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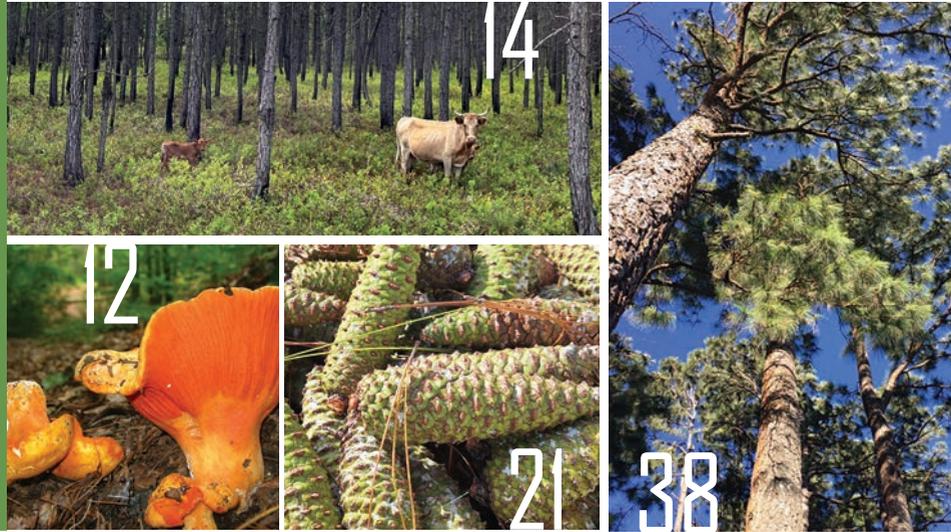
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**COVER** Where the pines meet their reflection—nature’s quiet symmetry at Escribano Point Wildlife Management Area, Florida. [Emma McKee]

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# THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY

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*Carol Denhof*



FROM THE PRESIDENT

The word *community* is defined as “a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common,” or in ecological terms, “a group of interdependent organisms of different species growing or living together in a specified habitat.” In either situation, for that community to function properly, there must be interaction and a certain level of balance between its inhabitants. In times of stress and uncertainty, people look to each other within their communities to find solutions to the challenges that they face daily. One only has to look at towns and cities impacted by natural disasters to see how people pull together to rebuild after these crises. This is true for the communities in which we live and for longleaf pine forests as well.

This past year has certainly had its share of challenges for those of us who work within the longleaf community. From staff reductions to funding impacts to agency shutdowns to shortages of materials, partners across the region have had to pivot and adapt to avoid severe effects to the work we are all doing to advance longleaf restoration and conservation. With longleaf, we are fortunate to have a well-established group of active stakeholders with a successful framework for collaboration. One of the keys to

weathering the challenges faced in 2025 was leaning into this community to fill gaps and work around obstacles to get the necessary work done.

One such example is the collaborative longleaf pine cone harvesting effort that took place in fall 2025. Facing a perfect storm of a poor cone crop report for most of the region, a shortage of staff to harvest in the pockets where cone crops were more favorable, and a dwindling supply of stored seed, partners rallied together to collect as many viable cones as possible to bolster the supplies necessary for growing next year's seedling crop. The successful collection and processing of the cones by our network of partners directly improves our collective ability to continue restoring new acres of longleaf. This is a testament to the power of communities.

In the upcoming year, I'm sure we will continue to face challenges. Still, there are many opportunities for us to work together to ensure we maintain focus and continue to grow this incredible resource we are tasked with protecting. The Alliance is proud to be part of such a passionate, impactful, and strong community.





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# MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST | WINTER

## PLANTING LONGLEAF

- **Site-Prep Burns:** Usually, it is important to conduct a site prep burn before planting longleaf. Site prep burns can remove logging slash, lead to better planting jobs, stimulate early growth by increasing available nutrients, and decrease hot spots that may kill young seedlings in subsequent burns. On deep sands or sites with little logging slash, site-prep burns may not be needed; fuel might be better saved until the first or second-year burn.
- **Plant Early:** Early planting is almost always better than late planting to take advantage of the winter precipitation, grow more roots, and maximize survival. With containerized seedlings, proper planting depth is the most critical factor for success.

## GRASS STAGE STANDS

- **Check Survival:** Evaluate young stands to determine one-year survival and ensure adequate stocking. Wait until after the first frost when the grass stage longleaf is more easily seen.
- **First Burn:** Late December through the end of winter is an excellent time to introduce fire in young, healthy longleaf stands to help control unwanted pine seedlings and other competition.

## SAPLING & MATURE STANDS

- **Prescribed Fire:** Winter is also a prime time to conduct fuel reduction burns in mature or sapling stands, but use caution (or wait) when burning in drought-stressed stands. When reintroducing fire into a long-unburned stand, monitor duff moisture to **guide** when to burn, and be ready to do immediate mop-up.
- **Prune Longleaf:** In some stands that lack fuels or have a low stocking rate, mechanical pruning may be an option to avoid the “old field” growth form. Winter is the easiest time to prune, and it should be finished before the spring green-up. Anticipate generating a large volume of limbs. Pruning may not be practical in a large stand.

- **Timber Thinning:** Take advantage of dry conditions and thin when the bark is less prone to slipping to minimize equipment damage to your stand. Thinning in the growing season is more likely to result in bark damage from skidding, leading to stress, beetles, loss, etc.

## CONTROL COMPETITION

- **Herbicide Treatments:** Basal bark and stem injection herbicide treatments are typically the most effective at controlling unwanted or invasive trees and shrubs during the dormant season.
- **Mechanical Brush Management:** It may be easier to reduce heavy shrub layers during the cooler months. Allow time to dry down the slash. Follow up later with a prescribed burn.

## GROUNDCOVER & WILDLIFE

- **Plant Native Warm-Season Grasses:** Late winter through early spring is the recommended time to plant our native understory species. Some plants require a cold-stratification period and need to be planted earlier.
- **Install Nest Boxes:** If you want more natural pest control agents like kestrels and owls on your property, install boxes early, as these are among the species that begin nesting in winter.

## WALK THE LINE

Now is an excellent time to inspect your property lines and freshen up boundary line markings. Take advantage of the cooler weather and greater visibility in the winter woods.



January frost on longleaf pine needles [Thomas Crate]

Reach out to The Longleaf Alliance for any questions about establishing and managing longleaf stands at [longleafalliance.org/contact](https://longleafalliance.org/contact).



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# Q&A

Read more from Michigan State University's article, *Not your Mother's Roundup*



**Q.** Dear Longleaf Alliance,

I recently went to buy Roundup®, intending to apply glyphosate to a patch of cogongrass on my property. Upon looking at the label, I discovered that the Roundup® sold at the chain hardware store did not contain glyphosate. Instead, the active ingredients were triclopyr, fluazifop, and diquat.

Further investigation on my part found that Bayer recently changed the formulation of many Roundup® products. Can you share this information with your *Longleaf Leader* readers? And do you know where I can purchase glyphosate?

Glad I Always Read the Label

**A.** Dear Always Read the Label,

Thank you for your thoughtful and timely letter. You've highlighted an important issue that's causing confusion for many homeowners, landowners, and land managers – **Bayer has removed glyphosate from its consumer-grade Roundup® formulations.**

For decades, herbicides containing the active ingredient glyphosate have been sold under the trade name Roundup®. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide used to control a broad spectrum of broadleaf and grass

weeds in landscape and natural settings. For many in restoration and land management, these two names were often used colloquially to refer to similar products.

The new Roundup® Weed and Grass Killer Exclusive Formula contains triclopyr, fluazifop, and diquat instead of glyphosate. While these ingredients have their own uses, they do not function the same way as glyphosate and may not be effective for your targeted weeds or appropriate for your application area. The bottles look similar to older glyphosate-based products, which makes label-reading more important than ever.

For those seeking glyphosate to manage cogongrass or other invasive plants, it is still available under other brand names and formulations. To make matters even more confusing, some stores may still have inventory of the old formulation with glyphosate.

**Be sure to check the list of active ingredients before purchasing.**

We will share this information to help others avoid similar confusion. We appreciate your diligence and encourage our readers to always read the label before buying or applying any herbicide.

Sincerely,  
The Longleaf Alliance

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By Chloe Holst, The Longleaf Alliance

# PLANT SPOTLIGHT

*Ilex vomitoria* Aiton | Yaupon Holly, Cassine | Holly Family - Aquifoliaceae



## Description

Yaupon holly is a perennial evergreen shrub or small tree (up to 25 feet tall). The plant has straight, grayish stems and small alternate oval-shaped leaves with crenate or slightly serrated margins. The leaves are dark green with a leathery texture and a pale underside.

Yaupon, like many other hollies, are dioecious and produce small, white, four-lobed male and female flowers on separate plants. In the fall months, the female plants produce beautiful clusters of berries that are glossy and bright red and usually persist on the shrubs until the following spring.

## Distribution & Habitat

Yaupon inhabits the Coastal Plains of the southeastern United States; it extends from Virginia down to central Florida and stretches west to Texas. *Ilex vomitoria* is tolerant of cold, shade, salt spray, and can thrive in dry and wet soils. This common plant is found in a wide variety of habitats including sandhills, sandy hammocks, dunes, maritime forests, forested wetlands, pine flatwoods, and on the edges of coastal and inland marshes.

## Management

Due to its adaptability and fast-growing nature, yaupon can easily overtake an understory and form dense undesirable thickets when there is an absence of fire. To prevent this overgrowth in pine ecosystems, a routine prescribed fire regimen should be used and maintained when possible. Mechanical removal and herbicide can also help reduce its presence in the understory.

## Wildlife Value

Since the fruits persist throughout the fall and winter, yaupon holly berries are an important food source for many species of

songbirds, gamebirds, and waterfowl. Other animals, like armadillos, raccoons, bears, and foxes will also eat the berries. These evergreen shrubs also provide cover for wildlife in the winter, and their flowers attract pollinators in the spring.

## Ethnobotany & Foraging

Yaupon is North America's only caffeine-containing plant. Many indigenous peoples in the southeastern United States, including the Cherokee, Caddo, Timucua, Muscogee, Seminole, and more, have historically used yaupon. The leaves were brewed into "cassine," a thick, concentrated "black drink" used as a ceremonial beverage to induce vomiting during fasting, or as a stimulant before battle. The leaves were also steeped for medicinal tea and as a social drink.

Yaupon is easily accessible, identifiable, and simple to process. Unlike regular tea, yaupon lacks tannins that can turn the drink bitter with prolonged steeping. The tea has a slightly sweet, grassy, fresh taste, and is good both hot and iced. If you'd rather purchase yaupon tea, check out the Yaupon Brothers American Tea Company for delicious tea with different flavors.

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# WINDOW *into* WILDLIFE



By MaryBeth Stager, The Longleaf Alliance

## Eastern Glass Lizard *Ophisaurus ventralis*

**Appearance** – Glass lizards may be confused with snakes, but they are uniquely known as the “legless lizard” with many features not present in snakes, including eyelids, ear openings, and lateral grooves. The lateral grooves run along the lizard’s sides and allow its body to expand during breathing, pregnancy, and eating.

The eastern glass lizard is tan at birth and then transitions to have multiple black lateral lines from its head to its tail. Hatchlings are between 15 and 20 centimeters (6 - 8 inches), growing to become one of the longest lizards in North America. Adults range from 45 to 108 centimeters long (18 - 43 inches) and can weigh between 300 and 600 grams (0.6 - 1.3 pounds).

**Habitat & Distribution** – The eastern glass lizard can be found throughout the Southeast in pine flatwoods, edges of wetlands, salt marshes, and beaches. Like many other species found within these ecosystems, habitat fragmentation and habitat loss are major threats to their populations.

**Behavior, Diet, & Breeding** – Foraging underground or undercover at dawn and dusk, eastern glass lizards primarily

consume invertebrates. They often bask on rocks, roads, or sunny spots during the day.

Eastern glass lizards breed once a year, from spring to early fall. Females lay 5-17 eggs and incubate them in shallow nests under logs or clumps of grass.

**Similar Species** – There are three additional glass lizard species found within the longleaf pine range including mimic glass lizard (*Ophisaurus mimicus*), slender glass lizard (*Ophisaurus attenuatus*), and island glass lizard (*Ophisaurus compressus*).

