



CENTRAL GRASSLANDS AND PALISADES COA

The Central Grasslands and Palisades Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) includes 471,905 acres in central Kentucky. The boundary was delineated utilizing the Chaplin River to the north, Dix River to the east, Beech Fork River to the west, and bounded by the Green River COA to the south. This COA includes the entirety of Washington, Mercer, and Boyle counties. The Central Grasslands and Palisades COA is mostly (93%) situated within the Bluegrass physiographic region with the remaining portion in the Knobs physiographic region. The Plateau Escarpment COA (to the east) and Muldraugh Prairies COA (to the west) reside adjacent to the Central Grasslands and Palisades COA. Much of the COA contains weathered limestone which produces sinking streams, springs, caves, and some of the oldest exposed geologic strata in Kentucky, vital to many SGCN. The channel of the Kentucky River throughout this COA is entrenched by nearly vertical limestone cliffs known as The Palisades. This area provides a rare habitat utilized by many SGCN including Globe Bladderpod, Rafinesque's Big-eared Bat, and the Eastern Small-footed Bat. The soils of this region are fertile, benefiting from the underlying nitrogen and phosphorus-rich limestone. These naturally productive soils have led to widespread agricultural use in the COA, but also provide potential for grassland restoration within this region.

Central Grasslands and Palisades COA has records for 112 SGCN, including 18 among the highest prioritization category. The majority of SGCN falling within this area are bird species. The top threats identified within this COA are Natural System Modification, Pollution,



Eastern meadowlark are a common bird in steep decline. Land use practices that provide increased acreage in pastureland, hay fields, and natural grasslands are vital to meadowlark survival.

Photo: KDFWR



The monarch butterfly has become a flagship species to help raise awareness about the decline of native pollinators. Incorporating insects during this revision will allow us to expand efforts to conserve native species in Kentucky. Photo: Nikki Nivision.

Central Grasslands and Palisades SGCN Priority by Taxa

Taxa	Moderate Priority	High Priority	Highest Priority	Data Deficient	Plant	Grand Total
Amphibians	1	1	1	2		5
Birds	63	12	1			76
Crustaceans				4		4
Fishes	1			3		4
Freshwater Mussels and Snails		1	1			2
Insects	1	1	2			4
Mammals	2	3		7		12
Plants					3	3
Reptiles	1			1		2
Grand Total	69	18	5	17	3	112

and Agriculture/Aquaculture. Much of the COA has been converted to agricultural use (59%) and development continues to increase around incorporated cities and along major transportation corridors.

A major conservation focus for this region has been to restore native open land systems by removing eastern red cedar from quality hardwood systems and old fields along with restoration of native short-grass and forb systems. In 2008, a relatively small (2,855 acres) focus area was chosen for native grassland restoration in the far eastern region of the COA. Moving forward, an emphasis has been placed on the private working lands in the COA through a Focused Conservation Project (32,411 acres) in the north central region of the COA. This project prioritizes removal of eastern red cedar and implementation of native production solutions for cattle and hay operations. At present, much of the hay/pasture land coverage is dominated by non-native cool-season grass forage in the form of KY31 fescue.

Restoration of native grassland systems benefits a variety of wildlife species including grassland birds, aquatic species, and pollinators. Considered one of the most imperiled plant communities in Kentucky, there remains less than 1% of the natural grasslands that existed in Kentucky before European settlement. Central Kentucky grasslands harbor some unique natural plant communities, broadly including natural prairies and barrens.

