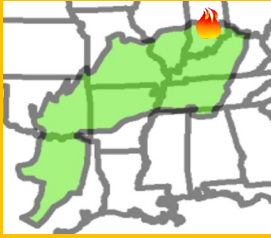


Hitz-Rhodehamel Woods

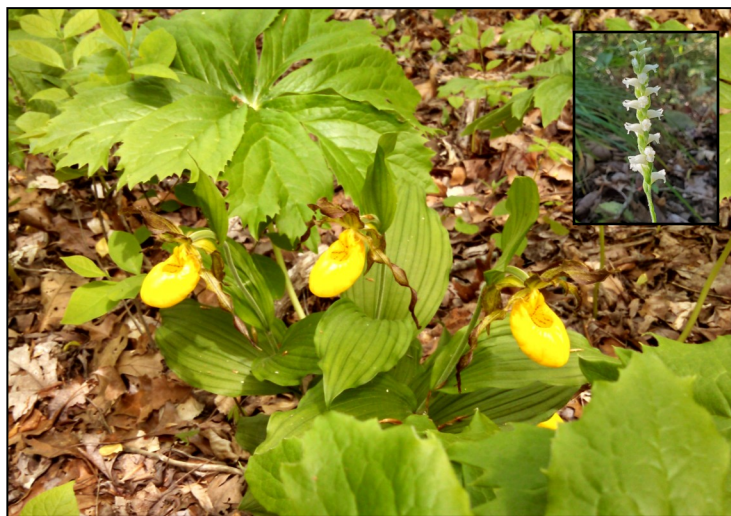
FIRE SCIENCE HOT SPOTS



In this feature, we bring into focus
fire science on-the-ground

At 512 acres, Hitz-Rhodehamel Woods Nature Preserve is a significant component of the Brown County Hills forest block in southern Indiana, known for its highly dissected topography and heavily forested landscape. Much of the Preserve was gifted to The Nature Conservancy in the 1980s by Harley Rhodehamel and his wife Evaline (née Hitz). The Preserve includes dry oak forests (dominated by chestnut oak) on the ridgetops and south-facing aspects, with moist beech-maple forest communities found mostly on the north-facing slopes, and white oaks prominent in the ravines. Like many oak forests of eastern North America, fire has been excluded for much of the past century, resulting in chronic management problems such as densification of the forest midstory by shade-tolerant mesophytic tree species (e.g., American beech and sugar maple, top-left image), and oak regeneration failure. Found here are avian species of conservation concern that depend on large, intact forest areas such as yellow-billed cuckoo, whip-poor-will, wood thrush, and also worm-eating, Kentucky, and Cerulean warblers.

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The Nature Conservancy uses prescribed fire (top-right) and mechanical thinning (inset top-right) at Hitz-Rhodehamel Woods to reduce the forest midstory, which promotes diverse, fire-adapted plant communities and prepares the next generation of oak seedlings to recruit into the forest overstory. These and other management practices also help to remove and prevent invasive plant species (e.g., Japanese stiltgrass, autumn olive, multiflora rose, and bush honeysuckle) and increase ecological resilience

for future climate change. Native plants such as yellow lady's slipper and lady-tresses orchids (bottom-left and inset), as well as lowbush blueberry, huckleberry, and the rare whorled pogonia are found in managed areas (bottom-right). Click on each photo for a full-size downloadable image, or view all [HERE](#). Photo credits – top-left, inset top-right, and bottom-right: Chad Bladow; top-right: Stuart Orr; bottom-left and inset: Jesse Moore.

