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COVER A road in the piney woods symbolizes our longleaf restoration journey – where we have been, where we are now, and the path that will carry us forward. Pictured is the Louisiana Ecological Forestry Center’s Hodges Loop as it meanders through a mixed pine stand with remnant longleaf. Photo by Marshall Rice.

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The Longleaf Alliance PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



CAROL DENHOF

*S*pring is one of my favorite times of the year. It reminds me of my grandfather, who loved seeing the many shades of green revealed with the emerging leaves – unblemished and ready for the year.

Growing up in South Georgia, we had short, mild winters, but it was still lovely to see the first signs that hinted toward the awakening of the natural world around us. In my mind, this awakening was and continues to be measured by the colors in the landscape. I waited for the first blush of the red maples, the pink of the redbuds, the bright yellow of the Carolina jessamine, and of course, the explosion of the azaleas. We knew winter was finally behind us when the pecan trees' buds broke open to release their catkins and fresh green leaves. The greens of new growth are welcome sights that signal the beginning of the growing season and get us thinking about new possibilities.

With renewal now on full display, we are energized to tackle projects and inspired to explore new and innovative opportunities that address the challenges surrounding us. We are always looking for strategies to advance our shared goals of restoring, managing, and conserving longleaf forests. I am especially excited to see the new Communities of Practice coming together to address challenges, explore opportunities, and support our efforts. The term 'Communities of Practice' is fairly new, but the concept is not and simply refers to a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic and who come together to fulfill both individual and group goals. One such community is the growing group of active female landowners here in the

Southeast. In this issue, we learn about the work in Alabama through the ForestHER Program. This program, along with similar programs across the longleaf range, focuses on providing education and outreach to female forest landowners in an inclusive way, crafted for their specific needs. Targeted learning experiences like these reduce intimidation factors, teach needed skills, and successfully expand the traditional community of landowners who are growing working longleaf forests.

All are welcome in the longleaf tent, and I am happy to see these innovative programs building up these groups, supporting landowners to be actively engaged in their land management. We know sustaining active management can be challenging in a fire-dependent ecosystem like longleaf. Successful longleaf restoration goes beyond planting trees; it is also the regular use of prescribed fire. The Longleaf Alliance is thrilled to be leading the new Georgia Sentinel Landscape (GSL) Pilot Project that focuses on increasing prescribed fire on private lands by 35,000 acres within the GSL area. This novel project will provide much-needed cost-share assistance, burning tools, and technical assistance to Georgians to improve forest health.

As we look towards the 8 million acres goal of longleaf pine by 2025, we know it is an ambitious target, and there is much work to be done. However, we also know that by engaging private landowners and working together with our partners to develop innovative game-changer strategies, we move closer to that goal. We are motivated and ready to work with you and make the most of these opportunities this year and beyond.

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MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST | SPRING 2021

Evaluate Young Longleaf Stands:

- Assess winter seedling plantings for any early mortality from freeze damage or other factors.
- Uncover and/or lift any viable containerized longleaf seedlings that were planted too deep.

Plan for Your Next Longleaf Planting:

- For fall and winter plantings, order your seedlings early (by April if possible). Sometimes nurseries sell out of preferred seed sources by early summer.
- A list of our partner nurseries can be found at www.longleafalliance.org.

Assess Longleaf Recruitment:

- If promoting natural regeneration is your goal, conduct your longleaf pine cone and flower counts in May to assess the developing crop, as well as next year's potential crop.
- If a good crop is developing, prepare the seedbed with prescribed fire – see burning section below.

Apply Herbicide Treatments:

- Assess stands for herbaceous competition to determine if there is a need for chemical release, especially on former agricultural sites. If using any Oust® product, test pH to ensure it is below 6.2 to avoid seedling mortality. For any release, avoid periods of stress or late-planted seedlings.
- Apply hexazinone as a site prep treatment or to control oaks on sandy sites after bud-break but before full leaf-out. Hexazinone is tough on oaks but easy on many desirable understory species.
- For site preparation following a cutover, ensure adequate time for resprouting to develop before applying a herbicide site prep treatment. If in doubt, wait a year to improve the effectiveness of treatment.

Prioritize Burning:

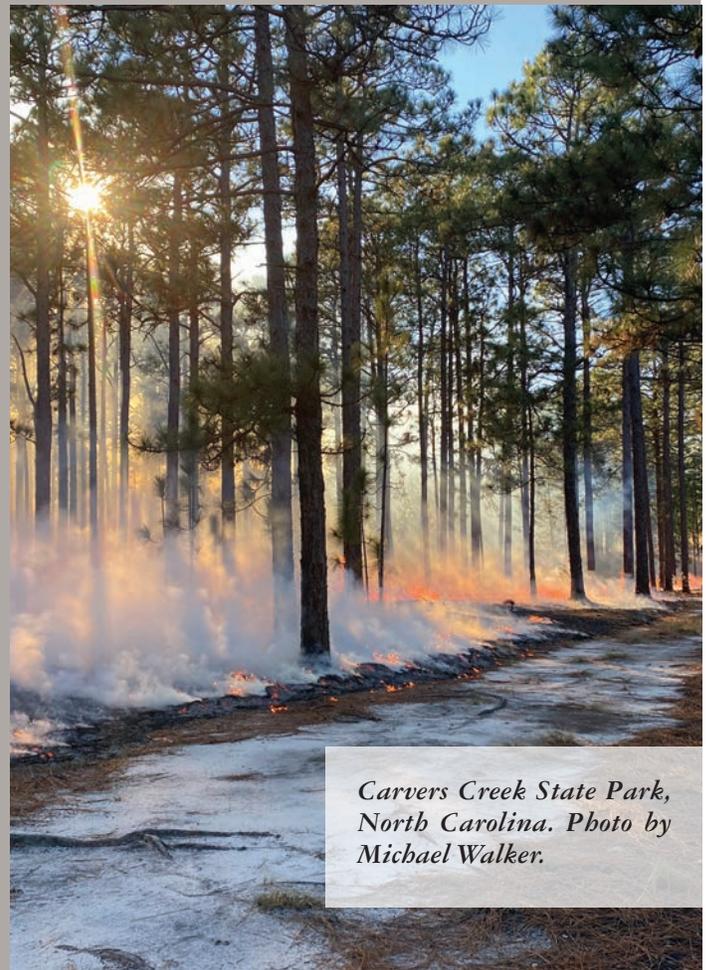
- Evaluate what you burned in the winter to determine if you accomplished your desired fire effects.
- Burn young longleaf stands invaded by short needle pines or hardwoods that are too large to control with winter burns.
- Avoid disking firelines around wetlands and ponds; reptiles and amphibians are actively traveling to wetter areas for breeding, and plowlines can impede their movement.
- Promote viable wiregrass seed production, increase wild flower abundance, and control hardwoods with growing season prescribed fire.
- Consider the best timing for a seedbed preparation burn on mature longleaf stands with good cone crops to promote natural regeneration. Later in the year, when natural seed fall occurs (October/November), the goal is to increase the likelihood that seed falls on bare mineral soil but not so clean that predators can find and destroy most of the new seed.

Mow the Competition:

- Avoid complete mowing in spring to early summer to reduce the loss of ground-nesting birds. Most birds will re-nest if damage does occur and suitable habitat is nearby.
- Mowing can be a tactical tool but consider combining it with periodic patch burning to enhance habitat development and condition.

Plant Native Warm-Season Grasses:

- Check for weedy competition 7-10 days prior to seeding. If needed, treat with herbicide.
- Time planting with seasonal rain events.
- For successful germination, seed must be planted less than 1/4 inch deep.



*Carvers Creek State Park,
North Carolina. Photo by
Michael Walker.*

Reach out to The Longleaf Alliance with any questions you may have pertaining to establishing and managing longleaf stands at longleafalliance.org/contact-us.

Q&A

Q. Dear Longleaf Alliance,
I planted longleaf on a tract last November. Everything looked good at planting – I checked the seedlings before they went in the ground, and they were correctly planted. Two months later and the seedlings turned brown. We had some freezing weather in North Carolina, but nothing as extreme as the polar vortex in Texas and Louisiana this past February. Did my seedlings freeze? How can I tell if my trees are dead?

Not Sure in North Carolina

A. Dear Not Sure,
While there is always a potential for freeze injury when seedlings are exposed to extremely cold temperatures (or even extreme fluctuations in temperature), there are a few encouraging clues in your message. First, you planted early (we recommend planting by December 31st to avoid some cold weather pitfalls), and second, you were on-site at planting, so we know your seedlings were healthy and planted correctly.

So why are your trees brown? Did they freeze? Southern yellow pines acclimate to winter weather gradually. While this provides some cold hardiness, the root system of longleaf pines never really goes dormant. When temperatures drop for extended periods, there is a risk of freeze injury, especially to the stem at ground level and more vulnerable surface roots.

That said, we suspect your brown seedlings are due to a different issue often called “winter burn.” This “burn” isn’t actually cold injury to the needles but needle browning due to desiccation. In frozen or dry soils, the needles can lose water faster than the roots replace it. They turn brown or reddish, looking scorched. The good news is that seedlings can usually recover from winter-burn once new root growth occurs as soil temperatures increase.

For extra peace of mind, we suggest sacrificing a few seedlings to rule out more severe damage. Gently scrape the bark from the stem and roots to expose the tissue below. Look for brown, damaged tissue; healthy tissue will be white or green. Make sure to do this all the way around, as damage could be visible only on one side. Cut the stem/root lengthwise to check the pith, too – dark brown tissue indicates damage.

For a comprehensive source on winter injury, we suggest this article from the North Carolina Forest Service: www.nclongleaf.org/pdfs/TRB011_ColdInjurySYP.pdf.

Please update us on what you find,

The Longleaf Alliance

*UPDATE

I did as suggested and checked for root/stem damage with the help of my forester. We only saw white, healthy tissue on the stem and roots. Even more reassuring, we saw

new needle growth once things warmed up. I’ll keep checking their progress this spring. Thank you! – Not Sure



Southern devil scorpion. Photo by Troy Bartlett.

Q. Dear Longleaf Alliance,
Please help me with a critter identification. I found this creature while putting up a deer stand on my property in Allendale County, South Carolina. It looks like a scorpion! Here in South Carolina? I thought you only found scorpions out West! Is it poisonous?

Allendale Deer Hunter

A. Dear Allendale,
Yes, the critter in the photo you submitted IS a scorpion, specifically, a southern devil scorpion (*Vaejovis carolinianus*), also known as a southern unstriped scorpion. This species can vary from 1.56” to 3.12” in length and are medium to dark brown, without any markings. They’re not uncommon on the coastal plain of our southeastern states.

While not poisonous, a term applied to ingested toxins, southern devil scorpions are venomous. The venom is injected from the tip of the scorpion’s abdomen or “tail.” The sting is not lethal, but it is painful. If you are allergic, it can be a much more significant medical problem. Usually, this sting is used to subdue prey like spiders and large insects, but it is also an effective method of getting a person or pet to back off.

You can usually find scorpions hiding out during the day underneath logs, branches, and leaf litter on the ground. I once was startled while measuring the diameter of a pine tree on a timber cruise when one scuttled out from underneath some loose bark.

Scorpions are nocturnal, usually foraging for small insects while we are sleeping. That’s why many folks don’t know they are around and are surprised with the onset of cooler weather when they occasionally find them inside their houses.

I wouldn’t be concerned about finding them around, though. Just be careful if you have allergies, especially to insect stings, and be prepared with a first aid kit when venturing out.

Sincerely,

The Longleaf Alliance

Throughout the southeast, the American Forest Foundation (AFF) is building partnerships to **help family forest owners care for their land.**



AFF and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program have teamed up to invest resources that will improve forest management and benefit listed and at-risk wildlife species on family forest land.

Opportunities are currently available for landowners to receive financial and technical assistance for forest management activities in key landscapes within Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee.



For more information, visit forestfoundation.org/usfws.

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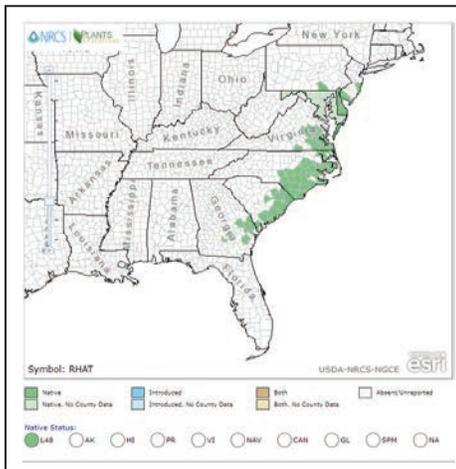
By Carol Denbof, *The Longleaf Alliance*

PLANT SPOTLIGHT

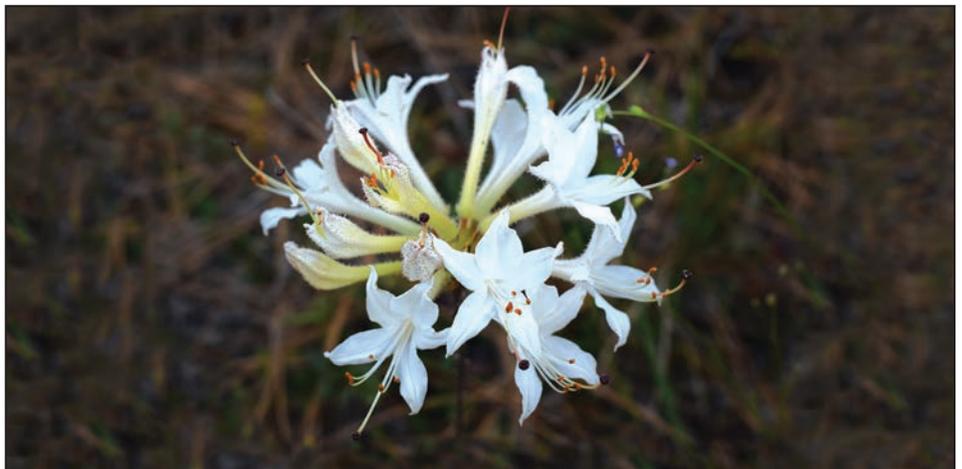
Rhododendron atlanticum (Ashe) Rehder

Dwarf Azalea

Blueberry Family – Ericaceae



Map showing distribution of dwarf azalea. USDA PLANTS Database.



Dwarf azalea blooming in a wetland edge in North Carolina. Photo by Carol Denbof.

Description

Dwarf azalea is a low-growing, deciduous shrub that spreads by runners to form dense colonies of stems. The stems rarely grow to over two feet tall unless they are growing in areas that are unburned. When young, the stems are covered with shaggy hair. Newly formed leaves are also hairy on the upper surface but will lose the hairs as they age, retaining bristly hairs along the leaf margins. The leaves measure 1-2.4 inches in length and grow on short stalks. The fragrant flowers form in a dense cluster terminally on the stem prior to the leaves emerging in the spring. They are mostly white but can be pinkish in color, with gland-tipped hairs covering the outside of the flower.

Distribution & Habitat

Dwarf azalea can be found growing in longleaf sites with higher soil moisture, such as pine flatwoods, savannas, and bogs. Its distribution is limited to the Atlantic Coastal Plain portions of the longleaf range in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia and extends into Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey.

Wildlife Value

The nectar of the dwarf azalea is highly attractive to pollinators. Butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds are all known to visit this shrub when flowering.

Be Aware

If planting as a landscape plant, be aware that it is highly toxic to humans.

Plant Availability

This plant is available commercially from nurseries specializing in native plants and azaleas.

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- Sorrie, B.A. 2011. *A Field Guide to Wildflowers of the Sandhills Region: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia*. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill, NC. 378pp.
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WINDOW into WILDLIFE

Southern Hognose Snake

Heterodon simus



All photos by Ben Stegenga.



Description

The southern hognose snake is most easily recognized by its sharply upturned snout and its prominently keeled scales. It has dark brown, squarish blotches down the center of its back and alternating smaller blotches along the sides with a background color of beige or tan. A light orange or tan stripe is usually visible along the center of the back.

Southern hognose snakes are easily confused with eastern hognose snakes (*Heterodon platirhinos*) and pigmy rattlesnakes (*Sistrurus miliarius*). Eastern hognose snakes are highly variable in pattern and coloration, sometimes appearing similar to the southern hognose, but are often larger with a less distinctive upturned snout. Pigmy rattlesnakes are similar in size and have a similar pattern, including the stripe along the back, but they have a tiny rattle, vertical pupils, and a small pit between the eye and nostril.

Habitat and Habits

Southern hognose snakes are primarily associated with dry, upland habitats with sandy soil. This species is extremely fossorial, meaning that much of its life is spent underground in burrows, stump holes, and root channels of rotting trees. Their fossorial habits, cryptic coloration, and secretive behavior make them extremely difficult to locate. Most sightings occur diurnally from May – June and from September – October each year.

Colloquially known as puff adders or spreading adders, the southern hognose snake is a mild-mannered snake that rarely tries to bite. Species within the *Heterodon* genus, especially the more common eastern hognose, are phenomenal actors as they may also roll over, feign death, and regurgitate their latest meal, all in the attempt to “play dead.” The southern hognose will sometimes flare its neck and hiss when threatened, similar to the eastern hognose snake.

Diet

Although southern hognose snakes occasionally prey on lizards, frogs, and small mammals, their diet is almost exclusively comprised of toad species (*Anaxyrus*) and eastern spadefoot (*Scaphiopus bolbrookii*). Specialized anatomical traits enable them to capture and prey upon these frogs. Their sharply upturned snout may aid in the excavation of buried toads, and their rear fangs are used to puncture toads that inflate themselves to keep from being swallowed.

Management Actions

Continued protection and prescribed fire management of upland longleaf pine woodlands and savannas are required for this declining species. When timber is harvested, stumps should be left to serve as underground refugia and hibernation sites.

Conservation Status

Once found in the Southeastern Coastal Plain from southern North Carolina to southern Mississippi and into Central Florida, only scattered locations in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida exist today. The southern hognose snake is listed as state threatened in South Carolina and Georgia and state endangered in Alabama and Mississippi. In North Carolina, it is ranked as a state species of special concern, and in Florida, it is ranked as a species of greatest conservation need.

References

Jensen, J., Camp, C., Gibbons, W. and Elliott, M., 2008. *Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgia*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, pp.356-358.



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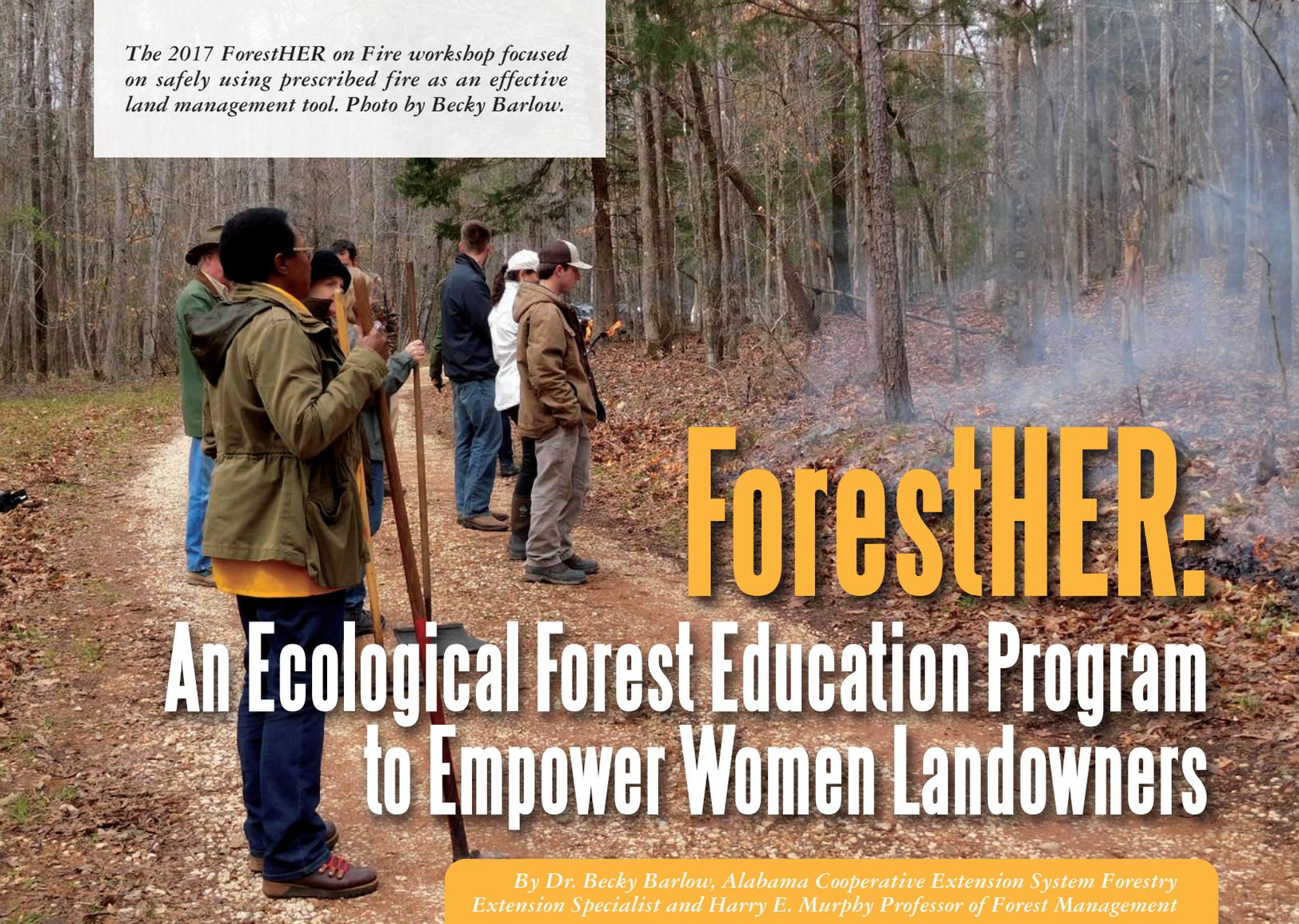
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The 2017 ForestHER on Fire workshop focused on safely using prescribed fire as an effective land management tool. Photo by Becky Barlow.



ForestHER:

An Ecological Forest Education Program to Empower Women Landowners

By Dr. Becky Barlow, Alabama Cooperative Extension System Forestry Extension Specialist and Harry E. Murphy Professor of Forest Management

“I’m ready to give up.”

That was the first thing said by a Regional Extension Agent in the fall of 2015 when our Alabama Cooperative Extension System Forestry, Wildlife, and Natural Resources (FWNR) team met to start planning for the new year. Other members of the team echoed this sentiment. They were weary of canceled workshops due to limited attendance or workshops attended by “the same old group.” And I must admit, I too was disheartened when earlier that year I looked out during a workshop presentation to see a person on the front row reading a paperback novel.

Yep, things had to change.

Our team realized that we were not reaching family forest landowners who needed help the most. As we brainstormed new topics and ideas, it was suggested that we try reaching out to women landowners. A few of the Regional Agents were willing, so we planned our first hands-on workshop, developed especially for women, to be held the following fall. The name started as a play on words, just as a placeholder until we could come up with a “real name” for the program.

But the name stuck, and in September of 2016, Alabama Cooperative Extension System launched the first ForestHER workshop! At that workshop, we welcomed more than 30 women who traveled from across Alabama and as far away as Tennessee, Michigan, Mississippi, and Ohio. Day one included information on goal setting, forest measurements, and management for wildlife, timber, and non-timber forest products like pine straw. The second day was a hands-on field tour that included tree identification, tree diameter and height measurements, forest inventory plot establishment, basal area, and a visit to sites demonstrating management techniques for wildlife and native pollinators. The energy and excitement from the participants were infectious, and the post-workshop reviews were overwhelmingly positive.

“Why aren’t you doing workshops for men?”

But as with anything, not everyone thought this was a great idea. I explain to those who express concerns that everyone is welcome at all our workshops, that we have men participate in ForestHER events. We encourage families to attend together when possible. We also continue to offer a wide variety of workshops where few to none of those attending are



▲ *Participants practice measuring basal area using a forestry wedge prism at a workshop in 2019. Photo by Katie Jackson.*

◀ *Practical skills, including how to take standard tree measurement, are an interactive component emphasized at events. Photo by Becky Barlow.*

“All I know about forestry is it is trees. So much to learn. Daddy had an understanding, and he left the farm to Mama. Now she's left it to us, four sisters. I know they are no more knowledgeable than I am. So thankful for the ForestHER program.” – ForestHER participant

women. And maybe this is why – past ForestHER workshop participants confided in us that:

- 1.They often rely on other family members to take the lead in land management decision-making.
- 2.They hesitate to attend natural resource-related meetings and workshops where they feel uncomfortable because few other women are in attendance.
- 3.They need and want science-based land management information to help them manage their land, but they worry about looking foolish or appearing ignorant when asking questions.

Turns out those women are not alone.

Surveys of U.S. forest landowners have found that, in general, women are less likely to make, or be part of, family forestland management decisions (Butler et al., 2016). However, this same study found that the number of women listed as the primary forestland decision-maker increased from 11% to 22% between 2006 and 2013 (Butler et al., 2016). This is because, historically, men are reported as primary forestland decision-makers. But as these landowners age, their property eventually passes to the secondary forestland decision-maker. Often these are wives, sisters, daughters, and nieces who may or may not be armed with the knowledge to take on the task. Women, often out of necessity, are making important short and long-term decisions about their forestland, but they may not be getting the assistance they need to make informed, confident land management decisions.

ForestHER for the future.

Since 2016, we have reached over 500 women in 16 states and many countries, including Canada, India, and Korea, with the ForestHER programs. Although in 2020, many of our face-to-face workshops were postponed or canceled, our team came together and quickly figured out how we could still have workshops in an online program format. In 2020 we had 9 webinars, and in some cases, we increased our reach 10 times over what we would have with face-to-face workshops. Alabama ForestHER also launched a podcast series in 2020. As we begin our 6th year of programming, 12 webinars are scheduled, and we have tentatively planned some face-to-face events for late 2021.

References

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To see our current listing of webinars, to register for events, or to listen to our podcast, visit our FWNR Webinar webpage www.aces.edu/blog/topics/forestry/foresther-workshops/.

Small, interactive groups provide an engaging setting for plant identification practice. Photo by Katie Jackson.



Engaging Women in Forestry Across the Southeast

By Lisa Lord and Sarah Crate, The Longleaf Alliance

In addition to Alabama Cooperative Extension System ForestHER programs, there are complementary initiatives across the Southeast (and beyond). The need and interest are so great that these opportunities consistently draw participants from multiple states, even before the surge of virtual offerings opened the geographical reach of outreach events.

In fact, Women Owning Woodlands (WOW) is a national project from the National Woodland Owners Association (NWOA) and the USDA Forest Service. Women Owning Woodlands has chapters throughout the country and aims to support women landowners and forestry professionals. Within the longleaf range, WOW programs are frequently offered in North Carolina (through NC State Extension) and South Carolina (through Clemson Extension), with topics ranging from chainsaw safety, pollinator habitat, land management, and more. Get connected with WOW at WomenOwningWoodlands.net.

Inspired by the name of Alabama's ForestHER and the success of localized female focused programming in North Carolina, ForestHER NC is a state-wide outreach initiative that began in 2019 as a joint effort between twelve conservation partners in North Carolina. Follow ForestHER NC on Facebook or reach out via email at foresthernc@gmail.com.

Female business owners and forestry consultants are another valuable resource for women landowners beyond what the state-led and non-profit groups provide. In Georgia, for example, Land & Ladies specializes in outreach to women landowners with workshops and webinars.

These initiatives provide forestry and wildlife-related learning opportunities while also offering valuable networking spaces for women, both landowners and professionals alike. The Longleaf Alliance hosted a "Women in Longleaf Lunch and Learn" at the 2020 Biennial Conference, the largest and longest-running longleaf event in the country. Inspired by women's work and leadership in natural resources, The Women's Forest Congress hosted an international event on March 8th, International Women's Day 2021, bringing people together to share experiences and develop strategies and solutions for forests through the female perspective.

While designed with women in mind, these efforts are not gender exclusive. With any forestry outreach program, it is beneficial for families to attend together in preparation for the next generation of landowners. At a ForestHER NC event, one man shared that he felt encouraged to attend because "I want my wife to have her own knowledge and networks when I'm gone." Programs like these are undoubtedly paving the way for future generations to manage longleaf forests into the future.

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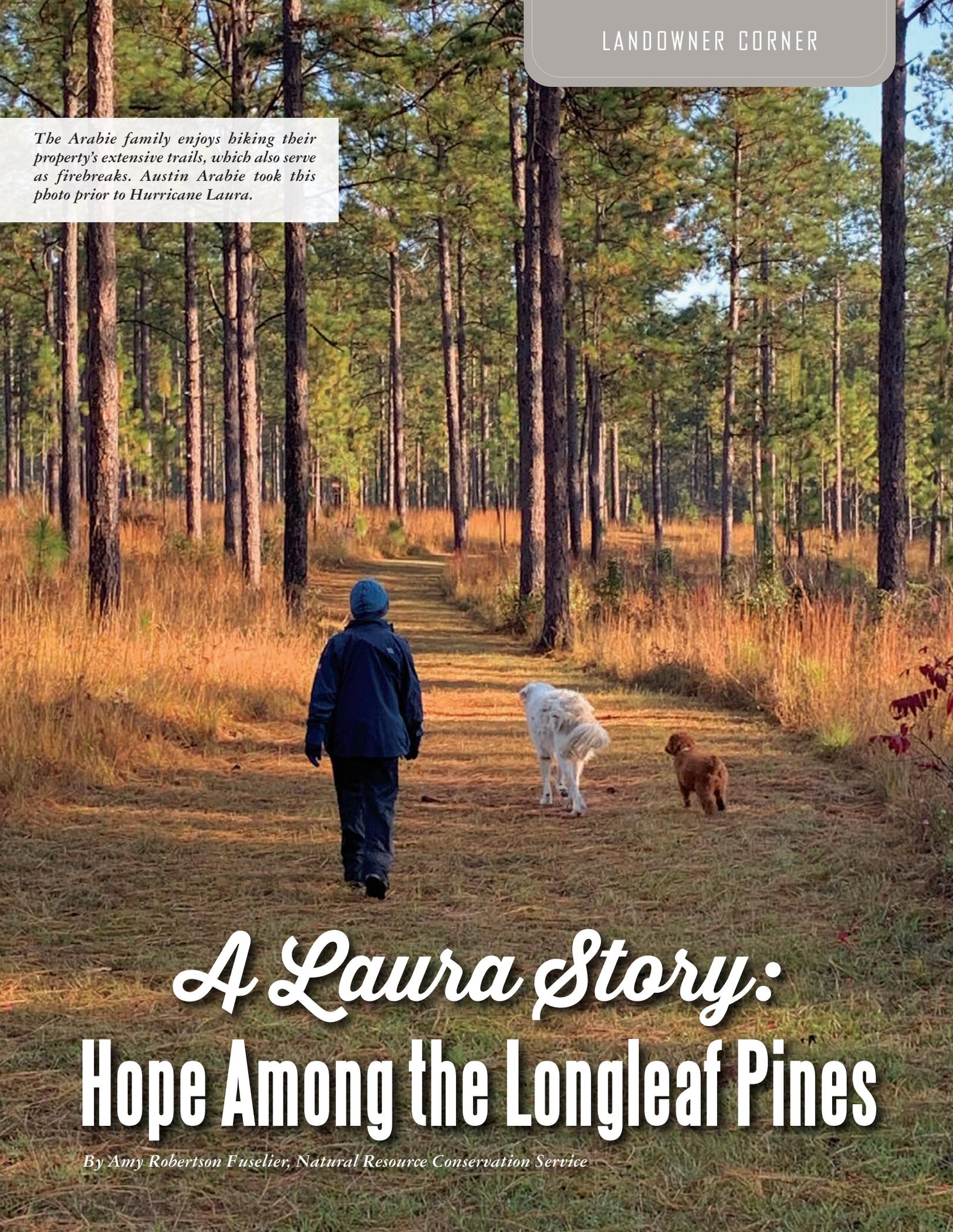
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The Arabie family enjoys biking their property's extensive trails, which also serve as firebreaks. Austin Arabie took this photo prior to Hurricane Laura.

A photograph of a person wearing a blue hooded jacket and dark pants, walking away from the camera on a dirt path. Two dogs, one white and one brown, are walking ahead of the person. The path is surrounded by tall, thin longleaf pine trees and golden-brown grasses. The scene is captured in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

A Laura Story: Hope Among the Longleaf Pines

By Amy Robertson Fuselier, Natural Resource Conservation Service

The Arabie Family's ties to their Louisiana forest land go back generations, and the sentimental value runs deep. "This land has been the passion of our family since the 1920s," explains Austin Arabie. "It's a way of life. It gets in your blood." The Arabies have actively managed their land and are amazed at how the land has evolved over the years. Maintained by regular prescribed burning and a lifetime of building fire lanes and access trails, their practices have created a thriving longleaf ecosystem.

"When you talk to people about longleaf pine, many times they think of just the tree, but it is a total package," explained Arabie. "The ecosystem the longleaf grows in is a fire-dependent system that creates a whole population of fire-tolerant plants around it." The result is a diverse ecosystem that not only provides a source of income from cut timber but also establishes habitat for wildlife and offers countless hours of outdoor recreation for the entire family.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist in DeRidder, Louisiana, Corby Moore, explains, "Strategically timed to mimic natural disturbance,

the Arabies use fire to improve plant structure and composition as well as treating invasive species and other woody brush species' encroachment." Moore goes on to say, "The Arabies use prescribed burning to sculpt and improve their longleaf forest; to increase plant diversity, promote active warm-season grasses, legumes and forbs."

Arabie agrees, "Longleaf provides a biodiverse ecosystem that's not fully recognized by the average person. It is interesting and valuable and a great example of a fire-dependent ecosystem."

On Thursday, August 27, 2020, that ecosystem was altered in a dramatic way when Hurricane Laura barreled through southwest Louisiana. According to the LSU AgCenter's initial state-wide estimates, the massive impact that Laura dealt to the state was a total economic loss to the timber industry of \$1.1 billion. Of that total value, \$767.6 million was attributed to pine timber, while \$346.9 million was attributable to hardwood timber. Vernon Parish was estimated to have experienced the most considerable economic loss at \$359.7 million. Rapides, Beauregard,



A.



B.



C.

A. The Arabie family's longleaf before Hurricane Laura damage. Photo by Austin Arabie. B. The aftermath of Hurricane Laura. Photo by Amy Robertson Fuselier. C. Despite the magnitude of destruction around them, the Arabies still find reasons to smile. Gathering with their friends and family, even without water or electricity for three weeks, they often shared stories and laughter. Left to right: Corby Moore, USDA/NRCS District Conservationist, Austin Arabie, and his son, Randy Arabie. Photo by Amy Robertson Fuselier.

Grant, and Allen parishes were all estimated to have losses greater than \$100 million.

Of the 720 acres of forest land the family owns, almost all the trees were damaged to some extent. After the hurricane, surveying the land revealed massive pines strewn and contorted in every shape imaginable and downed trees with exposed roots everywhere; the loss was immense. The path forward seemed uncertain. The most severely damaged was a 200-acre tract of longleaf that took a direct hit. “Hurricane Laura pretty much eliminated the possibilities for prescribed burning and other management practices until we could get some of the timber off the forest floor,” said Arabie. With a heavy heart, he posed difficult questions: “How am I going to implement management practices on the land now?” and “How am I going to enjoy my property the way I have in the past?”

Moving forward

After the initial shock of Hurricane Laura wore off, and with these and so many other questions to answer, the Arabies gathered with family and friends to plan the best path forward, concentrating on what they could do, like cleaning up areas where trees still stood. Their land was home to miles and miles of forest trails and fire breaks that they used daily for hikes, not to mention access and fire lines for prescribed burning. Arabie explained, “We determined our top priority would be to clear the trails and fire lanes.”

With some borrowed forestry equipment, 350 hours of chainsaw work, and an abundance of elbow grease, six miles of trails were cleared. The cleaned trails gave the Arabies access to survey the remaining damaged property and gave much-needed space for recreation.

The next step in the process was working with a timber salvage company to cut and clear timber that littered the forest floor. “After Christmas, we found a timber company that was able to salvage some of the downed trees; they were able to remove about 55 loads of timber that ultimately sold at a fraction of the cost,” explained Arabie.

Not long after the salvage operation, a significant rain event dropped eight inches of rain. “We determined that it was just too wet to continue the salvage, so work stopped,” said Arabie.

The family knew there would be management concerns associated with the salvage operation, including damaging

standing trees, stressing young longleaf, and rutting up the land. “It was a trade-off, and for the long term, we had to get the downed trees cleared,” explained Arabie. “There are an estimated 300+ loads of longleaf pine logs still on the ground. Unfortunately, the chances of salvaging those decreases each day that they are on the ground.”

The future still holds several management questions for the Arabies. The greatest is how to re-introduce prescribed fire on the land safely? Although some trails, access lanes, and areas are cleared, many downed trees still dominate the landscape. With the assistance of agencies like the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and The Longleaf Alliance (TLA), the family knows they are not alone on their path to recovery and returning to a sense of normalcy.

As a 20-year member of TLA, one of the aspects of membership that Arabie values most is the continued education through its publications and articles. “I’ve learned so much. They are filled with technical and practical information that I’ve applied to our land,” he explains.

With spring just around the corner, Arabie is hopeful for drier weather conditions to utilize technical guidance from the TLA and NRCS. “NRCS will be here to assist the Arabies when they are ready to begin replanting longleaf and when forest management practices are safe to begin again,” Moore described. “The Arabies are wonderful second and third-generation

forest landowners who are steadfast conservationists. NRCS will be right there beside them as they rebuild their forest.”

Austin Arabie remains hopeful for positive outcomes, “We know that Hurricane Laura was an act of God. It is something that has happened a hundred times over the centuries, and we just happened to be here this time.” He smiled, “The land has recovered many times before, and we know it will recover once again.”

A wise forester once said, *A soft wind blowing through longleaf pines makes a special sound; it creates beautiful music.* Working together, over time, the Arabie land will be cleared and cleaned, replanted and regenerated. Many years from now, those longleaf pines will reach toward the sky, sway in the breeze, and that *beautiful* music will be heard once again.

For more information about NRCS programs and technical assistance, contact a local USDA/NRCS field office.



*Salvaged timber, damaged in Hurricane Laura.
Photo by Austin Arabie.*



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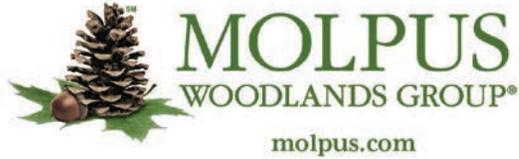
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ARE NOT REACHED
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Reese".

Reese Jordan Thompson
Vidalia, Georgia

By Sarah Lauerman, AVES Consulting LLC

Tools of the Trade – Red-cockaded Woodpecker Translocations

Ladders are used to band RCW nestlings in the cavity nest (and also for cavity box installation). Photo by Lisa Lord.



A.



B.

A. Monitoring an occupied cavity using a camera scope. Photo by Lisa Lord.

B. A banded red-cockaded woodpecker. Photo by Lisa Lord.

C. Volunteers and partners make translocations possible. Photo by Sarah Lauerman.

D. Temporary housing for RCW transport to their new home. Photo by Lisa Lord.



C.



D.



The stories of decline for the longleaf pine ecosystem and red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs) are connected, but so are their stories of conservation and recovery. RCWs are particularly fond of longleaf pines, and only a fraction of mature longleaf pine habitat remains; an estimated 16,000 birds are left where once there were likely millions. These birds are important to these pine communities because they are a keystone species. Like the architectural keystone, which becomes the critical piece allowing an arch to function, red-cockaded woodpeckers play a crucial role in their world. They are the primary excavators of cavities in live pine trees, which they use for nesting and roosting. However, their

cavities persist for years, even decades, and 27 other vertebrate species have been documented using them, including many other cavity-nesting birds.

As RCW populations rebound under active forest management and habitat enhancements, translocations provide opportunities to augment smaller, isolated RCW populations and even reintroduce birds to sites where populations were extirpated.

Saving a Species, One Bird at a Time

Each night, for the last thirteen years, my routine is the same; I stand quietly in a pine forest of fading light and listen for a sign. Through the buzzing of mosquitoes and calls of red-

bellied woodpeckers, I hear what I am waiting for, and my heart races. I grip my spotting scope and keep alert for movement. It is my favorite part of each night; the birds I am waiting for have come home to roost, and they announce their entrance with a chorus of contact calls.

The birds, although somewhat unremarkable in appearance, are a federally endangered species. The small black and white woodpecker is not much bigger than my hand, but what it lacks in size, it makes up for in importance. It is the red-cockaded woodpecker, and despite its name, red feathers are rarely seen. They get their name from the few, discreet, red feathers edging the black cap on the male's head like the

decorative ribbons, or cockade, on an eighteenth-century tricorne hat. However, this is not the eighteenth century, and much of the southern pine forests of the southeastern United States have been logged, thus putting this endemic species on the endangered species list.

Although the evening is routine in every way, tonight is the final night of the season, and it is going to end differently. Usually, I watch the birds come in and fly to their cavities' entrance, 20 to 40 feet up in old pine trees. The trees are well-marked by the woodpeckers and easy to spot with the layers of old and new sap running down the trunks, making them look like melted candlesticks. A bird will sometimes stop at



A.



B.



C.

Field Work Packing List

- ✓ spotting scope
- ✓ binoculars
- ✓ cavity viewing (or "peeper") camera
- ✓ net on a telescoping pole
- ✓ ladder
- ✓ translocation transport boxes
- ✓ headlamp
- ✓ mosquito spray
- ✓ crazy field crew

RCW translocations are conducted by trained individuals with proper permitting.

A. and B. Spotting scopes in action. Photos by Sarah Lauerman and Lisa Lord. C. A telescoping pole with a net is used to capture RCWs identified for translocation. Photo by Lisa Lord.

the cavity entrance, where it will roost for the night and peck away at the bark to encourage sap flow. his behavior proves to be a great defense against tree-climbing snakes. While they peck away, I use the **spotting scope** to view the bands on their legs. Each bird has a numbered **metal band** along with color bands making a unique combination and allowing me to identify the individual. Sometimes I am not so lucky, and the birds fly straight into the cavities without a single peck. However, tonight I am revisiting a site I have been to multiple times. I know which birds to expect and which tree they will disappear into, so the adrenaline I am feeling with their arrival is not needed yet. So, I wait. Once the birds have settled down for the night, I silently make my way to the tree of my target bird. I lift a **long pole, with a net** shaped like a closed windsock on the end, and advance towards the cavity. I pray the bird won't fly out of the tree before I have the net in position. Tonight, I am in luck, and the bird stays quietly in the cavity.

Once the net is over the hole, I breathe a sigh of relief, and my muscle tension eases slightly. Now I just need to get the bird to come out into my net. I am not alone in the woods, and I give a shout to the **volunteers** who have been watching this capture process. Just a few moments ago, the forest was filled with only the natural noises of dusk as everything quieted down for the night, but now we break the calm air with our loud voices. One volunteer takes a stick and gives the

tree a series of taps to encourage the bird to flush out of the cavity. The taps turn into scrapes as the volunteer starts to rub the stick against the bark; this sound does the trick. The bird flies out and into the net. It flutters down to the bottom of the sock, and we quickly lower the net. I gently extract it and see we have caught a young male who has recently molted his head feathers and sports his first red cockades. He will be paired with a female his same age, and several other pairs will join them on their journey to a new home, safely traveling in **translocation boxes**.

Every year, for the past thirteen years, I monitor between 110 and 130 breeding red-cockaded woodpecker groups in the Osceola National Forest as part of a translocation program to speed up the recovery of the species. I spend summers carting **ladders** and climbing sappy pine trees to band week-old nestling red-cockaded woodpeckers and follow their progress as they fledge from the nest. Each fall, when the banded fledglings are 5 to 6 months old, a crew of wildlife biologists and I capture and translocate approximately 20 birds (in 10 pairs) from the Osceola National Forest to other properties in the southeast region where they will augment and stabilize these small recipient populations. From 2008 to 2020, we translocated 255 birds to 12 state and federal properties in Florida and Alabama. To learn more about the red-cockaded woodpecker, visit www.fws.gov/rcwrecovery.



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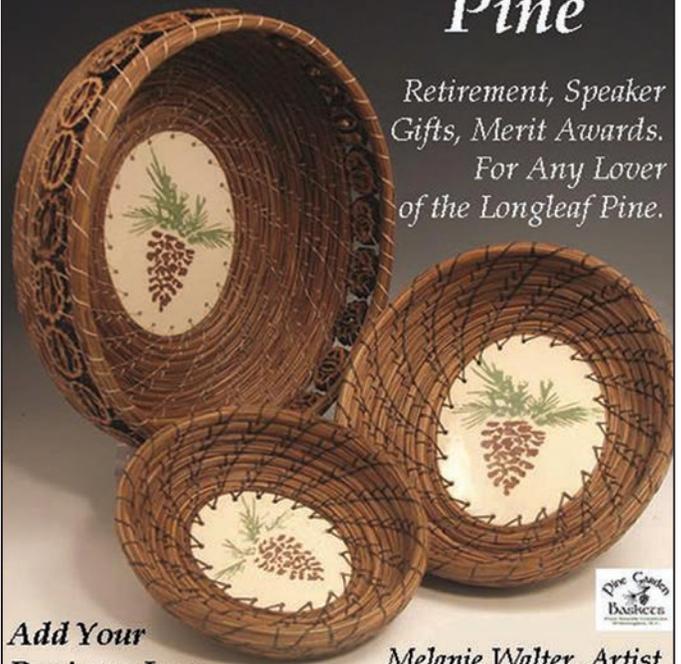
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By Chris Erwin, American Forest Foundation, Longleaf Partnership Council Chair

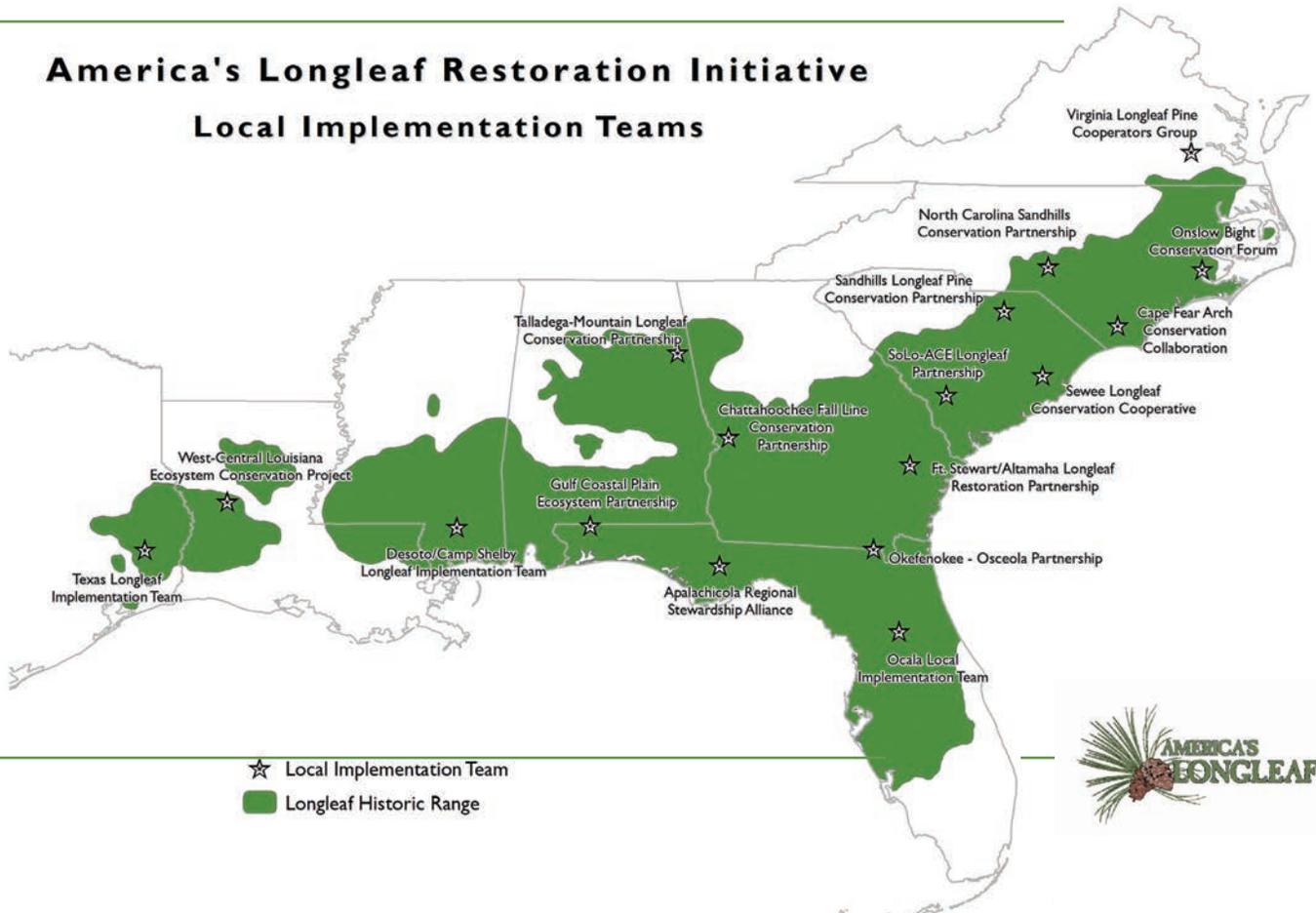
News from the Longleaf Partnership Council

The Longleaf Partnership Council recently hosted its first virtual quarterly meeting in 2021, and there was much to be excited about. We officially welcomed the Heartland Longleaf Implementation Team and its coordinator, Rosalind Rowe of Florida Park Service, to the Initiative. The Heartland LIT is focused on the southern-most portion of the longleaf range in peninsular Florida. We also welcomed Bill Owen, a passionate lover of longleaf and music, from Yale, Virginia, to the Council. Lucas Furman, GIS Coordinator with The Longleaf Alliance, provided an update on a beta version of the Southeast FireMap, which will be published this Spring, offering a snapshot of 26 years of fire history across the longleaf range. We heard from Amy Knight, Senior Botanist with the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, that 4 million acres of longleaf stands, including mixed stands, are now mapped in the Longleaf Ecosystem Occurrence (LEO) Geodatabase. And finally, Sean Sellers, a graduate student at the University of Florida, presented

research on ecosystem system services showing longleaf pine ecosystems are more water-use efficient and resilient to drought. Notably, fire-maintained longleaf systems use 15% less water than fire-excluded mixed pine-hardwoods and 30% less water than intensive slash and loblolly plantation. However, long-term studies found that forest structure was a better predictor of water yield rather than species.

Looking ahead, members of the Council are evaluating opportunities to engage and educate the new administration on longleaf forests' contributions to policy priorities, including climate change and carbon sequestration. Stephanie Hertz, Kyle Jones, and Ryan Bollinger are leading the development of our annual accomplishments report, a valuable resource for key leaders when considering support for longleaf. We will meet again on April 27th and are happy to share any news or concerns you may have. Don't hesitate to contact me at cerwin@forestfoundation.org.

America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative Local Implementation Teams





North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership

By Jeff Marcus, The Nature Conservancy

The NC Sandhills Conservation Partnership (NCSCP) was born out of conflict and has become a model of how to do collaborative conservation. A group of forward-thinking individuals from the U.S. Army, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and others helped to chart a path out of the “woodpecker wars” plaguing Fort Bragg in the 1980s and 1990s. This group took a problem-solving approach to the challenges, creating what would become the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program and the Safe Harbor program. They expanded the coalition of stakeholders and formalized the NCSCP in 2000.

The Partnership’s success is attributed to a keen focus on overlapping interests (while minimizing areas of disagreement), a commitment by the participants to address the root causes of problems, and most importantly, the establishment and maintenance of trust. The shared mission of enhancing red-cockaded woodpecker populations above the recovery threshold gave the partners a common goal.

The NCSCP invested in developing a conservation plan and mapping conservation priorities. The “Reserve Design” was one of the first landscape-scale priority maps in the region and helped to focus conservation efforts.

The Partnership has facilitated collaboration in a number of areas, chief among them land protection. The land trusts provide landowner relations and nimble action to close on properties, the Army provides significant funding, and state agencies provide long-term management and public access. This synergy attracts additional resources, builds positive relationships in the community, and has enabled the protection of almost 24,000 acres through the ACUB program and approximately 36,000 acres overall since the formation of the Partnership.

Recognizing that no single partner had sufficient resources to manage habitat across the landscape adequately, several state agencies and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) established Memoranda of Understanding that allows partners to share personnel and equipment for controlled burning and other habitat work. The philosophical shift required to make partners willing to commit resources to benefit another partner’s property was only possible after establishing trust, shared values, and a shared vision for the entire landscape. The most prominent example is a TNC burn crew that provides capacity to federal, state, and private partners.



All photos by Brady Beck.

The NCSCP has gotten behind several efforts to support private landowners, notably the Safe Harbor Program, which has enrolled hundreds of landowners totaling >75,000 acres, and the Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association, which is bringing back fire culture with a neighbors-helping-neighbors approach. The Partnership has also attempted to engage local governments through the Fort Bragg Regional Land Use Advisory Commission and the NC Wildlife Resources Commission's Green Growth Toolbox, with mixed results to date. Increasing buy-in from local governments, developers, and landowners to steer incompatible land uses away from sensitive areas remains one of the biggest and most daunting conservation challenges in the region.

The NCSCP encourages research and surveys to inform our work. The NC Natural Heritage Program, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, NC State University, and Sandhills Ecological Institute are among the key players in collecting on-the-ground species and habitat data. Of particular note is that the NC Sandhills has one of the longest-running studies of demographic data for the red-cockaded woodpecker, spawning dozens of research papers that have informed our basic understanding of the bird's ecology. The Partnership itself

collects data with a dedicated position that conducts surveys on indicator species and habitats to measure progress towards conservation plan goals.

Recognizing an important need and opportunity, the Partnership recently expanded the Local Implementation Team boundary to include a portion of the Uwharrie Mountains in the Piedmont ecoregion immediately west of the Sandhills. The longleaf forests of this region have been significantly reduced and degraded through conversion to loblolly pine plantations and fire suppression, resulting in the extirpation of many longleaf-associated species within the past 40-100 years. However, several climate resilience and other analyses point to the potential of this landscape to support high biodiversity with appropriate management. Inspired by the Uwharrie National Forest's commitment to restore longleaf, the partners developed a bold plan to bring back longleaf in the region and establish habitat connectors to source populations in the Sandhills.

While much work remains, our shared vision of a future with a viable longleaf ecosystem, and strong working relationships, have allowed the NCSCP to make significant progress and weather the turn-over of key personnel throughout the years.

OSI Acquires Critical 2,500-Acre Gopher Tortoise Habitat in Southeastern Georgia

By Maria Whitehead, Open Space Institute



Hairy rattleweed inflorescence. Endemic to longleaf pine ecosystems, hairy rattleweed is known only in two Georgia counties. Photo by Carol and Hugh Nourse.

The Open Space Institute (OSI) announced its latest conservation success along coastal southeastern Georgia in December 2020. OSI secured additional habitat for the threatened gopher tortoise thanks to a discounted sale and transfer by Southern Power (Georgia Power is a charter member of the Fort Stewart/Altamaha LIT).

The nearly 2,500-acre Wayne County Conservation property is adjacent to more than 1,600 acres protected by OSI and transferred to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 2019. Conservation of this property brings Georgia's public-private Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative (GTCI) to more than 80 percent of its goal, to protect the viable gopher tortoise populations required to preclude the species' listing under the Endangered Species Act. OSI, along with its partners The Nature Conservancy and the Conservation Fund, has contributed nearly a third of the total 100,000 acres targeted for conservation by the GTCI.

"The Open Space Institute is proud to have protected this amazing property for Georgia's state reptile, the gopher tortoise, and the incredible array of other species that call this land home," said Maria Whitehead, Senior Project Director at OSI. "I thank Southern Power for their incredible generosity in

selling this property at a significantly discounted price to make the permanent protection of the land a reality."

Whitehead also noted that in addition to Southern Power, the project was also made possible through a significant gift by the Knobloch Family Foundation.

In addition to gopher tortoises (*Gopherus polyphemus*), two other high-priority species are found on the Wayne County property. These include the federally threatened eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*) and the federally endangered hairy rattleweed (*Baptisia arachnifera*), as well as natural stands of longleaf pine forest with intact groundcover.

An Alabama Treasure – Splinter Hill Bog Preserve

By Keith Tassin, Alabama Chapter of The Nature Conservancy



White topped pitcher plants at Splinter Hill Bog. Photo by Keith Tassin.

Located within the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) in northern Baldwin County, about 40 miles north of Mobile, is a truly unique natural treasure known as Splinter Hill Bog. This matrix of longleaf pine-dominated ridges, expansive seepage bogs, and small stream forests located at the beginnings of Dyas Creek is one of the largest tributaries in the headwaters of the Perdido River. Since 2004, The Nature Conservancy and the State of Alabama have been working to protect this biologically rich area that contains some of the largest expanses of white-topped pitcher plant seepage bogs on the Gulf Coast. These conservation efforts have led to the protection of over 3,000 contiguous acres. Over the last fifteen years, the reintroduction of annual to semi-annual prescribed fire has significantly benefited the ecosystems and the wildlife found there.

With assistance from GCPEP's Ecosystem Support Fire Team, over 1,000 acres of fire are implemented annually. A visit to this area will show that the results of these restoration efforts speak for themselves, as the open woodlands are once again home to healthy populations of Bachman's sparrows, gopher tortoises, and over a dozen species of carnivorous plants. Both the Nature Conservancy and state-owned properties have well-established nature trails that allow visitors to experience the beauty of Splinter Hill Bog. For more information and directions, visit www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/splinter-hill-bog/ or www.alabamaforeverwild.com/splinter-hill-bog-complex.

Using Research Towers to Study Carbon Cycling in Longleaf Pine Forests

By Colette DeGarady, *The Nature Conservancy Longleaf Pine Whole System Director*



2021 prescribed fire conducted in 90-year-old longleaf stand with carbon sequestration tower. Photo by Jeremy Forsythe.

A Clemson University team is using 120-foot research towers located deep within longleaf forests in coastal South Carolina to study carbon cycling in newly restored and mature longleaf pine stands. In partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Clemson aims to provide new valuable data and landowner information to contribute to the decade-long effort to restore longleaf across the historic range. This project is supported by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and funding from International Paper.

“To start, it’s really just to answer those basic questions: How does a longleaf pine forest sequester carbon?” says Dr. Thomas O’Halloran, Clemson Assistant Professor and lead on the tower research. The project is being conducted on Hobcaw Barony property — a 16,000-acre research reserve owned by the Belle W. Baruch Foundation and located on the coast near Georgetown, South Carolina, within the Sewee Longleaf Conservation Cooperative (SLCC).

“The Baruch Foundation and TNC are doing a great job managing these forests with prescribed fire,” O’Halloran said. “That has created a wonderful research

opportunity for us right in our backyard.”

O’Halloran already has used his towers to collect about three years of data on carbon sequestration from the longleaf forests; now, following a recent burn in January 2021 on the mature stand, the measurements will factor in the effects of the prescribed burning on carbon sequestration. This new data, in conjunction with existing studies, will be reviewed and used to inform landowners and partners within the SLCC and beyond.

As climate issues are increasingly discussed, and solutions to reduce negative climate impacts are being sought, it’s important to understand what longleaf forests can bring to climate solutions.

South Carolina Sandhills Longleaf Conservation Partnership – A Decade of Collaboration

By Susan Griggs, *Natural Resources Conservation Service*



SLPCP volunteers and Coordinator Charles Babb prepare to burn a tract with Dan and Olivia Shultz. Photo by Susan Griggs.

The Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership (SLPCP) recently marked a decade of collaboration with stakeholders and private landowners toward the singular goal of longleaf conservation.

“What is amazing is that nearly all the original partners are still working together to continue the huge impacts we’ve been able to accomplish,” said Partnership Coordinator Charles Babb. “Our success is 100% due to their dedication and commitment to longleaf.”

Over the past ten years, partners have contracted with nearly 600 landowners to plant more than 23,000 acres of longleaf. Using the Partnership’s spatial inventory data to assess suitable soils, Babb calculated the landscape scale impact of these efforts. “We’ve established longleaf on roughly 8% of suited soils within our boundaries.”

Additionally, the spatial data tallied approximately 27,000 additional acres of longleaf not planted with cost-share assistance.

This means there are plenty of opportunities for management activities such as prescribed burning.

Over the past several years, Babb has worked alongside landowners to help them learn about prescribed burning. Forty-three landowners have taken the Certified Prescribed Fire Manager (CPFM) course, with 20 having completed their five certification burns.

“We probably work with eight to ten new landowners a year to put fire on the ground. Some have gone all the way through the CPM certification process, but we have others who aren’t ready for that and prefer just to help us on a burn. Either way, the important thing is that they are learning to be active managers of their longleaf.”

The SoLoACE (South Lowcountry and ACE Basin) Longleaf Partnership

By Jennie Haskell, *The Longleaf Alliance*



Longleaf regeneration. Photo by Jennie Haskell.

The SoLoACE was awarded a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation at the end of 2020 for \$286,000 to establish 850 acres of longleaf pine and enhance an additional 5,000 acres of habitat with prescribed burning and midstory treatments on public and private lands. The SoLoACE partnerships will work with its land trust partners to protect land with conservation easements and restore two gopher tortoise populations through headstarting.

Many SoLoACE partners participated in the Savannah River Clean Water Fund (CWF) Conservation Mapping stakeholder meeting in February to develop high-priority conservation factors and key indicators. The online platform should be available in June 2021. The Savannah River Clean Water Fund is a bistate effort to protect drinking water in the Savannah River watershed; there are many overlapping goals between the CWF and the SoLoACE Longleaf Partnership.

In November 2020, The Longleaf Alliance assisted with the translocation of three red-cockaded woodpeckers on a property in Aiken County, South Carolina, known as Stable View. These three birds joined the lone RCW that appeared earlier in the year. The equestrian training facility was formerly home to a quail hunting lodge. Efforts to restore the longleaf pine ecosystem include the reintroduction of prescribed fire and midstory mechanical treatment. Across the SoLoACE partnership area, the RCW population continues to expand and flourish. Recently, RCWs repopulated the Long Cane Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest, Aiken State Park, Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve, and Hitchcock Woods. These iconic birds' growing populations speak to the quality of the longleaf ecosystem habitat in Aiken County.

Texas Team Partners with East Texas Natives to Promote Groundcover Restoration

By Tyler Wayland, *TLIT Groundcover Working Group Chair*



Harvesting native seed. Photo courtesy Texas Native Seeds.



In east Texas, efforts to restore the longleaf pine ecosystem are rapidly increasing. Subsequently, the desire and demand for restoration of the native groundcover component that promotes the iconic diversity and ecosystem services associated with this habitat are also increasing. However, a lack of a reliable native seed supply is one of the largest factors limiting the successful restoration of native grasses and forbs in this system.

East Texas Natives (ETN), a regional project of the Texas Native Seeds Program (TNS) operated by the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University- Kingsville, is a non-profit, science-based research and development project focused on the collection and evaluation of native understory species to select the best performing populations for use in restoration efforts. Our goal is to enable impactful restoration by providing quality ecotypic native seed sources best suited for the region.

ETN has recently joined the TLIT Steering Committee and Groundcover Working Group to expand efforts in groundcover restoration. Together, leveraging regional partnerships, we are working in collaboration to establish viable, dependable commercial seed sources of native Texas understory species that can be widely used for ecosystem restoration projects on the private and public lands of east Texas.

In addition to seed source development, the TLIT Groundcover Working Group is excited to begin work on native groundcover restoration research, effective and efficient planting methodology, and landowner outreach and education efforts. We are also excited to work with landowners and managers to determine current issues and specific needs facing restoration efforts in the region.

Virginia Longleaf Cooperators Group

By Brian van Eerden, *The Nature Conservancy*, and Bill Owen, *longleaf landowner*



Members of the Virginia Longleaf Cooperators Group gathered at TNC's Piney Grove Preserve to observe trial flights of a drone aircraft used to assist aerial ignition operations. Photo by Daniel White.

The Virginia Longleaf Cooperators Group (VLCG) held their first virtual annual meeting in February, sharing its partners' considerable accomplishments in 2020. Acquisitions totaling 1,120 acres expanded the conservation footprint of Big Woods, Nottoway Bogs, Suffolk Scarp, and James River priority areas. The Big Woods area now includes 10,700 protected acres, the first longleaf priority area to eclipse the 10,000-acre mark. A portion of the newly acquired land will be designated as a State Natural Area Preserve by the VA Department of Conservation & Recreation. Partners also protected more than 1,500 acres of riparian forest along the Nottoway River, furthering conservation corridor efforts between longleaf priority areas.

Fire crews prescribed burned 1,300 acres in 2020. TNC invested in a drone aircraft for aerial ignition to boost fire management capacity, collaborating with partners to integrate this technology into burn operations. More than 3,100 acres are under Natural

Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) contracts for prescribed fire in the next three years. Virginia's new NRCS State Conservationist, Dr. Edwin Martinez, values the importance of landscape-scale, multi-partner initiatives and looks forward to furthering the agency's support for VLCG.

The VA Department of Forestry (DOF) propagated 125,000 northern range longleaf seedlings at Garland Gray Nursery. A portion was outplanted in the Raccoon Creek Pinelands on land owned by Bill Owen, the newly appointed Longleaf Partnership Council private landowner representative and board member of The Longleaf Alliance; these positions offer Bill opportunities to foster greater awareness about longleaf restoration in its northern range. Seedlings were also planted at South Quay Sandhills Natural Area Preserve, which supports the largest remaining stand of longleaf from Virginia's original 1.5-million-acre longleaf forest. Funding for these planting projects included support from the Dave Matthews Band and Arbor Day Foundation.

Virginia's red-cockaded woodpecker population continued to expand, supported by translocations from TNC's Piney Grove Preserve to Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The Department of Wildlife Resources' (DWR) southeastern fox squirrel pilot project includes nest box installation and timber thinning on 450 acres of DWR's Big Woods Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Field studies at Old Dominion University's Blackwater Ecologic Preserve, under the direction of Dr. Lytton Musselman, investigate survival of naturally regenerated longleaf seedlings and the use of genetic fingerprinting as a tool for determining the provenance of mature trees found on the preserve. Complementary studies involving native plant reintroductions and herbicide treatments on properties such as Joseph Pine Preserve increase awareness of groundcover restoration opportunities and challenges.

Noteworthy outreach accomplishments include improved public access at Big Woods WMA, expanded educational content through DWR's "Restore the Wild" program, establishment of a longleaf garden at the Norfolk Botanical Garden, and published articles in several media outlets including a profile article in *Blue Ridge Outdoors*. VA DOF's staff reached 139 private landowners across the region.

In June, Virginia lost a forest conservation champion with the passing of Virginia Tree Farm Foundation President John Matel, a private landowner whose enthusiasm and knowledge of longleaf pine and prescribed fire informed and inspired many others across southeast Virginia and beyond. A retired diplomat with the U.S. Department of State, John was thoughtful, generous, and passionate about the importance of forests, conservation, and building connections between people and nature.

Vernon Parish Landowner Partners with WLEP to Improve Family Lands

By Dan Weber, *The Nature Conservancy*



Longleaf restoration before and after mulching to remove woody fuels in preparation for prescribed fire. Photos by Ben Graham.

Mr. Ben Graham is a third-generation landowner in the piney woods of North Central Louisiana, actively restoring family land to longleaf. He looks after approximately 1000 acres, 400 acres of which he is currently treating. Ben is passionate about the benefits of longleaf and has a keen memory of the historic stands that used to surround the family home. As a longtime collaborator of the West-Central Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership (WLEP), he is always willing to share his story and experience with others. Ben has attended several workshops and a

partnership Fire Academy with his eye on the goal of restoring all of his suitable acreage to longleaf.

To alleviate wildfire risk and assist with his restoration path, WLEP partners with Ben to reduce the existing fuel load within his stands using mulching as the primary prescription. With support from the Forest Service and in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, funding was provided to mechanically remove brush and woody vegetation, paving the way for future growing season burns. Removing the dense shrubby areas of pyrogenic species is the first step toward wildfire safety and restoring the historic longleaf ecosystem.

The WLEP is a coalition of stakeholders, including the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Department of Defense, Natural Resource Conservation Service, state and federal wildlife agencies, conservation NGOs and others, overseeing longleaf and other ecosystem restoration efforts within the Fort Polk/Kisatchie National Forest Significant Geographic Area.

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By Sarah Crate, *The Longleaf Alliance*

Slicing the Pie: The Past Helps Us Understand the Present and Plan for the Future

Historically, longleaf pine ecosystems dominated the Southeast, stretching from Eastern Texas to Southern Virginia. Once covering over 90 million acres, only 3 million acres remained by the early 1990s. While the staggering decline is a familiar story to longleaf supporters, how well do these abstract numbers resonate? And why does the loss of longleaf habitat matter? Perhaps we can find new ways to tell the same story.

Imagine the historic 90 million acres of longleaf pines as a yummy PIE.

As representatives of the diverse plants and animals calling longleaf home, we all get a slice of the “longleaf” pie. Over time, the pie was eaten—the longleaf habitat was lost to conversion to non-forest uses, replacement by other tree species, and exclusion of frequent fire from the landscape. Without enough “pie” to go around, the loss of longleaf pine resulted in the decline of many plants and animals requiring longleaf and its associated habitats.

- Removal of pie slices signifies lost longleaf acres due to over-harvesting, feral hog rooting, land development, fire suppression, etc.
- By 1970, < 6 million acres remained.
- By 1990, only pie crumbs (3 million acres) remained.
- Today, many species in longleaf habitats are considered at-risk of extinction.

“Slice of the pie” is an extension activity for The Longleaf Alliance’s “Learning with Longleaf” curriculum. The first lesson in the series begins by describing the historical vastness of longleaf pine in the Southeast and its subsequent decline.

Don't have pie? Use board game money to demonstrate longleaf decline. Start with \$90, evenly sharing the bills with everyone in the group. Take the money back, citing reasons for longleaf losses, until only \$3 remain. — tip courtesy of Colleen Bower, Carver Creek State Park Superintendent, NC State Parks



Materials and coloring sheets found at <https://longleafalliance.org/what-we-do/education-outreach/next-generation>.

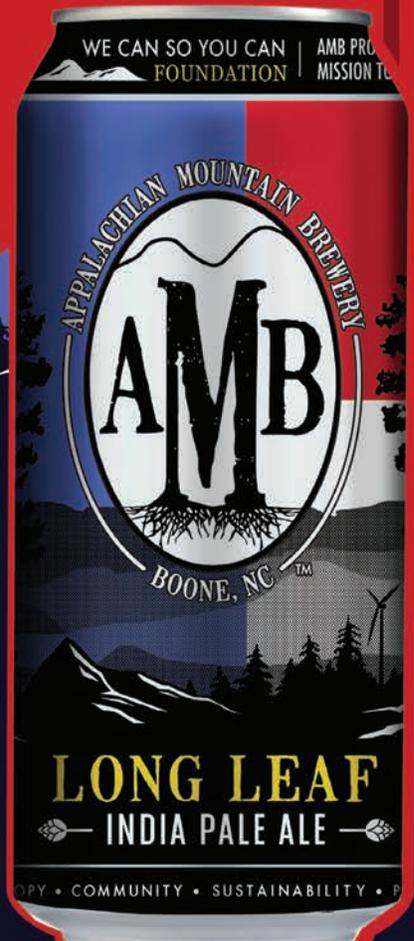
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LONGLEAF *Art* SPOTLIGHT

By Doug Hill

Ellsworth Woodward *First Light in the Pines*, 1913 Oil on canvas.

Roger Houston Ogden Collection,
Ogden Museum of Southern Art,
New Orleans, Louisiana.

It was not uncommon during the late 1800s and early 1900s for well-to-do residents of New Orleans to cross Lake Pontchartrain by steamer to the St. Tammany Parish resort towns of Mandeville, Covington, and Abita Springs. They would come in the summer to breathe the “healthy” ozone air believed to be generated by the abundant pine forests (longleaf savannas) and to drink the clean well water. Ellsworth Woodward seems to have done this as well, though he probably had the additional motive of overseeing the quality of his red clay supply, which was dug there for his pottery.

I was born in New Orleans and lived most of my life in St. Tammany Parish, but I only recently learned of Woodward during a visit to the Ogden Museum of Southern Art. My eyes were immediately drawn to a painting of what was obviously a pine savanna – Woodward’s *First Light in the Pines*. I was struck not only by its beauty, but also its vision of the longleaf savanna before it was cut over and when frequent fires still moved across the landscape.

I have since found more of his works, discovering that the pine savannas of St. Tammany were a favorite subject of his. In addition to this featured painting, two other favorites are *Winter in Southern Louisiana* and *Pines*. Many of his other paintings have titles such as *Abita Springs*, *St. Tammany Pines and Cabin*, *Abita Pines*, and *Backyard in Covington*, confirming to me that the locale for his inspiration was the same landscape I am working to restore today.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ellsworth Woodward (1861-1939) was born in Seekonk, Massachusetts, the younger of two artistic brothers. After studying art in Rhode Island and Munich, Germany, he followed his brother to New Orleans to join the faculty of Tulane University, where he taught from 1885 to 1931. He is most well-known for his promotion of the Arts and Crafts movement and the development of the pottery program at Newcomb College. However, he was an accomplished impressionist painter as well.

LONGLEAF LITERATURE

The forests, forest lands, and forest products of eastern North Carolina

Author: William Willard Ashe | Series: North Carolina Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 5 published 1894
reviewed by Ad Platt, The Longleaf Alliance

Why should we look back at such a dusty text at this point? What can we possibly learn from the challenges they faced over 125 years ago?

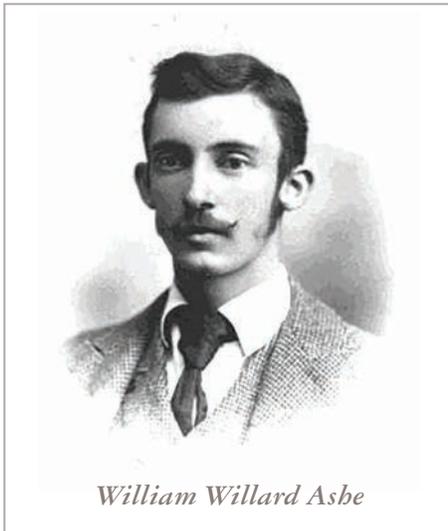
Perhaps you've appreciated the updated Alliance website, relaunched in February. Part of that updating included reviewing the pertinent research on longleaf, new or old, to decide what to maintain in our searchable database, what to archive, and what is no longer relevant. Having participated in that exercise, I'm reminded anew of our elders' wisdom and experience and the consequences of losing or not learning from foundational expertise.

There is also the pleasure of time traveling through reading compelling accounts, written on the verge of impending catastrophes in the past, that we somehow escaped. A reminder perhaps that the problems we face today are maybe not so big by comparison, though sadly, they are still too often self-inflicted.

And how can you not be drawn in by section headings like "The Waste Lands of Eastern North Carolina," "The Ultimate Utility of these Waste Lands," "How Long Can Our Turpentine Orchards Last?" or "Recent Timber Developments and the Outlook"? Much of Ashe's bulletin was devoted to stopping the profligate wasting of these forests by promiscuous burning and unregulated grazing, which it helped to accomplish. It also was instrumental in

perpetuating the wealth of forest resources and in developing the forest industry.

William Willard Ashe (1872-1932) was a lifelong student and prolific writer of the natural world. Educated at the University of North Carolina and Cornell University, he became an immediate leader in the emerging field of forestry. W. W. Ashe wrote Bulletin No. 5 at age 22, after two years of field surveys as a young botanist and forester for the North Carolina Geological Survey. This was but one of some 167 titles he authored in fields ranging from management to economics, research to legislation, botany and dendrology, and soil erosion. His writings were even among the first to advocate for land acquisition for public forests and parks. Ashe also published 510 botanical names across 35 genera during his career; over a dozen species bear his or his wife, Margaret's name today.



William Willard Ashe

**"The past is never dead.
 It's not even past."
 – William Faulkner**

Joining the new U.S. Forest Service (1905), Ashe rose quickly through the ranks, beginning as "forest expert" and advancing to the chief of land acquisition for the east and south. In addition to his administrative duties, he was a highly-skilled forest appraiser and contributed to the improved efficiency and operations in logging, lumbering, and the turpentine industry. We particularly honor him for working out the method of commercial growing of longleaf pine.

You will find this text in the public domain, along with an extensive collection of works by W. W. Ashe. Search the "Internet Archive," a digital library and 501(c)(3) non-profit at archive.org, using the advanced search to filter by "creator" "Ashe, W. W." for his other noteworthy texts on species like the chestnut in Tennessee, written before the chestnut blight's arrival, and landmarks such as North Carolina's Linville Gorge. Painstakingly researched, these pioneering manuscripts were in many instances foundational to further our understanding of these ecosystems.

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*View of the Birmingham skyline from the old quarry at Ruffner Mountain Nature Center.
Photo by Kelly Verdeck.*

Longleaf Destinations

Longleaf with a View — Remnants and Restoration of Montane Longleaf Near Birmingham

Alabama's original forests were very different from what we see today – dominated in much of the state by vast expanses of longleaf pine forests and their unique and desirable plant and animal species. In every region of the longleaf range, these forests were largely consumed during our development as a nation. What older timber remains is a fraction of once was, but Alabama is a leader in restoring longleaf from the coast to the mountains. Montane longleaf is different from coastal plain longleaf in more ways than just the elevation. The tree and the natural plant communities are adapted to their more arduous environment, though many parts of the forest community are familiar. While longleaf pine once extended over a vast area in the Southeast, only in Northeast Alabama and Northwest Georgia did these forests extend beyond the Coastal Plain,

through the Piedmont, and into the Blue Ridge Mountains. While Coastal Plain longleaf pine commonly occurs on a variety of soils, the mountain longleaf pine forests grow on steep rocky slopes and along upland ridges. They are considered the most endangered of the remaining longleaf pine communities.

Located in the north-central part of Alabama, with mountains prominently framing the surroundings, Birmingham offers a central base and a wide variety of diversions near many splendid mountain longleaf sites. The most extensive metropolitan area in the state with a population nearing 1.2 million, it serves as a regional transportation hub for the South. Arguably the state's cultural and entertainment capital, with many notable museums, galleries, diverse dining, sporting events, and historical sites, the city has transformed into a

It is hard for landowners to consider a choice they have never seen or even knew existed. Since there was no existing guide for montane longleaf sites, the U.S. Forest Service and The Longleaf Alliance, with input from the Talladega Mountain Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership, developed an interactive virtual tour showcasing the natural and historic treasures of ten montane longleaf sites surrounding Talladega National Forest.

In this preview, we share a few of the featured sites from the project. We invite you to explore the full tour online – you can find it by visiting longleafalliance.org.

When exploring on foot, please respect all posted signs and rules for each site, aiming to leave no trace and take only pictures. Many sites on this tour route are remote and, at times, beyond the range of cell phone signals. Know before you go – check current restrictions or status with the managing agency as you plan your trip.



A. Longleaf on a rocky slope at Oak Mountain State Park. Photo by Lauren Muncher. B. Planted longleaf pine seedling in a stand damaged in the 2016 wildfires near Lake Chinnabee. USDA Forest Service photo by Ryan Shurette.

banking and business hub and a higher education center.

Birmingham was founded during Reconstruction in 1871 as an industrial center built on mining, iron and steel production, and the necessary railroads for transport. All of those industries were, in turn, heavy consumers of the surrounding natural longleaf resources. With the decline of the mining and steel industry in the latter part of the twentieth century, multiple mining properties have been transformed into outdoor recreation opportunities. At Red Mountain Community Park, relict trees provide a glimpse into what was once there, and at Ruffner Mountain, initial longleaf restoration efforts provide a glimpse into what could be.

Whether you enjoy hiking, biking, birding, rare plants, hunting, camping, or simply taking a dip in a cool lake on a

hot day, the longleaf pine destinations near Birmingham offer healthy adventure and an introduction to some of Alabama's beloved and amazing natural diversity.

Oak Mountain State Park

In the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, you will find the largest and one of the most biodiverse state parks in Alabama. Initially established by the Alabama State Lands Act of 1927, Oak Mountain State Park has grown to 9,940 acres and is home to some incredibly important flora, including longleaf pine. This park has a rich history, with countless hours spent by the Civilian Conservation Corp building this beautiful recreation area. Many trees growing in the park were



Montane longleaf at Coosa Wildlife Management Area, one of ten sites featured in the “Guided Tour of Alabama’s Longleaf.”
 Photo by Mark Bailey.

used to construct cabins and other structures, but luckily many of the longleaf were spared.

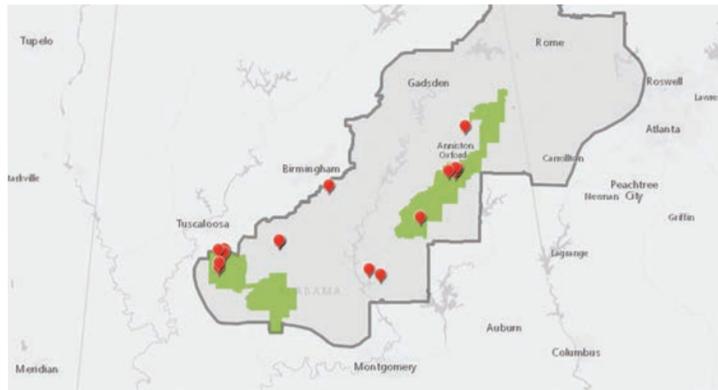
The longleaf pine habitat found throughout Oak Mountain is considered montane forest and is one of the largest remaining in the state. Some of the pines here are over 100 years old but appear younger due to slow growth in these thin soils and rocky terrain. At one time, this longleaf habitat supported red-cockaded woodpecker populations and some of their old cavities can still be seen today. As part of a planned restoration effort, the park will soon re-introduce controlled burns into the longleaf forests. This will significantly improve the health, biodiversity, and beauty of the forest and restore habitats that, in time, can again provide homes for the red-cockaded woodpecker and other important longleaf-dependent species.

The best access to view longleaf pine in the park is the 2.4-mile North Lakes Connector Trail, serving both hikers and mountain cyclists. As you hike up the mountain, you will see larger stands of pines. There is plenty of parking with restrooms and a changing room at the trailhead and a modest \$5 entrance fee for adults and \$2 for children.

Cheaha State Park

Located in the middle of the Talladega National Forest, Cheaha State Park takes its name from the Creek word meaning “high place” and is the highest mountain summit in Alabama

(2,407’). The hard and tireless work of decades of restorative efforts is visible on Cheaha State Park’s trails and the surrounding Talladega National Forest. Although Cheaha State Park contains only a small community of longleaf, it is surrounded by the Talladega National Forest’s rolling green ridges and valleys, encompassing over 300,000 acres of forests. Since this surrounding area was historically occupied by longleaf pines and naturally experienced frequent fires, park staff are in the initial stages of re-introducing fire back into the forests.

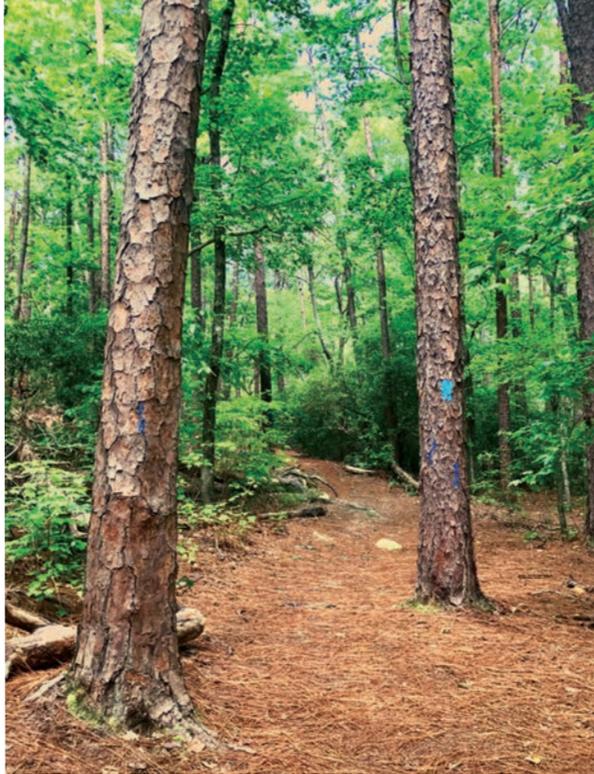


The virtual tour showcases ten montane longleaf sites (see red marker locations) surrounding Talladega National Forest (shown in green) within the Talladega Mountain Longleaf Conservation Partnership.

Some of the largest, oldest longleaf pines in the park can be viewed on the Lake Trail, which connects Cheaha Lake to Rock Garden. This 1-mile trail is steep and rugged, making it fun and challenging; just be sure you have proper footwear for tackling this adventure.

A primary focus of the park is to maintain healthy and natural forests, creating crucial habitat for numerous plants and animals while supporting great outdoor recreation opportunities. Cheaha Lake’s day-use area offers picnic tables, grills, bathrooms, swim beach, playground, and hiking trails. There is also a lodge, restaurant, campground, and other amenities in the State Park, making it a great place to stop, explore, or utilize as a home-base for exploring surrounding natural areas.

Cheaha State Park charges a day-use fee, ranging from \$2 to \$5 depending on visitor age, with free entry for veterans, active military, and children under three years.



- ▲ *Entrance Sign to Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge. Photo courtesy of fws.gov.*
- ◀ *Remnant longleaf pine along a hiking trail at Cheaha State Park. Photo by Mandy Pearson.*

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge protects the largest stand of mature longleaf pines north of the state's coastal plain. This Refuge was legislatively established on May 31, 2003, within the former military training base of Fort McClellan – which closed in 1999. On October 23, 2003, additional property was added to the Refuge, bringing the total to 9,016 acres of property.

You will find many unique habitats within the Refuge, such as spring seeps and hardwood bottoms, with longleaf pine forests dominant across much of the landscape. There are existing stands of old-growth longleaf pine as well as naturally regenerated second-growth forests where the herbaceous ground layer, in many situations, is intact and comprises an extremely diverse native fire-adapted plant cover. There is no record of tree planting ever occurring within the Refuge, so genetic contamination is not an issue, making this site incredibly unique. Additionally, fire has continually been a part of the landscape under Army ownership for the previous hundred years. Refuge staff are reintroducing fire back into the forests where it was absent.

It's important to note that about two-thirds of the Refuge is closed to the public because of ongoing remediation from the former Fort McClellan. The unexploded ordnance (UXO) removal is still in progress, so you will likely see contractors out while driving on the Refuge. The area to the west of Ridge Road is closed to the public. Area closed signs are posted and easy to find along the boundary of the closed areas. When UXO cleanup is completed in the years to come, the remainder of the Refuge will be open to the public.

Unfortunately, none of the large longleaf stands are currently accessible due to the UXO closures. Even so, great views of this Refuge's longleaf forests can be seen from the road. The best view of a mature forest can be seen on Bains Gap Road as you drive through the heart of montane longleaf country.

Lake Chinnabee

Cheaha State Park is not far from the Lake Chinnabee Recreation Area in the Talladega National Forest; Cheaha Creek feeds this 17-acre lake. The recreation area offers facilities, hiking, picnicking, and fishing. Upstream from the picnic sites, the Chinnabee Silent Trail winds beside Cheaha Creek and ends six miles away at Caney Head atop Talladega Mountain. It is popular because of the spectacular views of flowing streams, rock outcroppings, and waterfalls.

Coming into Lake Chinnabee, along the paved entrance (Forest Road 646), you will see lots of mature longleaf on both sides of the road. Some of the longleaf is mixed with other upland hardwood species like chestnut oak and pignut hickory. In 2016, a large wildfire fueled by windy conditions and a severe drought occurred just to the north of Lake Chinnabee, and the effects are still very evident.

Torched stands of longleaf and loblolly timber are visible along the Lake Chinnabee entrance road and County Road 42. These timbers are a prime example of how catastrophic wildfires impact the forest canopy. Still, it is also a testament to the resiliency of fire-adapted plants and animals in longleaf forests. As part of a restoration effort, the USFS has underplanted many fire-killed timber areas with containerized longleaf seedlings to get a jump-start on the next generation of longleaf forest.

Lake Chinnabee is open to the public from March 1st through December 1st with an admission fee of \$3 for day use only. There is no fee to view the post-wildfire longleaf recovery areas since you do not have to enter the official recreation area.

Thank you to the U.S. Forest Service for funding the development of "A Guided Tour of Alabama's Longleaf" and the numerous organizations within the Talladega Mountain Longleaf Conservation Partnership who shared site recommendations, supporting data, narrative, and photos.

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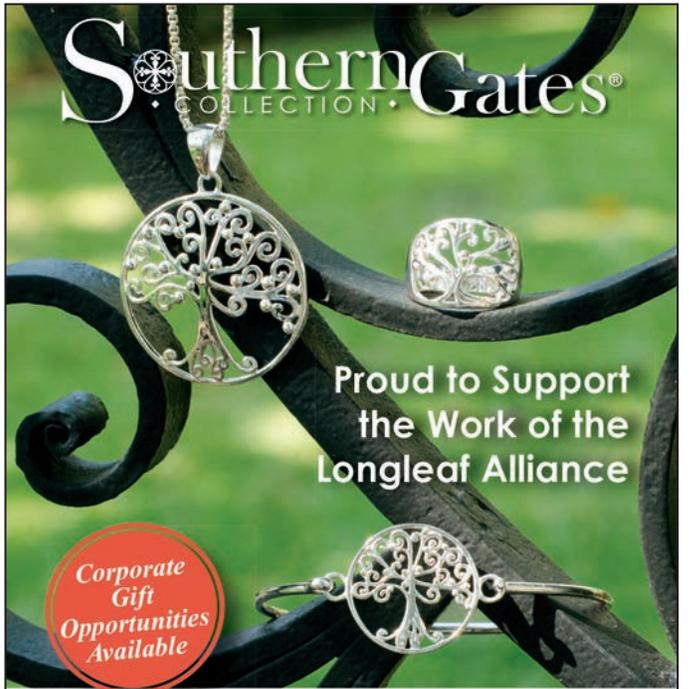
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To The Longleaf Alliance's Newest Staff



Samantha Dillon

was promoted to the Wetland Ecosystem Support Team (WEST) this year after first joining The Longleaf Alliance (TLA) last fall as a member of the AMBBIS Seasonal Restoration Team working on the restoration of reticulated flatwoods salamander habitat. Samantha said, "I am a native Floridian and biologist passionate about conservation, having worked with endangered animals in southeastern ecosystems for my entire career. The work I get to do with WEST is so rewarding because we are actively restoring habitat for imperiled amphibians. We are the first step in ensuring the persistence and success of these animals in longleaf pine ecosystems."

Samantha Dillon, Wetland Resource Technician

Jennie Haskell

began as the Coastal Partnerships Coordinator in January, assuming the SoLoACE LIT Partnership coordinator role and support for both the Sewee and SoLoACE landscapes with landowner outreach, technical assistance, and cost-share program support. With over twenty years of experience as a forester with the USDA Forest Service, much of that time at the Savannah River Site, Jennie's appreciation of the longleaf ecosystem is rooted in the diversity of the forest. She is excited to continue providing technical assistance and enhancing the longleaf ecosystem through all the partners' collaborative efforts.

Jennie Haskell, Coastal Partnership Coordinator



Taylor Gettis

joined TLA as Development & Media Manager. Located in Central Florida, Taylor is assisting our Development Program with grant writing, fundraising, donor engagement, and media communications. Taylor pursues her Master's of Nonprofit Management at University of Central Florida. Her professional area of research focuses on strategic philanthropy, board diversity, data analytics, and digital fundraising.

Taylor Gettis, Development & Media Manager



Susan French

is our new Georgia Sentinel Landscape Pilot Project Coordinator. In her role, she is working to increase prescribed fire in the Sentinel Landscape, coordinating a landowner cost-share program, starting a landowner cooperative in Coastal Georgia, providing landowner outreach and programs, and more! Before joining TLA, Susan worked as a wildlife biologist for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, focusing on providing technical assistance to private landowners. She is a Certified Prescribed Fire Manager in South Carolina. She holds a B.S. in Wildlife Ecology & Management from Auburn University and a M.S. in Wildlife & Fisheries Biology from Clemson University.

Susan French, Georgia Sentinel Landscape Pilot Project Coordinator

The Georgia Sentinel Landscape Pilot Project

The Longleaf Alliance is thrilled to announce a new Prescribed Fire Pilot Project in partnership with the Georgia Sentinel Landscape (GSL), which aims to coordinate conservation priorities across the landscape that benefit natural resources as well as national defense. Managing and maintaining healthy forestlands in Georgia benefits wildlife habitat and at-risk species while simultaneously strengthening Georgia's rural economies and military installations.

This project will increase prescribed burning within the GSL on 35,000 acres by providing technical and financial resources to private landowners. The financial assistance program is available in more than 50 Georgia counties to conduct prescribed burning, create firebreaks, and obtain prescribed burn plans. If you are located in one of the target counties and are interested in managing your forestland with prescribed fire, get in touch with Project Coordinator Susan French today!

Program Eligibility and Details:

- Applicant must be the legal landowner of private forestland within the GSL.
- Landowner must conduct the prescribed burn or hire someone who can, following all local ordinances and permitting.
- Minimum of 25 acres burned.
- Practices must be completed by September 30, 2021.
- Reimbursement rates include \$15/acre for burning and \$0.15/ft for firebreaks.

- Landowner must allow project coordinator access to the burn unit for application ranking, mapping, and verification.

The Longleaf Alliance administers this program with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Department of Defense through the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities.

DO YOU WANT TO MANAGE YOUR FORESTLAND WITH PRESCRIBED FIRE?

CONTACT

Call or email the project coordinator to discuss your interest and set up a site visit.

SITE VISIT

The project coordinator will visit your property and discuss your management goals with you.

APPLY

The project coordinator will assist with your application including project map and photos.

IMPLEMENT

If your application is funded, you will implement the prescribed fire practices.

REIMBURSEMENT

You will be reimbursed after verification the work has been completed.

ARE YOU LOCATED IN ONE OF OUR TARGET COUNTIES?

PROJECT COORDINATOR

Susan French
susan@longleafalliance.org
(813) 391-4476

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Celebrating its 25th Anniversary, The Longleaf Alliance launches 'Taproots a Legacy Program' to perpetuate longleaf pine throughout its range. Just as the tree's taproot contributes to the strength and superiority of longleaf, The Alliance seeks a founding group of 25 strength-giving individuals who have committed, or will commit, to make a bequest to The Longleaf Alliance through their will or estate plan. Together we are celebrating our past, but more importantly, we are creating a solid foundation not only for the future of the organization but support for protecting and promoting our cherished longleaf ecosystem.

When you notify The Alliance of your planned gift, either in the form of a bequest, retirement plan or insurance policy, you become a member of 'Taproots a Legacy Program' of The Longleaf Alliance. This is an inclusive program; no gift amount is too small - nor too large. Members are visionaries who demonstrate their confidence in the mission of The Longleaf Alliance by creating a legacy beyond their lifetimes to help insure the future of longleaf and The Alliance. Gifts in any amount can be designated to 'The Longleaf Alliance Endowment Fund.'

It is our desire to appropriately thank and recognize donors now for their sustaining gifts to be made in the future. Taproots members may self-identify or remain anonymous per the comfort level of the donor. Donors will be recognized in print and at select events.

To name The Longleaf Alliance as a beneficiary in your will, please include the following information:

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Louisiana Ecological Forestry Center at Hodges Gardens — New Life for the “Gardens in the Forest”

*By Will Hodges, President of the AJ and
Nona Trigg Hodges Foundation*

Hodges Loop, the road to the Garden in the Forest, representing both the path that led to creation of the LEAF Center and the path that will carry its vision forward. Photo by Marshall Rice.

Where do we go from here? It's the question that the AJ and Nona Trigg Hodges Foundation was asking itself in 2008 after gifting through a cooperative endeavor agreement, Hodges Gardens to the state of Louisiana to create Hodges Gardens State Park.

Billed as the “Garden in the Forest,” Hodges Gardens was founded by my great-grandparents, AJ and Nona Trigg Hodges, in 1956. AJ was a pioneer in the timber and oil and gas industries in North and West-Central Louisiana. By the late 1930s, he had purchased over 100,000 acres of barren cutover land and began a reforestation effort. It was in the heart of this land that AJ and Nona identified a 4,700-acre site to create Hodges Gardens. Situated at an old rock quarry site, the Gardens grew to contain 60 acres of formal gardens, a 225-acre lake, their island home, and several structures, including a lodge, gift shop, greenhouses, and office.

The Foundation was created shortly thereafter, and for the next 50 years, its primary purpose was to operate and maintain Hodges Gardens. Perhaps 3 million people visited over the lifespan of the gardens, with traffic peaking in the mid-1970s. But as time went by, people's interests moved away from flowers. As attendance waned, we found it increasingly difficult to operate. In 2008, the state and

Foundation finalized an agreement for Hodges Gardens to become a state park.

We now found ourselves at a crossroads. For so many years, the Foundation's identity had been linked to tending the prize-winning roses, tulips, and other perennials and annuals, the man-made lake, and the architecturally significant buildings. We needed a new direction. We found guidance by looking at the heritage created by our founders. As a pioneer and visionary, AJ was engaged in forestry research, and he experimented with new forestry methods. Long before they created Hodges Gardens, he and Nona were focused on creating sustainable forests.

As part of the agreement with the state, the Foundation retained control of the majority of the 4,700 acres, including all of the timberlands. We no longer needed to harvest the timber commercially to fund the operation and maintenance of the gardens. We began to look at our forest resources differently. We started to explore how we could return the forest to its original grandeur.

We found our direction: restoring the longleaf pine ecosystem of our small piece of West-Central Louisiana to its original prominence.



Andy Hodges, my uncle and the grandson of AJ and Nona, was instrumental in setting the Board on our new course. He met with other groups, including The Longleaf Alliance, to get a sense of what was possible.

What resulted from that effort was the Louisiana Ecological Forestry Center or LEAF Center. The Center was originally focused on transforming the 3,800 acres surrounding the state park into a longleaf pine forest. Transforming a variety of loblolly, slash, and intermittent longleaf stands of timber, ranging from 5 to 75 years in age, into a predominantly longleaf forest is no small undertaking. It became evident this would be a long-term, multigenerational project that

would require passion, persistence, and, most importantly, patience. It was the perfect undertaking for a foundation that was created to sustain itself for generations to come.

Ten years after the formation of Hodges Gardens State Park, the state of Louisiana decided to cease operations and close the gardens to the public. Upon its closure, as part of the original agreement, Hodges Gardens reverted to the Foundation.

Once again, we faced the question: Where do we go from here? But this time, we knew the answer. The difficult decision was made to keep the gardens closed and let the LEAF Center at Hodges Gardens take center stage with a new vision.

At its inception, the LEAF Center focused inwardly on transforming a property from a commercial timber operation into a forest that would support a longleaf pine ecosystem. And while that was a worthwhile effort, we strongly felt that to honor the legacy created by AJ and Nona, we should be doing more.

We turned our focus outward, looking closely at how we could be better stewards of our resources to create a center focused on fostering and promoting education, research, and community outreach. We had the forest and the facilities to support these efforts; it was time to put them to work.

We started looking at the entire property as a vast array of microenvironments. We began to see it as a place where we could bring in other landowners and help them improve their properties. We began to foster relationships with researchers and provide them with the kind of resources they could utilize to benefit all of us. We started working with local organizations that support wounded veterans, disabled

outdoorsmen and women, and disadvantaged people by providing them a venue to advance their missions.

To help direct our vision, we hired a manager for the center, forester, and wildlife biologist Rodney McKay. Rodney has close to 20 years of relevant experience to apply to our new mission, including experience with longleaf pine ecosystems in Louisiana. Ted Cabra, who worked at the gardens under the state's purview, has joined as operations manager. Along with a small group of volunteers who are Hodges descendants, Rodney and Ted have created a team focused on the future of the LEAF Center.

As we move forward and build upon our founders' legacy, we intend for the LEAF Center at Hodges Gardens to be a resource to landowners, forestry and wildlife researchers, biologists, and others. We see so much untapped potential, and we are excited to be working with The Longleaf Alliance in this endeavor.

For more information, contact Rodney McKay at (662) 402-1205 or lefclandman@gmail.com.



AJ Hodges and a longleaf pine stump that is now 412 years old. Photo courtesy of the Hodges Family Archives.

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