



THE
LONGLEAF
LEADER

DIVERSITY

*Chris Irwin, right,
with Salem Saloom*

News from the Longleaf Partnership Council

*By Chris Irwin, American Forest Foundation,
Longleaf Partnership Council Chair*

A new journey is best begun by reflecting on from where we have come.

Raised in the wiregrass region, hiking and camping came naturally to me, but it took a lot of work and guidance to find my way here. I was heartened to hear from Carol Denhof, the value she places on mentorship, and would like to take a moment to honor a few mentors in my life with longleaf.

While serving in the U.S. Air Force in Alaska, it became clear that my career path would involve the natural sciences. While home on leave, my mother recommended setting up an appointment with Dr. Lindsay Boring at the Jones Ecological Research Center. She knew my passion and knew Dr. Boring could help me find focus. He spent an afternoon with me in the woods, answering questions, and more importantly, highlighting all the questions yet to be answered and challenging me to be part of the solution.

Entering graduate school at Auburn University's School of Forestry required a summer at the Solon Dixon Center near Andalusia, Alabama. The purpose was to ensure I truly appreciated the South Alabama heat, snakes, and mosquitoes before investing tens of thousands of dollars in my education. This was no issue for me; however, being a newlywed and spending the first ten weeks of my "honeymoon" in the woods with fifty strangers did present a challenge. As my commitment wavered, Rhett Johnson and Dean Gjerstad spent an evening with me opening my eyes and capturing my imagination to the possibility of having a purpose in life that was greater than a 9-to-5 existence. I never looked back and have no regrets.

The Longleaf Leader

It is easy to remember where, when, and how I met many people in my life. But for Salem Saloom, it is as if he has always been there. Always encouraging. I first visited his and Dianne's farm while conducting a Tree Farm certification. I was struck by his passion, knowledge, and work ethic. His pride in the farm was apparent. Then Hurricane Ivan hit, and he and Dianne lost nearly half their farm. It could have broken him, body and spirit. But it didn't, and he rebuilt his farm, smarter and stronger. It was then that I truly appreciated what landowners do for society and in many ways goes unrecognized.

Jonathan Scott, with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and I have spent the last four years working on increasing capacity to engage family forest owners in longleaf restoration across the range. We supported projects across eleven landscapes at the intersection of family-owned lands, at-risk wildlife, and the demand for wood and fiber for products. By most measures, we were very successful. I will be forever grateful for the time we've had together conducting some of the most meaningful work of my career.

As I take the responsibility of chairing the Longleaf Partnership Council this year, it is with gratitude to Tiffany Woods and all those before her for their service. I will continue to facilitate the dialogue among the longleaf stakeholders and honor those who have mentored me by encouraging even more participation. Two young professionals on my team had the opportunity to participate in The Longleaf Alliance's virtual conference; they learned a lot and were able to network. Great job, Carol and team! Tiffany Woods began the Longleaf Partnership Council's first foray into the virtual world, and the leadership team will continue hosting virtual meetings in 2021. We are excited about the potential to have broader participation in this new environment and look forward to the journey ahead.

Texas Longleaf Implementation Team: A Recipe for Success

By Jenny Sanders,
Texas Longleaf Taskforce Coordinator



Since its formation in 2014, the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team (TLIT) has leveraged \$1.1 million cost-share funds into longleaf projects on more than 35,000 acres, resulting in a total longleaf restoration and enhancement value of over \$2 million.

The recipe for this success? The right people, guided by sound science, utilizing defensible and transparent processes, with tools and technologies that allow them to engage forest landowners in a quality product of longleaf restoration.

This diversity of expertise, programmatic contribution, perspective, audience reach, and available resources allows the Texas team to reach landowners where they are and provide the resources needed to get them over the finish line of longleaf restoration and management.

