



THE
LONGLEAF
LEADER

The Long Game

VOLUME XIV - ISSUE 4

WINTER 2022


LAND TRUSTS

Safeguarding and Restoring Longleaf for the Future

*By Charles Roe and Julie H. Moore,
Southern Conservation Partners, Inc.*



Many conservancies own and manage longleaf pine habitat in addition to holding permanent conservation easements with private landowners. Zach West burning at TNC's Green Swamp Preserve in North Carolina. Photo by Anne Liles.



Landowner Rick Studenmund, TNC Conservation Coordinator Gretchen Coll, and animal lover Milo during a site visit. TNC holds an easement on the Studenmund's property in North Carolina. Photo by Ryan Bollinger.

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. In combination, land trusts hold hundreds of permanent conservation easements on private properties and own reserves themselves containing longleaf pine habitats that encompass many thousands of acres.

LONGLEAF PROJECTS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Each of these featured land trusts protects and restores longleaf pine natural habitats by a combination of conserving and managing existing stands, restoration, and new planting activities.

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


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

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 ecosystems


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

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

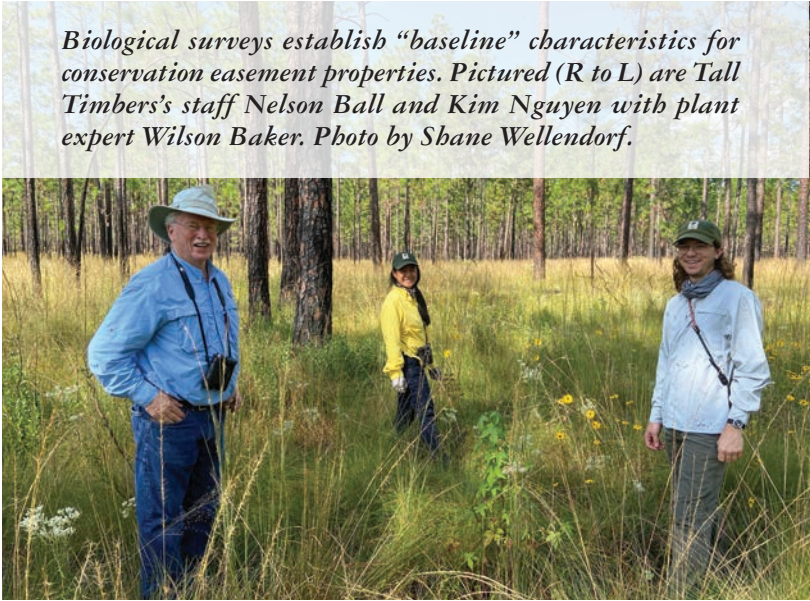
Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy owns and manages 13,000 acres in Florida and Georgia. The Research Station, established in 1958, specializes in prescribed fire and wildlife research. The Land Conservancy work began in 1991, and Tall Timbers now holds 80 conservation easements covering 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



Active management, especially prescribed fire, is critical for conservation of longleaf ecosystems and its unique species. Photo by Matt Jones.



Meadow beauty. Photo by Jeff Marcus.



Biological surveys establish “baseline” characteristics for conservation easement properties. Pictured (R to L) are Tall Timbers’s staff Nelson Ball and Kim Nguyen with plant expert Wilson Baker. Photo by Shane Wellendorf.

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

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

SHARED CHALLENGES FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Despite impressive track records with numerous conservation success stories, many land trusts expressed challenges to expanding their longleaf pine protection and restoration activities. Survey respondents identified a lack of

funds for land trusts and the private landowners they assist. Most land trusts want to do more but are handicapped by underfunding. They are short-handed by a lack of experienced personnel needed to arrange conservation agreements with willing landowners or to sufficiently assist private owners in preparing and implementing comprehensive forest management plans.

The primary function of conservation easements and deed restrictions by private land trusts is to prevent development incompatible with preserving forest ecosystems. The easements seldom require that landowners undertake proactive longleaf pine management and restoration practices. The landowners and land trusts are hard-pressed and often unable to implement the best forest management practices ideal for longleaf pine stand improvements and restorations, for conducting regular and frequent prescribed burning programs, for replanting appropriately suited longleaf seedlings and herbaceous plants, and for control of invasive plant species. Only a few land trusts have the financial capacities to employ personnel to implement needed forest management and prescribed burning actions fully on conserved forestlands.

Always challenging is the long-term investment and the long timescale to undertake longleaf pine conservation and management. Often financially restricted to pay for substantial easement transactional costs, more private landowners would likely be willing to accept management agreements on their properties if they secure funding, such as incentive programs and grant assistance. Although there is also interest in replanting longleaf as under-plantings after

thinning former loblolly stands and clear-cut sites, the challenge is convincing those landowners to undertake expensive conversions and longleaf replanting.

CASE STUDY: Land protection and active management working together

Despite numerous challenges linking the protection of longleaf pine habitats with active management of these properties, there are examples where land trusts and landowners collaboratively support these efforts. The Dogwood Conservation Easement with Tall Timbers is a 2,300-acre property in Thomas County, Georgia, with goals to protect old longleaf pine and native groundcover utilizing sustainable forestry techniques. A conservation management plan with Tall Timbers details the required and recommended management provisions (while allowing for flexibility and agreed upon modifications) for timber management, groundcover protections, and prescribed fire guidelines. Two hundred fifty-four acres of high-quality natural longleaf and

native groundcover areas are designated as Special Natural Areas (SNAs). No clearcutting is allowed in SNAs, only patch-cut and single-tree harvesting with specific harvest guidelines included in the conservation easement management plan.

OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

With the majority of southern forestland in private ownership, local land trusts are crucial partners in longleaf restoration and conservation. These organizations have established relationships and hold conservation easements with hundreds of private landowners who demonstrate sincere conservation commitments to longleaf protection into the future. Those already engaged with longleaf, including non-profits, government agencies, and local longleaf partnerships, can strengthen their collaborations with land trust networks to cooperatively increase landowner engagement and assist more private owners of longleaf pine forests.

Tall Timbers's conservation easement management plan outlines the required and recommended guidelines for the Dogwood Conservation Easement.

Timber Harvest Guidelines

- Simplified timber cruise data identifies current and goal basal area
- Difference determines timber available for patch-cut and single-tree harvesting
- Requires maintaining minimum 30ft/acre basal area of saw timber
- Recommends maintaining 5-10 ft/acre basal area of young timber (<6-inch diameter at breast height).

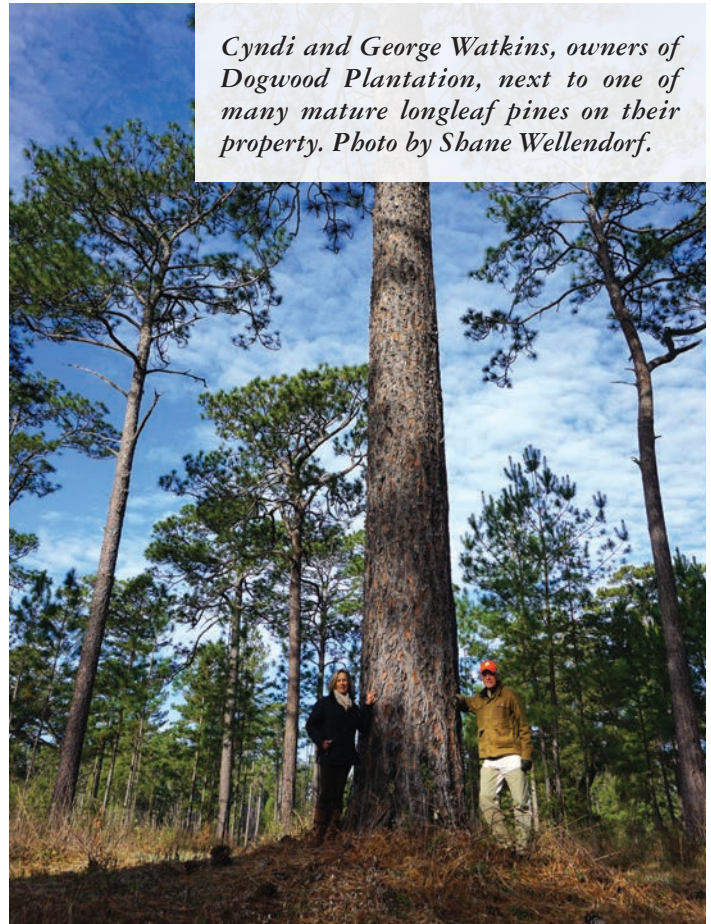
Groundcover Provisions

- Existing firebreaks and disturbance areas can be used – no new disturbances
- Hunting trails and hardwood control with mowing allowed; no roller chopping
- Log decks predetermined
- No new burn piles

Prescribed Fire

“Frequent prescribed fire shall be used to maintain and manage upland SNAs as limited by state and/or federal laws.”

Cyndi and George Watkins, owners of Dogwood Plantation, next to one of many mature longleaf pines on their property. Photo by Shane Wellendorf.



This article expands on two recent panels, the 13th Biennial Longleaf Conference session in October 2020 and the follow-up webinar in May 2021, highlighting experiences of six land trusts substantially engaged in safeguarding and restoring longleaf pine habitats in their geographic areas. Both panels were organized by Southern Conservation Partners in partnership with The Longleaf Alliance. Prior to these events, the authors surveyed private land conservation organizations in the longleaf pine’s natural range and compiled a report on their longleaf protection and management experiences. For more information on the land trusts working in longleaf, please visit longleafalliance.org/landtrusts.

PUBLISHER The Longleaf Alliance, **EDITOR** Sarah Crate, **ASSISTANT EDITOR** Margaret Platt

DESIGN Bellhouse Publishing, **ADVERTISING** Sarah Crate – editor@longleafalliance.org

COVER Land trusts are essential partners to conserve and restore longleaf pine natural habitats. This longleaf pine property in south Georgia recently completed a 2,447-acre conservation easement with Tall Timbers. Photo by Shane Wellendorf.

The Longleaf Leader is an official publication of The Longleaf Alliance, 12130 Dixon Center Road, Andalusia, Alabama 36420 and is published quarterly. The Longleaf Alliance reserves the exclusive right to accept or reject advertising or editorial material submitted for publication. Advertising rates quoted upon request. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Longleaf Alliance, 12130 Dixon Center Road, Andalusia, Alabama 36420. Periodicals Postage Paid at Montgomery, Alabama.

