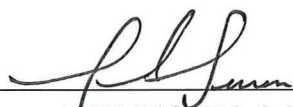


McGee Family Conservation Area

Fifteen-Year Area Management Plan FY 2018-2032



Wildlife Division Chief

12 OCT 2017

Date

OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** McGee Family Conservation Area, #201120
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 2011
- **Acreage:** 1,033 acres
- **County:** Clinton
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Statements of Purpose:**
 - A. Strategic Direction**

Manage for native grassland that supports a wide range of game and non-game wildlife species, with emphasis on small game, grassland birds, and compatible recreational opportunities.
 - B. Desired Future Condition**

The desired future condition for McGee Family Conservation Area (CA) is a restored, diverse native grassland and woodland complex providing outdoor recreation.
 - C. Federal Aid Statement**

N/A

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

- I. Special Considerations**
 - A. Priority Areas:** Little Platte River Fisheries Priority Watershed, Castille Creek Fisheries Priority Watershed, Scarces Prairie Terrestrial 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

- III. Existing Infrastructure**
 - Four gravel parking lots (Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] accessible)
 - One primitive camping site
 - Storage building
 - Three pond dams
 - Three silos
 - One well and windmill
 - Two fishing ponds (11.7 acres total)

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

A. **Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations:**

- The Trustee's Deed lists the following covenant: "The Trustees shall distribute the farm property identified in Part Two to the STATE OF MISSOURI for use as a fish, forest, and wildlife resource for the people of the State of Missouri. This property shall be managed by the Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri or its successor, for the greatest good of all foregoing, provided however, that if in the future it becomes clearly apparent to the Conservation Commission that it is not feasible to maintain the area for the foregoing, the Conservation Commission shall have the prerogative of disposing of the property with the proceeds from the disposition to be used by the Conservation Commission to purchase and develop the new wildlife, forest, and fish area in the state. These lands, or lands substituted therefore, shall be known as the 'McGee Family Conservation Area.'"
- Missouri Power and Light owns an inholding in the southwest corner of T55N, R31W, Sec. 30.

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:**

- There are two flowage easements with the United States of America at T55N, R32W, Sec. 25 and T55N, R31W, Sec. 30.
- Two other easements include a gas line and powerline.

D. Cultural Resources: No known cultural resources.

F. Endangered Species: None observed.

G. Boundary Issues: None

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

The McGee Family CA was historically a cattle operation that was sparsely vegetated with an undesirable cool-season grass mix. Since removal of the cattle in 2014, undesirable woody vegetation has begun to sprout in the open fields. Approximately 8 percent area is forest and woodland habitats. The majority of the forested habitats are riparian communities, consisting of early successional species (mainly hackberry and honey locust). Very little potential exists to manage for or restore oak-hickory forest/woodland habitats. Riparian areas are managed to maximize benefits to soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) The open landscape provides opportunity to convert the cool-season grass fields to native grassland.
- 2) Honey locust is the dominant tree species across the area. New saplings quickly sprout in undisturbed areas.
- 3) Maintain riparian habitats and expand where practical.

Management Objective 1: Enhance open land management to provide a diverse grassland habitat.

Strategy 1: Utilize agricultural crops and herbicide applications to remove cool-season grasses from fields historically used as cattle pasture to create favorable conditions for planting native grasses and forbs. Phase out large agricultural crop fields as fields are converted to native species, while retaining some open ground for disturbance, wildlife food, and cover. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Renovate fields of fescue and smooth brome with native grasses/forbs to restore habitat for grassland birds, species of conservation concern, and small game. (Wildlife)

Strategy 3: Reduce undesirable woody vegetation and invasive species using treatments appropriate for management and control of selected species, as needed. (Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Manage old fields, grassland, and woodland habitats using a combination of management techniques, including, but not limited to, prescribed burning, mechanical and chemical treatment to woody vegetation, disking, mowing, and overseeding. (Wildlife)

Strategy 5: Consider using grazing to manage grasslands when a sustainable amount of native grassland has been established. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 2: Maintain riparian habitats and expand where practical.

Strategy 1: Maintain or establish a minimum of 100-foot riparian buffers along waterways. (Fisheries, Forestry, Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Monitor for invasive vegetation and replace with native plantings as necessary. (Forestry, Wildlife)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Provide the public with quality sport fish populations on area ponds.
- 2) Manage for native aquatic vegetation on area fisheries.
- 3) Increase aquatic habitat in area fisheries.
- 4) Manage riparian corridors.

