



SOUTH FORK COA

The South Fork Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) encompasses 391,195 acres in southern Kentucky. This COA spans the southern ends of the Plateau Escarpment and Cumberland Plateau physiographic regions, and extends west to the Interior Plateau. The landscape of this COA is predominately deciduous and mixed forest (totaling 85% of the land area) with hay pasture being the next most prominent land use at 4.8%. The forests in the COA are a part of the largest contiguous forest block acreage known in Kentucky. Development in the area is sparse with the only city being Whitley City with a small population of less than 1,000 people. Developed land, including all levels of intensity, makes up only 2% of this COA.

South Fork COA takes its name from the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River which forms when the New and Clear Fork rivers merge in northern Tennessee. This 76-mile-long river runs north through the COA until it enters Lake Cumberland, and drains approximately 1,300 square miles within this COA and areas in northern Tennessee. The Big South Fork is designated as a Kentucky Wild River and much of its length is protected within the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area facilitated by the National Park Service and within the Daniel Boone National Forest. In total, four designated Wild Rivers are situated within this COA: Big South Fork, Rock Creek, Little South Fork and the main stem of the Cumberland River upstream of Cumberland Falls.

This COA is well protected compared to others within the state. With large sections of this COA being



Within Kentucky, the endangered Palezone shiner is known only in the Little South Fork of the Cumberland River. Photo: Matt Thomas



More work is needed to understand the distribution, life history, and specific habitat needs of the eastern spotted skunk in Kentucky. Photo: John MacGregor

South Fork SGCN Priority by Taxa

Taxa	Moderate Priority	High Priority	Highest Priority	Data Deficient	Plant	Grand Total
Amphibians	1	1	1	3		6
Birds	46	9				55
Crustaceans			3	3		6
Fishes	2	6	6	1		15
Freshwater Mussels and Snails	3	16	10	1		30
Insects	1	1	1			3
Mammals	3	10		9		22
Plants					22	22
Reptiles	1			7		8
Grand Total	57	43	21	24	22	167

managed by both the National Park Service and the United States Forest Service, just under half of the COA is classified as protected (46.6%). McCreary County specifically is comprised of 61% federal property (NPS = 18%, USFS = 43%).

The South Fork COA has 167 SGCN. This list is dominated by birds (55), freshwater mussels and snails (30), plants (22), mammals (22), and fishes (15). Twenty-one of these species are listed as highest priority, with the majority being freshwater mussels. This COA contains one of the largest concentrations of SGCN plants in the state. Several globally rare terrestrial natural communities occur in this COA, including riverscours prairies of the free-flowing rivers, upland headwater seeps/wetlands, and upland pine oak savannahs, barrens, woodlands and glades that were historically much more common in the uplands of this COA. These rare terrestrial communities contain concentrated populations of SGCN and are important areas SGCN conservation activities.

Threats to conservation in this COA are predominately related to Agriculture/Aquaculture, Natural Systems Modifications, and Pollution, with a host of other threats contributing to a lesser extent. Given the water resources available, including the four Wild Rivers, conservation of stream resources is paramount within this COA. With a broad section of this COA under conservation protections, the stage is set to further conserve stream resources and the species that rely on those habitats. A cooperative agreement

