

Upper Mississippi River Watershed

Bottomland Ecosystem Restoration Conference

The Challenge

The Upper Mississippi River watershed covers 189,000 square miles, including 836,000 acres of bottomland forest and the Illinois River watershed. The 26 locks and dams and many levees built along the Upper Mississippi River system have changed the watershed's hydrology. The result is a system with less fluctuation in water level and a disconnection between the river and its floodplain. Bottomland forests—where the land and water meet—and associated wetlands are not regenerating and are severely impacted by invasive species. Restoring the health and vitality of bottomland ecosystems is an important and ongoing component of sustainably managing the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

The Solution

Watershed managers organized the Bottomland Ecosystem Restoration Conference to bring scientists and managers together to discuss the rich Upper Mississippi resource and its associated issues. The March 2011 conference was the first of its kind and was well received. It focused on linking scientific expertise to specific restoration issues, with the goal of providing better solutions to ecosystem management problems in the Upper Mississippi River system. One hundred sixty attendees actively took part in the conference, taking advantage of the rare opportunity to network.

Resulting Benefits

During the conference resource professionals and research scientists shared knowledge, current efforts, and development and evaluation of specific restoration practices. More than 30 scientists, river managers, and other professionals were featured speakers and panelists. Discussion topics included long-term forest trends, ecosystem services, forest establishment, wildlife habitat, invasive plants and insects, forest diseases, climate variability, and much more.

“Excellent job putting together the conference. Really enjoyed presentations and the opportunity to network.”



Conference attendees toured a 75-acre parcel of floodplain forest being replanted to oak, pecan, and hickory to increase tree diversity for wildlife habitat, in Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge, Illinois. (Photo: Megan Dooling, National Great Rivers Research and Education Center)

On the last day of the conference attendees visited active bottomland restoration sites with a variety of tree planting techniques, as well as wetland and prairie restoration projects. Site managers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service discussed the effectiveness and long-term viability of the restoration practices in the Upper Mississippi River system. The Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry sponsored the conference.

Sharing Success

This first Bottomland Ecosystem Restoration Conference sparked widespread interest in holding similar forums. More than 75 percent of attendees surveyed said they would be interested in attending a conference on floods and floodplain management; 65 percent said they would like to attend a conference on river floodplain ecosystems research; and 53 percent said they would also like to attend a follow-up conference on bottomlands. Given the strong interest, this will probably not be the last time scientists and managers gather to discuss the challenges and opportunities within the Upper Mississippi Basin.



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