Management Objective 1: Manage for quality angling opportunities on area ponds.

Strategy 1: Perform fish population surveys to monitor for quality sport fish populations, e.g., largemouth bass proportional stock density (12) values of 40-70, and bluegill proportional stock density (6) values of 20-40. (Fisheries)

Strategy 2: Conduct supplemental stocking of fish (channel catfish and hybrid bluegill) when needed to maintain quality angling opportunities. (Fisheries)

Strategy 3: Implement appropriate harvest restrictions in order to maintain quality fish populations. (Fisheries)

Management Objective 2: Manage for native aquatic vegetation on area.

Strategy 1: Maintain and plant native aquatic vegetation in all area ponds to enhance sport fish recruitment and add fish holding structure in strategic locations in ponds. (Fisheries)

Strategy 2: Use aquatic herbicide to treat nuisance species when necessary. (Fisheries)

Management Objective 3: Improve habitat in area ponds.

Strategy 1: Install brush piles to enhance sport fish recruitment and add fish holding structure in strategic locations in ponds as natural fish structure deteriorates. (Fisheries)

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Enhance hunting, fishing, trapping, and other recreational opportunities.
- 2) Build relationships with neighboring landowners.

Management Objective 1: Provide public hunting, fishing, trapping, and other recreational opportunities.

Strategy 1: Implement annual management activities targeting improvement of terrestrial and aquatic habitat to improve fish and wildlife populations. (Fisheries, Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Provide access points and mowed service roads for all users. (Wildlife)

Strategy 3: Issue special use permits to allow trapping on area. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 2: Promote a positive working relationship with neighboring landowners.

Strategy 1: Respond to neighbors regarding shared fencing, boundary issues or trespass problems. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Respond to neighboring landowners with interest in habitat management improvements on their private property. (Wildlife, Private Land Services)

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Three silos remain on the property. These structures give the property a historical perspective of land use prior to Missouri Department of Conservation (Department) ownership; however, these structures should be considered for removal to avoid potential safety issues.
- 2) The northeast corner of the area is currently landlocked by private property and the Little Platte River.
- 3) Consider land acquisition, when available.

Management Objective 1: Maintain area infrastructure at level established by policy.

Strategy 1: Maintain area infrastructure in accordance with Department guidelines. (Wildlife, Design and Development)

Strategy 2: Develop a plan to safely remove the tree silos. (Wildlife, Design and Development)

Lands Proposed for Acquisition:

When available, 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.

APPENDICES

Area Background:

The 1033-acre McGee Family Conservation Area is south of Plattsburg and can be accessed off Route C or County Road 240. The area opened for public use, Sept. 15, 2011, providing additional hunting, fishing, and hiking opportunities in northwest Missouri.

Throughout most of the 1900s, this area was owned and operated as a cattle feeding business by the Newby family of Plattsburg. Their cattle operation covered 12,000 acres and fed as many as 9,000 Herford cattle around 1960. Later, the business downsized and only grazed cattle for other farmers. The area's rolling hills were primarily in pasture for this reason.

The Newbys eventually sold the farm to another owner and then a few years later was purchased by Kansas City businessman Thomas F. McGee, Jr. Mr. McGee, who died in 2010, donated his farm in Clinton County to the Missouri Department of Conservation so others could enjoy the area. A formal dedication of the area was held September 2011 with McGee family members, conservation leaders, and community members. The ceremony was held in appreciation for the generous gift made by Thomas F. McGee, Jr. and to all Missourians who enjoy the outdoors.

The Cecil Tract was purchased in 2016 and contains 35 acres of unplowed prairie, the only prairie located in Clinton County.

Current Land and Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	Miles	% of Area
Grassland (non-prairie)	806		78
Woodland	137		13
Old Field	63		6
Open Water	19		2
Other (roads and parking lots)	8		<1
Total	1,033		100
Stream Frontage		0.63	

Public Input Summary:

The draft McGee Family Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period Feb. 1–28, 2017. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from five respondents (Appendix A). The McGee Family 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 McGee Family Conservation Area Management Plan public comment period.

