

Cooper Hill Conservation Area

Twenty-Year Area Plan
FY 2018-2037





Wildlife Division Chief

1 June 2017

Date

Cooper Hill Conservation Area Management Plan Approval Page

PLANNING TEAM

Adam Jones, Wildlife Management Biologist

Brian McKeage, Fisheries Management Biologist

Seth Barrioz, Private Land Conservationist

Samantha Rhoades, Conservation Agent

Aaron Holsapple, Resource Forester

Brian Flowers, Outdoor Skills Specialist

Chris Newbold, Natural History Biologist

CENTRAL REGION

RCT Chair


Signature

5/23/2017
Date

WILDLIFE DIVISION

Wildlife Management Chief


Signature

5/30/17
Date

OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Cooper Hill Conservation Area, #9605
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1996
- **Acreage:** 214 acres
- **County:** Osage
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Forestry
- **Statements of Purpose:**

A. Strategic Direction

The primary purpose of Cooper Hill Conservation Area (CA) is to provide recreational opportunities to the public, including fishing, hunting, outdoor photography, wildlife viewing, and camping. The area is managed for the restoration and maintenance of forest and woodland natural communities, habitat for healthy wildlife populations, and diverse public recreational opportunities. The river access is maintained to be inviting for public use.

B. Desired Future Condition

The desired future condition of Cooper Hill CA is a woodland/forest complex, along with early successional old fields. Focus should be made on the restoration of bottomland forest communities, as well as diverse, early successional upland old fields.

C. Federal Aid Statement

N/A

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

I. Special Consideration

A. **Priority Areas:** Gasconade River Stream Reach Conservation Opportunity Area

B. **Natural Areas:** None

II. Important Natural Features and Resources

A. **Species of Conservation Concern:** Species of conservation concern are known from this area. Area managers should consult the Natural Heritage Database annually and review all management activities with the natural history biologist.

B. **Caves:** None

C. **Springs:** None

D. Other:

- **Woodlands:** The area is comprised of woodlands of varying quality. Some of the woodlands have been actively managed with thinning, while others remain overstocked and lack fire disturbance. Woodlands were historically maintained by fire (Nelson, 2010) and all of the woodlands on Cooper Hill CA need periodic fire disturbances to enhance and maintain their quality.
- **Ecological Subsection:** Cooper Hill CA is located within the Gasconade River Hills Subsection of the Ozark Highlands Ecological Section (Nigh & Schroeder, 2002). This subsection was historically dominated by a mosaic of oak savanna/woodland complexes and scattered upland forest stands. Today the region is dominated by fescue pasture, grazed woodlands, and overstocked woodlands due to the absence of fire.

III. Existing Infrastructure

- Primitive campground
- Parking lot
- One non-stocked pond (1 acre)

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

- A. Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations:** None
- B. Federal Interest:** Federal funds may be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.
- C. Easements:** None
- D. Cultural Resources Findings:** Yes, records kept with environmental compliance specialist. Managers should follow best management practices for cultural resources found in the Department Resource Policy Manual.
- E. Endangered Species:** Endangered species are known from this area. Area managers should consult the Natural Heritage Database annually and review all management activities with the natural history biologist.
- F. Boundary Issues:** Establishing accurate and identifiable boundary markers is a priority for this property.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Monitor and manage the area's natural/existing features (woodland complexes, forests, and diverse old fields).
- 2) Support healthy wildlife populations to provide public outdoor recreational opportunities.
- 3) Suppress invasive species and woody vegetation succession that threaten the quality of open land habitat conditions.

Management Objective 1: Restore and maintain existing features (woodland and forest complexes).