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# SNAKES GLASS LIZARDS

**Snakes have no eyelids present.**

---

**No external ears and use their jawline to “hear” vibrations in their surroundings.**

---

**Snakes do not have a lateral groove on their skin.**

---

**Tongues are heavily forked and are used for sensory purposes.**

---

**Mobility is made easier due to their belly scales, allowing for a smooth slither across flat surfaces.**

**Glass lizards have eyelids present.**

---

**Use of external ears for hearing their surroundings.**

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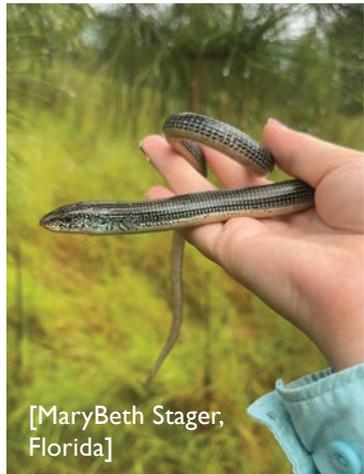
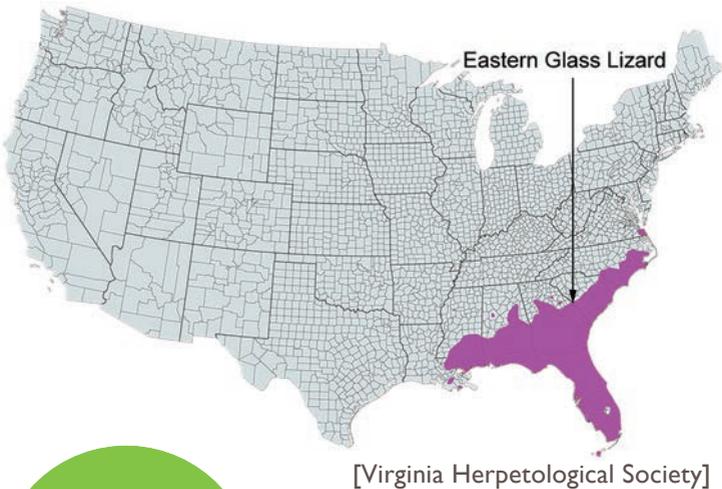
**A lateral groove present on the side of the glass lizards.**

---

**Tongues are rounded and blunt in order to help swallow their prey.**

---

**Mobility can be difficult on flat surfaces due to their movement being a side-to-side motion and lack of belly scales.**



## Fun Facts

- The eastern glass lizard, like other lizards, can drop its tail to distract a predator when feeling threatened. If the glass lizard successfully escapes, its tail can regenerate.
- Common predators include snakes and birds such as hawks, Great Blue Herons, and White Ibises.
- The eastern glass lizard can be a host for the black-legged tick, also known as the deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), with a peak in May and June.

# LONGLEAF ECOSYSTEM



By Alan Patterson, The Longleaf Alliance

## Lobster Mushroom (*Hypomyces lactifluorum*)

The **lobster mushroom** (*Hypomyces lactifluorum*) is one of the most fascinating and unique edible fungi due to its choice of host. Unlike other parasitic fungi, which target plants or other organisms, the lobster mushroom is the only species that parasitizes other fungi, most commonly members within the genera *Russula* and *Lactarius*. Many of these host species are considered inedible on their own; however, once infected by *Hypomyces*, they transform into high-quality edible mushrooms.

Lobster mushrooms get their name from their bright orange coloration, but they can also appear as pale yellow to deep crimson. The fruiting bodies vary widely in size, with some becoming quite large. The inner flesh is white and dense.

Lobster mushrooms are considered at their best before they begin to release spores, which appear as a white powder on the undersides of the cap. They are often dehydrated and stored for later use but can also be cooked fresh.

These mushrooms typically fruit in late summer to mid-fall, as early as July, with peak season from August through October. They usually fruit after heavy rains when the forest floor is damp. They are commonly found popping up through



Lobster mushroom with host species *Russula* spp. [Jeff Dorenbusch]

thick layers of leaves and pine needles. Where you find one pushing up, there will often be many others under the leaves nearby. Lobster mushrooms are abundant throughout the eastern U.S. and the Pacific Northwest.

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# HEALTHY MARKETS, HEALTHY FORESTS



Photos by Lisa Lord

## Shifting Forest Economy

Across the Southeast, the forest industry is in flux. Over the past few years, numerous pulp and paper mills and sawmills have shut down, leaving many forest landowners with limited options for selling their timber. With the closure or cutback in production of ten mills in South Carolina, the State's Forest Recovery Task Force January 2025 Report projected 8.2 million tons of wood markets will have been lost, approximately 25% of the state's timber product output. Five paper mills in Georgia also closed recently, including Georgia-Pacific's Cedar Springs Mill and International Paper's Riceboro and Savannah-area mills, with an estimated annual impact of \$2.9 billion. These losses have created ripple effects throughout rural communities where markets for low-value wood and pulpwood once provided jobs and were the economic underpinning of sustainable forest management.

For landowners managing longleaf pine, the impact on the forest products market creates both economic and ecological challenges. The ability to restore or maintain healthy longleaf forests is tightly linked to robust, functioning markets for wood

products of all types and sizes. Without viable markets for small-diameter trees, many landowners could be faced with hard choices: delay harvesting, reconsider restoration goals, or abandon projects altogether. This could potentially lead to overcrowded stands, insect and disease outbreaks, increased wildfire risk, impacts to water resources, and slower progress toward restoring longleaf pine, including growing higher-value products down the road.

## Market Diversification

A strong forest economy depends on diverse markets, which provide landowners with flexibility and the ability to adapt as the markets change. Market diversification creates value across multiple product sectors for longleaf, from pulpwood to poles to pine straw, while also tapping into emerging opportunities, ecosystem markets, and technologies. Landowners can thin at the right time and make management decisions that prioritize forest health and other goals, like wildlife habitat, over financial concerns.



Collecting drone imagery to estimate overstory pine basal area for Longleaf Biodiversity field testing

South Carolina landowner Vaughn Spearman and a week-old lamb from his flock of Gulf Coastal Plain sheep.



Diversification is more than just a market strategy; it's an important conservation tool. For longleaf pine restoration specifically, having a variety of product markets and income streams enables landowners to remove offsite species, replant with longleaf, continue necessary management such as prescribed fire, and implement uneven-aged management with longer rotations and more frequent harvests.

Vaughn Spearman, a landowner in South Carolina, has discovered that a combination of timber harvests, conservation incentives, and silvopasture makes longleaf management both possible and profitable. Periodic thinning provides income and maintains open-stand conditions for wildlife, cost share helps cover the costs of burning or establishing longleaf, and silvopasture provides additional revenue with the added benefit of the animals helping to maintain the stand. This combination of markets and incentives gives him the flexibility to manage for wildlife and long-term forest health without relying on a single income stream.

### Preparing for Future Markets

Managing with change in mind is challenging. Every landowner likes certainty, given the time it takes to grow trees to maturity and the cost of their investment, but it's often unattainable in a shifting economy. Markets evolve, policies change, and new opportunities often emerge where we least expect them. Adaptive management is the key to future success. So, what can forest landowners do to plan and prepare to access future markets?

The first step is to start the conversation. Talk with your consulting forester, state forestry agency, and other technical assistance providers like The Longleaf Alliance about how your management can anticipate changing markets. Consider how harvesting and reforestation decisions align so you can access current markets while also preparing or leaving the door open for opportunities down the line. Each forest management plan should include a market access plan, your roadmap for how your property can remain economically viable as market demand shifts.



Pineywoods cattle grazing among longleaf pines



Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) can be used to monitor avian or amphibian communities for biodiversity crediting projects.

Take a broader, long-term perspective – a good fit for many longleaf landowners! Even when stumpage prices are low, maintaining forest health through thinning, invasive species removal, midstory vegetation control, and prescribed fire pays off in the long run. Staying active and engaged ensures you will be ready to take advantage of new markets when they emerge.

In short, the longleaf ecosystem flourishes under active forest management, but management often depends on favorable economic conditions to be feasible. Sustaining the longleaf ecosystem relies not just on our commitment to land stewardship, but on our collective ability to build and diversify the economic systems that make forest management possible. The more we can prepare for and invest in innovation, technology, and new market infrastructure and strategies today, the greater the opportunities for working forests and landowners to thrive in the future.

## EMERGING MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

With 60% of the United States' total wood volume harvested in the Southeast, the southern timber economy is vitally important. A vibrant and sustainable future for longleaf pine depends in large part on exploring and growing new markets, including those already beginning to take shape:

**Mass Timber and Innovative Wood Products:** Demand for engineered wood products and sustainable building materials is growing. Longleaf pine is well-positioned to supply aesthetically beautiful, durable, and high-strength timber. Clemson University's new Forestry and Environmental Conservation (FEC) facility is built with longleaf pine sourced from the South Carolina Lowcountry.

**Ecosystem Service Markets:** Carbon, biodiversity, and watershed markets continue to develop, with the potential to reward longleaf restoration and stewardship of working forests. Longleaf systems are ideal candidates for nature-based credit programs. The Longleaf Alliance is developing a framework for biodiversity credits for longleaf forests and is piloting the protocol on several private lands.

**Bioenergy Markets:** The global demand for bioenergy is strengthening, and markets for pellets, wood chips, and biochar can help absorb small-diameter wood products and provide markets for thinning and restoration projects. The Longleaf Alliance partners with multiple bioenergy companies and engages landowners through outreach efforts to help them assess whether selling their wood for bioenergy could support and speed up their restoration objectives.



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## “DEEP ROOTS ARE NOT REACHED BY THE FROST.”

J.R.R. Tolkien

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Longleaf Alliance staff visit a beautiful pitcherplant bog with longleaf pine in Florida.

# 30 Years of Growing, Understanding & Improving Diverse Ecosystems

## 2025 Longleaf Accomplishments from The Longleaf Alliance

*As The Longleaf Alliance celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2025, we continued to shape our strategic vision for a sustainable future of longleaf pine landscapes using the G.U.I.D.E. framework—Growing, Understanding, Improving, Diverse, Ecosystems. Alliance staff, board, members, and conservation partners achieved remarkable successes across the range, from Texas to Virginia, reflecting three decades of collaboration and commitment to this iconic ecosystem.*

**GROWING** — We raise awareness, increase engagement, and grow a love for longleaf across the range.

The Longleaf Alliance continued our collaboration with Magic Kumquat Productions and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources T.E.R.N. with two short documentaries showcasing rare species and the partners dedicated to their conservation. *Devouring Beauties – The Remarkable Pitcherplant* explores the fascinating world of carnivorous plants and their relationship with the fire-dependent longleaf pine ecosystem. *A Tortoise Called Pumpkin Spice* tells the inspiring story of a rescued gopher tortoise and the lasting impact of collaborative conservation partnerships.

Burner Bob® the Bobwhite Quail, TLA's iconic mascot promoting the benefits of prescribed fire, had a very busy year, attending ten events as well as two more "Burner Bob® Goes to College" visits to the University of Florida and Clemson University.

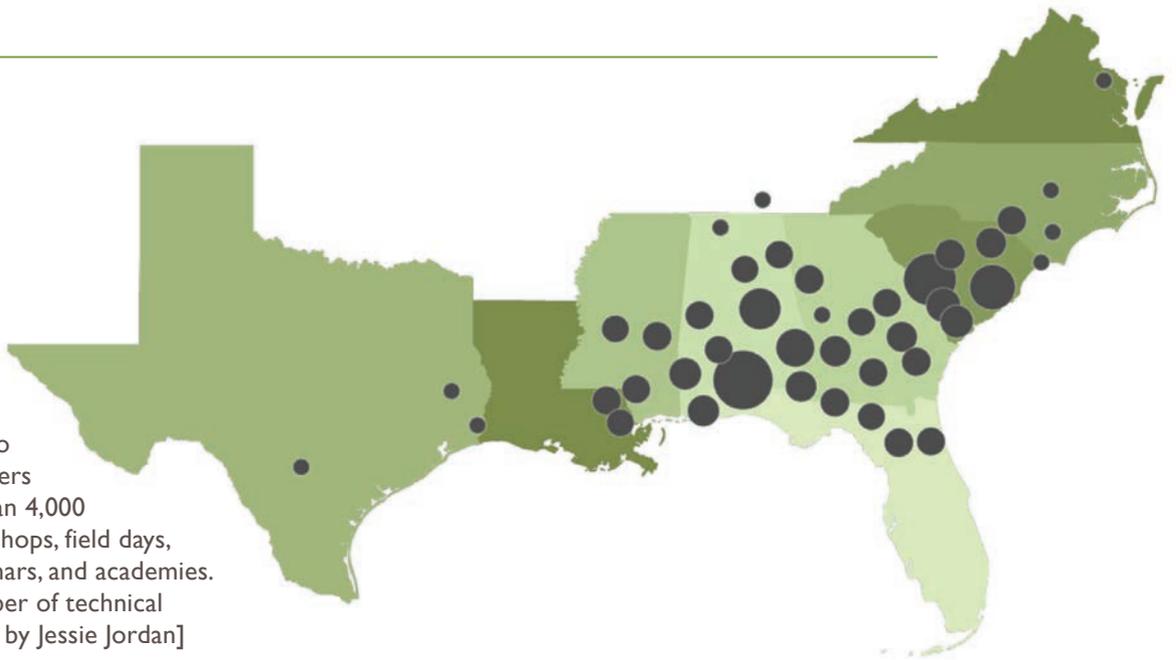
**UNDERSTANDING** — We collect and share technical information about longleaf through science-based education, outreach, and technical assistance through methods best for each audience.