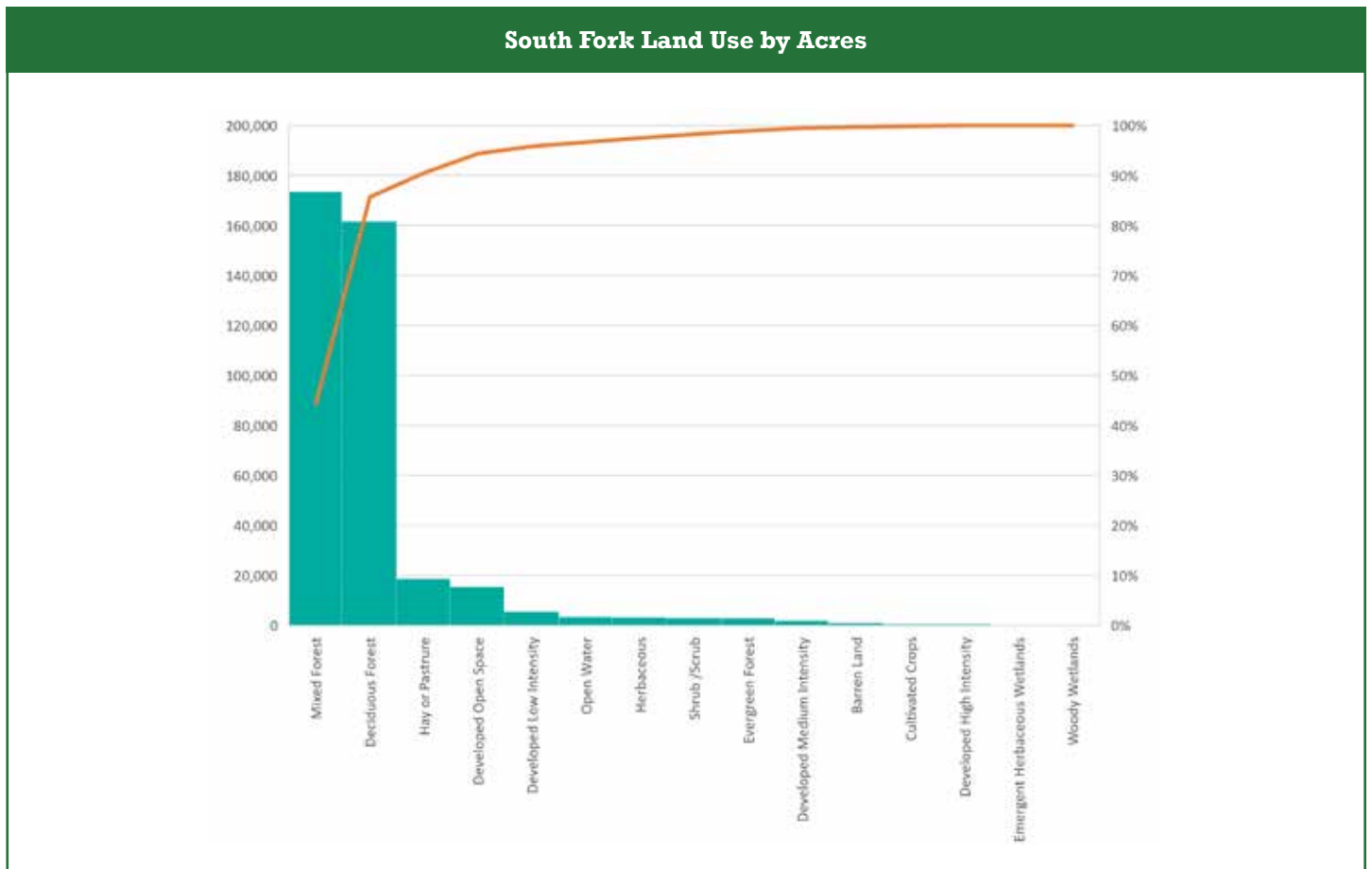


The Big South Fork of the Cumberland River is one of four rivers within South Fork COA to be designated as a Kentucky Wild River. Photo: John Hast

