



THE
LONGLEAF
LEADER

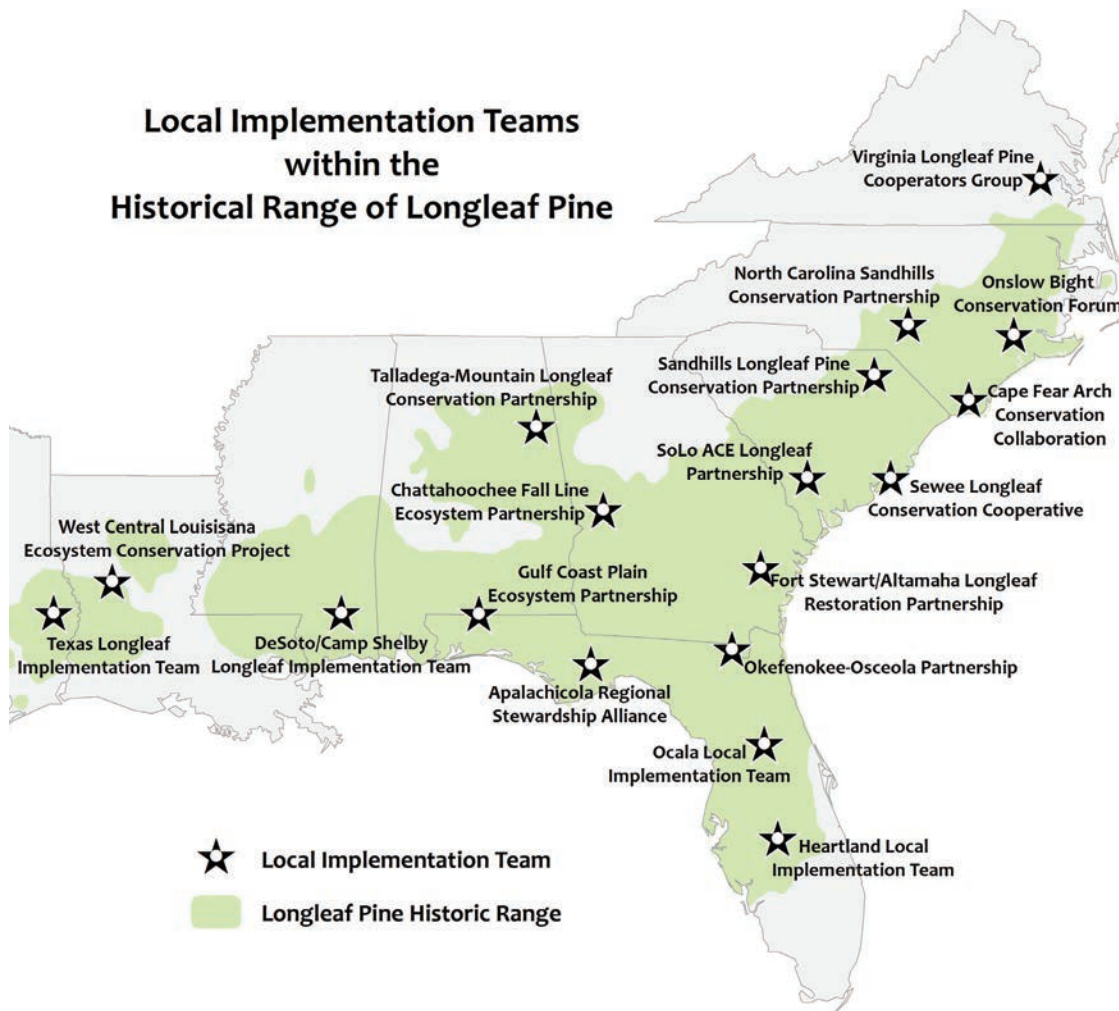
Rising Through
ADVERSITY

Longleaf for All

By Tiffany Woods and Luther Jones,
Longleaf for All Co-Leads

America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI) launched the *Longleaf for All* working group in 2020 as an ongoing commitment to advocate for and partner with minority and unserved landowners, as well as minority professionals in the field of forestry and longleaf conservation. Land ownership comes with an array of challenges. However, for minority and under-resourced landowners, additional barriers exist that have resulted and continue to result in a cycle of perpetual land loss in the Southeast. *Longleaf for All* is currently working to identify and address these specific challenges that face underrepresented landowners, such as access to resources, legal counsel, markets, and outreach.

Using the Initiative's network and platform, *Longleaf for All's* overarching goal is to increase minority participation in forestry-related programs, practices and activities and help landowners reap the economic, ecological, and cultural benefits of owning forested land. The working group/committee of diverse partners provides ALRI's Longleaf Partnership Council recommendations to accomplish this, enabling the Initiative to more effectively build relationships, share information and resources, and provide guidance on how ALRI and its partners can enact long-term strategies for inclusion and opportunities.



Improved Prescribed Fire Weather Information Available on the Chattahoochee Fall Line

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



A new RAWS station will provide improved prescribed fire weather information to both public and private landowners in west Georgia. Photo by LuAnn Craighton.

Prescribed fire practitioners now have a new source of accurate and timely weather information, which will help guide the safe and effective use of prescribed (Rx) fire along the Chattahoochee Fall Line. In April 2021, The Georgia Forestry Commission and The Nature Conservancy collaborated to install a new Remote Automated Weather Station (RAWS) in Marion County, Georgia. The station updates a broad set of weather parameters hourly and provides historic, current, and forecasted conditions free-of-charge to users who access the station online. Both public and private land managers will benefit from the information collected by the new RAWS station. Prescribed fire is consistently used as a management tool to maintain and restore the longleaf pine ecosystem in the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) conservation corridor around Fort Benning. The ACUB corridor currently includes over 22,000 acres of public land available for outdoor recreation in and around Marion County. In addition, the newly formed Chattahoochee Fall Line Prescribed Fire Co-Op is providing training and resources to increase the use of Rx fire by private landowners across the region. The new weather station fills a data gap between RAWS stations already in operation. It will provide

accurate information for planning, executing, and evaluating Rx fire in the sandhills of west Georgia.

To access the weather station, visit gatrees.org/fire-prevention-suppression/cflrxfirecoop. Scroll to the bottom of the home page to the “Helpful Resources” section, and click on the links to weather conditions. Alternatively visit mesowest.utah.edu. Select GEORGIA as the REGION/ZONE and use the drop-down menu to select NWS and RAWS as the NETWORK. Refresh the map. Click on the black dot due east of Columbus, GA (Oakland Station) to access the Marion County data.

Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield Recognized for Natural Resources Conservation and Cultural Resources Management

By Randy Tate, The Longleaf Alliance



Prescribed fire using Terra Torch ignition. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army.

In March 2021, the Army announced the winners of the 2020 Secretary of the Army Environmental Awards, the highest honor conferred by the Army in environmental science and sustainability. Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield (FS/HAAF), a founding member of the Fort Stewart/Altamaha Longleaf Partnership and the anchor site for this significant geographic area, won two of the coveted awards; Natural Resources Conservation - Large Installation and Cultural Resources Management - Team.

The announcement highlighted areas in which FS/HAAF excelled, including a successful Army Compatible Use Buffer Program, a recovered red-cockaded woodpecker population, an aggressive prescribed fire program, a popular public hunting and fishing program, and robust longleaf/wiregrass restoration efforts. These programs result in improved training landscapes and emphasize excellent natural resource programs.

Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield (FS/HAAF) is the largest Army installation east of the Mississippi River and is home to the 3rd Infantry Division. FS/HAAF is also home to the largest remaining tract of the longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem in Georgia. The longleaf pine ecosystem, blackwater rivers, ephemeral wetlands, HMAs, and wildlife openings provide training lands for soldiers and habitat for seven species protected by the Endangered Species Act and over 20 species of concern.

The lands on FS/HAAF have been used to serve our nation’s defense for well over half a century, and this legacy is not taken lightly by those who use them today. The Natural Resources Team is dedicated to future generations who will use these lands and their resources.

Record Start to the Fire Season for The Longleaf Alliance's GCPEP Teams

By Vernon Compton, *The Longleaf Alliance*



Prescribed fire at Eglin Air Force Base during the burn (left) and after the burn (right). Photos by Kaiden Spurlock.

Over the past 25 years, the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) has focused on prescribed fire as the utmost priority. In 2004 the Partnership approved establishing the first support team to work with partners to increase fire implementation. That team, the Ecosystem Support Team (EST), has since been joined by two newer teams now working in the landscape, the Wetland Ecosystem Support Team (WEST) and the AMBBIS Team (short for *Ambystoma bishopi*, the scientific name for the reticulated flatwoods salamander). With strong leadership from partner fire staff and a high level of collaborative planning and scheduling with The Longleaf Alliance (TLA), the GCPEP teams had a record start to the 2021 fire season; team staff supported 80,323 acres of fire on the ground as of May. This is

good news for native groundcover, wildlife habitat, and the recovery of rare natural communities and species. Such a high amount of prescribed fire would not be possible without the partners and teams taking advantage of good fire weather conditions at every opportunity.

Multiple partners also had outstanding starts to the fire season. Notably, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission led an excellent effort on the Escribano Point Wildlife Management Area, benefitting the restoration of ephemeral wetlands and the recovery of the reticulated flatwoods salamander.

There are many complexities to achieving the required, sustainable level of prescribed fire in such a busy landscape. The solution-focused leadership of our partners, assisted by TLA's GCPEP teams, are finding ways to accomplish more longleaf ecosystem restoration and management through our best and safest tool – prescribed fire.

Longleaf News from North Carolina

By Dan Hannon, *The Nature Conservancy & U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*



Orton Creek Preserve. Photo by Dan Hannon.

The end of April saw the completion of the Longleaf Ecosystem Occurrence (LEO) surveys throughout the southeastern portion of North Carolina. The effort began in August of 2020, with the goal of visiting and assessing 500 sites in each of three Local Implementation Teams (Onslow Bight, Cape Fear Arch & Sandhills) in North Carolina by April 2021. The project was completed in partnership with The Longleaf Alliance and Florida Natural Areas Inventory, with the field portion of the project led by the NC Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

With the majority of the longleaf on protected lands already documented and shared with LEO, our survey efforts focused on private land longleaf and previously undocumented longleaf on protected lands. With the help of several dedicated volunteers and an intern from NC Coastal Land Trust, we visited 1922 sites and assessed 1694 stands of longleaf pine forest. In addition to assessing new or undocumented longleaf sites, successful efforts were made to acquire existing longleaf data from partners, with Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune being the best example of an important longleaf inventory dataset that was shared during the project.

The field assessments, along with the acquisition of longleaf inventory data, fill an important gap in our understanding of the distribution of the ecosystem on private lands as well as on and around large blocks of longleaf both in NC and throughout the longleaf region. Our next steps include working with state and regional partners to classify longleaf condition class at each of the stands where longleaf was present and assessed.

Sandhills Generational Education Field Day

by Charles Babb, SLPCP Coordinator



NRCS biologist Sudie Thomas discusses how native plants attract pollinators and valuable insects food sources for birds and other animals. Photo by Susan Griggs.



Students use hand rakes to establish native understory plants in a 30-acre stand of longleaf pine. Photo by Susan Griggs.

The South Carolina Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership (SLPCP) held a field day with local Boy Scouts and 4-H members as part of a grant from NRCS to educate youth about the values of the longleaf ecosystem. This is the second annual event with nearly 30 youth having participated in an ongoing longleaf restoration on this privately owned stand of mature longleaf. LIT Coordinator Charles Babb says, “These kids have made a personal connection with this particular property. Last year they took part in the installation of artificial RCW nest cavities, and now they have helped us restore the native ground cover on the property and have seen the effects of prescribed fire on the landscape. These are things they will continue

to observe in the future – all because the landowner welcomes the opportunity to teach local groups about this wonderful ecosystem.”

After listening to talks about native species, wildlife, birds, and bees, the kids scattered out through the 30-acre stand and planted 116 individual plots of native seed provided in pre-measured packets by the SLPCP. Packets each contained enough seed to establish 100 square feet with eleven species of native plants important for providing both year-round pollinator and wildlife habitat. Trail cameras will be installed to capture wildlife visitors to the plots to develop additional educational materials.

“Despite the limitations caused by COVID-19, the SLPCP continues to find methods to teach the next generation of landowners about the value of the longleaf ecosystem to our economy and lifestyle,” said Babb. “They are the ones that will continue the longleaf legacy in the forests we are planting today.”

Opportunities for Landowner Assistance within the SoLoACE Longleaf Partnership and Sewee Longleaf Conservation Cooperative

By Jennie Haskell, The Longleaf Alliance



Prescribed burn in longleaf. Photo by Jennie Haskell.

Within South Carolina, approximately 1.8 million longleaf pine seedlings were planted on private lands during the 2020 - 2021 planting season. Over 528 acres were prescribed burned during the 2021 dormant season (January-March) on private lands with assistance from SC partnerships.

Through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the South Lowcountry and ACE Basin (SoLoACE) and Sewee Partnerships offer cost-share opportunities for landowners for 2021 and 2022. If you are a landowner needing assistance establishing longleaf pine or with prescribed burning, please contact Jennie Haskell at jennie@longleafalliance.org.

Because prescribed fire is an effective and efficient tool for managing the longleaf pine ecosystem, the SoLoACE partnership is developing prescribed burning cooperatives to help neighbors improve their longleaf pine ecosystem conditions. Please reach out if you are interested in joining a prescribed burning cooperative, as a burn crew member or as a landowner needing to burn or even supplying lunch to those who are making the burn possible.

Texas Team Named 2021 Conservation Wrangler by Texan by Nature

By Jenny Sanders, TLIT Coordinator



In April, the Texas Longleaf Local Implementation Team (TLIT) learned they were named 2021 Conservation Wranglers by Texan by Nature. As one of the four selected Texan-led conservation efforts, qualifying recipients are science-based projects that have demonstrated a positive return on conservation for people, prosperity, and natural resources.

As a 2021 Conservation Wrangler, the TLIT will receive 12-18 months of dedicated support with program management, strategic planning, marketing strategy, metrics capture and analysis, professional content production, and partnership development. Specifically, Texan by Nature will assist the TLIT in diversifying funding for longleaf restoration in Texas by engaging corporate partners in our work.

“The Conservation Wrangler program proves that conservation is essential for the health of our natural resources, our people, and our economy,” shared the former First Lady and Founder of Texan by Nature, Mrs. Laura Bush. “Congratulations to the 2021 Conservation Wranglers,

and thank you for the terrific example you’ve set for all Texans.”

“In addition to natural resource benefits, this year’s Conservation Wranglers represent collaborative, wide-ranging partnerships and new opportunities for delivering and measuring impact. Our work with the selected projects will expand conservation efforts and results across Texas. We look forward to sharing Conservation Wrangler learnings, best practices, and opportunities to participate in and scale conservation efforts and return,” said Joni Carswell, President and CEO of Texan by Nature.

The TLIT is excited to work with Texan by Nature to expand our efforts and engage more partners in the work of longleaf restoration in Texas! Read more about this program and the other 2021 Conservation Wranglers at txlongleaf.org.

News from Virginia Longleaf Pine Cooperators Group

By Brian van Eerden, The Nature Conservancy



AmeriCorps Volunteer Robin Lowe-Skillern holding red-cockaded woodpecker nestlings at The Nature Conservancy’s Piney Grove Preserve located in Sussex County, VA. Photo by R. Clontz.

The Virginia Longleaf Cooperators capitalized on stellar weather and fuel conditions to complete 6,880 acres of prescribed fire in southeast Virginia this spring. This year marked the first use of drone equipment to assist with fire operations on conserved lands in the region. In addition to performing aerial ignition, the drone also captures fire behavior video to help inform fire effects monitoring. Moreover, the drone’s thermal imaging equipment is being used to monitor surface temperatures and detect potential escapes. The Nature Conservancy, which purchased the drone, will be working with LIT partners to document best practices that can be shared with other fire management programs.

