



THE  
LONGLEAF  
LEADER

*Longleaf for  
the Future*



*Longleaf pine branch.  
Photo by Randy Tate.*

# Celebrating Ten Years of Success

*By the Longleaf Partnership  
Council Leadership Team*

Ten years ago, the U.S. Departments of Defense, Agriculture, and the Interior made a bold move that would forever change the landscape of the Southeast. Fueled by a mutual interest to secure the full spectrum of ecological, economic, national defense, and social values offered by the restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem, these agencies came together to support the establishment of America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI) and the Range-Wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine, released in 2009. This was an instrumental step in solidifying the public-private partnerships that would ultimately lead to management activities on over 15 million public and private acres cumulatively over the decade.

This year we are celebrating the monumental partnership of ALRI, deemed by many as one of the most successful landscape-level, conservation-based coalitions in North America. The Initiative is made up of public land partners, including federal and state agencies, private landowners, non-governmental organizations, forest industry, educators, and longleaf enthusiasts—all collaborating and endeavoring to reach our 15-year goal of 8 million acres of longleaf pine habitat on the landscape by 2025.

In the 1990s, an estimated 3.2 million acres of longleaf remained from what was once the dominant forested ecosystem in the Southeast. As a result of the efforts of ALRI, today we stand at approximately 4.7 million acres. Over the past ten years alone, more than 1.3 million acres of new longleaf stands have been established, and equally impressive is the more than

12 million acres of longleaf habitat with prescribed burn activities to advance forest management outcomes.

## Range-wide estimates of annual longleaf establishment

Year	Longleaf Establishment (acres)
2010	75,000*
2011	101,088
2012	163,595
2013**	156,800
2014	153,039
2015	150,808
2016	139,427
2017	131,254
2018	130,314
2019	133,414
<b>10-year total</b>	<b>1,335,739 acres</b>

\* 2010 conservative estimate

\*\*1st year of ALRI Accomplishment Report





*A new longleaf pine germinant.  
Photo by Gretchen Coll.*



*Prescribed fire is an integral tool  
for longleaf pine restoration. Photo  
by Gretchen Coll.*

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2010-2019



**1,333,739  
ACRES  
OF LONGLEAF  
ESTABLISHED**



**235,887  
ACRES  
OF LAND  
PROTECTED**



**12,221,076  
ACRES  
OF PRESCRIBED  
BURNS ON  
LONGLEAF LANDS**

*Ten years of range-wide longleaf accomplishments reported by ALRI.*

These accomplishments are a collective effort on both public and private lands, and the many dedicated professionals and landowners committed to longleaf restoration. Longleaf restoration happens on the ground through the work of these individuals as well as local partnerships (Local Implementation Teams) organized under ALRI to support the goals of the Initiative to conserve and restore longleaf. Setting the bar high for other agencies, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is already on its way to putting one million longleaf acres on the path to restoration by 2025. The Public Lands Task Force of ALRI is working with other federal and state partners to evaluate their lands to submit similar 2025 restoration goals to ALRI.

No words can adequately recognize the steadfast efforts of our private landowners who continue to contribute most longleaf accomplishments each year. Many of these landowners are led and supported by technical assistance and incentive and grant programs provided by ALRI partners such as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

The ten-year anniversary celebration in Washington D.C. this past March was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While we wait until the time is right to celebrate in person, we will continue to share the story and significance of the cumulative achievements of our partners and the Initiative. It is important to reflect on the substantial gains this partnership has collectively garnered in halting and reversing the decades-long trend in longleaf decline. ALRI exemplifies the “power of

partnerships” and shared stewardship principles of working together in an integrated way to make decisions and take actions on the land to restore this vital ecosystem. As we celebrate ten years of success, the Initiative is poised to build on our successes towards 2025 and beyond.

## Update from the Longleaf Partnership Council

First and foremost, I would like to send my best wishes to the entire longleaf community. While the spring looked much different than anticipated for America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI), it has been encouraging and wonderful to get updates from our partners that on-the-ground longleaf restoration continues here in the Southeast. The LPC leadership team was quite busy this spring with the release of the 2019 Annual Longleaf Accomplishment Report, as well as looking back over the past decade and documenting the cumulative successes from partners and friends of ALRI. I hope you enjoy seeing how your efforts, combined with others in this community, made all the difference in bringing back this iconic species. I truly believe the best is yet to come. *Tiffany Woods, 2020 LPC Chair*

# The LEO Project: Making Strides in Range-wide Mapping Effort

By Karen Zilliox Brown, The Longleaf Alliance

The Southeast Longleaf Ecosystem Occurrences Geodatabase project, “LEO” for short, was developed to create a shareable GIS database of longleaf pine ecosystem occurrences throughout its range. The LEO web map and geodatabase will be an interactive tool that enhances your work and that of others throughout the longleaf range—but first, we need your help. Representatives from the LEO team are making the rounds to Local Implementation Teams (LITs) and coalition meetings. If we haven’t visited you yet, we will soon!