Supports native grassland restoration on McGee Family CA.

Native grassland restoration is currently the top priority at McGee Family CA.

Opposes using grazing as a grassland management technique on this area.

The entire area was grazed to some extent for at least the last 50 years while in private ownership. Portions of the area continued to be grazed after the Department took ownership of the property in 2011, until all cattle were removed at the end of the summer in 2014. Cropping has been and continues to be used to convert fescue dominated fields to native warm-season grasses and native forbs to benefit wildlife. If done appropriately, grazing can be beneficial to grassland wildlife. However, whether cattle will or will not be used as a management technique in the future is dependent on many factors.

Concerned about several dead raptors found on the area.

This is a concern for the planning team. Please continue to report any findings and we will look for a suspected cause.

Suggests adding equestrian trails to McGee Family CA.

Adding multi-use trails for horseback riding would increase interference with existing area users and could negatively impact sensitive habitats. Horseback riders can pursue this recreational opportunity on Honey Creek CA (49 miles away), Riverbreaks CA (58 miles away), Bonanza CA (34 miles away), Clay County Parks (15 miles away), or U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Smithville Lake (12 miles away).

Concerned about the removal of silos disturbing nesting birds. Suggests using alternative nesting site boxes if silos are removed from McGee Family CA.

There is not currently a set timeline when the silos will be removed. The north structures made from brick are slowly degrading and will become a hazard in the future. The southern silo remains structurally sound to this point. The planning team is aware of nesting birds using the silos and will explore alternative options to keep nesting birds on the area if it becomes necessary to remove all silos.

Opposes trapping at McGee Family CA.

Trapping is allowed on McGee Family CA, but due to the open landscape of the area, few trappers show interest. Anyone that desires to trap on the area must obtain a special use permit from the area manager. Only completely submerged water sets and dog-proof traps are allowed.

Concerned hunters are generating trash on the area.

The planning team is aware of trash being left on the area throughout most of the year. Likely, it is not only hunters leaving the trash since most hunters are utilizing the area from mid-

September through mid-January while campers, hikers, and outdoor enthusiasts are using the area the remainder of the year. The Department will make efforts to keep the area clean and inviting to the public.

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

McGee Family CA offers a great opportunity for the Department to restore a low-diversity landscape into high-diversity grassland, similar to what may have been present prior to European settlement.

References:

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: Aerial Map

Figure 3: Aerial Map (Cecil Tract)

Figure 4: Easement Map

Figure 5: Land Cover Map

Figure 6: Land Cover Map (Cecil Tract)

Figure 7: Ecological Site Description Map

Figure 8: Ecological Site Description Map (Cecil Tract)

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A. McGee Family Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Area Map