Strategy 1: Conduct forest inventory with an estimated re-entry time of 15 years, or as needed. Existing forest inventory data will be current through FY2022.
(Forestry)

Strategy 2: Use existing and future forest inventory information to identify management units containing predominantly woodland complexes. Use a variety of tools including but not limited to prescribed fire to control woody vegetation development and encourage the expression of native herbaceous vegetation.
(Wildlife/Forestry)

Strategy 3: Use existing and future forest inventory prescriptions to identify overstocked woodlands and forests. Conduct mechanical and/or chemical treatments on these woodlands and forests using Department staff, contractors, and commercial harvests. Continue to conduct woodland/forest management on 25-30 percent of the identified acres between each forest inventory.
(Wildlife/Forestry)

Strategy 4: Utilize a variety of sustainable forest management techniques to promote healthy forest and woodland communities including, but not limited to, tree planting, harvesting, forest thinning, firewood cutting, salvage cuttings, tree planting, seeding, and prescribed burning. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Strategy 5: Maintain a diversity of tree age classes that will provide both a diversity of wildlife habitat as well as resiliency to living and non-living (fire, weather, and climate) damaging agents. (Forestry)

Strategy 6: Utilize best management practices during timber harvest as described in the Department's manuals: *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice manual* (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2014) and the *Missouri Forest Management Guidelines Voluntary Recommendations for Well-Managed Forests* (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2014). (Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Manage upland open lands to provide quality upland wildlife habitat, while maintaining them in the desired successional state.

Strategy 1: Utilize a variety of management techniques to eliminate or control undesirable vegetation, provide bare ground, encourage native vegetation and promote desired structure. Techniques will include, but are not limited to, spraying, prescribed burning, mechanical treatments, woody cover removal, disking, mowing, haying, and seeding. Utilizing these disturbance factors will also maintain a desired early successional state. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Maintain and rotate food plots to provide public use hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 3: Reduce/eliminate invasive species.

Strategy 1: Prioritize, monitor, and plan for the control of invasive species. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Implement invasive species control with priority given to areas delineated during monitoring. (Wildlife)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Protect water quality and habitat in streams.

Management Objective 1: Protect water quality and habitat in streams.

Strategy 1: Maintain/expand riparian corridors along the Gasconade River, Third Creek, and associated tributaries on Cooper Hill CA per Missouri Department of Conservation guidelines (2009). (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Identify riparian corridors that need to be widened and establish appropriate vegetation using tree planting, direct seeding or allowing natural regeneration. (Forestry)

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Provide area users with varied recreational opportunities (e.g., fishing, hunting, camping, and nature/wildlife viewing).
- 2) Provide public information regarding Cooper Hill CA.

Management Objective 1: Provide area users compatible and inviting multi-use opportunities for recreation.

Strategy 1: Maintain accurate area information and regulations through the Atlas database, area brochures, posted information, and staff contacts with area users. (Wildlife)

Strategy 3: Promote compatible recreational opportunities (e.g., fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, canoeing, camping, and nature photography). (Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Manage potential multi-use conflicts through special use permits and coordination of seasonal uses. (Wildlife)

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Maintain cooperation and good relations with neighboring landowners.
- 2) Enforce area and statewide regulations to ensure protection for area users and resources.

Management Objective 1: Maintain area boundaries and access roads to reduce any potential conflicts and confusion with neighboring landowners.

Strategy 1: Inspect and maintain boundaries every five years or as needed. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Continue maintenance and signage on access roads. (Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Monitor and administer area and statewide regulations to ensure public satisfaction.

Strategy 1: Ensure all special use permit users and contractors are following standards set within the contractual agreement, and confront any violations in a punctual manner. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Work in cooperation with conservation agents and other law enforcement to enforce and investigate violations of the *Wildlife Code of Missouri* and other state laws. (Protection)

Lands Proposed for Acquisition:

When available, inholdings and/or adjacent land may be considered for acquisition from willing sellers. Tracts that improve area access, provide public use opportunities, contain unique natural communities and/or species of conservation concern, or meet other Department priorities, as identified in the annual Department land acquisition priorities, may be considered.

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table:

	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 30	FY 31	FY 32	FY 33	FY 34	FY 35	FY 36	FY 37	FY 38
Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations																					
<i>Objective 1</i>																					
Strategy 1						X															X
Strategy 3	X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X
Administrative Considerations																					
<i>Objective 1</i>																					
Strategy1	X					X					X					X					X

APPENDICES

Area Background:

The 214 acres comprising Cooper Hill Conservation Area were acquired by the Missouri Department of Conservation in the early 1990s. The area is named after an adjoining small Osage county town, and borders the lower Gasconade River.

