

HeartLands Conservancy

Program Area:

Natural Areas Program

County:

Jackson, Alexander

Grantee:

HeartLands Conservancy

Grant Date:

May 2016

Grant Amount:

\$610,000

Location:

Grand Tower, IL 62942

In 2016, the not-for-profit conservation organization and land trust, HeartLands Conservancy, was awarded a grant to purchase habitat within and along the Mississippi River Floodplain to help expand the Shawnee National Forest in southwestern Illinois. The land trust has acquired 3 properties (Webb, Brooks, and Egret Lake) totaling 218 acres with the goal of transferring them to the United States Forest Service (USFS) for long-term ownership and management. The new acquisitions will not only expand the total acreage of Illinois' only National Forest, but will act as connectors between previously protected parcels owned by the USFS and provide additional public access points.

Together these new additions protect a variety of habitat, including a mature, bald cypress swamp, an oxbow along a historic creek, a to-be-restored bottomland hardwood forest, and a woodland dominated by oaks and beech trees. Each of the properties is connected to previously protected lands, with one adjoining over 800 acres of U.S. Forest Service wetlands and another being part of 2,500 acres of contiguous forest next to the Mississippi River.

While holding the newly acquired properties, HeartLands has also committed to maintaining and improving the sites as needed. In spring 2017, HeartLands began reforesting portions of the Webb property, including 65 acres of former farmland, by planting more than **26,000 trees** with assistance from Ducks

Unlimited and Arbor Day Foundation. Additionally, HeartLands is working on wetland restoration efforts at the site.

What's next for this project?

The grantee organization expects to eventually transfer all three parcels to the USFS. HeartLands is already in the process of transferring the Brooks parcel to the USFS with help from a National American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant acquired by Ducks Unlimited. The USFS plans to apply federal funds allocated under the Land & Water Conservation Fund program to purchase the remaining two properties. Per the Foundation's grant agreement, HeartLands has committed to reinvesting any funds it receives from the transfer of land to another conservation entity (in this case the USFS) towards the protection and restoration of additional natural habitat in southern Illinois. Expanding the Shawnee and protecting additional natural habitat within the Mississippi River Floodplain remain a high priority for HeartLands and its partners.



View of the Brooks property.





Looking down a steep hill at the Egret Lake Property.