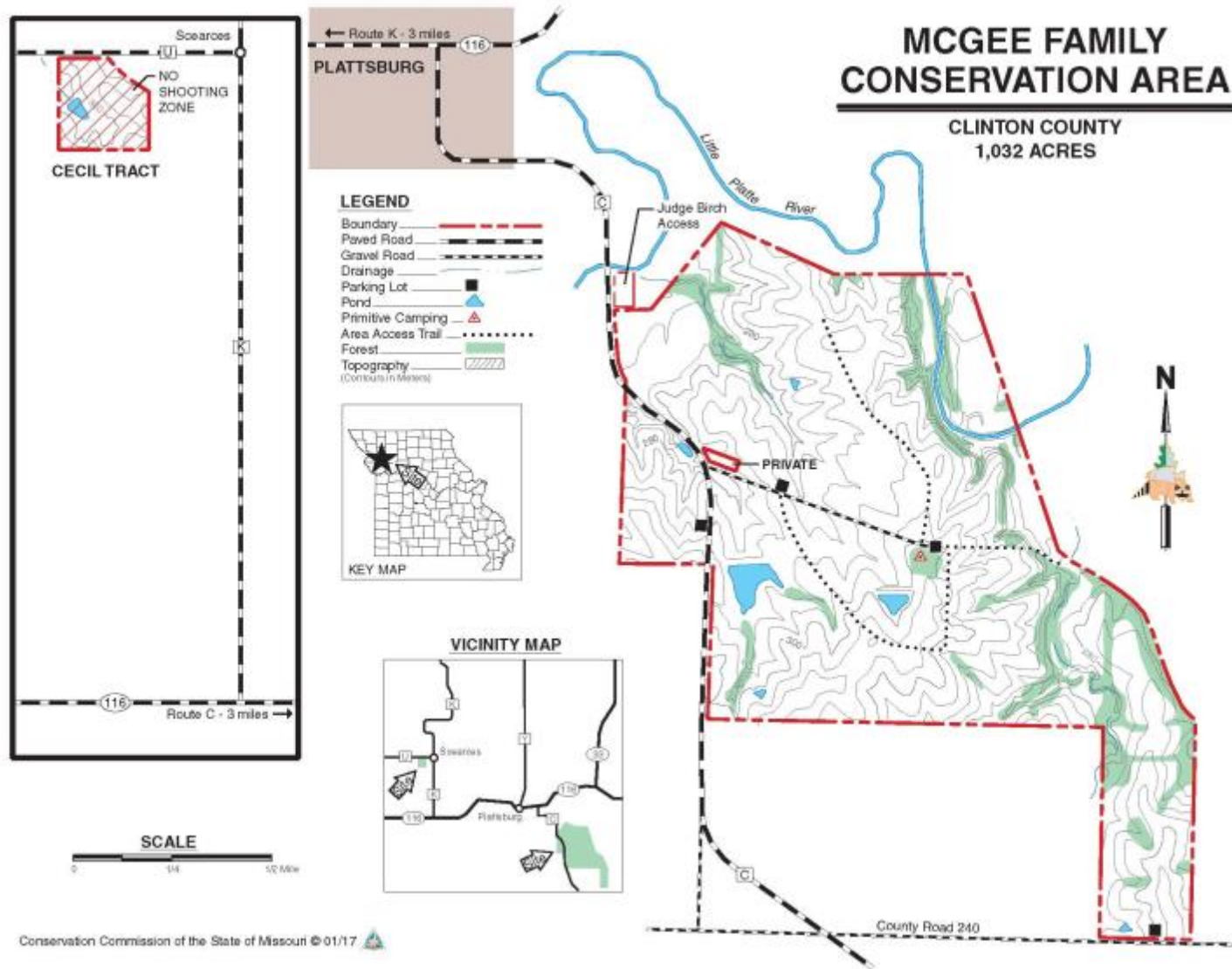


Figure 2: Aerial Map



Figure 3: Aerial Map (Cecil Tract)



