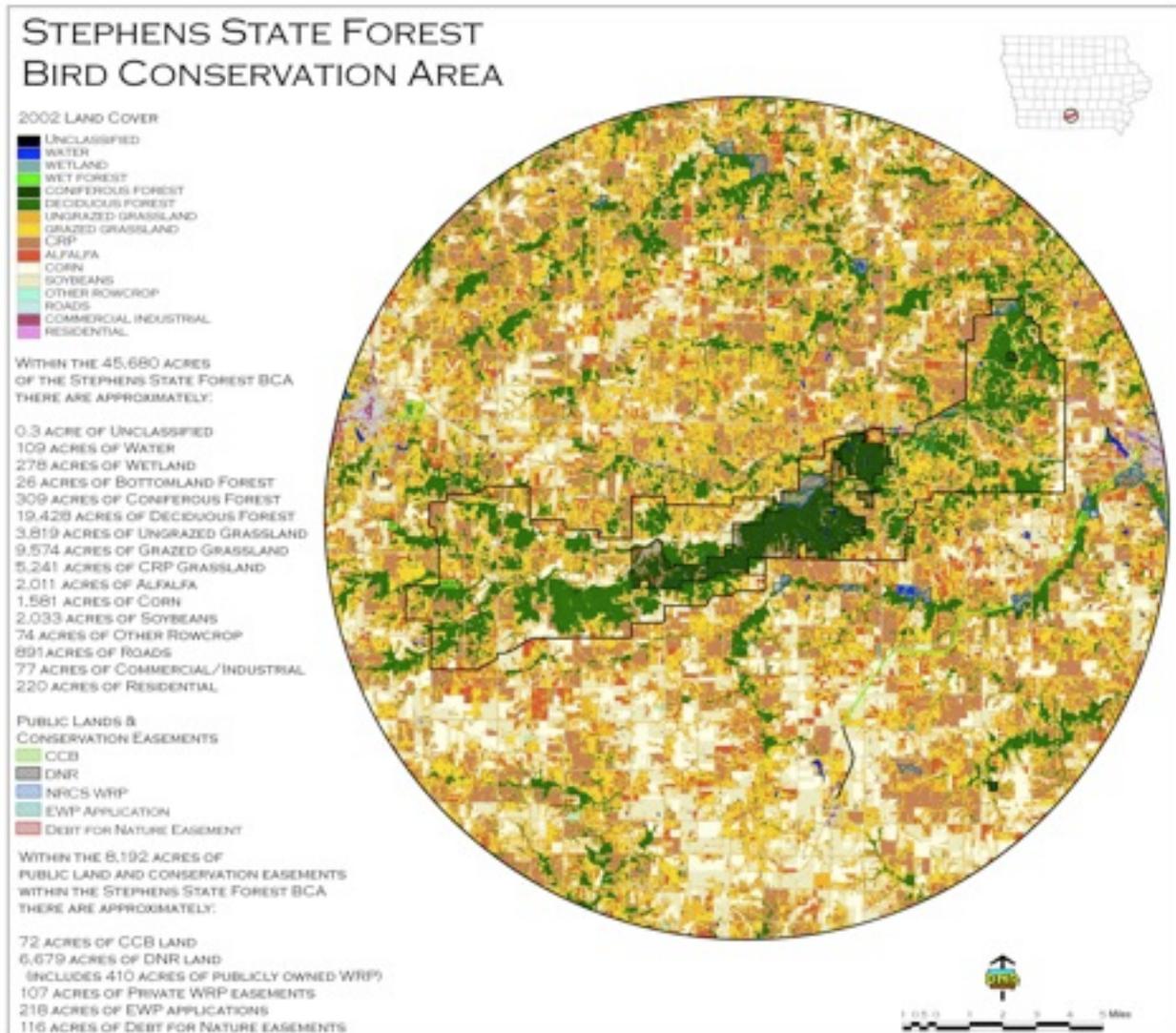
The proposed project area is Stephens State Forest Bird Conservation Area (BCA). The Stephens State Forest BCA encompasses 45,680 acres of public and private land in Lucas and Clarke counties in south central Iowa. Stephens State Forest BCA has a great diversity of ecosystems including oak/hickory woodlands, riparian areas, prairie, wetlands, and oak savanna. The Stephens Forest BCA was chosen as the project site because of its potential for oak ecosystem improvement, wildlife habitat for game and non-game species, and size of core public land. The grant application requests funding for 100 acres of oak woodland and savanna restoration of Stephens State Forest; the stands receiving treatment will serve as demonstration areas for the public and for planned forestry field days.

Of the 45,680 acres in the BCA, 82% are privately owned. A large component of this proposed project is private land outreach. Educational materials will be created and distributed and forestry field days will be held to foster a relationship with private woodland owners. Private landowners will receive assistance in the creation of a Forest Stewardship Plan for their properties. Iowa DNR private lands foresters, along with other project partners, will assist landowners in finding and applying for cost-share programs to help pay for recommended forest management

practices including, but not limited to, forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, and savanna restoration.

The Iowa DNR Bureau of Forestry will receive word in early 2010 regarding the status of the grant application. If the grant is funded, the project would start during the summer of 2010. This project has the potential to reach many landowners and improve the oak ecosystems and savannas in the Stephens State Forest BCA. With 90% of Iowa's forest resource in private ownership, outreach and education is the best way to advocate active forest management, oak ecosystem improvement, and long-term forest resource planning.

For more information, please contact Jessica Flatt at (641)774-4559 or [jessica.flatt@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:jessica.flatt@dnr.iowa.gov)



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## Help Savanna Habitat Restoration by joining SIOSA (Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance)

Members receive quarterly newsletters and can participate in activities throughout the year relating to oak savannas.

### Annual membership rates:

- \$10 Student Member
- \$25 Savanna Friend
- \$100 Supporting Member
- \$250 Sustaining Member
- \$500 Savanna Steward

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

Phone:

Email address:

Send completed form with check or money order payable to SIOSA to:

SIOSA  
c/o Dick Hillyard  
21654 295th Ave  
Leon, IA 50144

## **SIOSA OFFICERS & DIRECTORS**

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Gregg Pattison, USFWS

Richard Erke, Decatur County Conservation Board

William and Sibylla Brown-Timberhill Savanna

SIOSA newsletters are published quarterly. Submissions to the newsletter should be sent to the editor:

Mark Erke at [SIOSA@me.com](mailto:SIOSA@me.com)