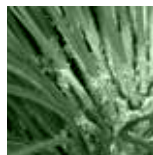


America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative

2015 RANGE-WIDE ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT

Longleaf Partnership Council | April 2016





Message from Kevin McIntyre

Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center
2015 Longleaf Partnership Council Chair

The members of the Longleaf Partnership Council are pleased to present the third annual summary of the Partnership's work to advance the goals of the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative. The *2015 Range-wide Accomplishment Report* details the collective achievements of our partners as we continue implementation of the *Range-wide Conservation Plan* for Longleaf Pine. The 33 members of the Council bring together a diverse suite of skills, talent and expertise that truly demonstrates the concept of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. The Range-wide Plan was developed out of recognition that the challenge of restoring longleaf pine ecosystems across their historic range at a scale that mattered was bigger than any one agency or organization and would require an unprecedented level of collaboration. I'm proud to say that the longleaf community has risen to the challenge and is now recognized as one of the most successful conservation partnerships in the nation. I was very honored to serve as Chair of the Council in 2015 and appreciate the support of all of our partners.

First, I want to express the Council's sincere thanks to all who contributed to the "rolling up" of these data, especially Clay Ware, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This report is an enormous undertaking, but is essential to documenting the Initiative's progress and justifying the resources allocated to our work. The results of this report are very encouraging. For the third year in a row, the goals for establishment of new acres of longleaf pine were exceeded and it is important to note that these numbers have been remarkably consistent from year to year. Importantly, 2015 marks the first year since we began this reporting process in which prescribed fire acreage goals have been met. Numbers were also up for other longleaf pine improvement activities, such as midstory and overstory treatments and native groundcover restoration. This is indicative that we are putting more emphasis on efforts to address degraded existing longleaf, an important component of our comprehensive strategy, but one that received less attention in the early years of the Initiative.

The sustained momentum and increased accomplishments are something of which we can all be proud. However, we cannot take these results for granted or lessen the efforts that were responsible for them. Indeed, we will need to accelerate our progress if we are to meet the goals of the Range-wide Plan. In the coming year, those involved in the Council will take a deeper look at the overall progress as well as the challenges and opportunities for accelerating our progress. In closing, I would like to thank everyone involved in this monumental effort for your contributions; we have much to be proud of and much that remains to be done. In particular, I would like to thank my colleagues on the Council leadership team, especially Mike Black for his three years of service. We are also very grateful for the generous financial support of the federal and corporate sponsors of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Longleaf Stewardship Fund. Finally, those of you doing the work on the ground are the ones that make the longleaf world go around; Local Implementation Teams, private landowners, agency and NGO personnel across the range and others too numerous to mention. **Thanks for all you do.**

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2015 Range-wide Accomplishment Findings

This report documents accomplishments associated with the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI) between October 1, 2014, and September 30, 2015, as compiled by the nine State Coordination Teams throughout the longleaf range from southern Virginia to eastern Texas. The primary purpose of this report is to assess and summarize the following: 1) the scale of on-the-ground work performed within the longleaf range; 2) the degree to which ALRI's priorities identified in ALRI's *Strategic Priorities and Actions 2013–2015* are being accomplished; 3) the level at which public and private funds are being leveraged; 4) the challenges and required actions related to the 8-million-acre longleaf restoration goal identified in the *Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine*.

The Longleaf Partnership Council (Council) consists of 33 agencies, organizations, forest industry, forestry consultants, and private landowners, which collectively epitomize the collaboration needed for the restoration of longleaf pine through ALRI. This report will highlight the success that the 17 Local Implementation Teams (LITs), working within the 18 Significant Geographic Areas (SGAs) identified in the Range-wide Plan, have had in getting “boots on the ground” to implement restoration activities, which the State Coordination Teams have both facilitated and tracked at the state level. The Federal Coordinating Committee's commitment to ALRI and the Council continued in 2015 through critical contributions of federal programs and resources. As a result, 2015 was a record-breaking year with various on-the-ground restoration activities reported on nearly two million acres to bring back or improve longleaf pine forests across the South.

