



American Bird  
Conservancy



# Open Canopy Workshop

*Exploring the Ecology, Management, and Public Understanding of Eastern Woodland Ecosystems*

September 4-5, 2025 – Louisville, KY

<https://abcbirds.org/OpenCanopyWorkshop>

University of Louisville  
Shelby Campus Conference Center  
Founders Union Building  
450 N Whittington Parkway  
Louisville, KY 40222

The Open Canopy Workshop will highlight the historical extent, ecological value, and decline of open canopy forest systems in the Midwestern and eastern United States and elevate the urgent need for woodland ecosystem restoration and management to the forefront of the conservation community. Emphasis will be placed on the structural diversity and biodiversity of open canopy systems, and tools will be provided to help practitioners better communicate to diverse public and private audiences the value of these systems and the need to actively manage them. Case studies of successful restoration efforts will be presented to help inspire landscape-level solutions.

## **Wednesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>**

12:00 – 4:30 pm: Optional Half-Day Field Trip to Clark State Forest, Henryville, IN

## **Thursday, September 4<sup>th</sup>**

8:00 am Registration

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### **Session I – History & Background**

8:45 am – Welcome and Overview

9:00 am – Early Woodland Landscapes – character, ecology, function, maintenance

– Allen Pursell, Director of Forest Programs, Sam Shine Foundation

9:30 am – Early Historical Eastern US Fire Regimes – Evidence from a Growing Fire Scar Network

– Joe Marschall, Coordinator, Oak Woodlands & Forests Fire Consortium

10:00 am – Native American Perspectives & Management

– Bradford Kasberg, Sustainable Landscape Specialist, Argonne National Laboratory

10:30 – 11:00 am – Break

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## **Session II – Ecological & Economic Importance**

11:00 am – Plant Communities & Structural Diversity of Woodlands

- Theo Witsell, Chief Conservation Officer, Southeastern Grasslands Institute

11:30 am Avian Communities of Open Canopy Systems

- EJ Williams, Southeast Director of Sustainable Forest Partnerships, American Bird Conservancy

12:00 – 1:00 pm Lunch (provided)

1:00 pm – Insect & Pollinator Communities of Open Canopy Systems

- Mike Ulyshen, Research Entomologist, USDA Forest Service (virtual)

1:30 pm – Economic Importance of Woodlands

- Laura Calandrella, Executive Director, Keeping Forests

2:00 pm – Future Resilience and Adaptive Silviculture

- Jacob Muller, Assistant Professor, UK Department of Forestry & Natural Resources

2:30 -3:00 pm – Break

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## **Session III – Reasons for Decline & Management Challenges**

3:00 pm – Open Canopy landscapes of the Southeast

- Cecil Frost, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (retired)

3:30 pm – Mesophication of Woodland Systems

- Heather D. Alexander, Associate Professor, Auburn University

4:00 pm – Panel Discussion – Management challenges

- 3 speakers; 10-minute presentations, then discussion
    - Challenges to implementation on public lands
    - Challenges to implementation on private lands – Jacob Stewart, Private Lands Coordinator, Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources
    - Managing for ecosystems while also considering economics
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## **Acorns to Oaks Reception – 6:00 – 8:00 pm**

- Sponsored by the **White Oak Initiative**

## **Friday, September 5<sup>th</sup>**

8:00 am Registration

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8:30 am – Welcome and Overview

### **Session IV – Communications, Outreach, and Policy**

8:45 am – Talking about a Forest (45-minute presentation, 15 discussion)

- Ethan Tapper, forester and author of *How to Love a Forest: The Bittersweet Work of Tending a Changing World*

9:45 am – Social Science of Forest Management

- Ashley Gramza, Social Science Lead, Playa Lakes Joint Venture

10:15 – 10:45 am – Break

10:45 am – Connecting people with forests through programming

- Amanda Duren, Director of Conservation Partnerships, Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture

11:15 am – Communications Panel

- Panelists: Ethan Tapper, Allen Pursell, Jarred Brooke, Kyle Brazil, Marion Mason

12:00 pm 1:00 pm – Lunch (provided)

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### **Session V – Solutions – Restoration, Management, and Case Studies**

1:00 pm – Litter to Glitter – Catoosa WMA Savanna Restoration

- Andy Vander Yacht, Assistant Professor, SUNY

1:30 pm – NRCS Deciduous Forest Framework

- Matthew Vandersande, USDA NRCS (virtual)

2:00 pm – Role of the White Oak Initiative – Connect, Convene, Collaborate

- Jamie Lewis-Hedges, Director of Conservation Partnerships, White Oak Initiative
- Kyle Brazil, Coordinator, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture

2:30 – 3:00 pm – Break

3:00 pm – Role of Private Contractors & Consultants

- Dan McGuckin, ACF, CF, CWB, Private Forester and Consultant

3:30 pm – TNC Forest Bank Program

- Chris Neggers, Director of Forest Conservation, TNC Indiana

4:00 pm – Panel Discussion