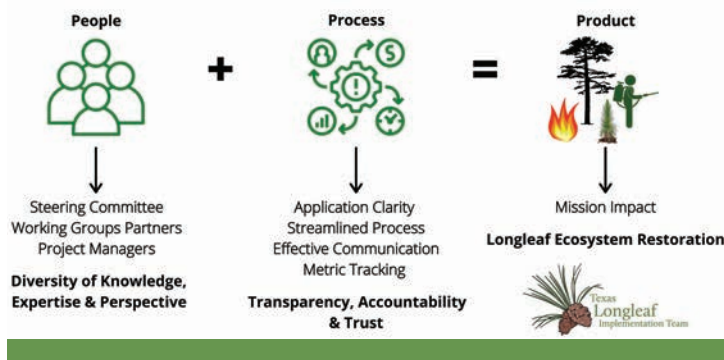
Land ownership trends, as well as evolving landowner goals, have proved to be compatible with longleaf restoration efforts in Texas. With non-industrial private forest (NIPF) owners increasingly focused on the

wildlife and recreational values of their forestland, and TIMOs and REITs placing more emphasis on social responsibility and ecosystem health, the case for longleaf restoration becomes easier and easier to make.

The TLIT also benefits from numerous partnerships with overlapping missions and target audiences. Notable examples include the North-east Texas Conservation De-

livery Network (NETXCDN) and the East Texas Natives (ETN) Project. The NETXCDN gathers grant funding for deployment across much of the same range as the TLIT, and with significant membership overlap, the partnership facilitates leveraged effort for maximization of resource development and conservation impact. Similarly, ETN is a collaborative effort to

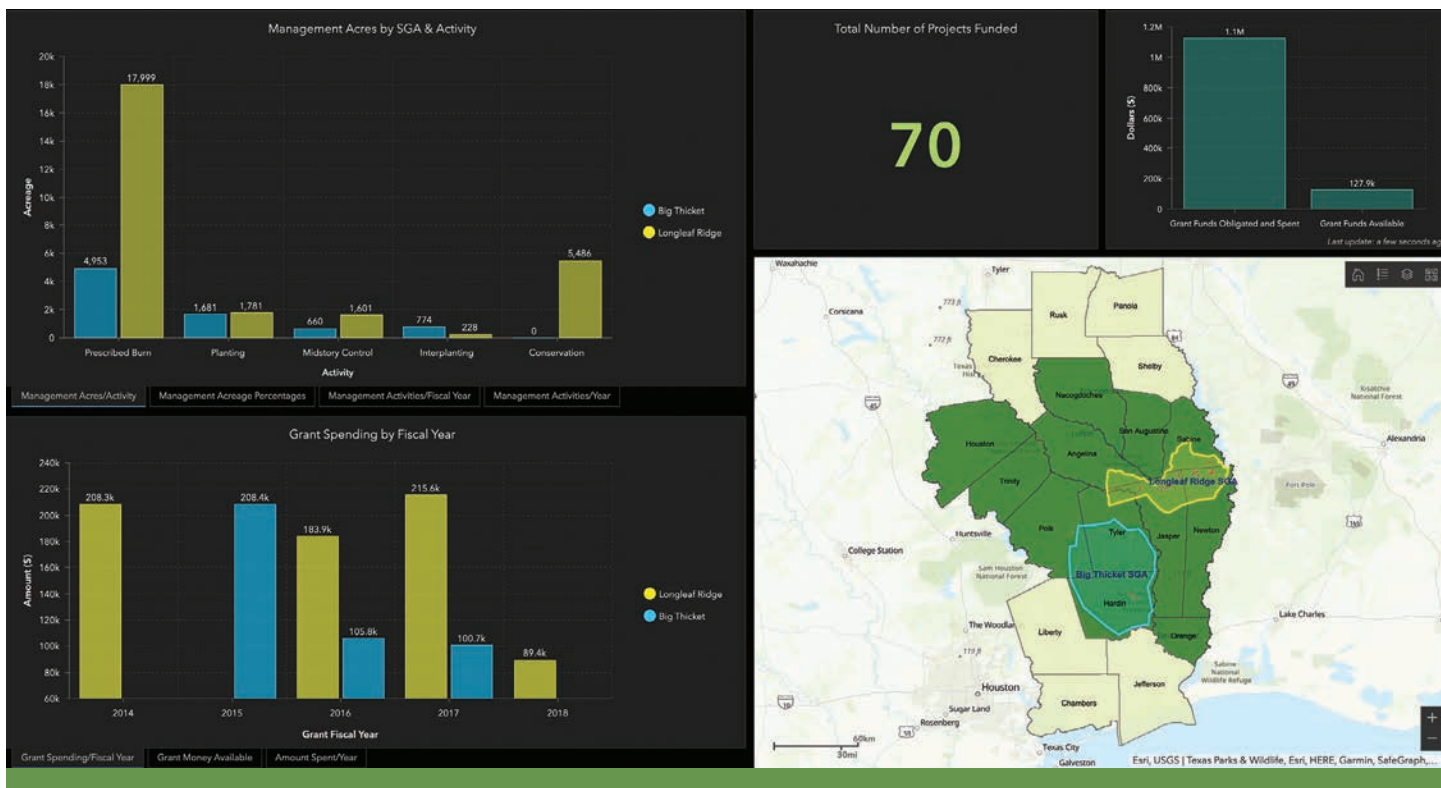
3 Ps of TLIT Success:



PEOPLE

The most critical element of any successful effort is the team that leads it. Largely due to the leadership of founding coordinator Kent Evans, the TLIT has quickly developed into a diverse, dedicated, and experienced partnership of longleaf champions.

DIVERSITY isn't just a critical concept for ecosystems – it's also a key ingredient for effective teams. The TLIT is no exception. Comprised of state and federal agency personnel, NGOs, academia, Timber Investment Management Organization (TIMO) and Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) representatives, industry professionals, and individual landowners, the group reflects the landscape they are charged with impacting.



Texas longleaf accomplishments dashboard

develop regionally adapted native seed sources to support native plant restoration efforts in East Texas. Tyler Wayland, the local director for the project, serves as the chair of the TLIT Groundcover Working Group and provides critical resources and guidance for our groundcover restoration efforts. These and other partnership groups bring a diverse team-approach to our restoration challenges.

PROCESS

The TLIT is eternally focused on adaptability and maintaining relevance for funders, partners, and especially landowners. Active working groups and teams provide insight and perspective needed to achieve these objectives.

The Communications Team focused recent efforts on digital content development, including resource pages on www.txlongleaf.org that educate visitors about the values of longleaf, effective management strategies, available assistance, and new pages highlighting birds and groundcover plants of the longleaf forest. A bi-weekly e-newsletter and Facebook page were each launched over the last year to help disseminate new content, share news, and develop a sense of community among longleaf enthusiasts and partners.

The Mapping and Data Support Group continually tracks the progress of efforts across the landscape; it utilizes the best historical data, past successes, and current conditions to establish strategic priorities for project funding. Most recently, this group worked with the Texas A&M Forest Service to develop an interactive dashboard to track program accomplishments and evaluate needs and trends.

The Project Review Working Group develops grant funding protocols, including the establishment of application procedures and reimbursement rates, identifying approved practices, and project management, monitoring, and tracking.

Lastly, a newly-formed Partnerships Working Group works to develop and nurture partnerships with mission-aligned organizations and groups to further the work of longleaf restoration.

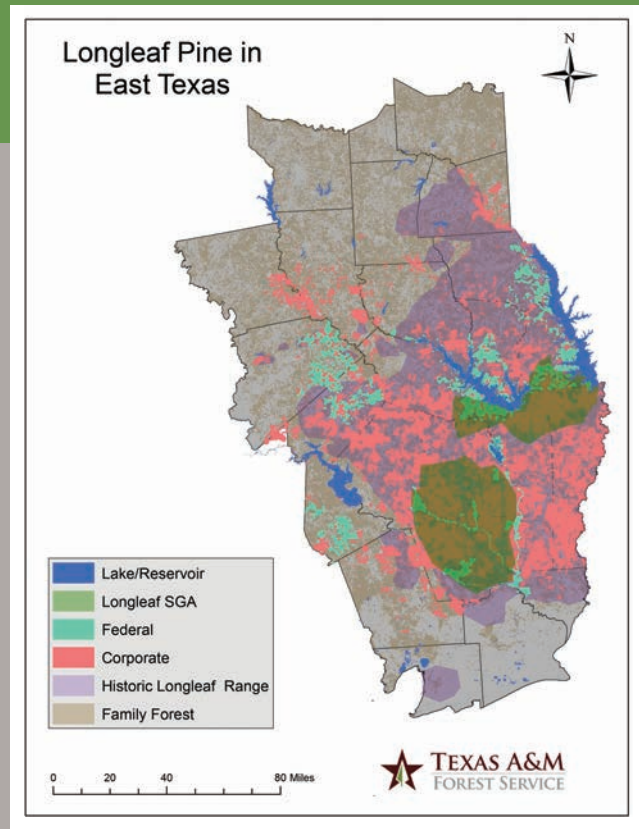
PRODUCT – LONGLEAF ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