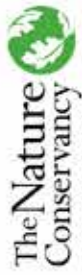
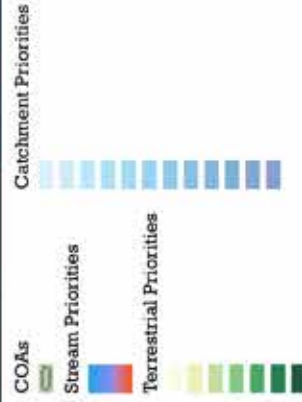
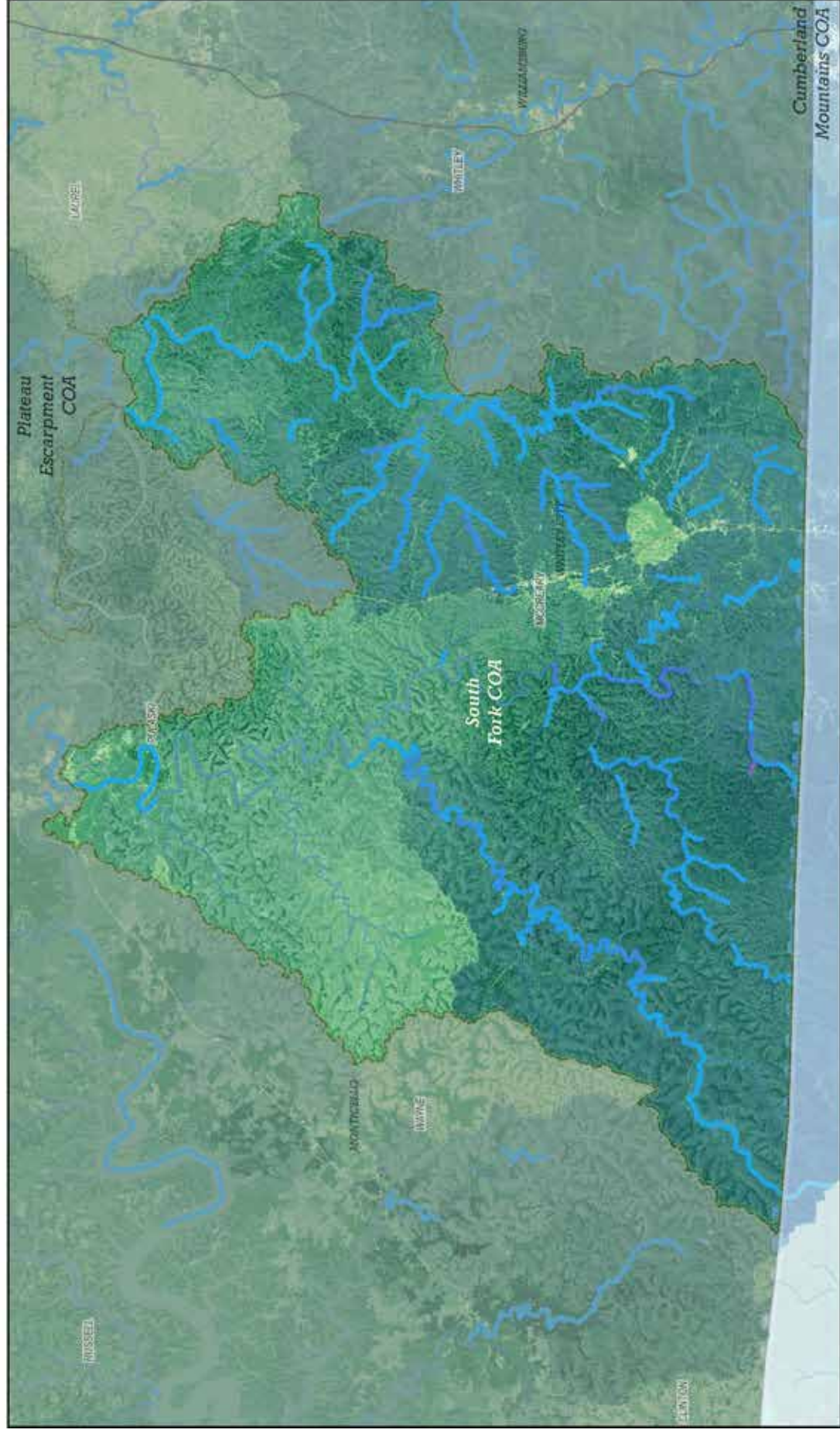


South Fork COA is dominated by forested habitat, much of which is in public ownership. This provides habitat management opportunities by a variety of conservation partners to benefit many SGCN. Photo: Zack Couch

is already in place on the entire Daniel Boone National Forest with multiple joint projects in place between the USFS and KDFWR. Additionally, the National Park Service is a cooperator on multiple black bear research projects currently and would represent a good partner within this COA. Any potential partnerships within this COA should include the Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves.



South Fork COA



Maps prepared by GIS staff at KDFWR in partnership with OKNP and TNC. Source: Esri, USDA, FSA, Source: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community. DGI, ByPromotion Partners, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, FRC, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS.