

# Shawnee National Forest Forest Facts

The Shawnee National Forest (Forest) encompasses the southern tip of Illinois. Here six natural ecological regions meet, resulting in a diversity of plant and animal species and unique geological features. The region is strikingly beautiful in its diversity of landscapes. It is possible to traverse the Forest in one day and experience vast oak-hickory forests, flourishing wetlands, razorback ridges. In addition, there are swamplands containing tupelo and cypress and thin-soiled hill prairies or barrens where rare native wildflowers thrive.

A distinct change in topography can be seen south of State Hwy 13; like an invisible line, the area north is flat farmland, but to the south of Route 13 are the rolling Shawnee Hills. This contrast is because the scouring effect of glaciation stopped just north of the Forest and the Grand Prairie that is most associated with the state of Illinois starts 40 miles north of the Forest.

The single largest publicly owned body of land in the State of Illinois, the Shawnee National Forest totals approximately 286,000 acres of National Forest System land. Here are some facts about this unique public land base:

* Seven Congressionally-designated Wilderness Areas (about 10% of the Forest)
* Six candidate Wild and Scenic Rivers
* Four National Natural Landmarks
* Four heritage resource sites on the National Register of Historic Places
* Two National Scenic Byways (NSB)
  + Great River Road NSB, extending along the Mississippi River
  + Ohio River NSB, along the Ohio, where it begins in Pennsylvania, traveling to Cairo, Illinois, where the Ohio meets the mighty Mississippi
* Eighty designated Natural Areas considered important for botanical, ecological, geological or zoological reasons (about 5% of the Forest). Ten of these natural areas are designated by the Forest Service as Research Natural Areas (9 ecological areas and 1 botanical area) to focus research on these high value ecological sites.
  + 56 ecological areas
  + 14 botanical areas
  + 3 geological areas
  + 7 zoological areas

*Administered by the USDA Forest Service, the Shawnee National Forest is one of 155 national forests nationwide. The U.S. Forest Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a mission of sustaining the health, diversity and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The Forest Service’s Eastern Region includes twenty states in the Midwest and East, stretching from Maine, to Maryland, to Missouri, to Minnesota. There are 17 national forests and one national tallgrass prairie in the Eastern Region.*

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