Key Overall Findings

Broadly speaking, ALRI considers various activities, including tree planting, prescribed burning, midstory treatments, invasive species control, native understory plant establishment, overstory treatments, and land acquisition/easements to be restoration activities, even though some of these may more accurately be considered stand or forest maintenance. These activities were reported on an impressive 1,926,456 acres of public and private lands, representing a 24% increase from 2014 and a 40% increase from 2013. Approximately 64% of the total accomplishments occurred within the SGAs.

Approximately 70% of the overall accomplishments were conducted on public lands (1,356,239 acres), with the National Forest System, military installations, and State Forests being primary contributors (Figure 1). Prescribed burning accounted for approximately 91% of accomplishments reported on public land.

1.93 Million Acres Improved or Restored

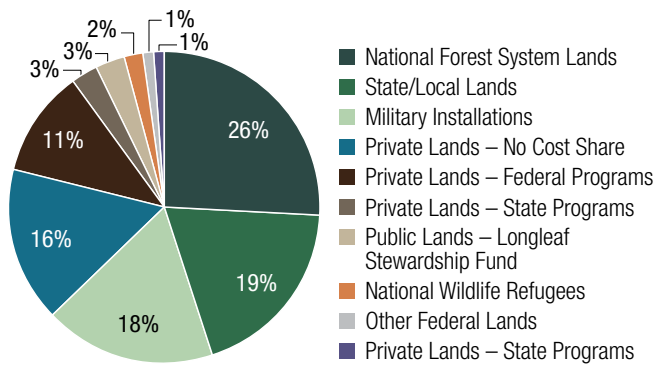


Figure 1. Distribution of longleaf accomplishment acreage across various land ownerships and support programs.

Consistent with 2014, approximately two-thirds of the reported accomplishments in 2015 occurred in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama (Figure 2). Impressive overall accomplishment acreage gains of over 20% were reported in five states in the longleaf range from 2014 to 2015: Mississippi (+28%); Alabama (+83%); Florida (+30%); South Carolina (+21%); and Virginia (+56%).

Restoration activities were reported on 570,217 acres of private land, an increase of more than 200,000 acres relative to 2014. Longleaf pine establishment accounted for approximately 23% of these 2015 accomplishments. Remarkably, over 345,000 acres of prescribed burning was reported on private land in 2015, an increase of over 165,000 acres from what was reported in 2014. This affirms the Council’s belief that more prescribed fire is being conducted on private lands than previously estimated. This is also a credit to the collaborative efforts of the Council and the states of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina to better track and

1.93 Million Acres of Longleaf Impacted Across the Nine State Range

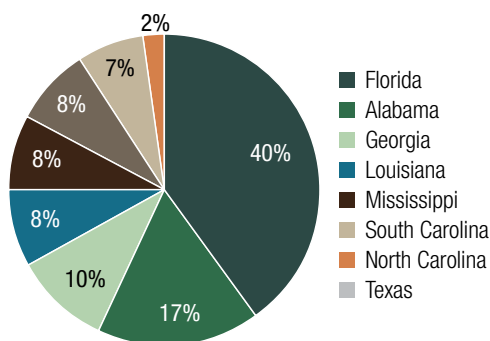


Figure 2. Distribution of longleaf accomplishment acreage by State.

report private longleaf acres treated with prescribed fire. These efforts will help us continue to refine our reporting process and demonstrate the feasibility of tracking prescribed fire in longleaf for other states.

In 2015, 70% of total accomplishments were reported on public lands, which comprise only 39% of the area of existing longleaf pine. Conversely, private lands account for 61% of the area of longleaf pine, but supported only 30% of reported accomplishments. As reporting mechanisms improve for restoration activities taking place on private lands, it is anticipated that the disparity between figures for public and private lands will lessen to some degree, but due to resource availability, technical expertise, and a more conservation-based management scheme, it is expected that public lands will continue to set the pace for longleaf pine ecosystem restoration and maintenance.

The increased longleaf restoration activity reported on private lands also translates into an encouraging change in estimated spending ratios, demonstrating greater leveraging of Federal dollars through various cost-share or other incentive programs. It is estimated that public funding accounted for 71% of the overall on-the-ground restoration expenditures in 2015, down from 78% in 2014. On private lands, however, Federal assistance to landowners for reported restoration activities only represented 47% of the overall cost, down substantially from the 60% estimated in 2014. While improved private lands reporting, particularly in prescribed fire acreage, is responsible for some of this shift, the Council welcomes this change as an indicator that more landowners and land managers are embracing longleaf pine and the species diversity, wildlife habitat, risk aversion, and wood quality benefits it provides as a viable alternative to other pine types. It is worth noting, however, that a few states reported greater demand for longleaf cost share than was available to them.

Strategic Priority 1. Significantly Increase Acres Established in Longleaf Pine

In 2012, the Council identified an annual longleaf establishment goal of between 105,000 and 130,000 acres, with 75% (79,000 to 98,000 acres) occurring on private lands and 25% (26,000 to 32,000 acres) occurring on public lands.

Approximately 151,000 acres of longleaf pine establishment is estimated to have occurred range-wide in 2015 (Figure 3). The estimate is based on known restoration acreages combined with tree nursery survey findings from Auburn University showing that 108 million longleaf seedlings were produced for the fiscal year 2015 planting season. This is down slightly from the 110 million seedlings produced in 2014, resulting in a similar decline in planted acreage. An estimated 23,000 acres (15%) were established on public lands and approximately 128,000 acres (85%) of longleaf pine were established on private lands. Fifty-five percent of the private land establishment acreage came through various cost-share programs. Of this 55%, USDA Farm Bill programs administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) accounted for the majority at 45%, with the remaining 10% attributable to the Longleaf Stewardship Fund, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, and various State forestry and wildlife agency programs. Forty-five percent of the new acres planted on private lands were apparently established independently of cost-share programs, which is an encouraging and welcome trend.

150,808 Acres of Longleaf Pine Established

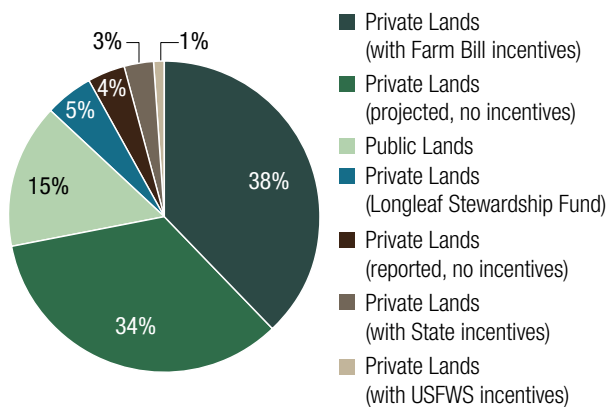


Figure 3. Longleaf establishment acres by ownership and incentive type.

Strategic Priority 2. Improve and Maintain Existing Longleaf Pine Ecosystems, with Emphasis on Prescribed Burning

The partners involved in ALRI recognize the importance of maintaining and improving existing longleaf pine forested acreage across the range through regular implementation of activities such as prescribed

fire, midstory and overstory thinning, understory restoration, and invasive species control. Continuing to apply these treatments on public lands is extremely important, as these protected lands make up nearly 40% of existing longleaf acreage and the vast majority of mature, intact natural longleaf pine forests. A much greater effort is required to conduct these treatments on private lands, as prohibitive costs, competing interests, economies of scale, and the lack of readily available and qualified expertise combine to make this a more challenging endeavor.

Prescribed Burning

ALRI's *Strategic Priorities and Actions 2013–2015* set a goal of increasing annual prescribed burning in longleaf pine ecosystems to between 280,000 and 360,000 acres on private lands and between 1.1 and 1.4 million acres on public lands by 2015. The overall goal across all lands is 1.38 to 1.76 million acres.

A total of 1.58 million acres of prescribed burning was reported in longleaf pine for all ownerships in 2015 (Figure 4). For the first time since the comprehensive Accomplishment Reports were initiated in fiscal year 2013, the reported overall prescribed burning accomplishments are within the range of the short-term goals in *Strategic Priorities and Actions 2013–2015*. Seventy-nine percent of the reported acreage (1.24M acres) occurred on public lands, primarily on NFS lands, DoD Installations, and State-owned forests. Prescribed burning activities on public lands increased by 20% from 2014 to 2015 to easily move within the desired range for public lands.

1,582,522 Acres of Range-wide Prescribed Burning Conducted

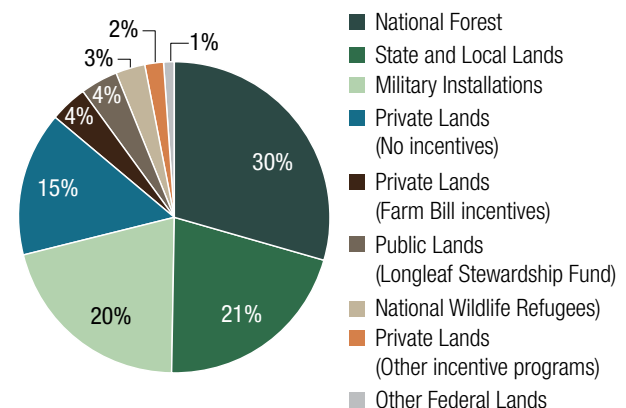


Figure 4. Distribution of prescribed burning acreage by ownership and funding source.

More impressive was the large increase in acreage reported on private lands, which nearly doubled the reported acreage from 2014. The 346,000 acres burned on private lands represent 22% of the overall range-wide prescribed fire acreage. Much of the private lands burning accomplishments can be attributed to improved reporting procedures in Alabama for the entire 2015 reporting year, and supports the Council’s impression that substantially more prescribed fire is being conducted than we were previously aware of. Roughly two-thirds of the overall prescribed burn totals occurred within the 18 designated SGAs.

Other Longleaf Pine Improvement Activities

Additional activities beyond the use of prescribed burning are being utilized to accelerate the restoration of native understory plant communities, desired longleaf stand structure in the overstory and midstory, and to combat invasive plant species. Decades of fire suppression have resulted in degraded conditions on many of the remaining acres of longleaf pine. Without these additional treatments, it would take many years to achieve the desired results using prescribed fire alone. Additionally, thinning operations to remove midstory and overstory have the potential to provide substantial revenue for landowners.

173,325 Acres of Enhancement Activities in Longleaf Pine Forests

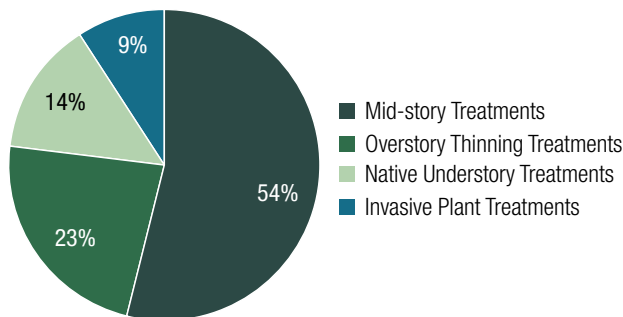


Figure 5. Longleaf ecosystem improvement activities.

In 2015, over 173,000 acres of additional restoration activities were reported (Figure 5). This represents a 22% increase over 2014 and includes approximately 93,000 acres of midstory treatments, 41,000 acres of overstory treatments, 24,000 acres of native plant establishment, and 15,000 acres of non-native invasive plant treatments.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

NRCS’ newest conservation program, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), is playing a major role in restoring longleaf forests by engaging non-government organizations and other groups. Since the first round of funding in 2015, NRCS has committed \$35 million in financial and technical assistance for six high-impact, partner-driven projects aimed at restoring longleaf forests, and our partners have pledged more than \$50 million in matching contributions. RCPP was authorized under the 2014 Farm Bill to promote coordination between NRCS and its partners in delivering conservation assistance to producers and landowners. RCPP has three pools of funding, including a special pool for Critical Conservation Areas (CCAs). Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack designated the longleaf range as one of eight CCAs where NRCS targets this pool of funding.

In fiscal year 2015, four successful RCPP proposals were submitted for funding in 2016. One of these projects, submitted by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, plans to expand forest health conservation practices in longleaf pine forests around six U.S. Department of Defense facilities in the Southeast. The Southern Sentinel Landscapes Conservation project includes \$7.5 million of NRCS funds, which will be matched by \$10 million from 20 partners, including the U.S. Army, Air Force and Marine Corps. This project will protect and restore working forest habitats while helping ensure military preparedness by protecting open space for training and reducing regulatory pressure on the bases by improving habitat for at-risk species on private lands. Longleaf forests will benefit from three other 2016 projects, including the African American Forest Restoration and Retention project led by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities; Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest project led by The Conservation Fund; and the Everglades Headwaters Longleaf project led by The Nature Conservancy.

NRCS Continues to Focus Efforts in Priority Counties

NRCS’s Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) continues to focus restoration efforts, with 81% of conservation activities occurring in priority counties that closely align with the SGAs identified in the *Range-wide*