## How does LEO work?

**Gather existing information** – Existing local information and field data are the foundation for this effort. We don't want to duplicate our partners' efforts, so this helps tremendously in the next step in the process.

**Determining areas for field surveys** – The mapping team at Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) and The Longleaf Alliance (LLA) use a variety of tools to identify areas on the landscape that are “likely longleaf.” They work down to a fine-scale to determine where the field surveys should take place, delineating areas of similar age or density characteristic. Each shape warrants a field survey to ground-truth the occurrence of longleaf and provide observations of ecological conditions. That leads us to the next step.

**Forming field teams** – We craft an individualized approach for each landscape with guidance from the partners. The local knowledge of partners plays a key role in this step by informing us on priority areas and interests. Field work occurs with partner help and contractors. After a training session, field teams



*A mobile app was developed for the LEO project. Field teams can use a variety of device types to take surveys. Photo by Karen Zilliox Brown.*

will go out to make assessments. Surveys are designed to be rapid and completed largely by roadside observations. This field data comes back to us and, after a quality control check, will be incorporated into the final product, the longleaf geodatabase and web map, produced by FNAI.

## How can your LIT help LEO?

**1. Contribute** to the knowledge-base. We work with dozens of partners to fit the data they share with us into the LEO database. Shared data may be in the form of forest stand characteristics, fire histories, habitat or vegetation map data, and relevant species habitat distributions, to name a few. We do this with the utmost respect for privacy and the integrity of your work. If you have something to contribute or questions on this step, reach out to Carolyn Kindell at [ckindell@fsu.edu](mailto:ckindell@fsu.edu). You can also find details at the LEO project website: [www.fnai.org/se\\_longleaf.cfm](http://www.fnai.org/se_longleaf.cfm)

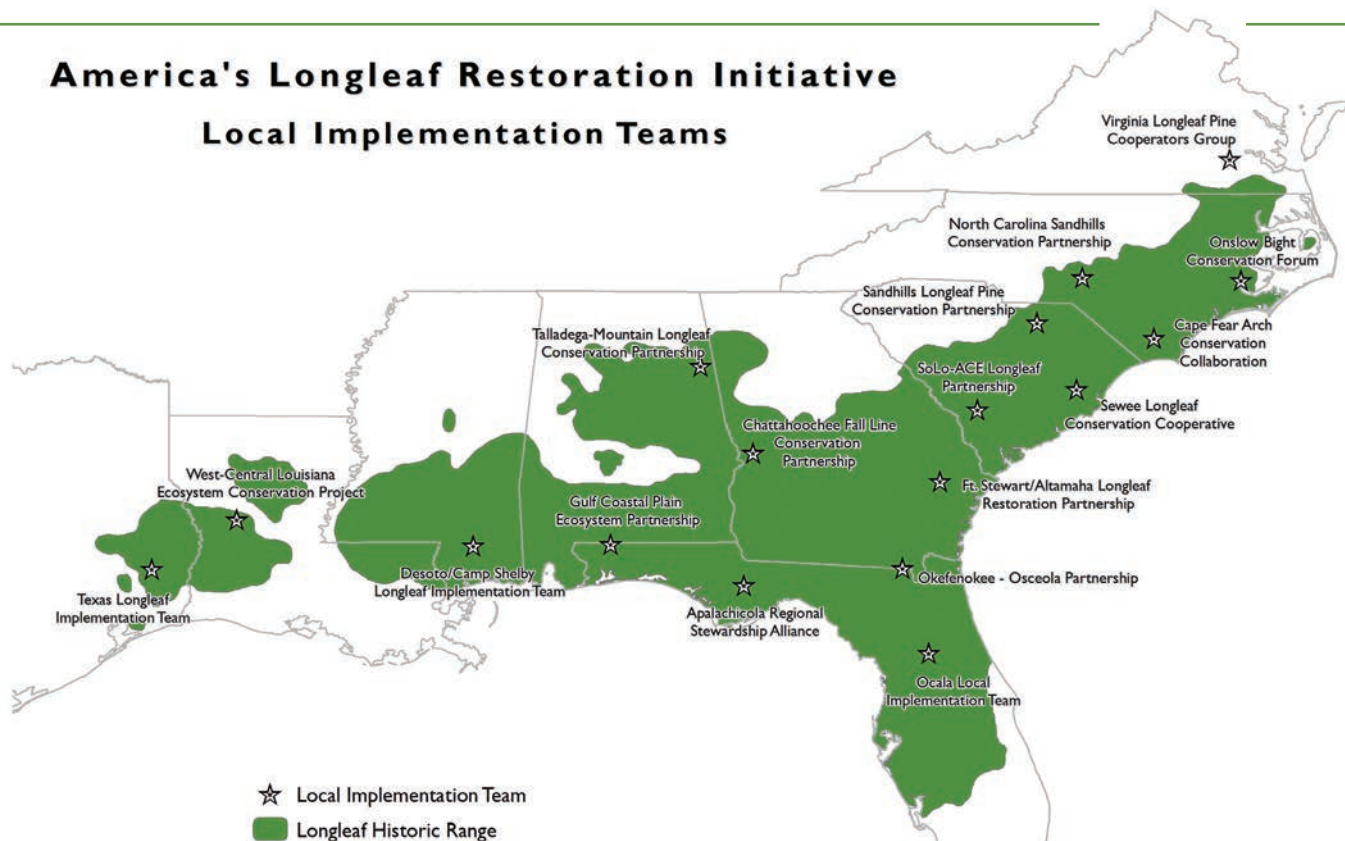
**2. Participate** in a priority mapping session. These are short web calls or meetings to identify where information gaps exist in your landscape. This may look different than previous mapping exercises LITs have gone through—or it may result in similar hot spots on your map where conservation values and knowledge gaps coincide. If you would like to help guide us in this step, please reach out to your LIT Coordinator or Ryan Bollinger at [ryan\\_b@longleafalliance.org](mailto:ryan_b@longleafalliance.org).