Each year brings new challenges and new accomplishments, but the TLIT continues to grow and improve. 2020 brought the greatest interest in cost-share funding the team has ever seen. Thanks to the creative use of digital resources and active promotion by members and partners, the TLIT leveraged over \$250,000 of cost-share funds into longleaf projects on more than 6,000 acres, resulting in a total longleaf restoration and enhancement value of over half a million dollars in 2020 alone!

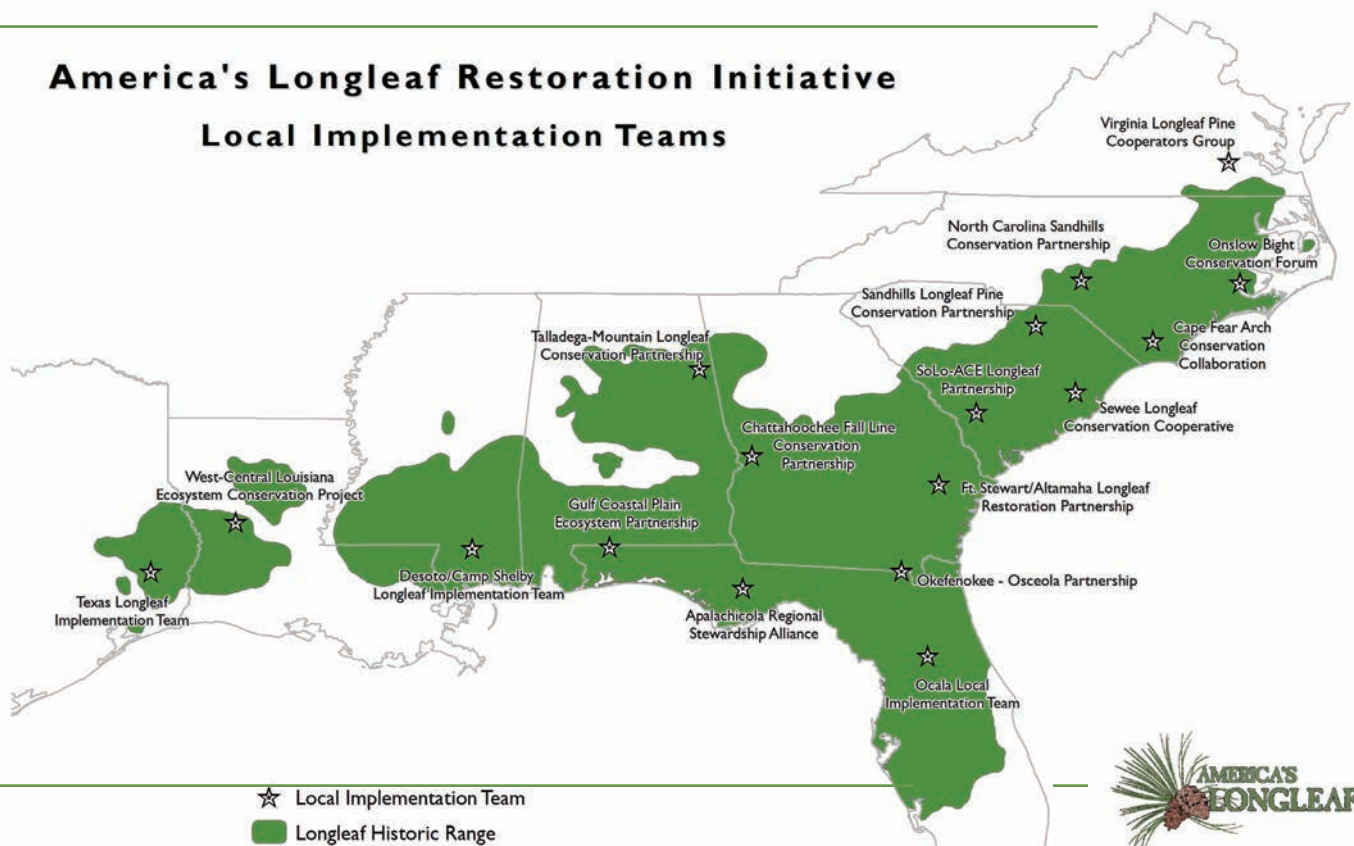
As the team looks to the future, they anticipate continued success across the range. Relationships with TIMOs and REITs will continue to be critical components of success and will take priority in the development of future outreach and communications efforts. Additionally, the TLIT expects continued growth of restoration efforts in the NIPF sector and will continue to provide field days and participate in partner-driven outreach and education efforts to promote wildlife-friendly forests, prescribed fire, conversion through silviculture, and other beneficial management practices.