Figure 4: Easement Map

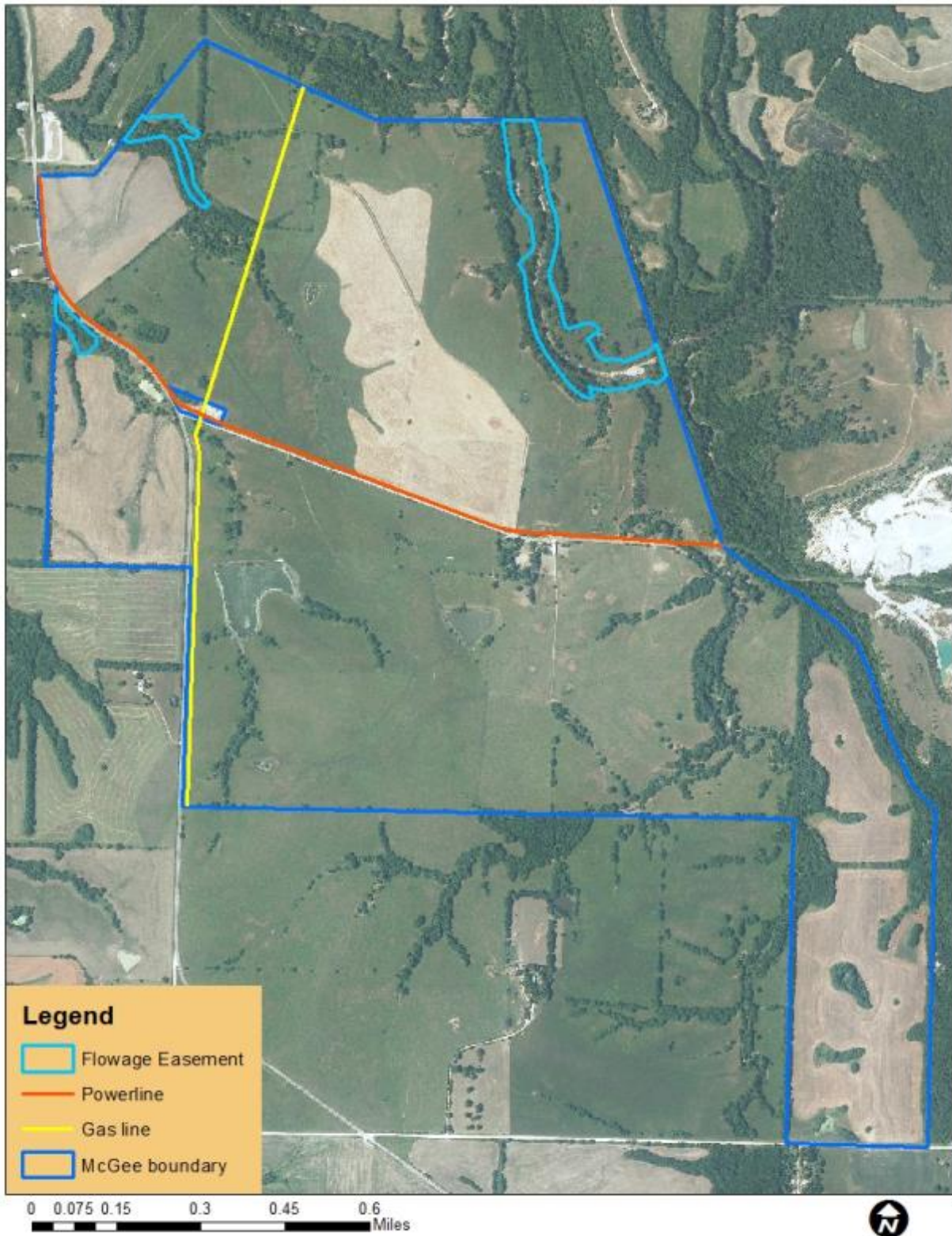


Figure 5: Land Cover Map