**3. Collect!** Karen Zilliox Brown, with LLA, is the project coordinator for field work; contact her for more details on collecting longleaf data in your LIT at [karen@longleafalliance.org](mailto:karen@longleafalliance.org).

Funding for LEO is provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service via the U.S. Endowment for Sustainable Forestry and Communities.



## America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative Local Implementation Teams



## The LEO project has hit the ground and is coming to a LIT near you!

### { ONGOING PARTNER SURVEYS }

DeSoto-Camp Shelby Longleaf Implementation Team • Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership  
Chattahoochee Fall Line Conservation Partnership

### { SPRING 2020 }

SoLoACE Longleaf Partnership • Ft. Stewart/Altamaha Longleaf Pine Restoration Partnership  
Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance

### { SUMMER 2020 }

Texas Longleaf Implementation Team • West Central Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership  
Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaboration

### { FALL 2020 }

Onslow Bight Conservation Forum • North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership  
Okefenokee-Osceola Partnership

### { SPRING/SUMMER 2021 }

Sewee Longleaf Conservation Cooperative • Talladega Mountain Longleaf Conservation Partnership  
Virginia Longleaf Pine Cooperators Group • Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership

*The Ocala-to-Osceola (O2O) Wildlife Corridor (O2O) strives for habitat connectivity for wide-ranging species such as Florida black bears. Photo by Kelly O'Connor.*

By Matt Greene, The North Florida Land Trust

# The O2O Partnership

## A Land Trust Approach to Longleaf Landscape Conservation in North Florida

Those of us who choose to reside in North Florida often do so for one of several reasons; no state income tax, plenty of sunshine (and golf courses), beautiful beaches, and our bays and rivers that provide world-class fishing. A select few do so because of something deeper – a connection to the land. We cannot seem to shake the desire to wander under dappled sunlight in longleaf forests, and marvel at the plant and animal diversity found here. Some of us are even lucky enough to make a living helping to protect and restore the once-dominant forest of the Southeast. While our portion of North Florida may not be as renowned for its longleaf pine as other spots in the South, this landscape is giving rise to a new belt of continuous longleaf pine ecosystems.

### About North Florida Land Trust

Within the last decade, several land trusts have waded into the longleaf arena to boost existing state and federal restoration efforts. Land Trusts are charities across the country that work with landowners to conserve and steward land for conservation, which may include protecting habitat, water quality, scenic views, soils, and more. Founded in 1999, the mission of North Florida Land Trust (NFLT) to protect natural resources, historic places, and working lands in North Florida has resulted in the preservation of nearly 25,000 acres. In addition to the acquisition of conservation lands, NFLT and land trusts nationwide have an obligation to protect and steward those lands in perpetuity, including annual monitoring and often ecosystem restoration. In recent years, NFLT has established partnerships focused on augmenting existing efforts of two longleaf Local Implementation Teams to preserve and restore longleaf ecosystems in North Central Florida.

### The Ocala-to-Osceola (O2O) Partnership

The idea of connecting Ocala and Osceola National Forests was created decades ago, but it was not until recently that the effort gained momentum. Known as the Ocala-to-Osceola Wildlife Corridor (O2O), this area includes 1.6 million acres of forested and rural lands that make up a 100-mile long section of the larger statewide Florida Wildlife Corridor. In a nutshell, the goal is to create a functional corridor of habitat large enough to allow wide-ranging species such as Florida black bears to meet their biological needs.

Launched in 2017, the O2O Partnership, led by NFLT, has 18 member organizations, including federal and state conservation agencies and six non-profit organizations. The Partnership centers on common goals – landscape conservation and protection of working lands and military training missions. The O2O Partnership seeks to promote collaboration among programs, funding sources, and resources to improve conservation delivery within the O2O. The Partnership envisions a landscape that includes habitat for wildlife and imperiled species, healthy watersheds, working forests, and rural-based economies to ensure ecological resiliency for future generations as our populations grow and our climate and environments change.

### Accomplishments

Camp Blanding Joint Training Center (CBJTC), located in the heart of the O2O and home of the Florida National Guard, is a prominent partner in regional preservation efforts. NFLT is working with CBJTC via the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program to accelerate land conservation near the installation to prevent incompatible development from impacting military





*North Florida Land Trust staff celebrated the Trust's 20th Anniversary this year. Photo by NFLT.*

*Skyblue lupine in a longleaf sandhill at Little Rain Lake Preserve. Photo by Matt Greene.*

training and to increase habitat for imperiled species. Since 2016, this partnership between NFLT and CBJTC, which benefits conservation and military mission flexibility, has protected >7,000 acres surrounding CBJTC in the O2O. Further contributions from the state have added an additional 3,562 acres, and a long-term commitment from the Natural Resource Conservation Service will apply more than \$12 million in conservation easement and land restoration funding.

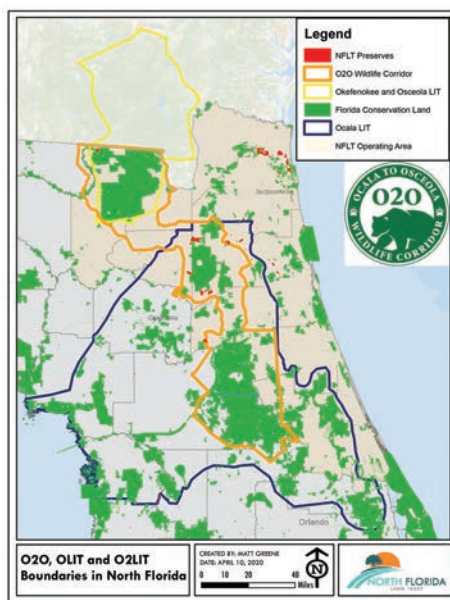
In less than three years, NFLT has acquired 6,000 acres of historical longleaf pine habitat, often neglected and fire-suppressed but still intact. Of our 4000 acres of upland longleaf, 47% is suitable gopher tortoise habitat, and restorable with prescribed fire. In fact, it is unusual, and disappointing, to not encounter a tortoise while doing fieldwork. Sandhills, pine flatwoods and scrub are home to other beloved species like the Florida black bear, pocket gophers, Bachman's sparrow, and brown-headed nuthatches. Seasonal ponds, sandhill lakes, and deep sugar sand soils aid in recharging the Floridan aquifer, the primary source of drinking water for millions of Floridians.

### Looking to the Future

Buying land is only half the story, however. In the last year, NFLT increased its stewardship staff to better tackle our management opportunities. Each NFLT property has a management plan and is enrolled in best management practice and forest product certification programs. Prescribed fire, coupled with chemical and mechanical treatments, will improve forest

health and enhance wildlife habitat. We are working on careful reintroduction of fire into a 600-acre sandhill ecosystem that hasn't burned in more than 50 years, restoring ephemeral wetlands to benefit declining amphibians (gopher frogs, striped newts, and ornate chorus frogs), and planting 130 acres of longleaf. It's a blessing to work on several large tracts (600+ acres) featuring intact groundcover underneath a canopy of multi-aged longleaf pine, with trees often exceeding 100 years old. The sight of a fox squirrel, array of wildflowers and winged friends, with the wind amongst the pines, are the simple pleasures of summer.

Although early land preservation efforts are promising, much work remains. Recently acquired lands require restoration, and fundraising needs never stop. Twenty-one million people already call Florida home, and with projections to add thirteen million more residents by 2070, our wildlands and working lands will be lost to degradation, development, and fragmentation if we do not act in a timely manner. The O2O represents an opportunity to preserve an ecologically functioning and fire-adapted landscape within reach of the first and fourth-largest cities in Florida, Jacksonville and Orlando. It will not be easy, but NFLT and partners look forward to partnering with private landowners to preserve the sunshine state, its agricultural economies, and perhaps most importantly, a vast array of biodiversity that John and William Bartram documented in the 1760s and 1770s for future generations to enjoy.



*The O2O Partnership collaborates with two longleaf LITs while also working towards a wildlife corridor between these longleaf focal areas. Map by Matt Greene.*

**Having met the initial goal of protecting 10,000 acres by 2020, the new O2O goal is to protect an additional 140,000 acres by 2040 through strategic acquisitions of land and conservation easements.**

## News from the Chattahoochee Fall Line Conservation Partnership

By LuAnn Craighton, *The Nature Conservancy*



*The Chattahoochee/Marion County Unit was named the Georgia Forestry Commission's 2019 North Zone Unit of the Year honoring their outstanding stewardship achievements across the region. Photo by Georgia Forestry Commission.*

The Georgia Forestry Commission recently honored the Chattahoochee/Marion County Unit as the 2019 North Zone Unit of the Year. This group of talented men and women work in the heart of the Fort Benning Significant Geographic Area along the Fall Line and provide a broad set of services to landowners in the region. The award was based on the Unit's wildfire response actions, plowing and harrowing completed for private landowners, prescribed burning assistance provided to private landowners, participation in community outreach events as well as their execution of special assignments and projects.

Prescribed fire is a critical component of land management across the region. The Chattahoochee/Marion Unit assisted with 5,929 acres of prescribed burning during the 2019 fiscal year. That positioned them as the Unit with the second-highest number of prescribed burn acres statewide. The Unit also provided instructors for three "Learn & Burn Workshops" organized by the Chattahoochee Fall Line Prescribed Fire Cooperative. These events focused on working with private landowners, in small group settings, to expand their prescribed fire skills and experience. In addition, the Unit conducted Smokey the Bear programs at the local elementary schools.

Congratulations to the Chattahoochee/Marion Unit on this award! Their expertise and commitment to excellence contribute significantly to the positive conservation outcomes achieved along the Fall Line.

## Georgia Sentinel Landscapes Awarded \$2.1 Million Grant from USDA

By Randy Tate, *The Longleaf Alliance*



*The Georgia Sentinel Landscape was formed in 2017 with the goal of coordinating state conservation priorities across a broad area of South Georgia.*

The Georgia Conservancy received an award made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service in support of the Georgia Sentinel Landscape, a collaboration of Georgia-based organizations and agencies whose mission is to conserve working and natural lands adjacent to Georgia's military installations.

"I'm excited to announce the first RCPP awards under the 2018 Farm Bill," said USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Matthew Lohr. "Through collaboration and aligning our resources toward a common goal, we're making an impact for natural resource conservation that could never have been realized on our own."

The \$2.1 million grant from the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) will be leveraged to address key land conservation and stewardship priorities in Georgia. The RCPP is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds solutions to natural resource challenges on private agricultural and forestry lands.

A portion will be allocated for permanent land conservation by land trusts in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program. The remainder of the grant will be used to enhance habitat management in ecologically-significant areas, including the native longleaf pine ecosystem.



## Florida Funds Invasive Plant Management; Back to Burning

By Brian Pelc, *The Nature Conservancy*



*Fire Staff waiting, 6 feet apart, before the daily prescribed fire briefing at Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve. Photo by J. Vineyard.*

Partners from both Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance (ARSA) and Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) convened the Panhandle Working Group for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's FY2021 Upland Invasive Plant Management Program. This unique program provides invasive plant control on any public conservation land in Florida, with projects submitted and ranked by local land managers. The Panhandle Working Group considered presentations on 12 projects, including several important longleaf pine sites struggling to manage large infestations of weed species. Contracts will be executed over the summer, and work on the highest-ranking projects can commence as soon as August. Prescribed fire is starting to return to the landscape as ARSA agencies gradually return to field work following spring stay-at-home measures due to COVID-19. While social distancing has huge implications for the fireline, creative land managers have worked to balance staff safety with the growing backlog of acres ready for growing season fire. Many of the critical longleaf pine forest groundcover species depend on growing season fire for seed production, so safely returning to burning this summer means we can collect seed in the fall for restoration.

## North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership Celebrates 20 Year Anniversary

Jeff Marcus, *The Nature Conservancy*, Susan Miller, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*, and Ana Castillo, *Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education*



*Planting of the one-millionth longleaf by The Nature Conservancy was celebrated by Fort Bragg Garrison Commander Kyle Reed, TNC NC Director Katherine Skinner, landowner Margaret Johnson, U.S. Senator Richard Burr, landowner and special forces Officer Jay Johnson, and NC Department of Agriculture Assistant Commissioner Scott Bissett. Photo by Brady Beck.*

The North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership (NCSCP) is celebrating its 20th anniversary. The Partnership was born out of conflict, following the “woodpecker wars” of the 1990s. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Jeopardy opinion to Fort Bragg, restricting military training. Meanwhile, on private lands, many were clearcutting their mature longleaf forests before they became “infested” with red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs) for fear of government regulation.

Fortunately, some forward-thinking individuals understood that there was more to gain by working together and thus began the “woodpecker dialogue.” Key collaborators from the U.S. Army, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense, and North Carolina State University worked together to craft solutions. Two notable programs were created through this effort—the Army Compatible Use Buffer program to conserve land to protect endangered species and military training, and the Safe Harbor program, which provides private landowners with regulatory assurances if they manage their land compatible with RCWs.

This collaborative spirit was formalized with the formation of the NCSCP in 2000, providing a forum for the Army and federal, state, and NGO conservation organizations to share information, ideas, and resources. Since its inception, NCSCP

partners have protected over 30,000 acres, restored and managed longleaf and related habitats on over 240,000 acres of conservation lands, and planted over two million longleaf pine trees.

