**January 14, 2015**

**Oak Savanna Break Out Group at the Burning Issues Symposium, Fort Custer**

(Notes from Ashley Wick)

**Participants (22)**

Jack McGowan-Stinski

Susan Benson

Tina Stevens

Keith Killing

Stuart Turner

Lars Brudvig

Mark Mackay (DNR)

Nate Simons, John B., Phil B. (Blue Heron Ministries)

Dan Zay

Don Bonnette

Rob Hamilton

Steve Allen

Ashley Wick

Ryan Koziatek

Ben Wagner

Mitch Lettow

Matt Demmon

Jesse Bramer

Steve Woods

Gary Siegrist

**Brainstorming Session:**

How to we capsulize information to make it widely available?

Start from scratch from a fallow field vs. trying to rehabilitate a degraded savanna - are these some of the bigger issues about getting savanna back onto the landscape? (Steve Allen)

Keith K. - Yes, but maintenance is also a big deal.

Do we need to define the difference between oak openings/savanna vs oak barrens?

Looking at pre-settlement maps to make sure we are putting savanna on the landscape?

What is the end-goal of savanna restoration/management?

KNC - microbial study on reconstruction and adjacent remnant - microbial

Lars - You can restore a house to so it looks exactly the same (one approach to restoration) the other approach - restore functionality, get it working

Brief discussion of compost tea/slurry of microbial communities for restoring soil (prairies, savannas)

Mitch - Property with restoration for 15 years with a lot of people doing small restoration activities (rogue botanists planting leadplant - conservative)

Kankakee Sands (IN/IL border TNC preserve) planted 450 species inn their mix but got less than half of

What is the end point of restoration? - Matt D.

Client with 50 acres says "burn this" but t hen it's planted with pin oaks and conifers...

Koz - soil structure is an important goal... Maybe hold off on fire and

How were they formed originally? Oaks probably established (depends on species) - what is the relevant human time scale?

Long-term burning study from MN - long-term burning that will open up the canopy will also prevents oak regeneration - Must remember that fire is a disturbance and will disturb.

Historically - we had recolonization after disturbances because savannas were connected across the landscape and not island

Clients think in terms of human time scales - and fire dependent ecosystems involve human interaction. It's hard to get people to think on ecological time scale (except people who have clients like Firekeepers who are good at thinking in the long-term)

Dan Zay - Sometimes has trouble with some of the terminology that is used. For example, succession - hard to communicate with foresters. Some folks minds - succession is linear - and it's not good. The closer you look at systems as dynamic places, succession goes out the window. Some old oak savannas have all trees that are the same age... Is that because of a lack of human intervention?

Common conversation in the DNR (problem with terms and putting them to use in the real world) - preserve oaks but 100% canopy cover... Don't want to lose bur oaks but don’t' want to take out cherries and maples in the understory. Fire in conjunction with thinning. What is immature stand? Old growth? How you define it and what does it mean once you define it.

What is the best use of our time here? Do we need to define savanna/barren in order to move ahead and have a conversation?

People who work with clients / land owners want a place to look a certain way. Changes scare people. People want a tallgrass prairie to look like a tallgrass prairie, but maybe that's not always what would naturally happen. Maybe not worth defining savanna because it's going to be different everywhere.

Jesse Bramer - interested in a support group for savannas. Collaboration and communication would help everyone.

**Prioritizing sites**

-Which sites have the most potential for achieving goals? Restorability

-Landscape scale - then prioritize landscape connectivity.

-Small remnants may house a lot of rare species but are there population viability issues? IF so is it worth it?

-Because of higher Ag prices, looking at less natural spaces

-Focusing on core areas must be balanced with connectivity

-We can make strategic decisions on where to restore based on a landscape approach

Share with group the Oak Fire Working Group contact? If it exists. Baby Oak Emotional Support Group?

Break into two groups?

We talked a lot about diversity and heterogeneity in management regimes. It seems that a lot of the questions we are asking are at all/multiple scales... Heterogeneity is important (point keeps coming up).

Who has restored how big a parcel from scratch? Ag field to savanna... It would be good to have a checklist of HOW TO MAKE A SAVANNA (Is there a handbook) (Do we have demo sites?)

**Database of all Savannas/Barrens**

SWMLC is talking about developing a database of all the oak savannas that are known.

Matt M. - would be happy to help with a database of existing oak savannas.

Many people agree that this database would be very helpful.

The public needs to know what we are talking about by having reference sites to go and stand in an oak savanna to go and stand in the middle and say "Oh, this is what a savanna feels like" to garner interest, educate.

Toolbox? We need a toolbox. Resource set. BMP of oak savanna restoration

Restoration practices guidelines can be found at oaksavannas.org

We need a forum? A network. A hub.

A database could help people like Lars give answers based on custom analysis of that data. Land managers hold the key to the disturbance in these ecosystems.

End goal will always end with maintenance.

How about a short list of younger and active academics to contact. Who you gonna call?

A registry for not only the savanna locations, but of which landowners are open to host research and experimental management.

Steve Woods struggles with there being so many networks.

Increased atmospheric deposition of N makes restoration a problem. Boo!

**Action Steps / Priorities**

1. Database of all oak savannas/barrens (in region/Michigan/Consortium?) and landowner info/land history/demo sites
2. List of names from all the fire people
3. BMPs
4. What's the deal with oak regeneration/restoration and timber harvest (more of a problem on mesic sites)?
5. Forum/network/listserv/Facebook group
6. Prioritizing sites based on site and landscape context

7. Needs assessment for savannas?

8. Defining end-goal of restoration/management / what is success? “Restoration ethos”

9. Identify / define demo sites