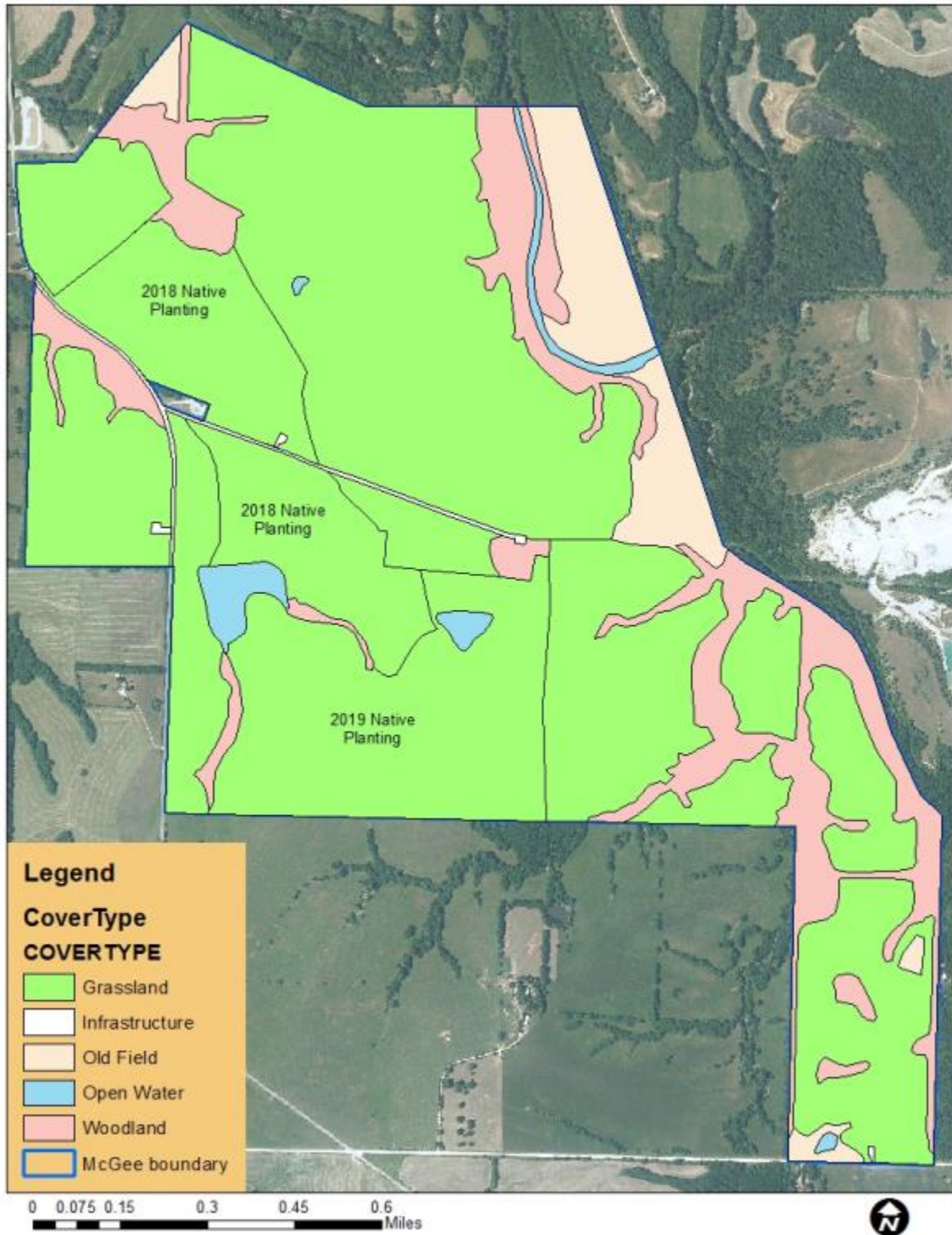


Figure 6: Land Cover Map (Cecil Tract)