The Partnership collects and synthesizes data on conservation priorities to guide protection work and land use planning by local governments. Partners launched the first Prescribed Burn Association in the southeastern U.S., provide cost-share and technical advice to thousands of landowners, and established a festival to celebrate fire and the oldest known living longleaf (472 years and counting). The Partnership leverages grants and facilitates the sharing of burn crews. In 2006 the NCSCP celebrated the recovery of the NC Sandhills RCW population, allowing Fort Bragg to ease many training restrictions.

The NCSCP helped inspire the creation of other conservation partnerships, and it continues to reinvent itself to respond to evolving challenges and partner needs. Happy 20th Anniversary, NCSCP!



## Spring Planting Success in the O2LIT

By Rebecca Shelton, O2LIT Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy



*Betsey Nayfield Crisp planting longleaf on her family's private conservation easement. Photo by Dr. KC Nayfield.*



*Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Florida Forest Service staff loading seedlings designated for private landowners restoring fire-damaged longleaf on 500 acres. Photo by Ginger Morgan.*

The Okefenokee-Osceola Partnership (O2LIT) enjoyed a productive spring planting season. From the feedback received from prior outreach workshops and by working with private landowners, we were able to identify several areas of land prepped and ready for longleaf restoration. Through a cooperative effort with our partners, over 57,000, second-year, containerized longleaf pine seedlings were recently distributed and planted. These seedlings were provided by the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in conjunction with partners in the O2LIT to meet longleaf restoration and outreach goals in our area.

More than 32,000 quality seedlings were given to several private landowners at no charge. This helped to create active and open lines of communication and guidance, as well as influencing restoration on several hundred acres of privately managed lands. Also, approximately 15,000 seedlings were planted on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Com-

mission's Lafayette Forest Wildlife Environmental Area (WEA), along with 10,000 seedlings on the Suwannee Ridge WEA to conserve and restore a critical habitat that is paramount to imperiled species management.

Upcoming plans for the O2LIT include additional site preparation for habitat restoration, removal of offsite pine species, and identification of areas and landowners interested in understory restoration. O2LIT members actively engage in social media, handwritten notes, and offer several virtual opportunities to learn and interact, keeping our landowners engaged and safe during this challenging time.

## Data Analysis of 3,500-Acre Longleaf Tract on Sandy Island

By Patrick Ma, The Nature Conservancy of South Carolina



*Upland timber age classes on Sandy Island. Green = mature longleaf (80-150 years), yellow = intermediate longleaf, and blue = young longleaf (<15 years). Other upland habitats are in red. Map by Sabine & Waters, Inc.*

The Sewee Longleaf Conservation Cooperative (SLCC) contracted Sabine and Waters Natural Resource Management (S&W) to conduct a timber cruise of the 3,500 acres of longleaf pine uplands on The Nature Conservancy of South Carolina's (TNC-SC) 9,165-acre crown-jewel preserve, Sandy Island. S&W cored three longleaf pines at each plot (one core from the dominant, co-dominant, and suppressed canopy classes in 353 plots, roughly 1000 cores total). Data suggest the Preserve's unique dune topography dramatically influences longleaf growth characteristics and canopy recruitment. S&W observed that longleaf pine on the sandy ridges exhibited stunted growth in both diameter and height. Conversely, trees near the top of the slope and in drains exhibited larger diameters and height for trees of the same age class. In other words, trees at the top and bottom of slopes could be the same age but exhibit vastly different diameters and heights. Clearly, soil type and water availability play a key role in these differences in growth.

Next, the SLCC will enlist the help of Dr. Don Hagan's Forest Ecology and Fire Science Lab at Clemson University for exploratory data analysis. Hagan's lab will conduct a thorough investigation of the data collected by S&W and process the collected tree cores. Prescribed fire is the only management tool allowed on the island due to the restricted covenants created during its protection in 1997. Ten years ago, The Nature Conservancy defined desired future conditions for the upland longleaf on Sandy Island Preserve based on LANDFIRE Biophysical Settings. When combined with ten years of significant prescribed fire history, this timber cruise will serve as a benchmark to guide future prescribed fire applications.



## South Carolina Sandhills Partnership Landowner Outreach Sees Results

By Charles Babb, SLPCP Coordinator



*Landowner Barbara Jenkins's longleaf restoration project included removing loblolly and hardwoods during thinning to shift the stand to longleaf dominant. Photo by Charles Babb.*

The South Carolina Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership (SLPCP) is once again using its field inventory of forest stands to conduct an outreach campaign, this time to landowners with mature longleaf sites who could benefit from management practices to enhance longleaf understory and wildlife habitat. The initial inventory indicates that only about 4,500 acres of privately owned, mature longleaf remain in the focal area. Protection and management of these stands is key to aiding the Partnership's efforts to return threatened and endangered species such as the red-cockaded woodpecker to private lands.

Charles Babb, Coordinator, is reaching out to landowners to discuss alternatives to clear-cutting and replanting mature stands. To date, seven landowners have worked with the SLPCP to remove undesired species of hardwood and loblolly pines, thinned to reduce basal area, and returned fire to their forest stands. Three landowners have installed RCW nest cavities. Approximately 375 acres of mature longleaf are being managed to encourage natural regeneration and long-term selective harvesting.

The SLPCP mailed letters to 200 landowners, identified as owning forests with mature trees, to introduce the Partnership and raise awareness of their stands' unique values and potential. "We want to start a conversation with these landowners in hopes of finding a few champions interested in creating something special. When people understand just what they have, we often find that their priorities aren't necessarily to maximize income," said Babb. "Habitat improvement and aesthetics are valuable to many landowners who enjoy their forests."

## Planting Trees, Chasing Frogs, and Workshops in the South Lowcountry – ACE Basin (SoLoACE)

By Bobby Franklin and Lisa Lord, The Longleaf Alliance



*Jim Porter discusses stand management at the Women Owning Woodlands tour in Jasper County, South Carolina. Photo by Lisa Lord.*

Even with the pandemic and weather-related challenges, the SoLoACE partners succeeded in restoring longleaf and providing outreach to landowners throughout the landscape. The wet weather slightly delayed the planting season, but all the seedlings made it into the ground, with a total of 813 acres planted.

Some species in the longleaf ecosystems benefited from the rainy period. The Longleaf Alliance partnered with the Savannah River Ecology Lab (SREL) to survey private lands for the Carolina gopher frog to better understand the species range in South Carolina. These efforts also provide landowner outreach opportunities to discuss the role of fire in maintaining their isolated wetlands. The rain kept ephemeral ponds full, providing a wonderful environment for egg mass surveys and water sampling. Dr. Stacey Lance, a researcher with SREL, moved her lab to her living room during COVID-19 stay-at-home orders to continue making progress on the project!

Despite rain delays and a short, virus-related burn ban, partners are on track to burn at least 1,600 acres. The area was impacted by the April 13th tornado outbreak with at least eight tornados confirmed in the LIT; some partners suffered extensive damage. Many in the Partnership were involved in damage assessment and tornado recovery.

Several SoLoACE partners, including Clemson Extension, The Longleaf Alliance, SC Forestry Commission, Lowcountry Land Trust, NRCS, and others, organized and participated in a Women Owning Woodlands Workshop and Field Day on March 7th in Ridgeland at the Blue Heron Nature Center and Bailey Mill Plantation. Over 35 women participated in this event designed to connect landowners with natural resource professionals and the resources they need to manage their land. The Women Owning Woodlands Program addresses the needs of female forest owners and supports women in forest leadership roles.



## Texas Team Launches Songbird Monitoring Project

By Bill Bartush and Jenny Sanders



*A song meter in a young longleaf stand where northern bobwhite quail were detected. Photo by Dr. Dan Saenz.*

In 2018 the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team (TLIT) partnered with the U.S. Forest Service Southern Research Station to launch a project that would evaluate the effects of longleaf restoration on priority bird species. Conservationists have long assumed that common longleaf management practices ultimately result in an increased occurrence of priority birds such as eastern wild turkey, brown-headed nuthatch, northern bobwhite, Bachman's sparrow, and red-cockaded woodpecker. However, responsible restoration requires the testing of assumptions.

Through this collaborative effort, an intensive investigation of bird response to longleaf restoration was initiated. Researchers placed remote sound meters in treated (burned) and untreated (unburned) sites in southern Angelina and Jasper Counties. Monitors collected singing bird presence data each day at dawn and dusk during the breeding season. After the first season of monitoring, the results are promising! Preliminary analysis indicates a greater occurrence of priority birds in the treated stands than untreated.

Additional song meters were deployed and are collecting data for a second season. Perhaps the best news in all this is that the TLIT is poised to have a more solid understanding of our impacts on a key indicator of system health and integrity. The birds are letting us know, and we're listening!

Read the full preliminary report at [www.txlongleaf.org/blog](http://www.txlongleaf.org/blog). Thank you for funding and resources provided by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, American Bird Conservancy, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, Texas A&M Forest Service, Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

## Season of Fire Guidelines for Longleaf Pine Seedlings and Saplings

By Mary Anne S. Sayer, Plant Physiologist, USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station



*After May prescribed fire, starch that is naturally available between late winter and early summer feeds the post-scorch foliage growth of seedlings and young saplings until new foliage is mature enough to export photosynthate. Photo by Mary Anne S. Sayer.*

