

Health of Iowa's Forests Outlined in New Report

The Department of Natural Resources has issued a report showing that the health of Iowa's state tree, the oak, is in decline as more woodland owners shun tree harvest as a method of managing their forests. This allows more shade tolerant trees to displace oaks on the landscape. The dominant forest type, oak-hickory, has declined from 37% in 1990 to 26% in 2008.



DNR's Forestry Bureau spent the past year working with stakeholders, industry experts, and others with an interest in forests in Iowa to produce a new document called: "*Iowa's Forests Today*."

DNR notes that we have changed the natural systems in Iowa through settlement by suppressing fire and installing roads. To maintain and to keep our oak-hickory forests requires disturbance and without it, oak-hickory forests will be replaced by shade tolerant forests and once we lose the oak-hickory seed, shade tolerant species will dominate.

The shade tolerant species generally produce less food for wildlife than the oaks and hickories and as they continue to replace the oaks and hickories, over time, the makeup of wildlife communities in those forests will change.

"*Iowa's Forests Today*" addresses a number of the forest health issues, discusses the wood products industry, and lists biggest threats as well as a number of other issues. It is available on the DNR's website: www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/assessment.html.

Other issues outlined in the assessment include the invasive species threatening Iowa's forests. In addition to the emerald ash borer and gypsy moth, there is bur oak blight, tatters, hickory mortality, juniper mortality, oak wilt, thousand cankers disease, and other invasive plants.