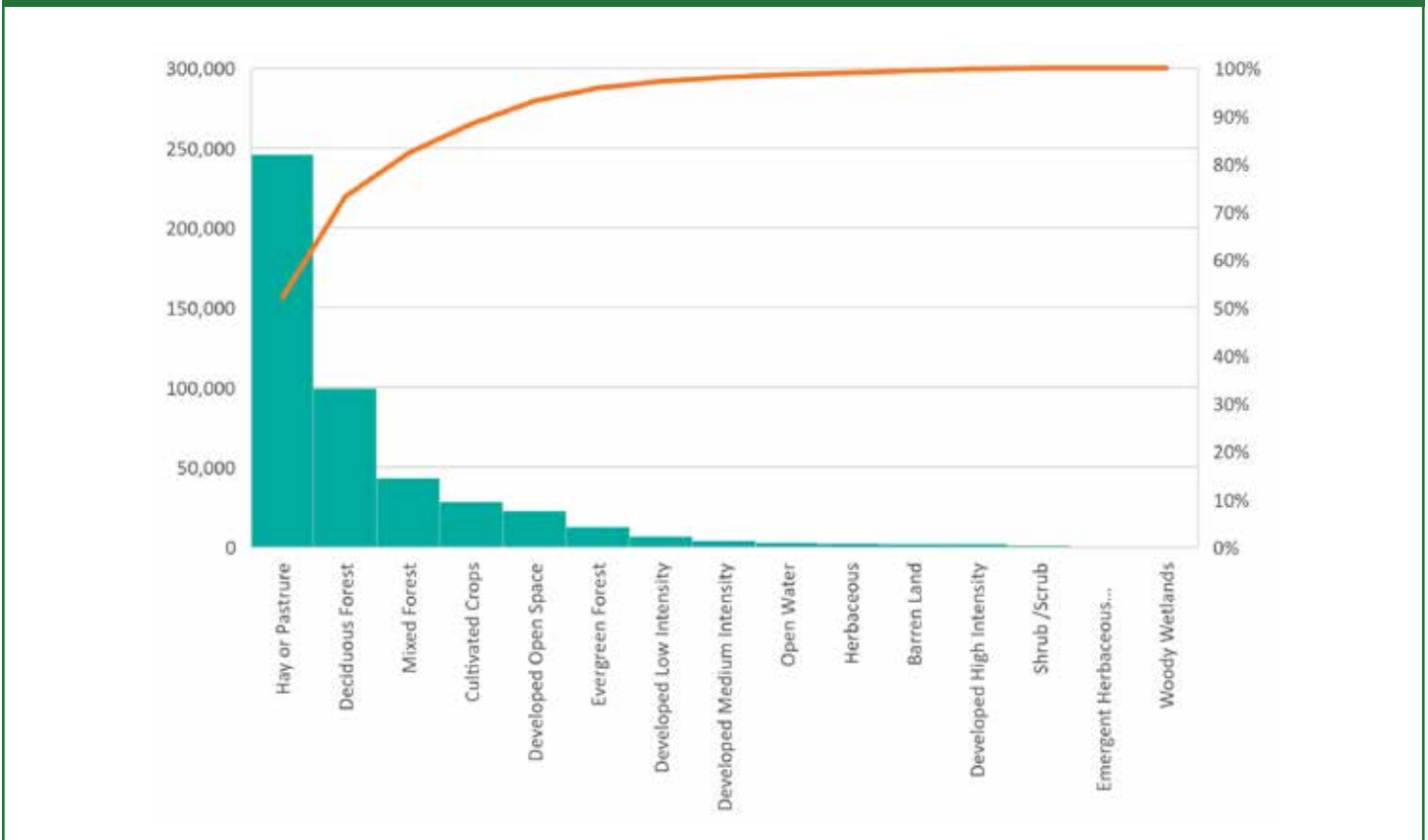
Collaborative partnerships to reduce or eliminate