Partnerships have always been the key to sharing knowledge through the *Longleaf Academy Program* and other educational events. Those relationships were even more important this year as funding disruptions and uncertainties affected many.

In that spirit, we brought the *Longleaf for the Landowner Academy* to Tuskegee, Alabama, along with The Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Federation, and the Alabama Heirs Property Alliance. This program (one of our newer Academies, first offered in 2023) is designed especially for beginning landowners and those who are ready to take a more active role in the management and ownership of their land.

*Groundcover Restoration Academy* offered a wealth of expertise in southern Georgia this past spring. Participants

Alliance staff kept very full calendars all year with more than 375 technical assists to landowners and partners and reaching more than 4,000 people through workshops, field days, learn and burns, webinars, and academies. [Circles indicate number of technical assists in an area; Map by Jessie Jordan]



A. Burner Bob® joins Smokey Bear, Karen Brown, and Jennie Haskell at the Sewee Fire Festival in South Carolina. B. *Longleaf for the Landowner*, while intended for landowners, has an added benefit in educating natural resource professionals to be more informed and better able to recognize issues like heirs property concerns and how to advise and steer landowners towards resources. [Doug Eaves, Tuskegee University]

learned from a diverse set of public and private restoration practitioners and saw examples of restoration efforts at the Doerun Pitcherplant Bog Wildlife Management Area, with guides from Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

*Gopher Tortoise Academy* received a large turnout in Andalusia, Alabama over the summer. Partners and landowners from every state in the gopher tortoise range convened to learn longleaf management and conservation techniques for this keystone species.

Workshops and Field Days were a source of sustained outreach efforts this year as well. In west-central Georgia, The Longleaf Alliance was one of many collaborators for events with the Chattahoochee Fall Line Conservation Partnership, Georgia Forestry Commission, and the Georgia Heirs Property Law Center – providing layers of outreach for more sustained presence on the landscape. In this way, we are all able to foster connections between landowners and the services they need to be successful.

**IMPROVING FOREST HEALTH** – Through active stewardship, we improve the condition of longleaf ecosystems across the range.

The Longleaf Alliance achieved a significant stewardship milestone this year — facilitating prescribed fire across 244,063 acres, a record-breaking increase of more than 100,000 acres compared to 2024. This accomplishment reflects extensive collaboration on both private and public lands.

Most of these burn acres occurred within the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) as our field staff assisted state, federal, and nonprofit partners on prescribed fires. GCPEP personnel, including the Ecosystem Support Team (EST), Invasive Species technicians, *Ambystoma bishopi* (AMBBIS) biologists, and the AMBBIS Restoration Team (A.R.T.), provide critical prescribed fire capacity in the landscape. In fact, all GCPEP fire-qualified staff were assigned to five prescribed fires with five different partners on one

single day in February with particularly favorable weather conditions. GCPEP also continued to assist partners with invasive species control, wetland restoration, rare species recovery including installation of Red-cockaded Woodpecker cavities, and other habitat improvement activities in Alabama and Florida.

The Longleaf Alliance also supported prescribed fire implementation on private lands through cost-share project administration, supporting prescribed burn associations like the Aiken Prescribed Fire Cooperative in South Carolina, and facilitating learn and burn field days.

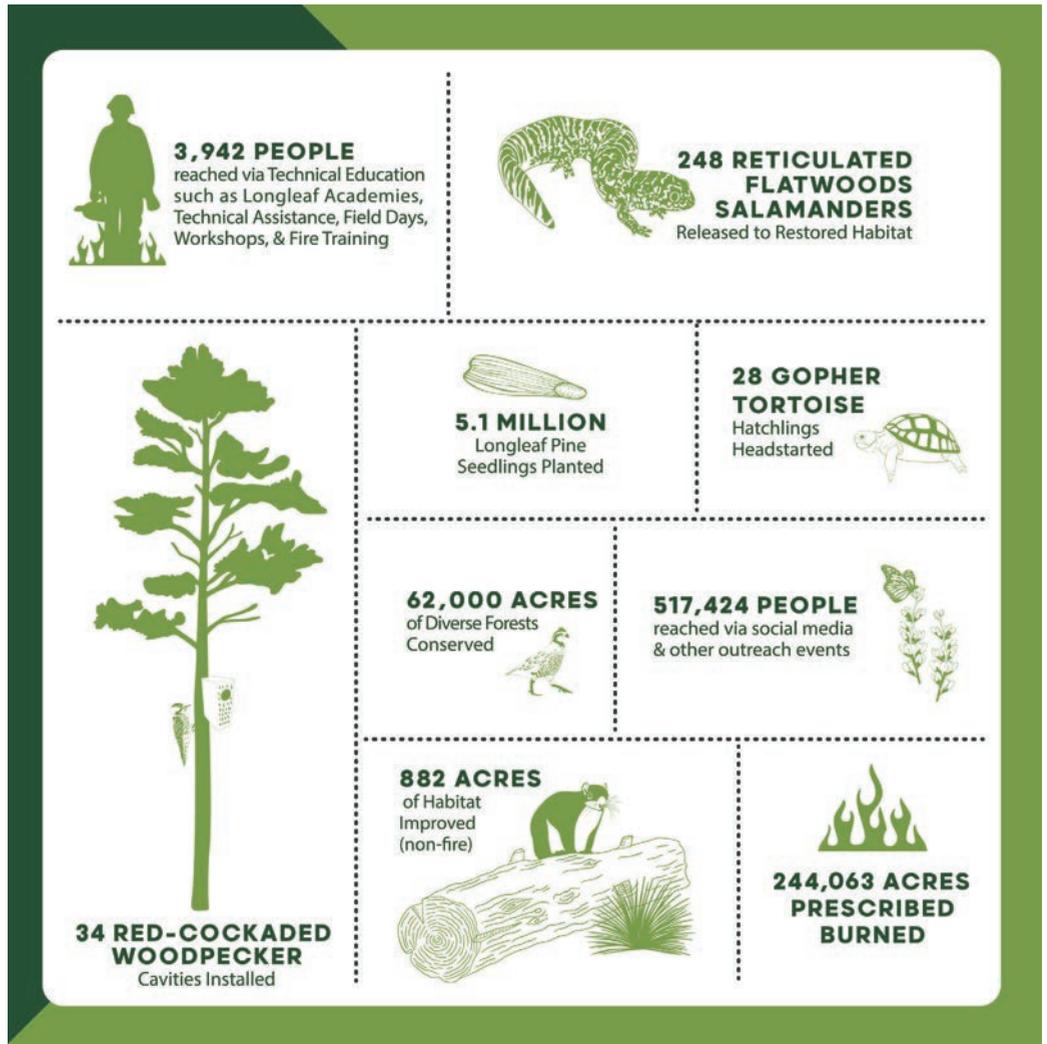
**First-ever Reintroduction of Reticulated Flatwoods Salamanders on Private Land**

In January, The Alliance’s AMBBIS Team led a pivotal effort in the recovery of the federally endangered reticulated flatwoods salamander. Working alongside Resource Management Service, LLC (RMS) in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Eglin Air Force Base, and Naval Air Station Whiting Field, the team facilitated the release 50 larval salamanders on permanently protected private land in Northwest Florida—the first reintroduction of this species on private property. AMBBIS staff restored habitat at the release site and reared larval salamanders originating from native populations in the nearby Escribano Point Wildlife Management Area in captivity prior to their release. A follow-up survey confirmed salamanders surviving in the ephemeral wetland, marking a significant step forward for this rare species.

**DIVERSE FORESTS CONSERVED** — We work with landowners to ensure the future of longleaf by conserving high-quality, diverse longleaf forests across generations.

**Longleaf Biodiversity Impact Fund**

The Longleaf Alliance launched the Longleaf Biodiversity Impact Fund to help brand the longleaf biodiversity credit project, an innovative approach to valuing and financing biodiversity and longleaf restoration, and helping to bridge the gap between the private sector’s “nature-positive” commitments and the restoration and conservation impact



across the longleaf range. TLA developed surveys, conducted one-on-one conversations, and held webinars to engage corporate and industry partners and landowners to help shape the biodiversity credit project and develop additional private investment opportunities that support biodiversity and longleaf restoration. Feedback from these engagements is informing project design, strengthening investment pathways, and building market awareness.

**ECOSYSTEMS RESTORED** — Through advocacy, policies, assistance, partners, and our own management actions, we facilitate the expansion of longleaf ecosystems across the range.

The Longleaf Alliance, working in collaboration with restoration partners, supported the planting of 5.1 million longleaf pine seedlings during the 2024-2025 planting season. Projects were completed on both private and public land, with funding from Arbor Day Foundation, Enviva, HCL Tech, National Forest Foundation, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We also continued our tree planting program with Appalachian Mountain Brewing.

By Ad Platt, The Longleaf Alliance

# Longleaf Partners Achieved Major Success in Fall Cone Harvesting



Longleaf cone harvesting is compressed into a short few weeks when cones become fully ripe but before they open and release the seeds, usually in October. [Ad Platt]

2025 longleaf pine cone harvesting sites  
[Circle size indicates the number of bushels collected; Map by Jessie Jordan]

Together, a large number of longleaf partners accomplished a significant milestone in 2025, made possible only through collaboration and the numerous ways they assisted one another.

At the beginning of the summer, longleaf pine seed inventory was nearly exhausted after sowing seedlings for the 2025-26 planting season. Without a significant collection effort, there would be no seed for next year. When the annual *Longleaf Pine Cone Prospects* report was released in June, it generally showed poor cone production across the South. Four of the sampled sites were slightly more encouraging, but follow-up checks failed to confirm several of them. Still, there is usually a cone crop somewhere, and the new challenge was finding it.

To help, citizen scientists joined partners in the search, utilizing a longleaf pine cone survey widely shared through outreach channels by The Longleaf Alliance and others. Although the overall response was modest, awareness grew, and every report helped narrow the search.

Knowing that cone harvesting coincides with peak hurricane season and that untimely windstorms have derailed past efforts, we wanted to ensure that each of the few collecting crews had a primary plan and a backup alternative, just in case.

Cone collection is a highly labor-intensive process in a very short harvest season, requiring many people to handle

processes that are only partially automated. Most longleaf partners are short-staffed now and were so during the season when they are most dependent upon temporary labor. The robust response from partners assisting each other made all the difference and was a crucial factor.

With significant engagement from many levels and from state, federal, and private partners, longleaf pine cone collections were made in the limited longleaf pine orchards that exist, as well as in natural longleaf stands, across a wide swath of the range. The 2025 range-wide harvest now totals over 34,000 bushels and is expected to yield about that same number of pounds of cleaned seed at a time when seed inventories were essentially exhausted. We are very proud of

all the contributing partners who made cone harvesting a priority this year.

On the seedling side, our nursery partners report we should expect to see fewer seedlings planted in the 2025-26 planting season. Longleaf pine seedlings are still available at many nurseries heading into winter. This is both very unusual and undesirable, but also not limited to just longleaf pine. Seedling inventory for other species also remains unsold.

Anyone who is still looking to plant this season should know we can help you find seedlings, and we want to ensure as many of these seedlings as possible get planted and put to work, not wasted.