LAND OWNERSHIP MAP

Texas timberland is primarily privately owned, and corporate ownership represents a large majority of that land base. This creates unique challenges for longleaf restoration, but the TLIT has benefited from strong relationships with several TIMOs/REITs in the region, leading to the development of successful outreach strategies and significant impact on the industry landscape.



America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative Local Implementation Teams



ARSA Land Management Continues

By Brian Pelc, *The Nature Conservancy*



Praying mantis takes an upside-down view of Apalachicola National Forest wet prairie near Sumatra. Photo by Brian Pelc.

The spirit of a typical, in-person semi-annual membership meeting was preserved when the Partners from Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance (ARSA) convened for the first time in a virtual setting. Our agenda included a conservation property spotlight, a professional presentation on cooperative species monitoring, round-robin updates, and a brief but wildly amateur video montage of nature from across the LIT. Even with the necessary COVID-19 restrictions, much of the important work in the field has proceeded with relative normalcy. Nearly all partners are planning for site prep, reforestation, and burning on schedule.

Significant projects receiving LIT funded seedlings or labor include: Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, FWC), Tate's Hell State Forest (Florida Forest Service), and Econfina Wildlife Management Area (FWC/Northwest Florida Water Management District). Aucilla Wildlife Management Area (FWC) will be receiving groundcover seed mix from Apalachicola National Forest flatwoods, while Torreya State Park and others will be receiving sandhill seed mix. Reports from across the LIT of outstanding fall wildflower displays were also an important signpost of the terrific fire management the partners have maintained under COVID conditions...way to go, Team!

Rx Fire Initiative Underway to Assist Private Landowners

By LuAnn Craighton, *The Nature Conservancy* and RT Lumpkin, *Georgia Forestry Commission*



RT Lumpkin, Georgia Forestry Commission, reviews the West Central Georgia Rx Fire Initiative with a Marion County landowner. Photo by Georgia Forestry Commission.

The West Central Georgia Rx Fire Initiative is a program focused on assisting private landowners with prescribed fire (Rx fire) across the Chattahoochee Fall Line region of Georgia. The Initiative is guided by the Chattahoochee Fall Line Rx Fire Co-Op led by the Georgia Forestry Commission. Funding comes from multiple partners, including The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, American Forest Foundation, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Bobwhite Quail Initiative, and a Landscape Scale Restoration grant, to support both technical and financial assistance to assist landowners with prescribed fire activities. A new partnership with The Longleaf Alliance is slated to bring additional prescribed fire resources to the region as well.

In its first year, the Initiative funded 72 landowners across 7 counties to successfully burn 6,571 acres. Sign-up is currently underway for this year's program. Landowners utilize an on-line application process that determines their eligibility for the Initiative. Eligible projects are inspected pre and post-burn and then mapped. Landowners are paid after the prescribed burn has been completed. The application process is also designed to connect landowners who

don't qualify for this program with alternate resources that support their land management goals. Interest in the Initiative is strong, and we look forward to continuing to expand the use of this keystone management practice on private lands across our region!

