

# Treeways

2023 - 5

## Open Woodland Restoration

Oak Savanna is a type of lightly forested grassland. Some of the open woodland of Sunfish Lake is remnant oak savanna. Oak savanna is described as an ecosystem having 50% or less of tree canopy coverage. If the tree canopy cover is greater than 50% then you have a woodland or forest ecosystem. Less than 10% tree canopy cover is considered grassland in Minnesota.

The park-like character of the oak savanna is much like the open woodlands that existed in pre-white settlement times in this part of the Midwest. Oak savannas most commonly occur on southwest and west facing slopes. The open grown trees are characterized by low wide spreading branches. Wide spreading branches are retained since open grow trees receive maximum sunlight and competition between trees is limited. Oak savannas have herbaceous plants from prairie plant, savanna plant and woodland plant categories. Herbaceous plants including grasses and sedges can thrive in the open shade of an oak savanna even during summer.

Woodlands or forests more typically develop in wetter areas and on north and east slopes. Usually woodland trees shed their lower branches and have taller straighter trunks. Spring ephemeral flowers are a common feature in a woodland understory.

The major task of open woodland restoration is “daylighting the oaks” or the liberation of open grown trees from understory and woody invasive competition. The more open the canopy the more the understory will appear like a prairie. Lower branches of declining open grown trees may revive once the trees and savanna are opened up. Fire is a critical element in maintaining a savanna since it is a “fire dependent ecosystem” and oaks are uniquely resistant to restorative prairie fires. Mowing may be a reasonable substitute for fire in an open woodland setting.

Here is a process to consider:

1. Clear woody invasives such as buckthorn and honeysuckle
2. Clear invasive weeds such as burdock, garlic mustard and thistles
3. Repopulate with new native trees as needed
4. Repopulate with new native woody understory plants as needed
5. Plant native grasses and flowers as needed
6. Control reinfestation by invasive species
7. Mow or burn understory as needed or possible
8. Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy!

Your City Forester is available for a free consultation by phone, text, email or in-person discussion of all things trees, environment or landscape within the City of Sunfish Lake (612-803-9033 or Jim@LStreets.com).