As partners began preparing equipment for cone harvesting, mechanical issues arose. Because tree shakers are aging machines, spare parts and maintenance expertise are increasingly hard to find. Part of this problem was solved by connecting those in need with those who could help. [Ad Platt]



Once longleaf pine cones drop to the ground, many hands are needed to find and gather the cones on the same day to reduce Fusarium disease from too much time on the ground. [Alliance staff Chloe Holst and Michael Hubbard collect seed at Munson Seed Orchard in Florida; photo by Jasmine Little]



Individual trees may be harvested by tree shakers similar to those used in pecan orchards, or by personnel using lift trucks to glean the cones from the tree. [Jennie Haskell]



Large containers typically hold 15-20 bushels each for optimal pre-drying while awaiting processing in the seed extractory. [Ad Platt]



The fresh seeds are dewinged, run through vacuum separators to remove unfilled seeds, sized, and dried to the optimum moisture content for storage. Each stage demands additional labor as well as numerous forklifts. [Ad Platt]



Drax Biomass is a manufacturer of compressed wood pellets produced from sustainably managed working forests. Headquartered in Monroe, LA, with operations in Louisiana and Mississippi, the company is committed to supporting the communities in which we operate by promoting sustainable forestry and investing in local economic development.





Joni and Sharon enjoy the rural tranquility of forest ownership.

By Emma McKee and Joel Lett, *The Longleaf Alliance*

## From Beach to Forest — Finding Tranquility and Purpose as Stewards of the Land

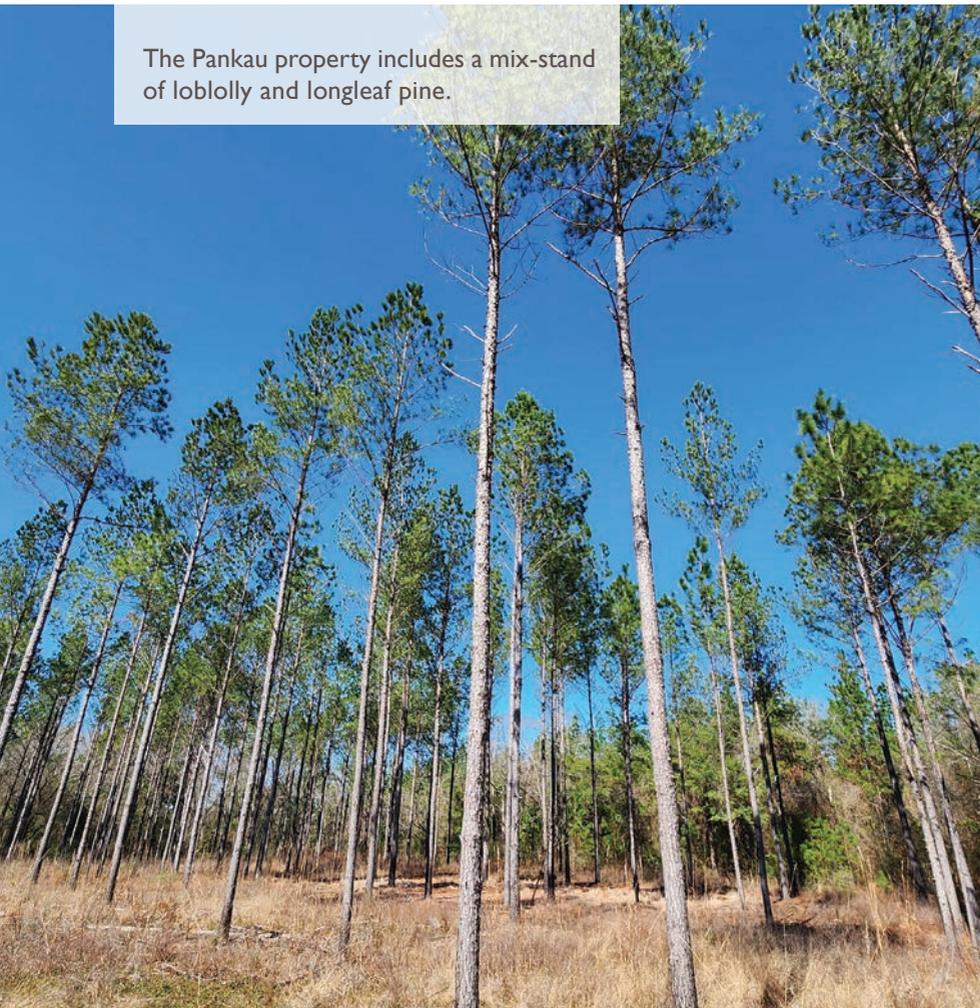
Sharon and Joni Pankau's property lies in the heart of the Blackwater River State Forest near the Florida-Alabama state line. With this prime location, they work closely with GCPEP partners to maintain fire breaks, promote native habitat, and decrease the chance of invasive plant encroachment onto either property.

Sharon and Joni Pankau have been residents within the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) for over a decade. Originally from rural Illinois, Sharon was a teacher and administrator for 20 years, and Joni, a retired Master Sergeant, was in the Marines for 25 years. They moved to Navarre, Florida, in 2015 at a pinnacle point for the rapidly growing community. It wasn't long before urbanization and development led them to look for a permanent home in a greener, quieter place. In 2022, after eight years of searching the market, they sold their Navarre home and bought a 40-

acre parcel bordered by the Blackwater River State Forest. Their decision to transition from a fast paced urban-beach lifestyle to the serenity of Blackwater State Forest was made with the primary goal of returning to their roots and enjoying retirement in the tranquility of nature.

Sharon and Joni's property is primarily loblolly pine, interspersed with old-growth longleaf pines and live oaks. Soon after acquiring the land, they began transitioning the property to a longleaf-dominant stand. As with all restoration projects, they have encountered bumps in the road. With little to no

The Pankau property includes a mix-stand of loblolly and longleaf pine.



In just over three years of land ownership, Sharon and Joni Pankau's property is a certified Tree Farm with the American Tree Farm System and recognized as a Stewardship Forest by USDA Forest Service and Florida Forest Service.

Photos by Emma McKee

background in forestry, they faced obstacles as new landowners, such as plant identification, understanding available resources, purchasing proper equipment, securing financial assistance, and dealing with invasive plants.

By attending landowner classes, workshops, and trainings hosted by local agencies, these co-owners are taking the necessary steps to be active land stewards. In turn, they are increasing their knowledge of best management practices while increasing the representation of women landowners. Sharon and Joni describe being landowners as *empowering freedom*. "Don't be scared to take that leap of faith."

They found that being patient and persistent in their search for best management practices is fundamental. Connections made through our partners and supporters led Sharon and Joni to reach out to The Longleaf Alliance for assistance. Careful and thorough surveying revealed a dense understory of cogongrass with a mid-story dominated by Chinese privet, tallow, mimosa, and Japanese climbing fern. Mechanical thinning and foliar herbicide applications have opened both the canopy and forest floor, allowing native species to thrive and drastically change the composition of the stand. Further efforts through

our partner, the Florida Forest Service, have also presented the opportunity to reintroduce prescribed fire back into the landscape.

The motive behind their land stewardship journey is wildlife habitat restoration. "We were limited on how we could help in the city. Owning land is an opportunity to give back." Taking only one acre for their own use, Sharon and Joni are devoting the rest of the property to improving the native habitat to sustain both wild and rehabilitated animals. They have partnered with the Emerald Coast Wildlife Refuge (ECWR), offering their property as a release location for rehabilitated animals. They also plan to establish an apiary to promote pollinators within the area.

Joni and Sharon both describe their experiences of working with The Longleaf Alliance, its partners, and supporters as "welcoming, appreciative, and encouraging." Specifically noting "the willingness from each agency to help us achieve one goal." In just three short years, these landowners have begun the transformation from an overgrown timber stand to realizing their dream of living in a wildlife corridor.

# From Sentinel Landscapes to Solar Futures: Key Takeaways from America's Longleaf Fall Meeting

By *Jamelle Ellis, Longleaf Partnership Council Chair, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership*



Fall 2025 LPC Leadership – Jason Dockery, Jamelle Ellis, Nancy Walters, Katy Smith, and Ricky Lackey



Nancy Walters, Longleaf Partnership Council facilitator from 2012 to 2025, received the inaugural Longleaf Legacy Award.

The Longleaf Partnership Council (LPC) meets twice a year to strengthen coordination of America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative, share emerging science and opportunities, and advance progress toward the 8-million-acre restoration goal outlined in the *Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine*. On October 29–30, 2025, the LPC gathered alongside the 79th Annual Southeast Fish & Wildlife Conference in Biloxi, Mississippi, demonstrating once again that collaboration is the longleaf community's greatest strength.

The Council welcomed several new members to the meeting whose expertise and enthusiasm will further strengthen our collective impact: Arjun Dunn (NGO representative, American Forest Foundation), Jennifer Fawcett (prescribed fire representative, North Carolina State University), Bronson Bullock (university partner, University of Georgia), Diane Alix (Local Implementation Team representative, Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance), and Chaz Oliver (prescribed burn representative, Tall Timbers). The longleaf community thrives on new voices and diverse

perspectives, and we are excited for the leadership and partnership they bring to the LPC.

One of the most memorable moments of the meeting came courtesy of the talented Bruce Beard of Texas A&M's Natural Resources Institute, who delivered a dramatic and highly entertaining interpretation of the importance of Sentinel Landscapes to the mission of America's Longleaf. Bruce emphasized longleaf's deep relationship with the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) and walked us through the "ingredients" that make a Sentinel Landscape effective, including anchor installations, mission footprints, strong local partnerships, clear goals, coordinated plans, and dedicated staff. Ken Bradley, Georgia Sentinel Landscape Coordinator with the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, underscored how critical these landscapes are by noting that the Department of Defense faces a net deficit of 25 million acres of training lands. Longleaf pine ecosystems help fill that gap, supporting both biodiversity and national security.

The meeting also turned its attention to an increasingly important topic, the rapid expansion of solar development across the Southeast. Presentations from The Nature Conservancy and the Renewable Energy Wildlife Institute explored the emerging intersection of renewable energy and longleaf restoration. The conversation made clear that responsible siting and early engagement with landowners and other critical conservation partners will be essential during the expansion process. The LPC is uniquely positioned to help guide this work, ensuring that the Southeast's clean-energy future and its longleaf legacy advance together.

Updates from six of America's Longleaf Working Groups highlighted continued momentum across the partnership. The Council also received a briefing from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation on business planning and upcoming Longleaf Landscape Stewardship Fund opportunities. In addition, the Council updated the LPC charter, reestablished the Public Lands Working Group, and continued refining the America's Longleaf Strategic Priorities and Action Plan in preparation for 2026 restoration activities.

The Council presented the inaugural Longleaf Legacy Award to Nancy Walters, whose leadership, dedication, and tireless service embody the best of America's Longleaf. Her