Figure 7: Ecological Site Description Map

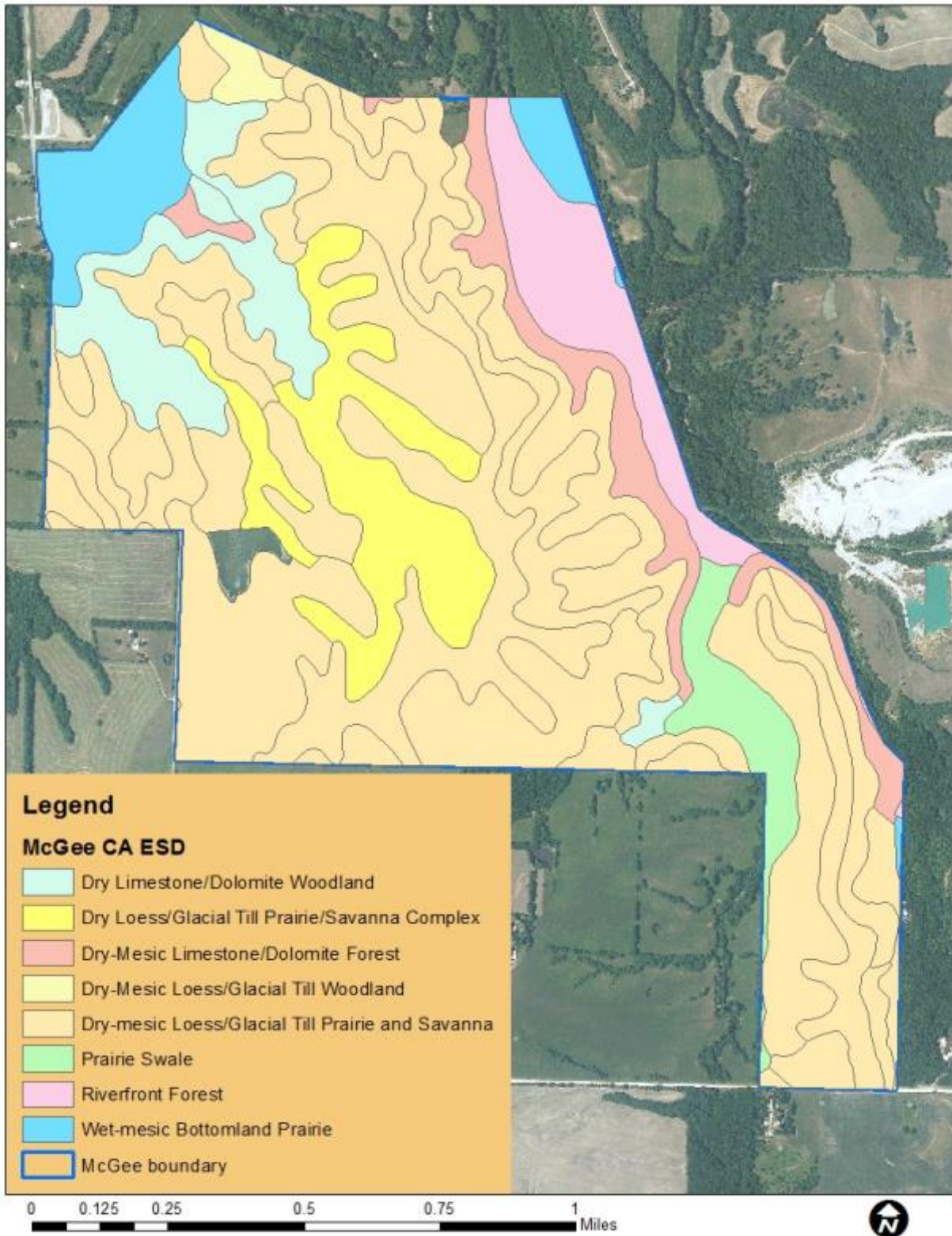


Figure 8: Ecological Site Description Map (Cecil Tract)



Appendix A. McGee Family Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

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

Restoration to native grassland should be one of Missouri conservation's, in general, most important goals. A fraction of Missouri native prairie's are remaining, and the species that once thrived there are disappearing. The fact that this management plan focuses on native grass restoration is welcome. Hopefully it see implementation.

Love this area as a place to hike, bird and explore near the city. The creeks are geological gems lined with a smattering of interesting trees and plants, one creek with a pretty waterfall. I am happy you are improving the fields with native grasses and forbs. Two concerns: I do not wish to see grazing there as a management method. My other concern is that you consider placing an alternative nesting site for the avian species of conservation concern that nests in one of the silos. If you find it necessary to remove the silos perhaps they will adapt to a nest box.

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 add equestrian trail opportunities. This area of the state is under-served with trail riding opportunities - and a parcel of this size should have some suitable areas for equestrian trails.

On the silos - first off, yes I realize people can be stupid and removal of at least two would save these type of folks from getting hurt, then screaming at MDC about it. However, the southern silo, its still in pretty good condition, needs to stay. It offers a relatively safe resting area for owls. There is no opening a 4-legged predator can get inside. I have seen two different owls - different times - a barn and a horned - inside. My bad, I startled the barn owl when I peeked in. There is a small broken opening on the west side, a peephole you could say.

Trapping - I take my dogs hiking all over McGee. And yes, we follow same areas wildlife does - no my dogs do not hunt/run the wildlife: aside from moles & mice - and the occasional failed rabbit jumps. I work on training them for behavior off leash - I do have a small game permit - my point, and yes I'm getting there. While there is a healthy pop of coyotes, I see no benefit to wildlife or humans, in trapping on McGee. 2017 is the first time in years I've actually seen red foxes back in this area.

Two years ago we ran across a young coyote in a wire leg trap. #1 area was not marked by trapper as having a trap. #2 it was in a "cross road" area all wildlife & humans - with dogs - walk and #3 it was disgusting what the animal had been thru while caught (they are not more humane traps) . He was dead - recently shot, but not collected. I ran into the trapper up in the parking lot. I did vent regarding area he had put the trap and not marking it. Yes, you guessed it... I'm against trapping. To my experience at McGee, there isn't an "overage" of any "trappable" species.

Hunting on McGee,.... Maybe MDC could offer a "good neighbor" pamphlet. Llike used TP & crap - person should take the time to bury it. How about shooters gathering up all their spent

shotgun cartridges, empty hand warmer packets etc. And using biodegradable stand markers vs plastic pieces.

One other thing.... in the last 8 months or so. we have found 3 dead owls, 3 hawks and areas I'm pretty sure other raptors were killed just due the area & amount of feathers around. I did notify area agent. But.... in eight years of hiking the area combined - I've never seen so many dead raptors. Kinda makes one wonder what the hell's going on.

Appreciate the MDC & her folks.