

Whether you encourage oak regeneration by controlling individual trees or shrubs, by harvesting groups or a large area of trees, or by burning—or if you simply choose to do nothing—your woodland will continue to change. These changes—whether natural or induced by humans—will affect woodland aesthetics as well as function. Therefore, it's best to discuss these options and their possible ramifications with a forester or other natural resource professional before you decide on any action.

While we're speaking of gaps—one last suggestion—don't make unnecessary gaps in the canopy by removing dead trees. If left standing, they provide food and shelter for many birds, insects, and mammals.



■ Limiting Damage from Livestock and Deer

In a state where most of the land is tillable, many Iowans regard woodlands as a kind of wasteland. In order to put this “wasted” space to use, landowners often have used it as grazing land. Unfortunately, livestock nearly always harm woodland health by:

- Damaging flowering plants of the woodland floor;
- Opening the woodland floor to invasives;
- Decreasing tree and shrub reproduction (cattle are especially fond of oak seedlings and saplings); and
- Increasing the effects of stress and disease on trees.

Grazing further degrades woodland health by reducing the amount of soil organic matter, compacting the soil, increasing erosion, and reducing soil fertility.

Moreover, livestock gain less weight when grazing in woodlands than they gain on improved pasture. They also may consume toxic forest plants. Often, a landowner's most important stewardship tool is to fence livestock out of his or her woodland.

Deer, especially in the numbers present across the state today, have a similar impact on woodland health. Deer browse woody plants and also consume herbaceous plants, fruits, and berries. Antler rubbing by bucks in the fall can damage or even kill individual trees.

If deer damage is a concern, do not invite deer to your woodland by putting out salt or by planting special crop mixes intended to entice deer. Other more complicated and expensive control methods are excluding deer with high or electrified fence, frightening them away with exploders, or repelling them with commercial products.

The most practical way to control deer damage in many cases is to allow some deer hunting in your woodland. Aside from coyotes, which will prey on fawns, deer have few natural predators. If not kept in check by hunting, Iowa's deer herd could increase at an annual rate of 20 to 40%, doubling the population every three years.

■ Avoiding Further Fragmentation of Woodlands

The “miles upon miles of almost undisturbed timber” present at the time of Euro-American settlement are long gone from Iowa's landscape. Ten- to forty-acre woodlands now are the rule and tracts of several hundred acres are the exception. The cutting up, or fragmentation, of Iowa's woodlands began with the conversion of timbered tracts to farms, towns, railroads, and roads and continues today as new housing developments, utilities, and more roads spring up in what remains of our forests.

As woodlands are carved up into smaller and smaller pieces, the amount of habitat obviously decreases. In addition, more of what previously had been the interior of the woodland is