

Oak Ecosystem Recovery Plan

Goals and Strategies 2026–2030

One of the great successes of the first ten years of the *Oak Ecosystem Recovery Plan* (OERP) was the formation of an enduring working group comprised of representatives from across the Chicago Wilderness Region. With the group in place, the focus of the plan's tenth anniversary refresh became this strategic plan. The plan will guide the work of the Oak Ecosystem Recovery Project Working Group for five years, 2026-2030, toward our goal of **sustaining oaks in the Chicago Wilderness Region**. Additional updates to the narrative text of the original plan, as well as to its case studies, will happen as part of the execution of this new strategic plan. Support for the strategic plan was provided by Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

GOAL 1: ALIGN EFFORTS TO ADVANCE OAK ECOSYSTEM HEALTH.

- **Strategy:** Align priority areas with green infrastructure models and strategies developed by individual counties/regions.
 - **Action:** Survey stakeholders about what would be useful tools for them in terms of sharing information about the status of oak ecosystems.
 - **Action:** Develop a method for sharing the information.
- **Strategy:** Update research on health status, regeneration, effects of recent management efforts, and how this looks spatially.
 - **Action:** Identify and rank top regional research gaps that should be prioritized.
 - **Action:** Evaluate a rerun of the original stakeholder survey from 2014 for 1:1 data comparisons.
 - **Action:** Evaluate the data available to update canopy mapping with 2017 (or newer) canopy information.
 - **Action:** Develop a quantitative “state of the region’s oaks” type report.
- **Strategy:** Develop a set of future scenarios and how they relate to management/adaptation/planning in different environments.
 - **Action:** Undertake scenario planning around the impacts of climate change on oaks.
 - **Action:** Set realistic, achievable goals for invasives, particularly woody shrubs.

GOAL 2: STRENGTHEN THE REGIONAL COALITION FOCUSED ON OAK ECOSYSTEM HEALTH.

- **Strategy:** Approach the OERP work as developing a network of networks.
 - **Action:** Extend support for volunteer-based groups.
- **Strategy:** Establish and strengthen relationships with key groups to co-create future approaches to oak ecosystem health.
 - **Action:** Make a concerted push to engage Indigenous voices in meaningful ways by prioritizing building trust and strong relationships through time, transparency, and genuine respect for their culture and history.
 - **Action:** Redouble efforts to keep relationships with stakeholders in underrepresented areas of the Chicago Wilderness Alliance boundary.
 - **Action:** Engage researchers to address knowledge gaps.
 - **Action:** Engage regulators at various levels to ensure that oak ecosystems are encouraged across the region.
- **Strategy:** Increase the pace and scale of inviting strategic participants to the Working Group.
 - **Action:** Expand the Working Group, paying particular attention to current underrepresentation.
- **Strategy:** Collaboratively secure resources.
 - **Action:** Pursue funding opportunities that benefit multiple stakeholders.
- **Strategy:** Document and celebrate success.
 - **Action:** Add a “successes” moment to all meetings.

GOAL 3: AMPLIFY THE IMPORTANCE OF OAK ECOSYSTEMS, BEST PRACTICES FOR THEIR HEALTH, AND WAYS TO GET INVOLVED.

- **Strategy:** Focus on actions people can take.
 - **Action:** Develop and implement a broad campaign based on the *Oak Awareness, Preservation, and Protection Resource Packets for Landowners*.
 - **Action:** Continue to host webinars for either the Working Group or a broader audience, also to keep everyone up to date on pressing issues.
- **Strategy:** Update, expand, and keep active case studies illustrating oak ecosystem recovery efforts.
 - **Action:** Identify new case studies and update existing case studies every 5–10 years.
 - **Action:** Increase the number of annual field trips, orienting them around case studies or management/concern issues.
- **Strategy:** Elevate the *Oak Ecosystem Recovery Plan* work on the Chicago Wilderness Alliance website.
 - **Action:** Use the Chicago Wilderness Alliance Hub to share GIS data.