Clover Lick Barrens

USDA Forest Service Hoosier National Forest 8/2011

Location

Clover Lick Barrens is located in Perry County, Indiana, on the Hoosier National Forest. A vicinity map on the back shows the general location of the area.

History/Geology

Geologically, this part of Indiana is at the contact zone of the Pennsylvanian and Mississippian formations. The Pennsylvanian-age sandstone caps the area and forms small cliffs. The Mississippian formations are of sandstone, shale and limestone, with few outcrops. These markedly different types of bedrock create conditions favorable for the diverse natural communities at Clover Lick. Forests on the sandstones are typically chestnut oak on ridgetops, and other species of oaks and hickory on slopes. The shales and limestones support post oak and blackjack oak, and where more open, have an understory of prairie plants.

Like all of the national forests in the eastern United States, the area was previously in private ownership as farmland, and has been reacquired by the federal government. Land in the vicinity of Clover Lick was acquired beginning in 1936, some of the first tracts to be included in the Hoosier. Ownership of the area was consolidated by the government in 1972, when the last of over two dozen tracts were purchased.

The forest cover has gradually returned over time, and with the exception of pine being planted in areas that were seriously eroded, most of the forest reflects the same species that were there in pre-European settlement times. The number and diversity of prairie plants in the barrens area however, indicate that the area was likely more open in earlier times. Surveyor notes from 1805, recorded a description of the area as "a mile of poor barrens and grassy hills, with much flint and a few scrub oaks."

Ecological significance

The special ecology of the barrens community in the Clover Lick watershed was first noted during the natural areas inventory of Indiana in 1987. Noteworthy areas of prairie grasses and forbs were found under the open canopy of post oak and blackjack oak in this area of predominantly white and black oak. Closer inspection of the sites yielded several prairie species considered rare in the state. Because of the significance of the barrens and its rare plants, Clover Lick Barrens was established as a special area in the 1991 Hoosier National Forest Plan.

Barrens Management

After years of fire suppression, the quality of the natural communities in this watershed had been deteriorating. The understory trees had become so dense that little light filtered down to the forest floor. This increased the humidity and stressed the rare prairie-adapted plants, which impacted the area's diversity.

To begin restoring the vigor of the

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ecosystem, a landscape-scale prescribed fire was recommended. A 2,300-acre landscape, including Clover Lick Barrens, was burned in early April 1993. Seven miles of fire control lines were "constructed" using leaf blowers and rakes to contain the burn area.

The burn blackened about 70 percent of the 2,300 acres. Most of the fuel was accumulated leaf litter. Scorch marks on tree trunks were mostly less than a foot high, but occassionally reached as high as 10 feet. The fire did not burn hot enough anywhere to kill more than a few isolated overstory trees. It did reduce the shade by top-killing small (two-inch diameter or less) understory trees. This allowed the site to dry out by increasing the sunlight and airflow on the forest floor. Since the burn, the herbs in the understory have made a remarkable recovery. In one area, Indian grass, which had been about five feet tall before the fire, grew to nearly eight feet the year after.

Interestingly, the same results were found in invertebrate, mammal, and bird populations. Populations have soared in the area of the burn where more nutrients and a larger food base is now available.

The results following the second burn of this area conducted in April 1995 have been equally dramatic. The second burn was more complete and more uniform with very low scorch marks. Flowering of forbs in the forest and barrens has been profuse and much of the forest floor is now covered with dense vegetation.

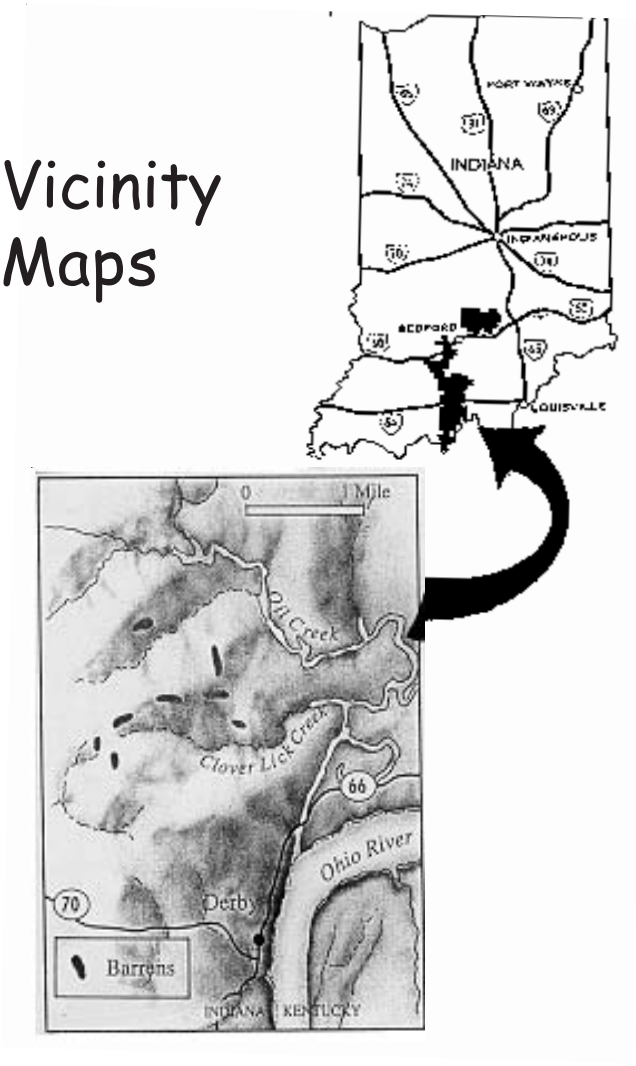
Turkey Management

In 1972, Indiana lacked a viable wild turkey population. The Forest, in cooperation with Indiana Department of Natural Resources, established a 6,000 acre area around Clover Lick to re-introduce wild turkey. This area, known as the Mogan Ridge Turkey Management Area was fenced and closed to hunting until a viable turkey population was established. Six years later, a limited hunting season was opened.

Wildlife is still prevalent in this relatively remote area of the Forest. A limited road system exist, but is kept closed for most of the year. A designated multiple-use hiking, horseback, and mountain bike trail is nearby. A permit is required for mountain bike or horse use of the trail.

A large population of ticks in the area limit the number of visitors to the barrens.

Vicinity Maps



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