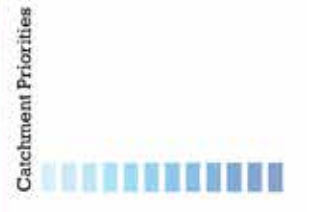
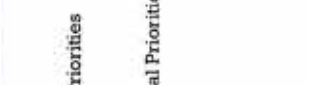
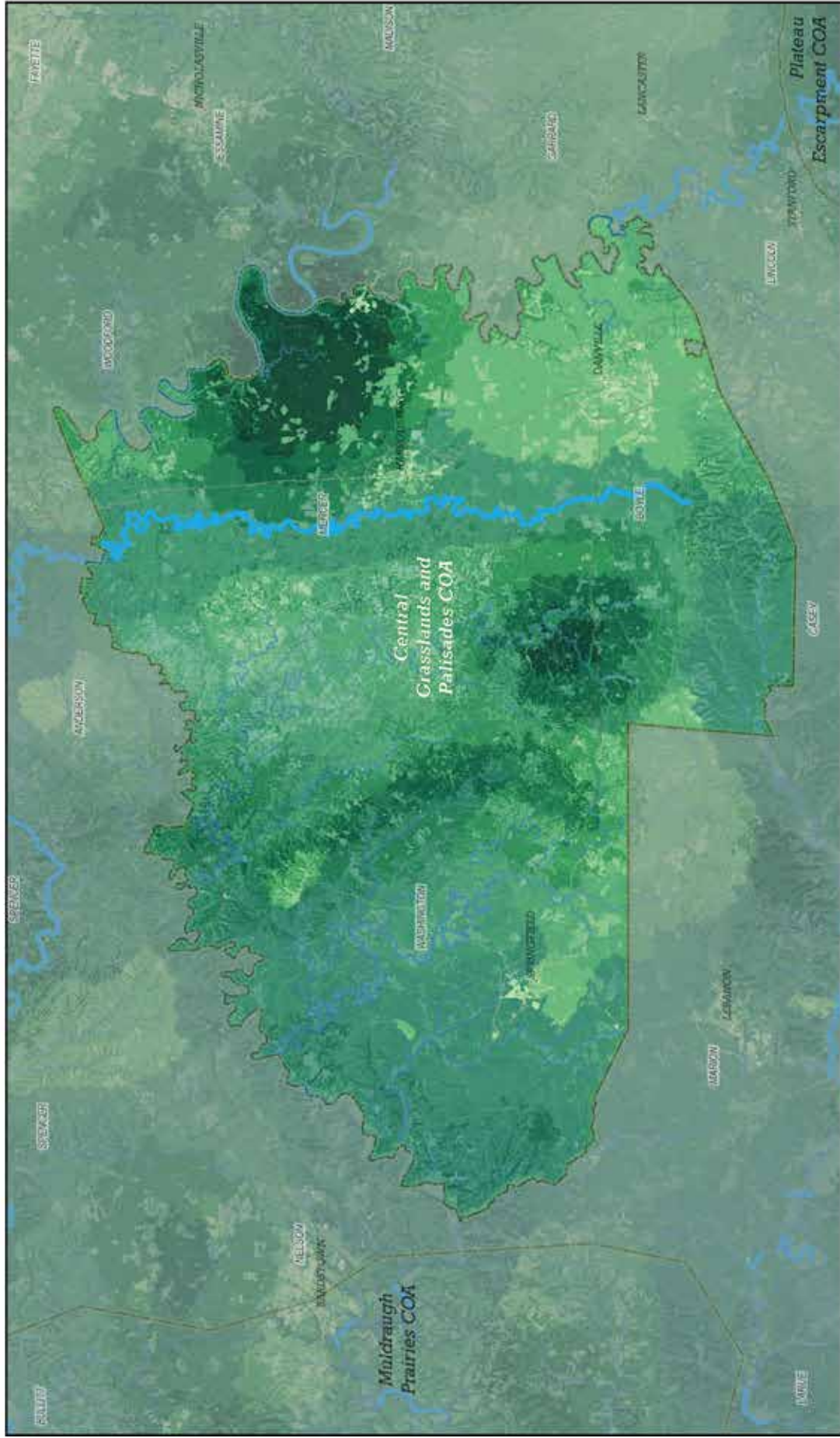
Prescribed fire is one tool used to improve the quality of native grasslands used by many SGCN.
Photo: KDFWR

threats to native open land systems are of highest priority in this COA, primarily through public outreach and continued working land projects. External capacity building will be essential to implement these and related projects. OKNP holds easements at conducts regular prescribed fire management at several locations within this COA including Perryville Battlefield State Historic Site. Current and potential partners include U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA-Farm Services Agency, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Kentucky Division of Conservation, Kentucky Division of Forestry, Kentucky Division of Water, Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves, Kentucky State Parks/Perryville Battlefield State Historic Site, and Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill.

Central Grasslands and Palisades Land Use by Acres



Central Grasslands and Palisades COA



1:450,000



Map prepared by GIS staff at KDFWR in partnership with ORNP and TRC. Service Layers courtesy of Source: Esri, USDA FSA, Source: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community, DCL, KyFromAbove Partners, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SwireGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS.