

PRIVATE LAND TRUSTS ENGAGED IN CONSERVING LONGLEAF PINE

Land trusts are essential partners in efforts to conserve and restore longleaf pine natural habitats. Private, not-for-profit land and environmental conservation organizations, known as land trusts or conservancies, are actively involved in longleaf pine habitat protection and restorative management activities across the species' entire range.

ALABAMA

Alabama Forest Resource Center is a land trust whose explicit purpose is to enhance, preserve, and sustain Alabama's forest resources. AFRC has protected 70,000 acres of forests and farmlands in Alabama, principally through permanent conservation easements with private landowners. It holds 20 conservation easements in 11 counties with 11,500 acres supporting longleaf pine forests. All of these easement properties have required management plans and prescribed fire management plans in operation. Most of the private landowners have timber revenue as a primary objective, and only a few lease hunting rights. The private landowners fund their forest management from a combination of timber sales and personal income not derived from the property; some have secured USDA NRCS cost-share grants. The Forest Resource Center itself owns one property in fee-title that contains some remnant longleaf. www.forestresourcescenter.org

Georgia-Alabama Land Trust (GALT) is active in longleaf pine habitat protection and holds conservation easements on more than 400,000 acres, with about 20,000 acres containing longleaf pine habitat components. Annual monitoring and management consultation with landowners occurs on all these properties. Landowners generally have the discretion to give attention to longleaf pine in the required forest management plans. Additionally, GALT is restoring longleaf on a preserve it owns. www.galandtrust.org

FLORIDA

Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) has protected over 53,000 acres in north central Florida, including purchasing nearly 20,000 of those acres for public parks, preserves, and wildlife management areas. ACT owns about 2,500 acres of longleaf pine-dominated habitats, and six of the 22 conservation easements it holds contain significant longleaf habitat totaling 1,400 acres in extent. ACT has established management plans for its properties with focused management of existing longleaf natural and planted stands. ACT's prescribed burning program includes its own equipment, and coordinates with longleaf Local Implementation Teams (LITs) with financial assistance from the Longleaf Stewardship Fund to help private landowners with longleaf restoration and prescribed burning. www.alachuaconservationtrust.org

Conservation Florida, formally named Conservation Trust for Florida, has protected more than 25,000 acres of natural and agricultural landscapes across the state, including two tracts of land containing over 600 acres of longleaf pine habitat. One it owns and manages as a preserve, and the other stand is protected by a conservation easement. The easement property owner is attempting to restore longleaf with financial and technical assistance provided from the USDA NRCS and Florida Forest Service. The land trust's management of its own preserve containing longleaf is intended to combine protection and restoration of the existing longleaf pine habitat and to convert pastureland to longleaf restoration. www.conserveflorida.org

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast is a land trust that operates Florida's southwestern coastal region and has protected a total of over 18,000 acres in 45 properties through conservation easements and fee-title land acquisitions. It has joined in partnership with a NFWF-sponsored program called the Heartland LIT. At present none of its easement properties contain significant extents of longleaf pine, but on two of its fee-owned properties (totaling about 270 acres) the land trust is designing management plans in part intended to restore and improve longleaf pine stands through a combination of prescribed burning, removal of invasive plants, and some restoration planting. The land trust closely supervises the management work done by hired contractors, including a burn boss. The land trust is particularly interested in obtaining local genotypes for its longleaf restoration efforts. At present, there are no reliable sources of tree seedlings for southernmost longleaf genotypes, which are likely be more adaptive and resistant to impacts from climate change and increased storms, and would be more desirable for use in longleaf restoration than seedlings of more northern longleaf pine genotypes). www.conservationfoundation.com

North Florida Land Trust - A large portion of its 12-counties region of northeastern Florida and many of its land and easement acquisitions contain remnant longleaf pine woodlands. Five of its conservation easement properties contain longleaf forest tracts, somewhere between 500-700 acres in extent (in natural habitats or planted stands). Forest management plans are either in place or in process of being designed and implemented to include prescriptions for thinning, mechanical treatments and/or prescribed fire. NFLT also owns and manages several properties. Forest management activities are conducted by a combination of staff personnel, consultants and contractors, in consultation with the State Forest Service and other public agencies. The land trust is developing an inhouse prescribed fire program (with assistance from the Florida Forest Service and cost-share funding from USDA NRCS programs). www.NFLT.org

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FLORIDA Continued

Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy owns and manages 13,000 acres in Florida and Georgia. The Research Station, established in 1958, specializes in prescribed fire and wildlife research. The Land Conservancy work began in 1991, and Tall Timbers now holds 80 conservation easements covering 120,000 acres (about 70 percent of which is forested by upland longleaf pine communities). All Tall Timber easements require forest management plans which include sustainable forestry standards and practices. Hunting is a principal activity on most of the conserved lands. Prescribed burning is critically important; almost all uplands owned by Tall Timbers are burned on a one to two-year interval. Controlled burning is encouraged and assisted on easement properties. www.talltimbers.org

GEORGIA

Southeast Regional Land Conservancy staff reports no current longleaf protection or restoration activities on any of the more than 31,000 acres of properties under its conservation easements. Some of the easement lands contain longleaf pine within mixed species forests, which could potentially become sites for longleaf restoration management in the future. www.serlc.org

See also **Georgia-Alabama Land Trust** (Alabama) and **Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy** (Florida).

LOUISIANA

Land Trust for Louisiana is a statewide private land trust that has protected over 7,300 acres on 20 properties, principally through permanent conservation easements over private properties. Four of the properties it protects by conservation easements contain longleaf pine tracts, totaling about 3,500 acres of pine flatwoods and wet savanna habitats, plus a ten-acre site that is currently being restored to upland longleaf pine. Most of these places are part of wetland mitigation banks, which require detailed management and restoration plans. The management focus is on restoration, including new plantings, prescribed burning, and invasive species control. No income from natural resource production, other than from hunting leases, occurs for any of these properties. Management funding derives from the wetland mitigation banks sale of credits, and some other federal agencies cost-share grants, and private landowner funds. www.landtrustforlouisiana.org

MISSISSIPPI

Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain currently owns 110 properties in fee-title and holds 18 conservation easements over private properties (totaling about 9,500 acres). Ten of its properties support longleaf pine forests, totaling about 1,200 acres. The land trust manages restoration of three USACE In-Lieu Fee programs that restore about 109 acres of wet pine savannah habitat; and it manages 250 acres for restoration of upland longleaf pine forest habitat for gopher tortoise and gopher frog. Adhering to best-management practices, the land trust's pine forest management combines timber management (improvements and restoration activities for existing longleaf stands and planting new seedlings), prescribed fire, and invasive species control. It receives funding from the USDA NRCS and USFWS cost-share programs and from other grants. Management of the land trust's properties is done by staff and contractors. www.ltmcp.org

Mississippi Land Trust, a division of the Mississippi Wildlife, is a multi-faceted organization with many conservation programs, including directly protecting over 145,000 acres of land and wildlife habitats principally through permanent conservation easements with private landowners. Among its easements, about 15 properties have an estimated 7,000 acres of longleaf pine habitats. Most of these properties have forest management plans which guide timber harvests, controlled burning, stand regeneration, and invasive species control done by a combination of the landowners and their contracted managers and consulting foresters. Funding for forest management derives from sales of natural resource products, cost-share grants from public agencies, and donations. www.wildlifemiss.org

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Coastal Land Trust (CLT) owns 45 preserves and holds more than 60 conservation easements protecting nearly 80,000 acres of land in the coastal region of eastern North Carolina. Longleaf pine forest protection and restoration is a major focus of its regional conservation plan. Its conservation easements require forest management plans when forestry activities are anticipated. CLT's annual monitoring of all its conservation easement properties includes oversight of longleaf pine management practices by those landowners employing consulting foresters and contractors. CLT has a prominent leadership role with both the Cape Fear Arch and Onslow Bight longleaf local implementation teams. www.coastallandtrust.org

Three Rivers Land Trust operates in a 15 counties region of central North Carolina. In combination of land assets, the Three Rivers Land Trust holds five properties totaling 212 acres in fee ownership and 22 conservation easement properties totaling 800 acres in size, which each contain tracts of longleaf pine forests. www.threeriverslandtrust.org

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NORTH CAROLINA Continued

Triangle Land Conservancy operates in a six counties area of North Carolina's east central piedmont region, into which longleaf pine once extended. None of TLC's conserved land areas contain existing natural stands of LLP, but it has begun a longleaf restoration replanting project on its most-recently acquired Williamson Farm-Walnut Hill preserve, located southeast of Raleigh near the Neuse River. www.triangleland.org

Southern Conservation Trust, based in Georgia, acquired a 1,600-acre property containing substantial longleaf pine forest tracts located in the Sandhills region of North Carolina. The intent for Nicks Creek Longleaf Preserve is to make this preserve a longleaf pine management and restoration demonstration site and public education resource. www.sctlandtrust.org

SOUTH CAROLINA

Lowcountry Land Trust (LLT) has protected over 135,000 acres of natural habitats and landscapes in six watershed-based conservation focus areas in the 17- county coastal region of South Carolina. LLT focuses on longleaf pine ecosystem preservation and restoration, and it protects 62 properties containing about 10,000 acres of longleaf pine forests or mixed pine forests. Additionally, about 4,420 acres on those easement properties have been identified in the forest management plans as suitable for potential conversion to longleaf pine forest. Landowners are required to provide advance notice before undertaking any forestry practices. Lowcountry Land Trust owns two properties containing longleaf pine and has devised forest management plans for them. www.lowcountrylandtrust.org

Pee Dee Land Trust operates in the greater Pee Dee River watershed in the coastal plain region of South Carolina and holds conservation easements on 16 private properties totaling 1,429 acres that contain stands of natural longleaf pine habitat. Owners of easement properties generate income from timber management, and exercise a combination of longleaf protective management, restoration and replanting. The land trust also owns one property managed as a nature preserve with longleaf pine present mixed with other species. www.peedeelandtrust.org

RANGEWIDE

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), an international conservation organization, is actively involved in protecting and restoring longleaf habitats across its natural range. TNC owns and manages longleaf pine habitat in fee-simple title and holds permanent conservation easements deed restrictions and management agreements with private landowners. With nine state chapters engaged with longleaf, the comprehensive size and scale of TNC's longleaf pine efforts are difficult to estimate, but in North Carolina alone, TNC owns over 15,500 acres on which longleaf pine occurs and holds 15 permanent conservation easements on private properties totaling nearly 5,500 acres supporting longleaf pine habitats. Additionally, TNC frequently acquires longleaf pine habitat lands that are later conveyed to governmental agencies (federal and state). As active partners in longleaf Local Implementation Teams (LITs) across the range, TNC also employs prescribed fire crews in several areas that assist in cooperator burns. www.nature.org

ABOUT THE SURVEY

In 2020, Southern Conservation Partners surveyed private land conservation organizations in the natural range of longleaf pine; the responses submitted are summarized here. Additional land trusts not listed may hold conservation easements over tracts containing longleaf pine but did not respond to inquiries.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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The authors are board officers of Southern Conservation Partners, a nonprofit corporation dedicated to conservation and public awareness of natural heritage assets across the southern United States. Southern Conservation Partners provides fiscal sponsorship for projects advancing its objectives. www.ConservationSouth.org