The area features a location to hand launch small boats, Gasconade River access, bottomland forest, and scattered upland and bottomland fields. The area has one designated parking lot which accommodates five vehicles.

Wildlife habitat management on the area includes disturbing old fields, dove management, enhancing native diversity in old field/woodlands, and conducting forest management.

Current Land and Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	Miles	% of Area
Bottomland/Upland Forest	89		42
Woodland	50		23
Food Plot	32		16
Grassland	20		9
Old Fields/Upland Fields	18		8
Stream/Open Water	5		2
Total	214		100
Stream Frontage –Third Creek		0.12	
Stream Frontage – Gasconade River		0.33	

Public Input Summary:

The draft Cooper Hill Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period February 1–28, 2017. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from three respondents (Appendix A). The Cooper Hill Conservation Area Planning Team carefully reviewed and considered these ideas as they finalized this document. A brief summary of public input themes, including how they were incorporated or why they were not, can be found below. Rather than respond to each individual comment, comments are grouped into general themes and are addressed collectively.

Department responses to themes and issues identified through the Cooper Hill Conservation Areas Management Plan public comment period.

Suggests adding a concrete boat ramp.

Because of the proximity of two nearby concrete boat ramps at Pointers Creek Access and Held's Island Access, a ramp at Cooper Hill CA is not a high priority for new infrastructure. Concrete ramps require significant funds to install and maintain.

Suggests moving the camping area away from the parking lot.

Due to forest cover, siltation, flood frequency, and flood debris, camping on Cooper Hill CA is available only in a primitive condition. This means camping on or near the river is allowed but there are no designated sites or restroom facilities available. Maintenance on any such facilities would be significant and is not feasible at this location. Allowing primitive walk-in camping anywhere on the area, away from vehicular traffic, will be considered; we appreciate the input. Camping is also allowed on nearby Canaan CA and Held's Island Access in a condition that may more closely meet needs of someone wishing to avoid tall vegetation and vehicular traffic.

Appreciates the efforts made by the Department to conserve natural spaces.

The planning team appreciates your active involvement and echoes your desire to conserve and retain public lands within the state.

References:

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2009). *Watershed and stream management guidelines for lands and waters managed by Missouri Department of Conservation*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2014). *Missouri Forest Management Guidelines Voluntary Recommendations for Well-Managed Forests*. Jefferson City, MO: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2014). *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests: 2014 Management Guidelines for Maintaining Forested Watersheds to Protect Streams*. Jefferson City, MO: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2016). *Natural Heritage database [Arc Geographic Information System data files]*. Retrieved from Missouri Department of Conservation shape files.

Nelson, P. W. (2010). *The terrestrial natural communities of Missouri*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Natural Areas Committee.

Nigh, T. A., & Schroeder, W. A. (2002). *Atlas of Missouri ecoregions*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Maps:

Figure 1: Area Map

Figure 2: Existing Cover Types

Figure 3: Modeled Natural Communities

Figure 4: Area Infrastructure and Facilities

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A. Cooper Hill Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Area Map