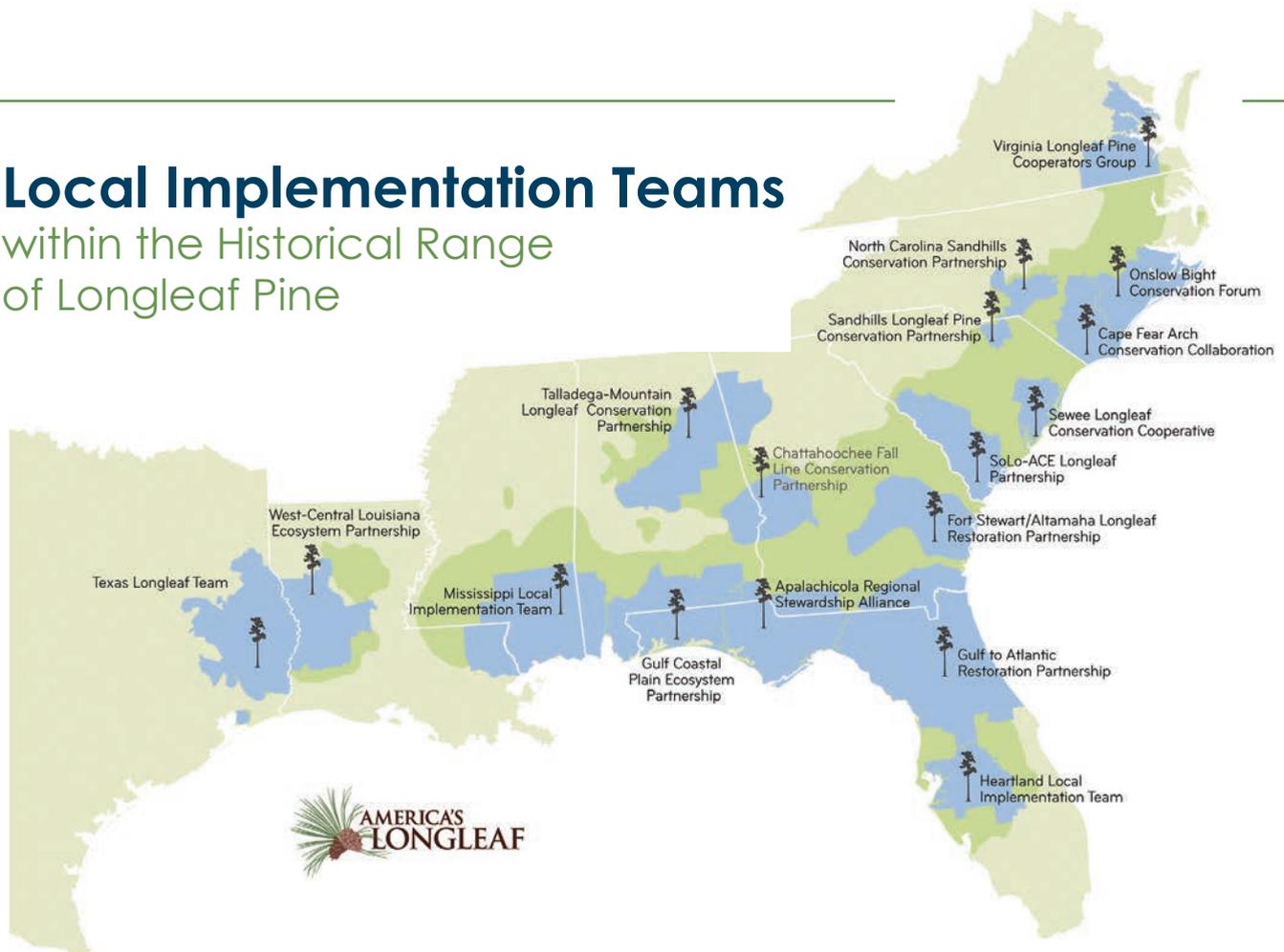
contributions have strengthened our partnerships, advanced the conservation plan, and inspired countless colleagues. Nancy's legacy is woven into the very future we are working toward. Thank you, and congratulations, Nancy!

We also celebrated incoming leadership. Brandon Rutledge of the Jones Center at Ichauway was selected 2026 Chair-elect, and Ricky Lackey of the National Wild Turkey Federation transitioned to LPC Chair on January 1, 2026. Special thanks go to Jason Dockery for his service, expertise, and leadership as Past Chair in 2025.

Now that my term as LPC Chair has ended, I want to extend my deepest gratitude. This year was an extraordinary privilege – a chance to learn from and work alongside some of the most knowledgeable, dedicated, and genuinely kind professionals in conservation. Serving America's Longleaf on behalf of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership has strengthened my belief that the longleaf community is not just restoring a forest. It is stewarding a legacy.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. I look forward to continuing this work with you all, united by our shared commitment to the longleaf pine and the landscapes, wildlife, and people it sustains.

## Local Implementation Teams within the Historical Range of Longleaf Pine



By Sarah Crate, The Longleaf Alliance

# The North Carolina Longleaf Coalition celebrates 15 Years of Conservation Collaboration

In 2025, the North Carolina Longleaf Coalition proudly marked its 15th anniversary. This milestone that reflects a decade and a half of dedicated work to restore and protect one of the state's most iconic ecosystems: the longleaf pine forest.



## A Legacy Rooted in Range-Wide Restoration

Formed in 2010, the Coalition was born out of a growing movement to revive North Carolina's longleaf pine ecosystem, which once covered nearly half the state. Inspired by the launch of the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative in 2009 and sparked by Susan Miller's Natural Resources Leadership Institute (NRLI) project, the Longleaf Coalition united a diverse network of stakeholders—from state and federal agencies to nonprofits, academics, and private landowners—to provide strategic leadership and support local restoration efforts across the state's historic longleaf range.

The NC Longleaf Coalition is unique in that it was the first state coordinating group focused on longleaf restoration and is the only state-level team with multiple longleaf local implementation teams in the landscape. Collaborating with the North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership, the Onslow Bight Conservation Forum, and the Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaboration, the Coalition provides a state-wide perspective that allows partners to pursue particular topics and coordinate efforts beyond local implementation team boundaries. The group is led by two co-chairs (Susan Miller, USDA Forest Service, and the North Carolina Forest Service's Longleaf Program Coordinator, Casey Wofford), alongside a steering committee.

## Outreach and Resources for Landowners

Central to the Coalition's mission is empowering landowners with the tools and knowledge to sustainably manage longleaf

pine. With support from the North Carolina Forest Service, the Coalition maintains a robust online resource hub at [www.nclongleaf.org](http://www.nclongleaf.org), where visitors can access management guides, technical assistance contacts, and financial assistance programs. These resources offer support and guidance on silviculture, prescribed burning, understory management, and reforestation strategies to both new and experienced landowners.

## Honoring Stewardship: The NC Longleaf Honor Roll

One of the Coalition's most impactful initiatives is the North Carolina Longleaf Honor Roll, a recognition program that celebrates exemplary landowners who actively manage their longleaf pine stands. To qualify, landowners must have a current forest management plan and demonstrate a commitment to prescribed fire—an essential tool for maintaining the longleaf ecosystem. Additional criteria include responsible pine straw harvesting practices and restoration efforts for young and mature stands.

The Honor Roll not only acknowledges individual stewardship but also serves as a powerful outreach tool, inspiring neighboring landowners to adopt similar practices. Honorees are featured in an ArcGIS StoryMap, showcasing their contributions to North Carolina's conservation legacy.

## Recognizing Excellence: The Illustris Palustris Award

Since 2013, the Illustris Palustris Award has stood as the North Carolina Longleaf Coalition's highest honor, recognizing individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the conservation and restoration of the state's longleaf pine ecosystem. Named after the scientific name for longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), this award celebrates those who go "above and beyond" in their leadership, advocacy, and outreach efforts.

Each year, the Coalition presents the award during a special event, honoring recipients with a certificate and inclusion on the symbolic Illustris Palustris Pine Cone Award. Past honorees include professionals from state and federal agencies, private landowners, and conservation advocates whose work has significantly advanced longleaf restoration in North Carolina.

**Looking Ahead**

As the Coalition celebrates 15 years of progress, it remains steadfast in its mission to restore longleaf pine across North Carolina. With continued collaboration, education, and recognition of outstanding stewardship, the Coalition is helping

ensure that future generations will inherit a landscape rich in ecological, cultural, and economic value.

**Here’s to the land of the longleaf pine—and to the people working tirelessly to bring it back.**



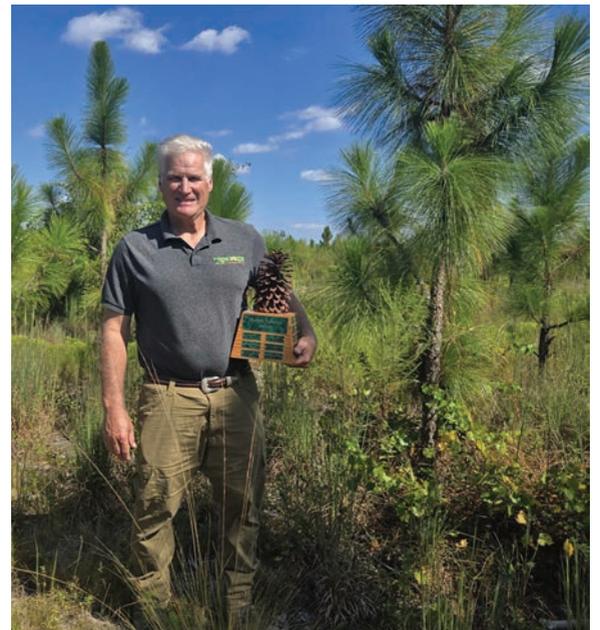
▲ 2011 NC Longleaf Coalition Steering Committee members and ex-officio members; (from left) Fred Cubbage, Jim Gray, Barry New, Bill Pickens, Ryan Elting, Susan Miller, Lee Thornhill, Lark Hayes, Paul Friday, Victoria Cortes Tillotson, Issaac Harold, and Bill Ross.

◀ Representatives of the NC Longleaf Coalition met with Michael Raines to recognize his and his brother Matthew’s outstanding efforts in restoring longleaf habitat on their property. Through prescribed fire, seedling planting, and collaboration with conservation partners, Michael has fostered a thriving ecosystem that benefits native wildlife and supports a diverse understory. [Jones County, North Carolina; 2023]

▶ The NC Longleaf Coalition spreads the word about longleaf pine at festivals and educational events with interactive displays, brochures, and giveaways like these buttons to promote the state’s online longleaf hub at [nclongleaf.org](http://nclongleaf.org). [Fire in the Pines Festival, The Nature Conservancy].



▶ Most recent Illustris Palustris honoree David Halley, President and Owner of True North Management Services; Dave is a registered forester assisting landowners with longleaf and groundcover restoration projects, a NC Longleaf Honor Roll committee member and ambassador, and a certified facilitator who guided the initial discussion on the formation of the NC Longleaf Coalition in 2010.



## Florida Panhandle Landowner Assistance Expo a Tremendous Success

By Vernon Compton, GCPEP Director, The Longleaf Alliance

FLORIDA



Emma McKee presenting on Invasive Species Awareness at the Florida Panhandle Landowner Assistance Expo. [Kelsey Bernard, FWC]

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) hosted a Florida Panhandle Landowner Assistance Expo at the Walton County Fairgrounds in DeFuniak Springs, Florida, in August 2025. Ed O'Daniels, Private Lands Biologist with FWC, led the effort, bringing partners together to exchange information on technical assistance, cost-share opportunities, conservation easements, habitat management plans, prescribed fire, wildlife management, and the financial implications of each program. Partners, including FWC, Florida Forest Service, University of Florida/IFAS Extension, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Florida, Northwest Florida Prescribed Burn Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Women's Landowner Association, were on hand to provide landowners with one-on-one assistance.

A panel of five landowners and a land manager also provided a private lands perspective, sharing lessons learned. Over 425 people attended the event, including hundreds of private landowners. Ad Platt, Emma McKee, and Joel Lett from The Longleaf Alliance assisted in the areas of forestry, fire, and invasives. Emma, The Longleaf Alliance Invasive Species Coordinator, presented a program on identifying and treating invasive species. As a result, a number of landowners signed up for follow-up discussions and field reviews related to their land to ensure long-term control of invasive species as a part of their land management plans. It is exciting to see so many organizations working together to better support private landowners with management and restoration objectives for their lands.

## Strategic Longleaf Pine Restoration in West-Central Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership (WLEP)

By Bill Bartush, Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture

LOUISIANA



Bachman's Sparrow singing in restored longleaf habitat [James Childress]

During the summer and fall of 2025, the West-Central Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership initiated an effort to expand longleaf pine restoration and species recovery on private lands through prescribed burning to benefit at-risk species like the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, and Louisiana pine snake. In August, the WLEP Steering Committee gathered for its first in-person meeting in several years, hosted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Going forward, Bill Bartush of the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture has assumed the coordinator role from Dan Weber of The Nature Conservancy. The Steering Committee also welcomed the inclusion of John McGuire and Kyle Carrington from Tall Timbers, both of whom participated in our August and October meetings and initiated a process to retain a Prescribed Fire Coordinator.

Unique to WLEP, a pilot Grassland Bird Working Group was formed to address population declines and set a path for species recovery in the Louisiana longleaf pine geography. The American Bird Conservancy, through the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture West Gulf Coastal Plain (Avian Ecologist, Janine Antalffy; Conservation Delivery Coordinator, Austin Klais; and Southeast Director of Forest Partnerships, EJ Williams), worked with partners across Louisiana during in-person and virtual meetings among forest landowners, private landowners, conservation land manager specialists, and partnerships that include the Arkansas-Louisiana West Gulf Coastal Plain Conservation Delivery Network and WLEP, to initiate actions such as: connecting with over 30 landowners; drafting a private lands agreement template; establishing a range-wide **Bachman's Sparrow Working Group**; initiating a **Bachman's Sparrow priority map**; and completing interviews for the **Prescribed Burn Association Coordinator** position.

## Aiken Land Conservancy and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Add to Local Heritage Preserve

By Jennie Haskell, *The Longleaf Alliance*

**SOUTH CAROLINA**



Peter Kleinhenz, Executive Director of the Aiken Land Conservancy, describes the process of purchasing and protecting the Korn Tract with the help of conservation partners. [Ryne Huggins]

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) and conservation partners celebrated the dedication of the Korn Tract to the Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve in Aiken County, South Carolina, in October 2025. This 302-acre addition expands the Preserve to more than 2,000 acres.