For more information on the Rx Fire Co-Op visit: www.gatrees.org/fire-prevention-suppression/cflrxfirecoop.

Burning at Broxton Rocks Preserve

By Ani Marty, Georgia Department of Natural Resources



Prescribed fire at Broxton Rocks. Photo by Ani Marty.

I first burned at Broxton Rocks when I was a Student Conservation Association intern at Moody Forest in 2017. It's a preserve maintained by The Nature Conservancy in Southeast Georgia outside the town of Broxton. The longleaf pine savanna at Broxton Rocks is a sight to behold and has many rare and endangered species. It is known for the Altamaha Grit, a layer of sandstone that has been exposed over time. There's an old ecological history there that generation after generation has taken part in to create the preserve of today.

Burning at the Rocks is different from the other properties I burned with Georgia DNR. In fact, burning there for the first time inspired me to continue working with fire. The next couple of fire seasons were mostly spent working in areas that had been fire suppressed for decades — fighting with a drip torch and a tool through the unforgiving southern rough to give a chance to bring back the longleaf pine ecosystem. Sites I had burned in years past began to change as I burned them a second time. Where there was a single clump of wiregrass overrun with gallberry, there was now a patch growing, ready to carry more fire. With every burn, there is a rebirth and a slow rebuild, a flicker of a recovering ecosystem.

Now, after several burning seasons under my belt, we get called back to burn a place that doesn't need us to persuade the flames to spread. In the heat of early June, we just needed to drag a line of fire along Braxton Rock's longleaf savanna. Working with The Nature Conservancy and The Orianne Society, I got to light and then sit back to watch the longleaf pine savanna take control. Fire danced along the grit, flitting from the pine litter to the wiregrass. The black left behind was sharp and clean, ready for the next cycle of growth. Broxton Rocks stands as a reminder of what once was and what a little fire can do.

Chinese Tallow Trees Treated Along Portion of Yellow River in Florida, Thanks to Florida State Wildlife Grant

By Vernon Compton, The Longleaf Alliance



Left: Herbicide stump treatment of Chinese tallow tree along Yellow River. Right: Kaiden Spurlock cutting a Chinese tallow tree in the lower Yellow River. Photos by Vernon Compton.

Chinese tallow trees are a serious threat in the longleaf range because of its ability to invade high quality, undisturbed forests. It is "capable of spreading into both disturbed and undisturbed environments and can alter the composition of both terrestrial and wetland forest communities. It causes large-scale ecosystem modification by replacing native vegetation and changing community structure and can also modify soil conditions by producing tannins and by increasing rates of eutrophication. Seeds are spread by birds and may also float for great distances." (Bogler and Batcher, 2000). As with all prolific invaders, the key to successful control is to prevent new infestations or to control the older ones as soon as possible. If controlled during the early stages of invasion, the potential for successful management is high.

Recognizing the threat posed by the Chinese tallow tree, the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) identified control of this and other invasive species as a high priority. Thanks to a State Wildlife Grant and support from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Longleaf Alliance staff have located and treated over 7,000 Chinese tallow trees within the Florida portion of the Yellow River watershed, with more work needed for successful control in the GCPEP landscape.

Reference: Bogler, D. T. and M. S. Batcher. 2000. TNC Element Stewardship Abstract. 11 p.

4,000 Acres Conserved to Establish Priority Longleaf Corridors in North Carolina

By Hervey McIver, *The Nature Conservancy*



Jordan Timber tract longleaf. Photo courtesy of Hervey McIver.

Protecting, restoring, and managing the longleaf pine ecosystems are the objectives of North Carolina's three Longleaf Local Implementation Teams (LITs) – the Cape Fear Arch, Onslow Bight, and Sandhills. The partners of these LITs cooperate in developing conservation plans to guide the allocation of limited resources to protect new lands. High-quality longleaf, as well as lands that connect and buffer our existing network of conservation lands, are prioritized. In 2020 North Carolina LIT partners added over 4,000 acres of new and diverse habitat to this network through fee and conservation easement purchases.

For over twenty years, the North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership has worked to connect widespread blocks of longleaf owned by the Army, the state of North Carolina, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to build a resilient population of red-cockaded woodpeckers. In May, with TNC's purchase of the 2,021-acre Jordan Timber tract, three large blocks of state lands were permanently connected. The property, acquired with Army funds, will be transferred to the

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission with plans to introduce controlled burning and restore longleaf habitat where needed.

In the Onslow Bight landscape, lands around the Croatan National Forest are under threat from development as more people want to be near the coast. Using mitigation funds from a highway expansion project impacting a portion of the Croatan, the NC Coastal Land Trust acquired two tracts of longleaf land totaling 918 acres that may someday be added to the National Forest. These properties add more longleaf and important wetlands and protect future burning on significant sites within the Croatan from future development.

SoloACE Partnership Continues to Grow

By Bobby Franklin and Lisa Lord, *The Longleaf Alliance*



Matt Lerow, SCDNR RCW Biologist and Aaron Chavous, Aiken State Park Manager prepare to release RCWs. Photo by Lisa Lord.

The first week of November wrapped up another round of red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) translocations. Since 2016, 61 RCWs have been translocated from the Francis Marion National Forest to eight properties in the South Lowcountry – ACE Basin (SoLoACE) landscape through a series of grants funded by NFWF. The recovery efforts in Aiken County, South Carolina, have exceeded expectations. There are now eight active clusters at Hitchcock Woods, where RCWs were first introduced in 2016. Several years ago, recruitment clusters were installed at Aiken State Park and Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve (AGTHP). All available clusters are now full at AGTHP after being discovered by dispersing birds. South Carolina State Parks has been diligently prescribed burning Aiken State Park for over a decade to improve the habitat. An unbanded pair showed up at Aiken State Park in the spring of 2020 and went on to successfully fledge two young. The translocation team then brought two additional pairs of birds to Aiken State Park this November. A pair of RCWs was also provided to Sumter National Forest to assist with their RCW recovery efforts. Thank you to the 9 trappers and 15 assistants that helped with this year's moves.

The SoLoACE Longleaf Partnership also continues to work with landowners, both in-person and virtually, assisting with their longleaf pine restoration and management goals. This fall, technical assistance was provided to more than 80 landowners and managers. Virtual outreach has increased and is being offered at various scales from small landowner meetings to the first-ever virtual South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council meeting, which was attended by 165 people on September 9th.

South Carolina Sandhills Longleaf Partnership Welcomes New Member

By Susan Griggs, Natural Resources Conservation Service



Daniel Griffin, Chesterfield County's new NRCS District Conservationist. Photo by Susan Griggs.

The South Carolina Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership (SLPCP) welcomes new NRCS District Conservationist Daniel Griffin to the Chesterfield office. Daniel is a 2004 graduate of Clemson University and a Chesterfield County native. He most recently served as District Conservationist in Lee County, SC. "I'm excited to be back home working with landowners I've known all my life," Griffin said. "I'm super hyped about what is going on here with longleaf pine restoration through the Partnership. I still have a lot to learn about this ecosystem, but the experience of the Partnership members around me is something I can draw on every day."

Daniel had a chance to get his feet in the fire quickly. The Chesterfield Field Office recently completed obligations to 100 landowners for financial assistance with the establishment of 3350 acres of new longleaf, as well as improvements of another 1050 acres through release from overstory and prescribed fire. Funding sources for these obligations were primarily from the USDA EQIP program but also utilized funding from National Fish and Wildlife (NFWF) grants and the USFWS Partners for Wildlife. "This wouldn't be possible without the efforts of the SLPCP team," said Griffin. "The outreach efforts by the Partnership, using their field data, has reached many people who were not aware of the assistance available to private landowners. We expect to see continued growth in landowner interest in longleaf as we provide educational opportunities and promote the advantages of the longleaf forest."

National Wild Turkey Federation Awarded Grant to Restore Longleaf Pine in West-Central Louisiana

By Tom Sullivan, National Wild Turkey Federation



Regeneration after prescribed fire in Allen Parish, LA. Photo courtesy of NWTF.

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) was awarded a \$300,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Longleaf Stewardship Fund to advance longleaf restoration in the Fort Polk/Kisatchie National Forest Significant Geographic Area (SGA). Additional non-federal matching funds of over \$350,000 from NWTF and other partners will also be applied to the project. The project is a part of the Forestland Stewards Initiative formed by International Paper and NFWF to identify, restore and protect landscapes in three priority regions in the southern United States, one of which is the Piney Woods of Texas and Louisiana.

This grant will establish and enhance 5,700 acres of longleaf pine in a six-parish West-Central Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership Conservation Area anchored by the Fort Polk/Kisatchie National Forest SGA. This project will provide financial assistance to plant longleaf and enhance existing habitat with prescribed fire, as well as support landowner outreach and technical assistance through field days and development of forest management plans. Site visits by forestry and wildlife professionals will support and encourage

longleaf restoration and management. Efforts will include verified, updated reporting and support the mission of Fort Polk by broadening the ecological base of the longleaf pine ecosystem surrounding the installation.

Project partners include The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Department of Defense-Ft. Polk U.S. Army, U.S. Forest Service Kisatchie National Forest, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, International Forest Company (IFCO), forestry consultants, and timber companies.

O2 Landowner Receives National Private Lands Fish & Wildlife Stewardship Award

By Rebecca Shelton, *The Nature Conservancy*



Doug and Teresa Moore, courtesy of Christopher M. Demers

The Okefenokee and Osceola Local Implementation Team (O2 LIT) area enjoyed a very productive 2020 summer season of partner outreach, offsite timber sale awards, understory restoration projects, and planning for the upcoming planting season. This quarter, we would like to focus on and thank one of our most active and contributing landowners – Mr. Doug Moore of the South Prong Plantation.

The South Prong Plantation is a 5,895-acre working, multi-use timberland operation that provides wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, and a living classroom to teach others how to be better land stewards. The property, located in North Florida (Baker County), is actively managed by Mr. Moore and his wife Teresa, along with assistance from family, neighbors, and friends. White-tailed deer, fox squirrel, wild turkey, Northern bobwhite quail, and Florida black bear are

known to frequent the property, and Mr. Moore strives to guide his management decisions to their benefit. In addition to active management of wildlife, Mr. Moore is involved with promoting longleaf restoration and protecting several endangered plant species, including Chapman's fringed orchid, which has benefited through his use of prescribed fire on the landscape.

An O2 partner, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has worked closely with Moore over the years as part of the agency's Landowner Assistance Program (MyFWC.com/LAP). "Mr. Moore works passionately to bring fellow landowners together by hosting multiple workshops and field tours that cover topics such as prescribed fire, food plots, forest health and habitat management," said Ginger Morgan, the program's North Florida regional coordinator. "He also serves as a strong community mentor moving his local landowner-led conservation initiative forward through his work with the North Florida Prescribed Burn Association and the Baker County Landowner Group." In addition, Mr. Moore promotes safe wildland fire by serving with Fire-Wise Communities after the 2007 Bugaboo Wildfire that consumed over 560,000 acres in Florida and Georgia.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) recently recognized Mr. Moore and the South Prong Plantation with the 2020 National Private Lands Fish & Wildlife Stewardship Award. Each year the AFWA Awards Committee recognizes an individual or family-run farm, ranch or forest land that has incorporated proactive conservation practices and exhibits outstanding stewardship of fish and wildlife resources. Upon receiving his award, Moore said, "I am honored to receive this national award. I thank all the forest and wildlife agencies, friends and family that made it happen. It has always been a passion of mine to own a large timber property that I could manage, share and introduce others to learning more about our great outdoors. I am living my dream."

Mr. Moore's attention to the needs of the forest and its natural inhabitants has paid significant dividends in the overall quality of the land and recreation, serving as a model land steward for the O2 area.

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COVER The extraordinary diversity in longleaf ecosystems comes from the abundant plant life found in the understory. This species richness plot at the Green Swamp Preserve in North Carolina illustrates the high groundcover diversity in wet savanna habitats. Each red pin flag marks the location of a new plant species. Monitoring is an important tool for measuring restoration success. Photo by Sarah Crate.

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