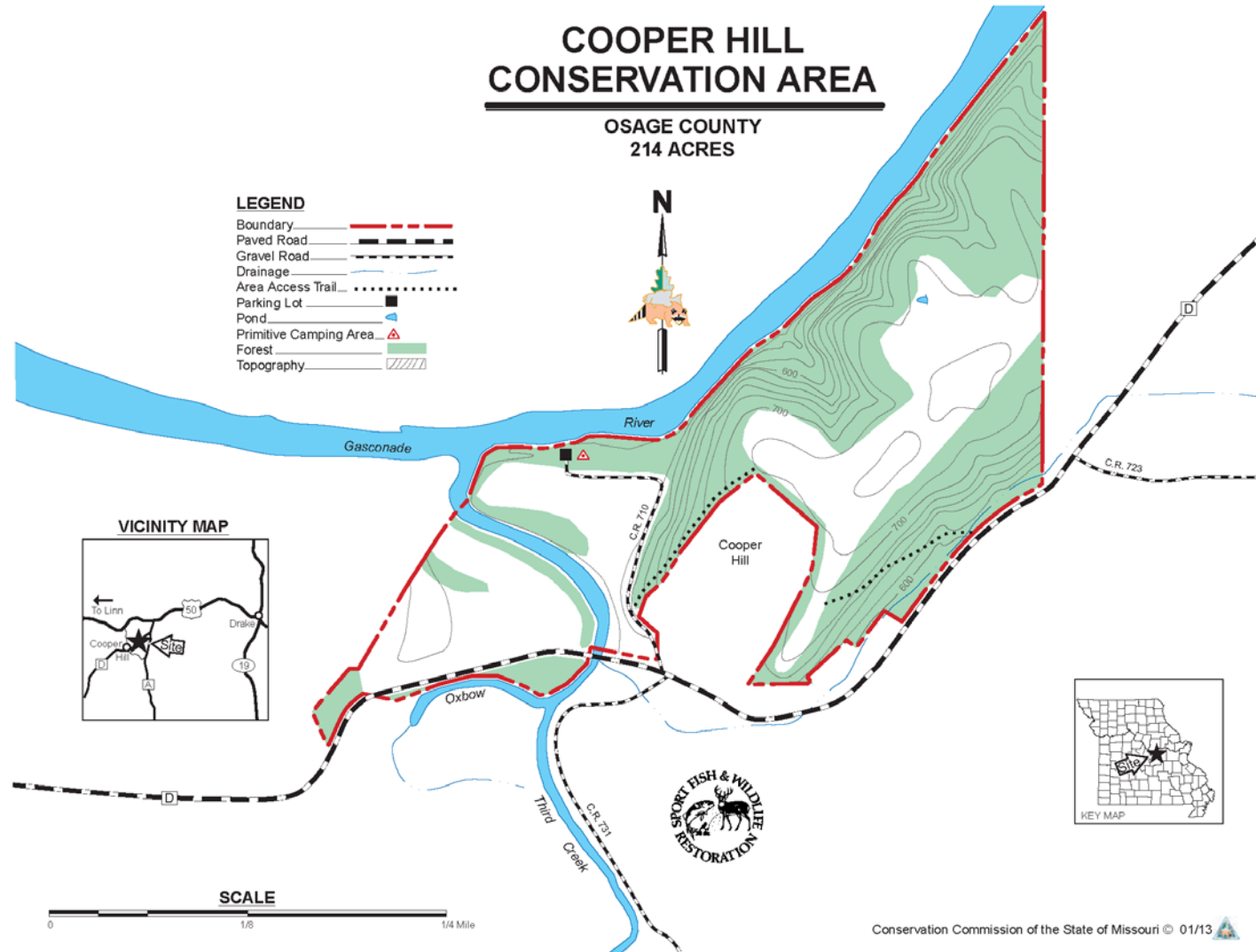


Figure 2: Existing Cover Types

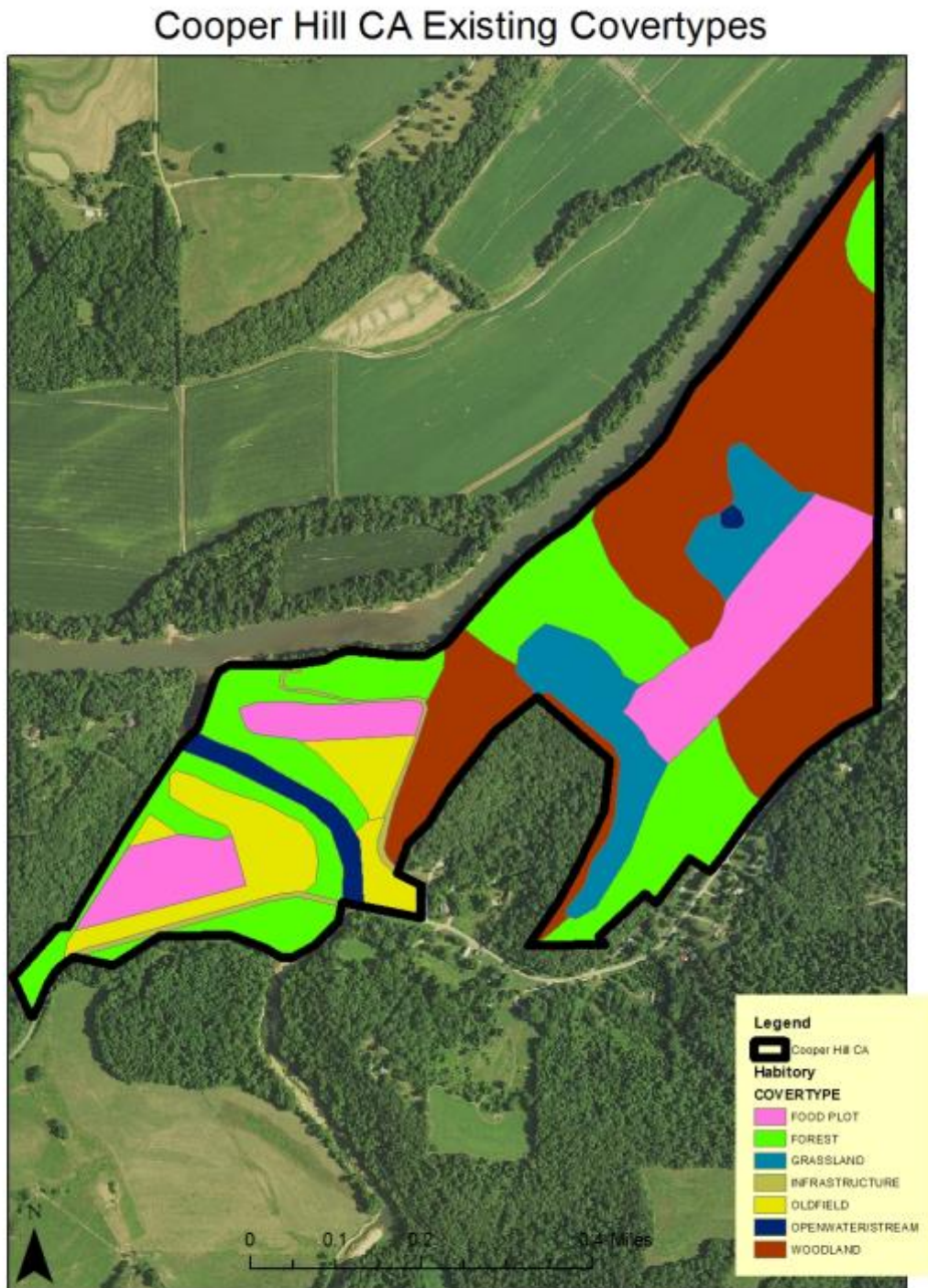


Figure 3: Modeled Natural Communities

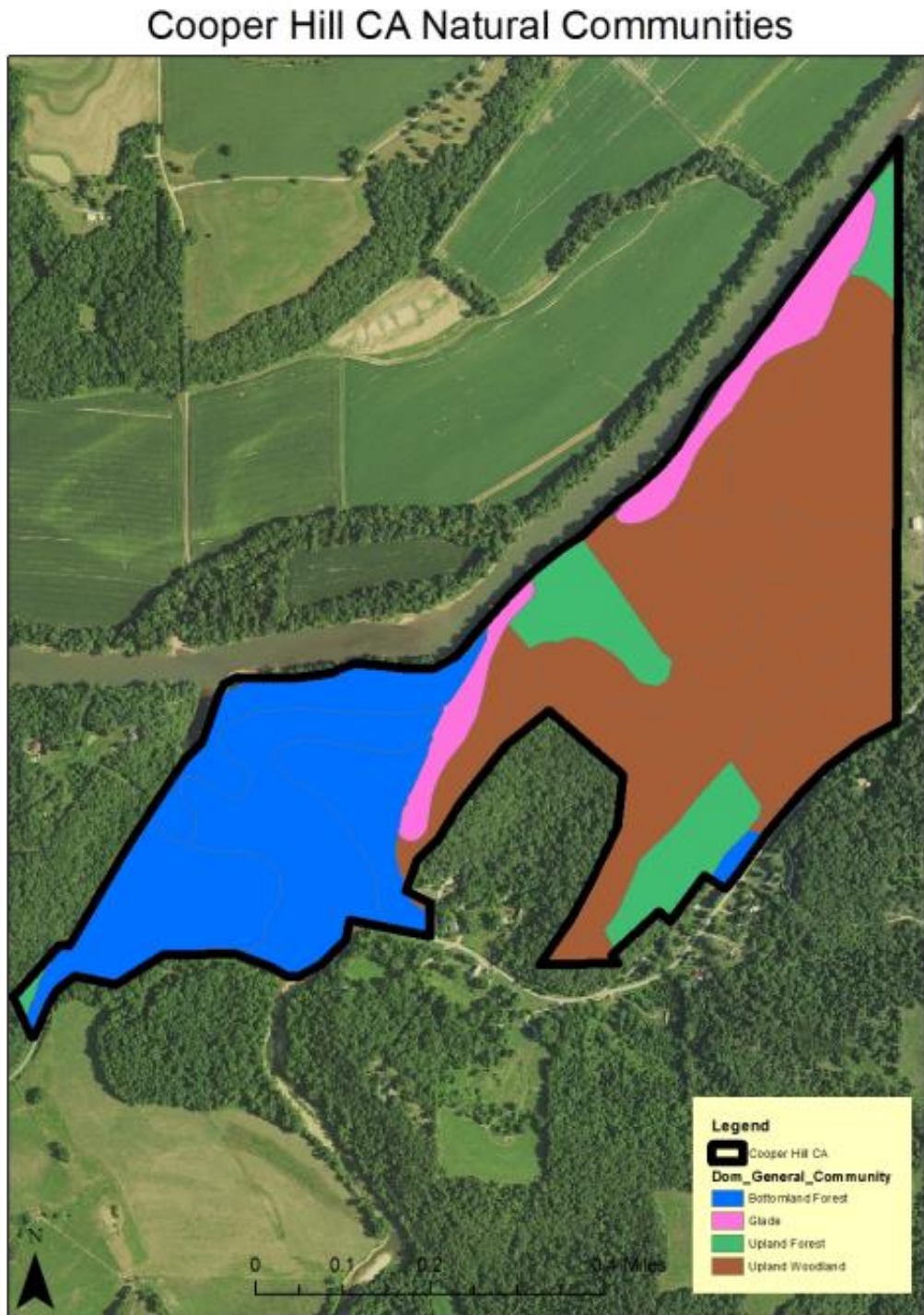
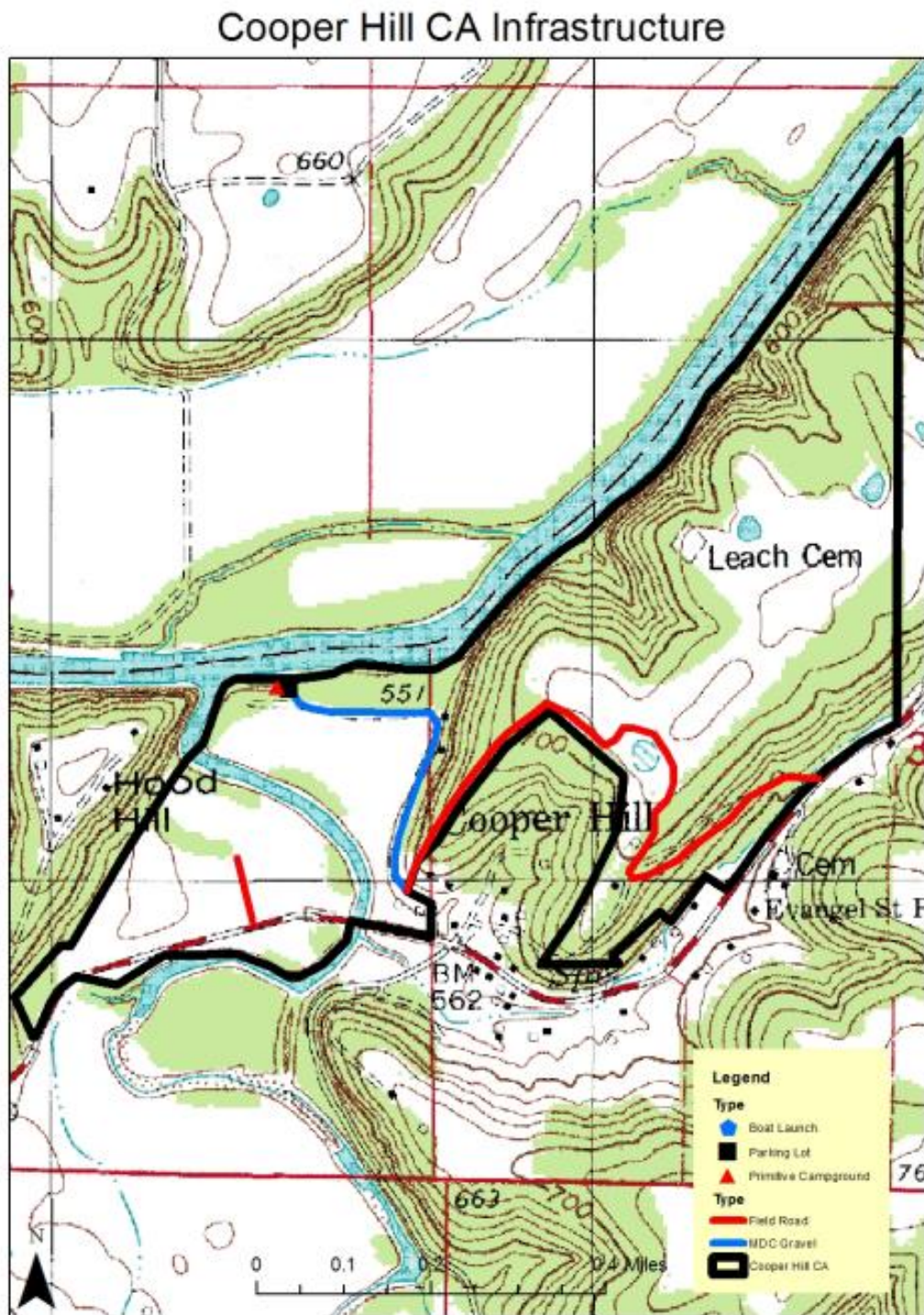


Figure 4: Area Infrastructure and Facilities



Appendix A. Cooper Hill Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (February 1-28, 2017):

This is great, as a lifelong Missouri resident I've always appreciated the care and planning that goes in to making our natural spaces last forever. Thank you for continuing your efforts on behalf of mine and future generations. Cheers.

Please put a concrete boat ramp in .

First, let me say how much I appreciate all of MDC's areas. The vast array of areas open to the public should be considered a great achievement to all who work to maintain them. My family has been to the cooper hill conservation area multiple times. We have recently purchased a home approximately 1/4 mile away and plan to use this area much more in the coming years. As it is designated now, the primitive camping site at this area is not in an ideal location. Most of the year the area designated is overgrown with vegetation or is filled with vehicle parking. I suggest moving the camping area to a place that is not next to the parking lot. For safety concerns, when camping with my young children, I do not want to camp right next to where vehicles are being driven without any sort of clear division between parking lot and camping area. Thank you again for all you do to provide citizens of Missouri with access to these natural areas.