Thanks to the thoughtful stewardship of the Korn family, wiregrass still forms a dense groundcover beneath longleaf pines. Other native grasses, milkweed species, and an array of native wildflowers flourish on-site. These native plants, in turn, form the basis of an intact sandhill ecosystem home to rare species such as Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Eastern coral snakes, and even a small population of state-endangered gopher tortoises. Pond Branch, a tributary of the South Fork of the Edisto River, flows along 1.5 miles of the Korn Tract.

Mr. Korn listed the property for sale in late 2023. SCDNR wanted the property to expand the Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve but could not move quickly enough to secure it on the open market. Aiken Land Conservancy stepped in to protect the property from other uses that might impair its ecological value. With funding from the South Carolina Conservation Bank and the Lowcountry Land Trust's Land Protection Capacity Fund, the Conservancy purchased the property in mid-2024.

"This project represents partnership in its truest and most successful form," states Peter Kleinhenz, Aiken Land Conservancy's Executive Director. "During every step of this project, Aiken Land Conservancy's partners stepped up to help move this project across the finish line. Those partners range from individuals to organizations, but each had a role to play in conserving one of the most ecologically important unprotected properties remaining in Aiken County."

SCDNR land managers will soon begin implementing proactive land management measures, such as prescribed fire, to further enhance the habitats on the property. Eventually, the Korn Tract will be opened to the public for recreational use such as wildlife viewing, horseback riding, and hunting.

## Successful 2025 Longleaf Seed Collections in South Carolina

By Jennie Haskell, *The Longleaf Alliance*

**SOUTH CAROLINA**



Local forest and regional staff and partners are excited to contribute to creating future longleaf forests by collecting cones to send to the seed extractory for processing. [Marcus Warwell]

Despite environmental and equipment challenges and a government shutdown, the USDA Forest Service (USFS) harvested longleaf pine cones in South Carolina for future reforestation projects.

The 2025 *Longleaf Pine Cone Prospects* report projected the year's crop to be very limited based on the sampled sites across the longleaf range. This forecast was a big concern in the SoLo-ACE Longleaf Partnership because the USFS-Savannah River had not collected cones from its designated seed projection areas for several years, and the stored seed quantity was low. Typically, USFS-SR collects longleaf pine cones every year to ensure adequate seed from a known seed source for plantings on the Savannah River Site, but hurricane season impacted efforts the last few years. In 2024, Hurricane Helene blew over 60% of the trees in the seed production area, limiting access.

When the USFS tree shaker malfunctioned after shaking only five trees, the USFS-SR was concerned about fulfilling its goals. Luckily, The Longleaf Alliance was able to locate a local contractor with the right equipment to continue the collection process, allowing USFS-SR to achieve its goal.

Additionally, the Francis Marion National Forest harvested longleaf pine cones from its Seed Orchard in the Sewee Longleaf Conservation Cooperative even during a low production year with help from local and regional Forest Service staff and partners to meet their goals. This was a great accomplishment as this was the first time harvesting cones at this seed orchard in over thirty years.

## Connecting Landowners and Forests: Texas A&M Forest Service Honored for Outstanding Outreach

By Courtney McInerney, The Texas Longleaf Team

TEXAS



Joel Hambright and the Texas A&M Forest Service were honored as Communicator of the Year at the 2025 Texas Forestry Association Annual Conference. [Texas Forestry Association]

In 2025, the Texas A&M Forest Service demonstrated its strong commitment to land stewardship by hosting ten landowner workshops across the state, reaching more than 750 attendees. These workshops provided an invaluable opportunity for private landowners to learn from forestry and conservation professionals about managing and sustaining their lands for future generations.

Participants engaged with presentations on a range of critical topics, including forest management planning, wildlife habitat enhancement, timber tax valuations and exemptions, longleaf pine restoration, forest health, wildfire preparedness, prescribed fire, and cost-share programs designed to support active forest management.

The Texas Longleaf Team contributed to eight of the ten workshops, sharing the ecological story of the longleaf pine—a legacy species once dominant across the Southeast—and the vital role that fire plays in maintaining its unique ecosystem. Through these sessions, many landowners were introduced to the benefits of

restoring longleaf pine forests, from improved wildlife habitat to enhanced ecosystem resilience, for the first time.

In recognition of these exceptional outreach efforts, the Texas Forestry Association honored the Texas A&M Forest Service as Communicator of the Year. This award highlights the agency’s outstanding contributions to forest sustainability and education, as well as its success in connecting new landowners with the tools, knowledge, and resources needed to manage their land effectively.

Together, these efforts continue to grow a culture of stewardship and sustainability across Texas forests.

## Two Key Conferences Highlight Fire and Forest Management in the Southeast

This past November and December were busy months for professionals dedicated to forest restoration and fire ecology in the Southeast. Two important events brought together experts, practitioners, and advocates to share knowledge and strengthen partnerships.

The Shortleaf Pine Conference, held in November at Lake Guntersville State Park, Alabama, welcomed approximately 175 attendees focused on restoring and managing shortleaf pine ecosystems. Carol Denhof, President of The Longleaf Alliance, delivered an engaging presentation that emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts in pine restoration. The Longleaf Alliance team also exhibited at the event, featuring the ever-popular Burner Bob®, who helped spark conversations about prescribed fire and its role in healthy forests.



Carol Denhof presenting at the 6th Biennial Shortleaf Pine Conference [Ryan Bollinger]

In December, the Association of Fire Ecology’s Fire Congress convened in New Orleans, attracting a diverse audience of fire practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. This dynamic event included a Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) takeover, showcasing grassroots efforts to expand the use of prescribed fire across landscapes. Beyond the technical sessions, attendees enjoyed a lively social dance where Burner Bob® stole the show joining in the “Cha-Cha Slide,” proving that fire education can be both informative and fun.

Both conferences underscored the growing momentum behind fire ecology and forest restoration in the Southeast. From science-based presentations to creative outreach, these gatherings highlighted the power of collaboration and community engagement in advancing conservation goals.



# Wildlife & Wild Foods:

## Help your forest friends find their favorite foods!

By Karen Z. Brown, *The Longleaf Alliance*

This interactive game is DIY-friendly, customizable to your species of interest, and perfect for outreach events! The goal is to demonstrate the connections between wildlife in the longleaf pine ecosystem and the native plants they rely on for food.



### MATERIALS

- ▶ Set of small bowls or baskets
- ▶ Laminated **wildlife cards** (recommend starting with three species)
  - Front: photo of an animal
  - Back: list the plant species they consume
- ▶ Laminated **plant cards** (include at least three plant foods for each animal)
  - Front: photo of plant species or plant family
  - Back: list the wildlife that eat them
  - Place a small fire icon 🔥 for **fire-dependent** or **fire-tolerant species**.

### GAME PLAY

1. Place one wildlife card in each basket; arrange the plant cards in front so only the photos are visible.
2. Invite visitors to feed the **plant cards** to the **wildlife species** by placing them in the appropriate basket.
3. Let players take their time — it's okay if they're unsure! The activity encourages observation, reasoning, and curiosity.
4. Remember, depending on the species that you use, there can be multiple correct combinations.

### INTERPRETATION & LEARNING

*Once players have made their guesses:*

Flip over the wildlife cards and compare the plant species listed as their food sources to the visitors' guesses in each bowl. Review the correct matches and redirect any misplaced plant cards.

For plant cards with the fire icon 🔥 on the back, use the opportunity to discuss how frequent, low-intensity fire maintains a healthy longleaf ecosystem — not just to benefit plants but also the wildlife that depend on them.

Visitors may be surprised to discover how many species rely on regularly burned habitats. This is a great connection to make at prescribed fire festivals!

*For an added layer, use this game as a springboard to talk about:*

- Each species' role in the ecosystem
- Surprising or unique dietary connections
- How fire during different seasons drives the availability of these foods in longleaf habitats

Pumpkin Spice was named for its unusual bright orange coloring.

# Pumpkin Spice and the Power of Partnership: Story of a Georgia Gopher Tortoise



A.



B.



C.

A. Shan Cammack assists with releasing headstarted gopher tortoises into a longleaf pine sandhill managed with prescribed fire. B. Gopher tortoise hatchling. C. Berkeley Boone explains Pumpkin Spice's role as an outreach animal at the Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center.

In the new short documentary, *A Tortoise Called Pumpkin Spice*, viewers meet a tiny survivor with a big mission.

Hatched from the egg of a female gopher tortoise tragically killed by a vehicle, Pumpkin Spice was the sole hatchling to emerge and thrive under the care of Georgia wildlife experts. Today, Pumpkin Spice is not just a juvenile tortoise but an ambassador for one of the Southeast's imperiled species.

## From Hatchling to Headstart Hero

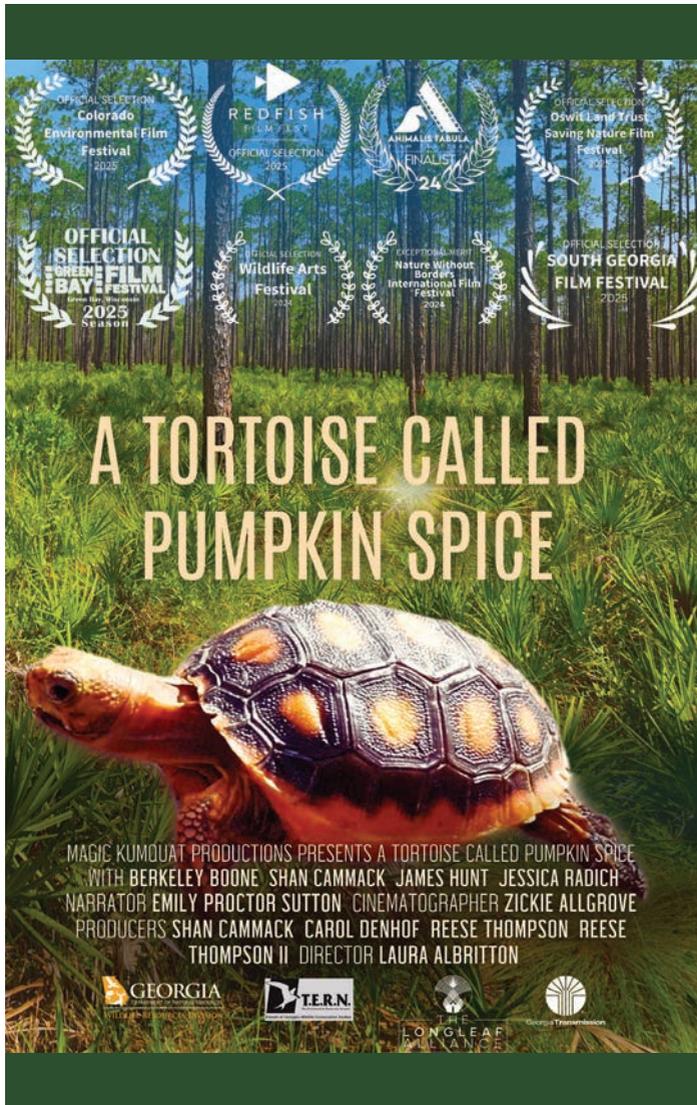
*A Tortoise Called Pumpkin Spice* digs into the young turtle's history — hatched by the Georgia Sea Turtle Center, the only viable egg of eight from a mom fatally struck by a car, raised at the University of Georgia's Coastal Ecology Lab, and now serving as an outreach animal at the Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center in Mansfield, Georgia.

The film also follows biologists from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (Berkeley Boone, James Hunt, and Shan Cammack) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Jessica Radich, who coordinates raising tortoises at Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery, as they release headstarted tortoises into the wild, monitor burrows, and restore longleaf pine ecosystems.

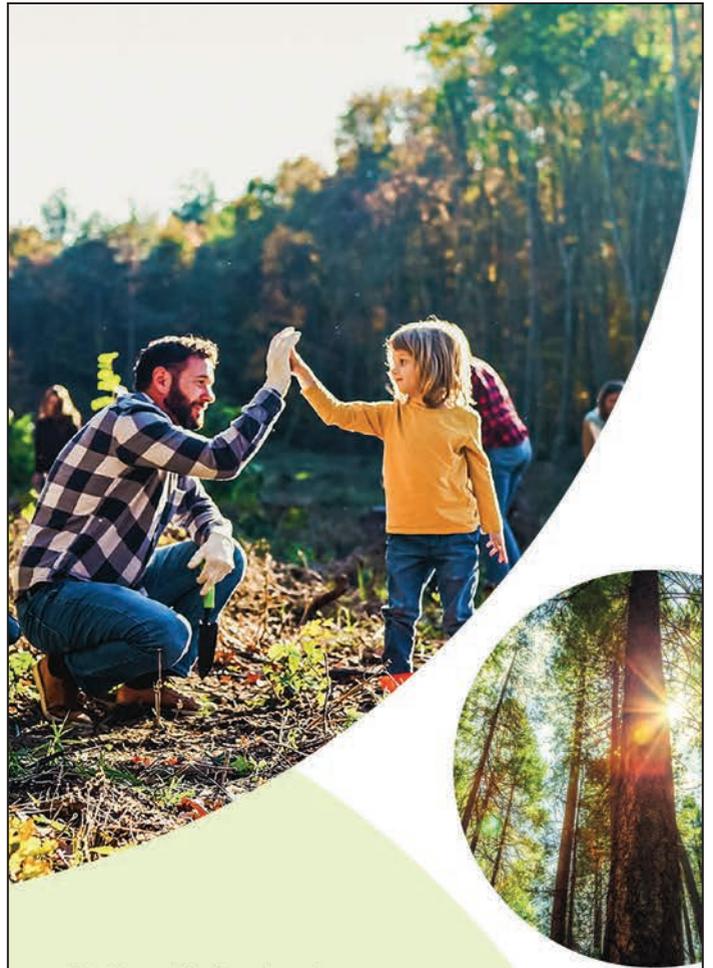
Discover Pumpkin Spice's story  
and be inspired by what's  
possible when people come  
together for conservation.



Pumpkin Spice's journey, from a rescued egg to a thriving juvenile, mirrors the broader conservation strategy that Georgia has embraced. In September 2025, the Georgia Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative announced it had reached its ambitious goal: **permanently protecting 65 viable gopher tortoise populations** across the state. This achievement is the result of a decade of collaboration among nearly 30 partners, including state and federal agencies, nonprofits, private landowners, and conservation foundations. Their efforts helped keep Georgia's state reptile off the federal Endangered Species Act list and preserved 100,000 acres of longleaf pine habitat on which it depends.



*A Tortoise Called Pumpkin Spice* is a film by *Magic Kumquat Productions*, directed by Laura Albritton with videography by Zickie Allgrove. Featuring Berkeley Boone, Shan Cammack, James Hunt, and Jessica Radich. Narrated by Emily Proctor Sutton. Produced by Shan Cammack, Carol Denhof, Reese Thompson, and Reese Thompson II. Made with support from The Environmental Resources Network (TERN) and assistance from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Division and The Longleaf Alliance.



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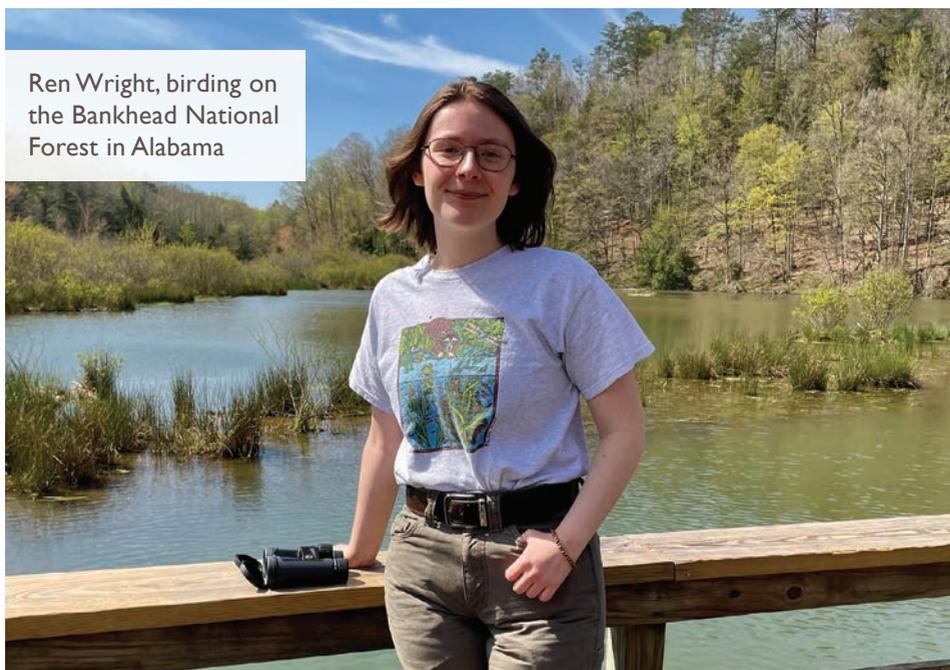
# CONSERVATION THROUGH ART

## REN WRIGHT

As a self-taught artist raised in rural Alabama, I've always been inspired by the complex ecosystems found all around us. From moving turtles across the road as a child to drafting reintroduction plans for extirpated species as a young professional, I have always found my meaning in conservation work. Currently, I am an endangered species biologist on a team focused on restoring fire-adapted ecosystems on the

Conecuh National Forest, in the heart of the Coastal Plain of Alabama.

Spending every day surrounded by the incredible diversity of our wild places is my greatest inspiration, and I am passionate about using artwork to inspire the public to care about the nature that surrounds us.



Ren Wright, birding on the Bankhead National Forest in Alabama



Commissioned artwork for the upcoming West Florida Fire & Nature Festival on March 7, 2026

Connect with Ren at [www.wrenillustrated.com](http://www.wrenillustrated.com)  
or via email at [wrenillustrated@gmail.com](mailto:wrenillustrated@gmail.com).



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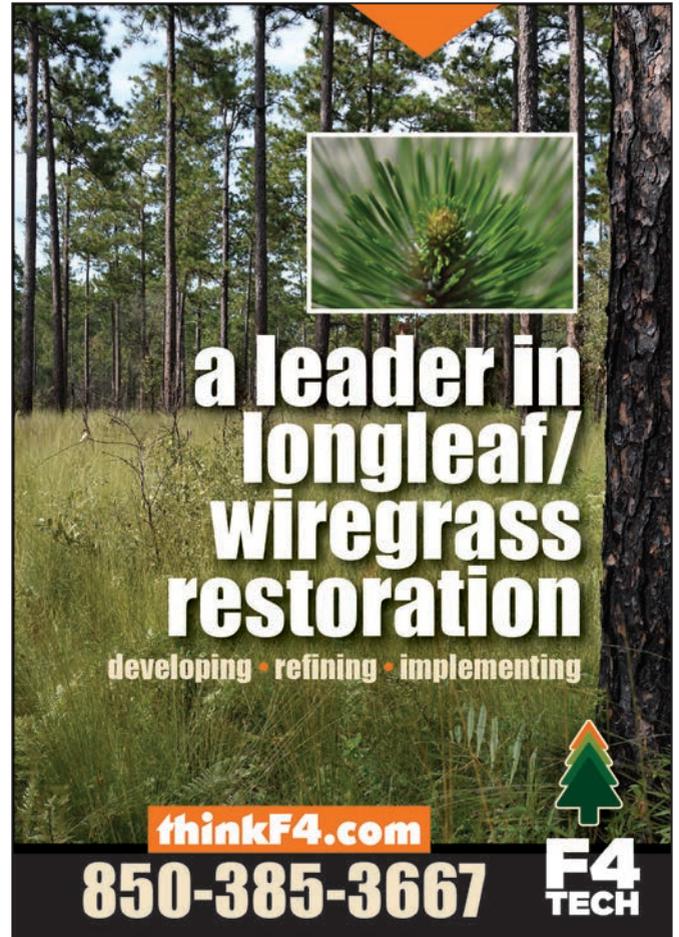
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## Homesick Alabama Quakers and the Pines of Monteverde

By Chuck Roe, Southern Conservation Partners



In early 2020, before the coronavirus pandemic interrupted international travel, my wife, Charlotte, and I concluded our explorations of Costa Rica’s marvelously diverse natural wonders with a visit to the high-elevation cloud forest reserves in the vicinity of the contiguous communities of Monteverde and Santa Elena. Immediately after arriving and reaching the nearby El Bosque Eco-Lodge, we enjoyed lunch in a small coffee shop next to CASEM (Cooperativa de Artesanas de Santa Elena y Monteverde), a local women’s artisans cooperative. We surprised the proprietor by excitedly pointing and asking about the pine trees we spied out of his back window. We knew *Pinus* is not native to Costa Rica, and these specimens looked very familiar to the South’s iconic longleaf pine. Much to our surprise, only a short walk beyond this historic village was a whole stand of mature pines covering several roadside acres near the upper entrance to the Children’s Eternal Rainforest (Bosque Eterno des los Ninos, a 22,000+ acre reserve).

Upon closer examination of the needles and canopy, we suspected these were indeed longleaf pines! However, no pine cones were available to confirm our identification. We asked our local naturalist guide who indicated these were “longleaf” pine. However, that is the challenge with common names—they are often applied to multiple species, and in our case, we were navigating both English and Spanish terminology.

According to local accounts, these “longleaf” pines were planted in the early 1950s by the Quaker pacifists who founded Monteverde after fleeing their homes near Fairhope, Alabama, to avoid threatened imprisonment of their young men for declining to be drafted into Korean War military service. The settlers planted several hundred, now mature, pines as reminders of home and the native trees of their Alabama legacy.

So, the question is – **did homesick Alabamians bring longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) with them when they put down their roots in the cloud forests of Costa Rica?** Or

did they plant a longleaf-look-alike as a visual connection to home? We encourage a longleaf pro to visit and help us confirm the species identity while you sample the natural treasures of Costa Rica’s Monteverde cloud forests.

### A Word of Caution from The Longleaf Alliance

While The Longleaf Alliance does not recommend planting longleaf pine beyond the natural range, we know it has been moved to many places around the world by people who admire it. We’ve heard reports of longleaf planted on the West Coast, South Africa, Turkey, etc., but this unusual “longleaf” pine sighting by Chuck and Charlotte Roe potentially takes the tree’s scope to South America – a noteworthy story that we thought our supporters would appreciate reading.

We are often asked by interested parties on the periphery of the longleaf range, “Can I grow longleaf here?” Sometimes the answer is “maybe” with many caveats as to the tree’s suitability for the soils, site conditions, climate, and personal motivations. When “experimenting” with planting species in new settings, there is always a risk that it will do poorly and the effort will be wasted, but more importantly, there is also a risk that the species will thrive with unintended consequences. Any land steward knows that the South has been at the receiving end of many takeovers by non-native species.

