



LICKING RIVER COA

Comprised of karst topography, steep to rolling hills and valleys, and rich natural resources, the Licking River Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) spans 869,653 acres in northeastern Kentucky and includes much of the Licking River watershed. The Licking River is thought to have been named for the natural salt springs and licks historically used by ungulates that congregated seasonally in the region. Ungulate fossils found near these licks, along with the presence of disturbance dependent remnant grasslands and SGCN plants such as Running Buffalo Clover and Short's goldenrod, provides further evidence of the extent of grassland and woodland habitat that once existed in this area.

The Licking River runs north to the Ohio River along a course of 303 miles and empties into the Ohio River just across from Cincinnati, Ohio. There are roughly 180 miles of free-flowing river from Cave Run Lake to the mouth of the Ohio River. The portion of the Licking River that lies within the Daniel Boone National Forest is dominated by deciduous forest and limited roadways. Unlike other rivers in the state, the Licking is relatively untouched by mining or heavy industrial development, and it moves primarily through forested and agricultural lands. Forests dominate the landscape within this COA, with over 464,000 acres comprising deciduous or mixed deciduous forest. These cover types are critical for many rare plants and forest dwelling SGCN including songbirds, insects, salamanders, and bats.

Once beyond Cave Run Lake, except for some small mill dams, there are no significant obstructions to aquatic



Actions to help prevent pollution and protect this watershed are critical to the management of SGCN.

Photo: Monte McGregor



The endangered northern riffleshell is a highest priority SGCN. Once widespread, Kentucky's population is currently restricted to the Licking River watershed. Photo: KDFWR

life movement. This allows for significant restoration potential work with aquatic organisms. Since the KDFWR Center for Mollusk Conservation Center began in 2002, over 95% of the mussel fauna have been restored to multiple sites in the river. These efforts are proving

Licking River SGCN Priority by Taxa

Taxa	Moderate Priority	High Priority	Highest Priority	Data Deficient	Plant	Grand Total
Amphibians	2	3	1	6		12
Birds	76	11		1		88
Crustaceans		1		4		5
Fishes	2	4		4		10
Freshwater Mussels and Snails	6	15	5	4		30
Insects		5	3			8
Mammals	5	4	1	11		21
Plants					9	9
Reptiles	2			2		4
Grand Total	93	43	10	32	9	187

effective, as reproduction of certain rare mussels are now being documented. Crayfish, aquatic insects, and fish are also benefactors of the restoration and protection efforts within these waterways.

The Licking River is critical for many species of greatest conservation need and has high potential for significant long-term protection and management. There are 187 records of SGCN within the Licking River COA. Of the ten highest priority SGCN, six are aquatic species. In addition, there are important remnant grasslands located in this COA, particularly around the Blue Licks State Park and OKNP SNP areas. The globally rare outer bluegrass limestone prairies and barrens contain numerous SGCN and have been a restoration focus for OKNP, USFWS, Kentucky State Parks, and KDFWR (Clays Lick WMA area).

Partners have long recognized the importance of the Licking River and its surrounding landscape. The top threats to SGCN identified within this COA are Natural System Modification, Agriculture/Aquaculture, and Pollution. Corresponding actions identified for this COA include education and awareness of these natural resources and their management and protection needs. External capacity building is identified as a critical tool for reaching goals in this COA. Working with partners and building projects between state and federal agencies such as KDFWR, Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves, Division of Water, Division of Forestry, Daniel Boone



Nesting habitat for the prothonotary warbler includes large bodies of standing or slow-moving water. This cavity nesting bird will use artificial nesting structures like this one installed by KDFWR. Photo: KDFWR

National Forest and Natural Resource Conservation Service are critical. In addition, efforts should include working with non-governmental organizations, private partners, and land trusts. Land and water management was identified as the third highest priority action item. Actions that help prevent pollution and protect watersheds and healthy forest and open lands will be critical to the management of SGCN.



