NEW MU PROGRAM PROMOTES HEALTHY WOODLANDS
Missouri Woodland Mentor program invites landowners to share their knowledge.

COLUMBIA, Mo. – A new initiative is taking root across Missouri to promote healthy woods and trees through the power of peer mentorship.

The Missouri Woodland Mentor program, launched by University of Missouri Extension in partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), invites landowners to serve as mentors for other property owners who are exploring forest management practices for the first time.

“This innovative program aims to build a strong community of land stewards by connecting those with hands-on experience in forest management—such as timber stand improvement, wildlife habitat enhancement, invasive species control and prescribed burning—with landowners seeking guidance and inspiration,” says Brian Schweiss, sustainable forestry specialist with MU Extension.

“Landowners learn best from each other,” he says. “By sharing real-world experiences and lessons learned, mentors can help others avoid common pitfalls and make informed decisions that benefit their land and the environment.” While the program is designed to recruit mentors, it is open to all landowners and others interested in learning more about Missouri’s great forest resource.

Many landowners have expressed interest in meeting with a mentor, says Schweiss. Through the Call Before You Cut program, MDC has found that 44% of landowners want to work with a mentor.

“Missouri woods are one of our greatest natural assets” says George Kipp, forestry program supervisor with MDC. “Good stewardship does not happen by accident. Connecting landowners with others with similar interests and passion for healthy forests and wildlife can help more Missourians care for their forests for generations to come.”

MU Extension will work with MDC to match mentors with landowners who have similar interests. The first step is to identify and train mentors to give them a base of knowledge and tools to share with landowners.

To be a mentor, landowners must complete on-line training that covers topics including Missouri natural communities, practices to improve songbird and game animal populations, forest products and sustainable harvesting. Sessions are 6:30-7:30 p.m. on the last Wednesday of each month from January through September. Sessions will be recorded so missed ones can be viewed later. Details and registration are at https://muext.us/MentorSeries2026.

Mentors can be as active as they want, says Schweiss. Outreach activities can include phone consultation, site field visits and community workshops. The program provides training, resources and support to help mentors effectively share their knowledge and foster meaningful connections.

“Let’s grow a healthier forest – together,” he says.

To learn more or to sign up as a mentor, visit https://muext.us/MentorSeries2026, or contact Schweiss at 573-882-4775 or mailto:schweissb@missouri.edu.

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