The Longleaf Alliance President Carol Denhof visited southeast Virginia in early May to conduct a longleaf ecosystem groundcover restoration workshop attended by Virginia’s Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring, Virginia’s new NRCS State Conservationist Dr. Edwin Martinez, Dr. Lytton Musselman of Old Dominion University, private landowners, public and private agency field biologists, and college students. The event was hosted by The Longleaf Alliance Board Member Bill Owen. Plans are underway to establish a native groundcover seed orchard on Owen’s Raccoon Creek Pinelands property to provide locally sourced seed for groundcover restoration projects across longleaf pine habitats in southeast Virginia.

Louisiana Ecological Forestry Center Hosts Burn Workshop

By Dan Weber, North Louisiana Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy



Burn workshop participants. Photos by Louisiana Ecological Forestry Center.

During May 5-7, 18 participants attended a prescribed burn workshop organized by the Louisiana Ag Center. The multiday event took place at the Louisiana Ecological Forestry Center (LEAF) in Sabine Parish, Louisiana, and included classroom training and a live fire exercise. At approximately 4,600 acres, LEAF is the site of one of the largest private longleaf pine restoration efforts in the state. It regularly hosts agencies and landowners interested in advancing their understanding of restoring and maintaining longleaf habitat.

Additional partners in the effort included the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the LA Department of Agriculture and Forestry. The workshop's goal was to train and encourage forest landowners to burn their lands safely and legally. Topics included: fuels, burning techniques, proper tools, optimal weather conditions, smoke management, liability management, planning, fire behavior, and more. Participating in this workshop begins the process of becoming a Louisiana Certified Burn Manager. Execution and documentation of five prescribed fires will complete the process.

Attendees included six private landowners and 12 forestry and land management professionals. This included LEAF staff resulting in the entire staff of LEAF having their Louisiana Burn Manager Certifications. The class burned 92 acres on the property for the live burn exercise.

The West Central Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership (WLEP) is a coalition of stakeholders supporting longleaf and other ecosystem restoration efforts within the Fort Polk/Kisatchie National Forest Significant Geographic Area. The WLEP includes the partners involved in this workshop in addition to the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Department of Defense, Natural Resource Conservation Service, conservation NGOs, and others.

Federal Oil Spill Funding to Benefit Longleaf Forests in the Florida Panhandle

By Brian Pelc, Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance LIT Coordinator



Members from several ARSA agencies, including The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, Inter-agency Prescribed Fire Training Center, Florida Forest Service, and Florida State Parks team up to burn the Conservancy's Rock Hill Preserve in Washington County, FL. Photo by Brian Pelc.

Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance (ARSA) members are excited to announce the recent award of \$5 million from the RESTORE Council due to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Apalachicola Regional Restoration Initiative (ARRI) will bring much-needed funding for forest management (including longleaf pine restoration, prescribed fire, hydrological flow restoration, and invasive species control) on both public and private lands within the ARSA landscape. A major focus of the work will be on the Apalachicola National Forest and surrounding conservation lands, where a legacy of water and land management decisions from the past continues to degrade critical wildlife habitats and water quality, even today. East and west of this specific project area, all partners within the longleaf local implementation team (LIT) will glean the benefits from the fire and invasives team, on-going monitoring collaboration, and sharing of this and other funding resources. The USDA Forest Service generously sponsored this proposal, and their commitment to the LIT construct has been apparent throughout the several years' process of ARRI application and approvals. This and other funding have made the LIT successful in implementing the 2017 ARSA Longleaf Conservation Plan, which guides the priorities for all longleaf work within the team's boundary.

PUBLISHER The Longleaf Alliance, **EDITOR** Sarah Crate, **ASSISTANT EDITOR** Margaret Platt, **DESIGN** Bellhouse Publishing
ADVERTISING Sarah Crate – editor@longleafalliance.org
COVER In the aftermath of Hurricane Laura, Kisatchie National Forest is diligently working to restore their longleaf pine and its awe-inspiring views like these featured at the 2018 Biennial Longleaf Conference. Photo by Randy Tate.

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The Longleaf Leader (USPS#) is an official, quarterly publication of The Longleaf Alliance, 12130 Dixon Center Road, Andalusia, Alabama 36420.

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