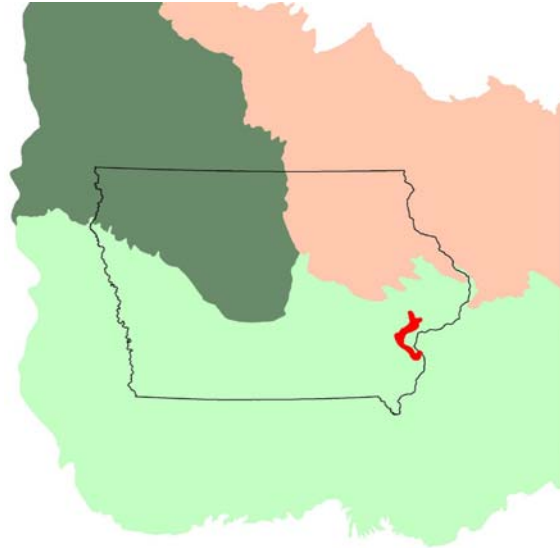


In southeastern Iowa, the Cedar River winds through a landscape that is a priority area for The Nature Conservancy due to its high biological diversity. In addition to two globally rare plant communities – swamp white oak woodland and rich peat fens – a significant variety of plants, fish, reptiles, amphibians and birds find refuge in this complex habitat.

Perched on sand terraces along the river, this remarkable wetland region supports a tremendous assortment of life in the oxbows, sand prairie, peat bogs, floodplain forest and oak savanna. The area's sandy soils provide habitat for more than 19 species of reptiles and amphibians, including the rare massasauga rattlesnake, stinkpot turtle and ornate box turtle. More than 300 plant species have been identified, including cardinal flower, forked aster, royal fern and kittentails.

As the Cedar River heads southward, it flows into the Iowa River and then joins the Mississippi River below the Quad Cities of Davenport and Bettendorf, Iowa, and Moline and Rock Island, Illinois. The connection to the Mississippi River allows large freshwater fish, such as paddlefish and sturgeon, to swim up the Cedar River to essential habitat.

The floodplain oak savannas of the Lower Cedar Valley were established when the forest was more open – when fire and seasonal floods controlled growth. Now, without adequate fire, too many trees grow in an unnatural density, preventing new oak trees from growing. The Cedar River also is flooding unnaturally, causing certain populations of



plants and animals to decline. Ecological threats to the region also include harmful non-native species such as reed canary grass and garlic mustard.

### *Protected Places*

To date, more than 20,000 acres in the Lower Cedar Valley have been protected by private landowners and partners, with approximately 800 of those acres under the Conservancy's ownership.

### For More Information

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The Conservancy's 372-acre Swamp White Oak Preserve is an open savanna located in Muscatine County. The preserve sits on a low sand terrace and is dominated by swamp white oak woodland that includes sedge-dominated woodlands and dry sand prairie ridges. Also located in Muscatine County and accessible only by boat is the 34-acre Red Cedar Woodland Preserve. It is part of a Cedar River island that often floods and is home to a wide variety of trees – black walnut, box elder, cottonwood, hackberry, hawthorn, honey locust, pin oak, silver maple, sycamore and others. Wildlife that can be seen in these preserves include the western painted turtle, Illinois mud turtle, massasauga rattlesnake, great blue heron, red-headed woodpecker and red-shouldered hawk.

### *Conservancy Initiatives*

The Conservancy's long-term goals include working with partners to conserve and restore 5,000 acres of swamp white oak and floodplain savannas via controlled fire and other science-based techniques. The Conservancy is working with partners to create a viable aquatic passage to the Mississippi River, providing critical habitat for large freshwater fish that spawn in its tributaries. The Conservancy is initiating groundbreaking floodplain savanna restoration research. A botanical inventory was recently completed and a reptile and amphibian inventory is underway.