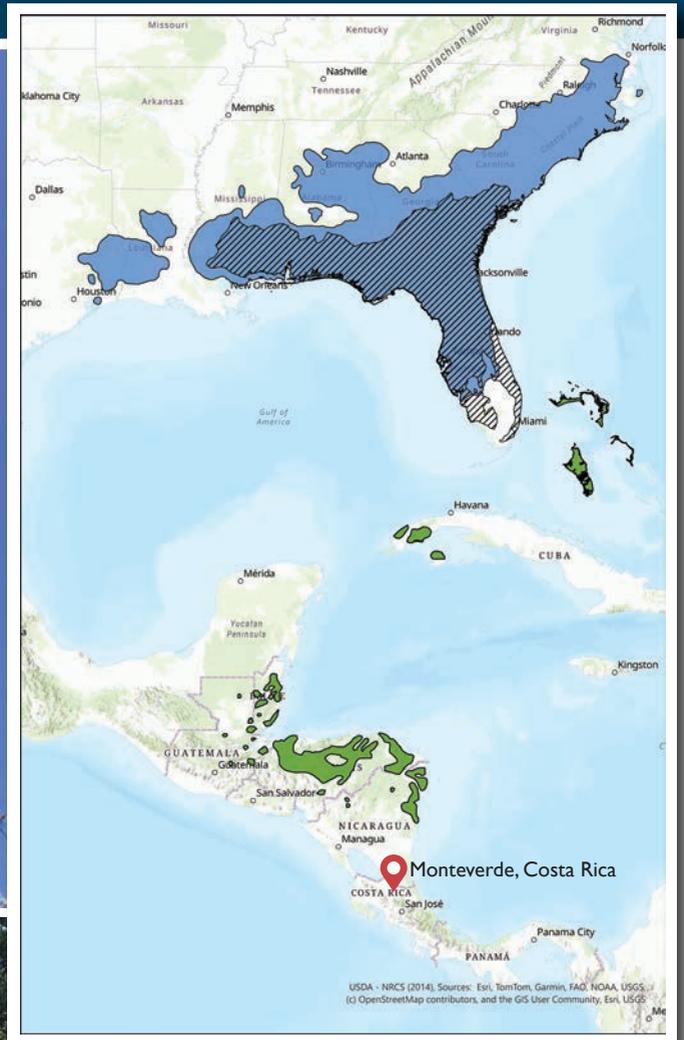
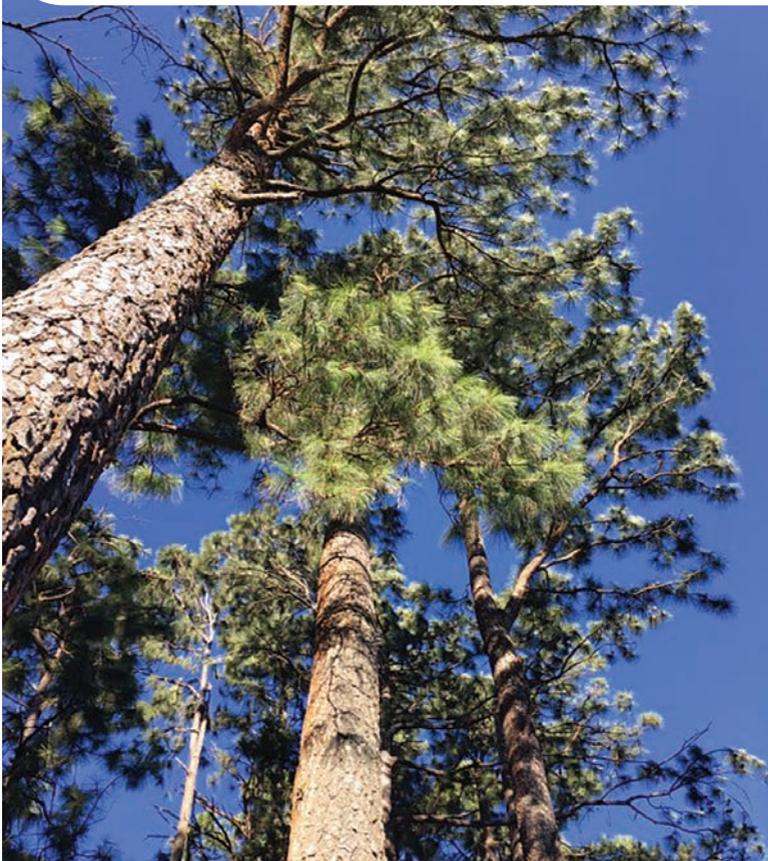
The Roes did not observe any indicators that the “longleaf” pine had naturalized in Costa Rica. Many times species moved beyond their natural ranges experience altered phenology from the drastic climactic change and are unable to successfully reproduce. Species moved to similar climates in far distant regions that are able to propagate themselves can become quite invasive, freed from their natural enemies.

**Our message remains that we don’t recommend it, but we know it happens.**

## SIMILAR SOUTHERN PINE SPECIES

Accurately distinguishing closely related plant species can sometimes be challenging without observing all stages of their growth cycle. In the southeastern U.S., the *Elliottii* clade of the *Pinus* genus (think of a clade as a branch from a phylogenetic or “family” tree) includes three species: *Pinus palustris* (longleaf pine), *Pinus elliottii* (slash pine), and *Pinus densa* (South Florida slash pine). Taxonomic studies indicate that three Caribbean species are also a part of this group: *Pinus occidentalis* and *Pinus cubensis* occur in Cuba and Hispaniola with *Pinus caribaea* (Caribbean pine) extending into Central America.

Caribbean pine closely resembles slash pine, which itself shares overlapping traits with longleaf pine, making identification even more complex. Notably, Caribbean pine has the southernmost native range of any American pine, extending naturally as far as Nicaragua. All three species—longleaf, slash, and Caribbean pine—have been widely introduced outside their native ranges for timber production.



Native ranges of longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris* in blue), slash pine (*Pinus elliottii* and *Pinus densa* represented together with black hatches), and Caribbean pine (*Pinus caribaea* in green) according to the *Atlas of United States Trees* (Little, 1971) and *Geographic Distribution of the Pines of the World* (Critchfield, et al., 1966). Note: this map is missing some known occurrences as our taxonomic and geographic understanding of these species has expanded over time. [Map by Jessie Jordan]

# CELEBRATING LEADERSHIP

## Ad Platt Begins a New Chapter



**Ad Platt** stepped down from the Vice President of Operations role, effective December 31st, but will continue to support the work of The Alliance and all of our staff part-time in 2026.

“It has been a hard decision to even think about, as I love The Longleaf Alliance and am very proud of what we have accomplished together with so many partners and landowners. It has been my great honor and satisfaction to be part of this organization’s growth and development over the past 14.5 years. But we have been planning for this eventuality for some time, and I am confident The Alliance is in strong and capable hands, and grateful for the opportunity to continue in a mentoring and coaching role part-time as I personally adjust to this change in life and work.”

Ad hopes to ease into an active retirement and expects to find ways to continue supporting the mission of The Alliance, as together we help ensure a better future for the most incredibly diverse and beneficial ecosystem of the South. We are so grateful for Ad’s time, expertise, and passion that he has shared (and will continue to share) with The Longleaf Alliance and the longleaf community.

## Lisa Lord Steps into Vice President of Operations Role

We are happy to announce that **Lisa Lord** has assumed the role of Vice President for Operations at The Longleaf Alliance as of January 1, 2026. With over eight years at The Alliance, Lisa brings exceptional leadership and expertise in longleaf pine restoration, program development, and partnerships—skills that will advance our mission to sustain longleaf ecosystems through landowner support, habitat protection, and collaborative conservation.

As Conservation Programs Director, Lisa led initiatives to advance longleaf forest restoration and conservation by expanding market opportunities for longleaf pine, developing programs that enhance forest health and resilience, and working with partners to recover wildlife populations. In her new role, Lisa will continue this vital work while also leading The Alliance’s operational strategy to ensure efficient program delivery and drive organizational growth.

Lisa holds a B.S. in Wildlife Science and M.Ed. from Auburn University and an M.S. in Wildlife & Fisheries Biology from Clemson University. A Certified Wildlife Biologist since 2013, she has been recognized for her innovative work in conservation. Her leadership promises to advance The Alliance’s impact and operational excellence.



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**Kelly Petersen**

**2022-2024 Award Recipient**

Using advanced genomic techniques on tissue samples from old-growth longleaf pine trees, Kelly will characterize molecular genetic diversity and population differentiation across the species range to inform restoration and conservation efforts.

*Ph.D. Student in Ecology  
at the University of Georgia*



**Ian Warr**

**2024-2026 Award Recipient**

Ian's research aims to unravel poorly understood physiological processes in longleaf pine, specifically the role of below ground non-structural carbohydrate (NSC) reserves in its early life history stages.

*Graduate Student in  
Forestry & Natural Resources  
at the University of Georgia*

**Applications Accepted**

**September 1, 2025 - January 23, 2026**

Past Recipients and Award Details at  
[Longleafalliance.org](https://longleafalliance.org) > Education & Outreach

By Lynnsey Basala, *The Longleaf Alliance*

## You Are Fueling Meaningful Change

Membership support is our lifeblood, keeping everything in motion. Without it, we would be unable to grow awareness, increase engagement, and foster a love for longleaf across its range; share information through education, outreach, and technical assistance; improve habitat via active stewardship by our teams; conserve existing diverse forests; and restore new longleaf acres.

Our supporters and conservation partners enable our highly skilled staff to develop and expand programs and services, network with like-minded individuals and groups, fund longleaf research, and offer a sense of belonging and solidarity for those with an affinity for the natural world. Our high supporter retention shows just how serious you are about this iconic forest.



We are in this together,  
and we thank you.

## 2025 Supporters

This list of our 2025 supporters contains those who contributed monetary or in-kind goods between October 1, 2024, and October 1, 2025. Every single donation received, regardless of the amount, was accepted with gratitude and enthusiasm.

*The Longleaf Alliance is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Contributions are tax-deductible as allowed by law.*

### Members of The Longleaf Alliance's Palustris Society

The Palustris Society was founded by several members of The Longleaf Alliance Board of Directors to further the legacy Rhett Johnson and Dean Gjerstad created to protect and restore longleaf forestlands. Since its inception in 2015, thirty-six members representing nine states across the longleaf range have joined this elite group of dedicated conservationists who share a dream of restored and viable working longleaf forests. Members pledge \$10,000 or more to The Longleaf Alliance to be paid over a period of up to five years.

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### \$10,000 Level

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### \$5,000 Level

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Domtar Paper Co., LLC  
Fram Renewable Fuels, LLC  
Suzano Packaging, LLC

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Molpus Woodlands Group, LLC

New-Indy Catawba, LLC  
Pro-Serve, Inc.  
Roundstone Native Seed, LLC

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Cohasset Farm, LLC  
Flowing Well, LLC  
Hood Industries, Inc.  
Little Thomas, LLC  
LJR Forest Products  
Merrily Plantation, Inc.  
Norman Plantation, LLC  
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### \$250 Level

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Broadwell Brothers, LLC  
Cheeha Combahee Plantation  
Crest Natural Resources, LLC  
Crowell Forest Resources, LLC  
Dargan, King & Knight, LLC  
JB Group, LLC  
Jenkins Timber Properties, LLC  
Long Leaf Land & Timber, LLC  
Longwood Land Management, LLC  
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Varn Wood Products, LLC  
We-Do-It, Inc.  
Windy Ridge Longleaf, LLC

### \$200-\$100 Level

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Bankhead Land & Timber  
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Black Mingo Plantation, LLC  
Bradley Pine Farms, LLC  
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SLOWLY,  
BUT SURELY,  
YOU ARE  
BEGINNING  
TO SEE:  
IT IS NOT  
TOO  
LATE  
TO EMBRACE  
THE POSSIBILITY OF  
WHO YOU COULD BE.

### A Note from Author & Artist Morgan Harper Nichols

This poem was written from a place that has shaped me deeply. I grew up in Georgia and live here now, so this is where I first encountered longleaf pines up close. I have so many memories of driving by rows of them on long drives.

What has also stood out to me about them is how they grow in their early years, how they stay low to the ground for a long time while their taproot develops, and how they hold more potential than anyone might guess from their small size. As an artist and poet, I see something human in that, too. We also have seasons when our growth feels slow or unclear, even though important things are forming within us.

I spent a lot of time paying attention to the details of longleaf pines, and from that slow process, the artwork and the words eventually came together. I hoped to create something that shows how growth can be quiet, how emergence can take time, and how a life can still be forming long before we recognize its full shape.



By Morgan Harper Nichols

# The Longleaf Pine (in its early years), a poem:

There are parts of who you are  
that you may believe  
only exist in fragments:  
a taproot growing straight down  
clustered needles staying low, close to the ground...  
as if they belong to different timelines.  
And in each of those timelines,  
no one told you how long emergence would take.

But as the years go on,  
somehow, you still end up rising  
from the forest floor,  
even without yet knowing  
how your new shape will hold.

Slowly but surely,  
the sky stretches wide above you  
and everything within you begins to see:

it is not too late to embrace  
the possibility of who you could be.

Your ground-held green,  
nearly-hidden bud,  
and relentless root...  
all unfold in ways

that have mystified you  
with timing  
that feels too hard to trust  
and too far out of your control.

But somehow,  
through it all,  
a full tree still forms,  
and all of this  
is a part of the whole.

You are still whole.

Getting to this point in your life  
has taken so long that you might  
not even recognize  
who you have become so far, along the way,  
but perhaps, that is okay,  
for time did not erase meaning.  
The years did not take away the depth.  
All along, you were still becoming,  
and the story is not finished yet.

Notice all that grows tall and strong around you.  
Dare to be seen, beyond the fear.  
For even at this stage, you belong here.

---

Morgan Harper Nichols is an artist, author, and PhD student in Communication Studies at the University of Georgia. Her work explores interactive storytelling, worldbuilding, and game-inspired narrative structures to create spaces for meaning-making. She holds an MFA in Interdisciplinary Media Arts from Lindenwood University. Diagnosed with autism, ADHD, and sensory processing disorder in her early 30s, Nichols integrates these experiences into her art, writing, and research across a range of digital and print media, including her bestselling book, *All Along You Were Blooming*, an online shop, *Garden24*, and the app *Storyteller*.

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