By using prescribed fire as early as two years post-planting, foresters can “jump-start” the growth of longleaf pine seedlings. Abundant sunlight after burning leads to early emergence from the grass stage, thereby promoting the juvenile growth of longleaf pine desired by private landowners. But what are the risks of burning young longleaf pine? A recent study on the Kisatchie National Forest by the USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station found both starch and photosynthate are important to post-scorch needle regrowth, which is key to sustained production in prescribed burned forests. Relative contributions of these mechanisms depend on post-fire foliage retention and season of fire. Longleaf pine starch reserves accumulate annually from November through March and are nearly depleted by August. Photosynthate produced by un-burned foliage feeds foliage regrowth, but for young, completely scorched longleaf pine, foliage regrowth depends on seasonally available starch until new fascicles mature. Prescribed fire in spring should be avoided where seedlings recently initiated height growth and have fire-vulnerable elongating buds. Otherwise, prescribed fire in spring is tolerated by young longleaf pines despite complete crown scorch because of seasonally available starch that supplements photosynthate to regrow scorched foliage. The USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station is a founding member of the West Central Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership, a coalition of stakeholders including the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Department of Defense, Natural Resource Conservation Service, state and federal wildlife agencies, conservation NGOs and others advancing longleaf restoration within the Fort Polk/Kisatchie National Forest SGA.

Research publication: Sayer, M.A.S.; Tyree, M.C.; Kuehler, E.A.; Jackson, J.K.; Dillaway, D.N. 2020. Physiological Mechanisms of Foliage Recovery after Spring or Fall Crown Scorch in Young Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris* Mill.). *Forests* 11(208). <https://doi.org/10.3390/f11020208>



## Talladega Mountains Longleaf Conservation Partnership Burning Update

By Alex Varner, TMLCP LIT Coordinator/Mountain Longleaf Conservation Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy



*This high ridge along Weogufka Creek in Coosa County, Alabama contains significant stands of ancient longleaf. Fire crews burned this area for the first time in February. Photo by Alex Varner.*

Despite this abridged fire season, the seasonal fire crews across the Talladega Mountains Longleaf Conservation Partnership (TMLCP) landscape still got in some great burning. Total fire acres for the two Alabama and one Georgia crew were 40,481—an impressive number for a very short amount of time wedged between the abnormal rain amounts this winter and the early shutdown due to COVID-19. Prescribed fire occurred across the entire TMLCP landscape, from the southern edge in Autauga County, Alabama, to the rocky escarpments in east Alabama and northwest Georgia. Fire was conducted on all three districts of the Talladega National Forest, the Conasauga District of the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest in Georgia, TNC lands in Georgia and Alabama, Paulding and Sheffield State Forests in Georgia, high priority old-growth tracts in Alabama, state-owned lands in Alabama, and Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) lands in Georgia. Some of the most important lands within the landscape were burned this year. All the seasonal firefighters learned a great deal about firing operations and ecosystem dynamics in this unique part of the longleaf pine's range. Berry College was lined up for a 120-acre unit fire, but will have to wait until next year, like many other burns planned this season. Fingers crossed that we can get next year's fire season underway without any major hiccups from the pandemic.

## Exceptional Prescribed Fire Year for Conecuh National Forest

By Vernon Compton, The Longleaf Alliance



*Prescribed burn through the ground-cover on the Conecuh National Forest. Photo by Geoffrey Sorrell, The Nature Conservancy, Alabama Chapter.*



*Understory response, 2.5 months post-fire on the Conecuh National Forest. Photo by Vernon Compton, The Longleaf Alliance.*

Within the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) landscape, partners have identified prescribed fire as the highest priority for longleaf pine ecosystem restoration and management. The Conecuh National Forest benefited from a banner prescribed fire year with 34,208 acres burned, the most burned annually since 2001. This was all accomplished before March 18, when the Forest Service paused prescribed burning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several factors led to such a productive year, including a new streamlined burn plan format and funding for a full-time dozer crew to prepare firelines.

With more line prep accomplished earlier in 2019, all was ready to go when the first good burn day arrived in November, leading to more prescribed fire opportunities. New equipment also played a role as two new UTV torch units helped with ignitions, and helicopter ignitions assisted with several big burn days where two to four units were burned at the same time. “This good year helped us get fire into areas that were very much in need of fire effects,” said Kevin Mock, new Fire Management Officer on the Conecuh. “It wouldn't have happened without the great financial support from our Regional and Forest Supervisor's Office, and exceptional ground and air support from our local staff, the whole National Forests in Alabama team, and the many partners who provide us essential capacity to do more.” Partners contributing to this accomplishment include Alabama Forestry Commission, Florida Forest Service, Prescribed Fire Training Center, The Nature Conservancy, and LLA and GCPEP. Of course, Mother Nature must cooperate for a season like this to occur, and good fire weather conditions prevailed with rain falling when needed to allow prescribed burning to continue. Congratulations, Conecuh National Forest, on pulling together everything necessary for the outstanding prescribed fire accomplishments in a shortened burn season. Job well done!



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**COVER** Young longleaf reclaiming the shore of Hurricane Lake, in the Blackwater River State Forest of Florida. Longleaf forests yield cleaner, more abundant water than other forest types. Photo by Ad Platt.

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