

DRY BRANCH
CLASS II NATURAL-SCIENTIFIC STATE NATURAL AREA

COUNTY: Lewis

7.5' QUADRANGLE: Graves Spring

PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE: Western Highland Rim

OWNERSHIP: State of Tennessee

ACREAGE: 2,168

YEAR DESIGNATED: 2007

Description of Site

Dry Branch is 2,169-acre natural area in Lewis County on the Western Highland Rim. It was previously a registered state natural area owned by International Paper, and was sold to The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee in 2006. The State purchased the property in 2007 when it was designated a state natural area. Dry Branch supports the largest population of Tennessee yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris tennesseensis*) known in Tennessee, which is both a federally endangered species and one of the rarest plants in the state. The plants are growing in both seeps and growing in limestone edges and cracks at seven locations along a 1.5-mile stretch of Dry Branch Creek and its tributaries. The seeps and other *X. tennesseensis* locations within the Dry Branch watershed make up about 900 acres of the natural area. The remainder of the natural area is upland buffer land and was previously planted as pine plantations.

While most known occurrences of *X. tennesseensis* are typically associated with seeps, the majority of occurrences here are along the banks of the creek. The surrounding tree canopy is dominated by various species of oak and hickory, red maple, and alder. Common associated herbs included hog peanut (*Amphicarpaea bracteata*), small-headed rush (*Juncus brachycephalus*), grass of parnassus (*Parnassia grandifolia*), and blackeyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *umbrosa*). Other less common associated herbs include various sedges, jewelweed, rush (*Juncus effusus*), cowbane (*Oxypolis rigidior*), and smooth phlox (*Phlox glaberrima*). Two of these species are listed as rare plants in Tennessee: *Juncus brachycephalus* (Special Concern) and *Parnassia grandifolia* (Special Concern). This natural area contains the globally rare herbaceous community *Carex lurida*-*Carex leptalea*-*Parnassia grandifolia*-*Juncus brachycephalus*. Dry Branch has the highest biodiversity rank under the Natural Heritage ranking system (B1).

There has been little disturbance to the Dry Branch core ecological area although the uplands have been converted to pine plantation. Potential threats include invasive exotic species and ORV/ATV use, the latter threat has not yet been observed as a problem here. Nepal grass (*Microstegium vimineum*) has become established near seeps and other *X. tennesseensis* locations and poses a threat that requires management. There are no plans at this time to open this area to the public.

SITE MANAGEMENT: Division of Natural Areas, 401 Church Street, 7th Floor L&C Annex, Nashville, TN 37243, phone (615) 532-0431

PUBLIC ACCESS: No public access is provided at this time.

DIRECTIONS: Directions are not provided since there is no public access. Click on the map link to view its location.