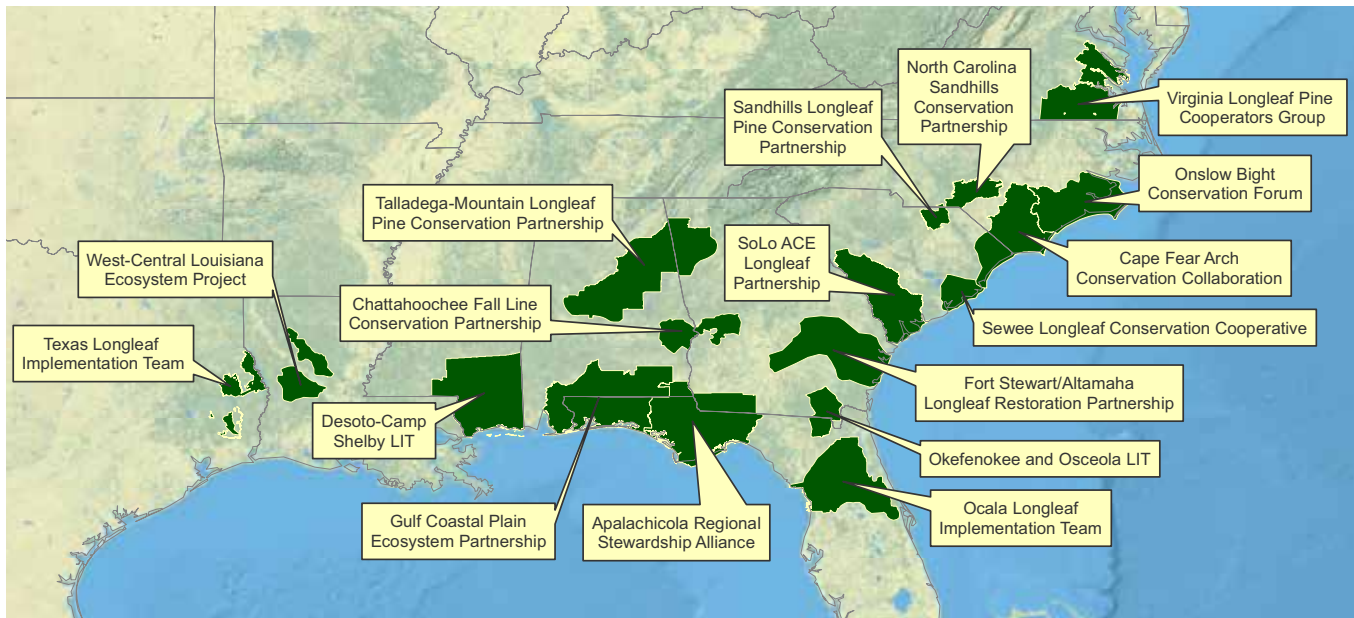


Figure 6. Seventeen Local Implementation Teams are in place across the longleaf range, providing coverage to all 18 Significant Geographic Areas identified in the *Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine*.

Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine. Of the 53,000 acres identified for restoration or improvement activities under the LLPI during fiscal year 2015, more than 43,000 acres were in priority counties. NRCS invested \$8.4 million in restoration efforts in fiscal year 2015, including \$6.6 million in priority counties. This focus on priority counties is part of the Agency's targeted support of ALRI. The LLPI includes the nine states in the longleaf range, and it plays a crucial role in stitching together public and private lands. Overall, more than half of the forests conserved are located near Military Installations, National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, State Forests, or Heritage Preserves. Since 2010, NRCS has invested \$52 million to help 3,700 forest landowners restore more than 290,000 acres of longleaf forests.

Strategic Priority 3. Enhance the Ability to Successfully Implement Restoration Actions

Local Implementation Teams

In order to better coordinate on-the-ground and various reporting activities conducted by the LITs, the Longleaf Alliance hired Ryan Bollinger in January 2015 as the LIT Consul for the ALRI effort. Ryan's accomplishments in 2015 included the large task of coordinating a range-wide LIT Coordinators meeting at Tall Timbers Research Station on July 29–30.

The 1 ½ day meeting brought together 15 of the 17 LITs to discuss LPC range-wide priorities, partnership development, tools for enhancing information sharing among the teams, and updates on funding opportunities through the Longleaf Stewardship Fund administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). The meeting provided LIT Coordinators an opportunity to interface with each other as well as with representatives from the Longleaf Partnership Council and NFWF. The meeting was also a great way to keep NFWF and the Council engaged and informed on the successes, strengths, and needs of the teams. See Figure 6 for LIT distribution across the range.

West Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership – 2015 Longleaf Success Story

The West Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership (WLEP) initiated a partnership with the Ecological Forestry Center of Louisiana, established by the A. J. and Nona Trigg Hodges Foundation. The Foundation has begun an aggressive restoration effort utilizing prescribed fire, reforestation, and herbicide on approximately 4,000 acres of forest in Sabine Parish in west central Louisiana. Formerly longleaf forest, the current slash and loblolly pine stands are being removed and restored back to longleaf. A cost share agreement provided to the Foundation by WLEP leverages



Figure 7. The West Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership is utilizing prescribed fire, reforestation, and herbicide on 4,000 acres of longleaf forest in Sabine Parish through a partnership with the Ecological Forestry Center of Louisiana.



Figure 8. Field trips are a common activity at the 29,000-acre Ichaaway Plantation, home of the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center in Newton, Georgia.

NFWF funds with landowner matching funds to apply herbicide to heavy woody brush on 847 acres of emerging longleaf forest. The restoration effort is especially promising; thousands of longleaf pine seedlings from the bumper seed crop in the autumn of 2014 have become established on the site.

The Foundation plans to make the forest available to research and for educational use at all levels. The Louisiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has established survey plots in the area to track the effectiveness of the restoration treatments. The question of how best to control undesirable brush while maintaining and promoting diverse, native ground cover vegetation in longleaf restoration is one that land managers in the region are currently working to resolve.

J.W. Jones Ecological Research Center

The Jones Research Center held 24 different longleaf-related educational events in 2015 that reached approximately 450 participants. Building on a 2013 inaugural event, the Center brought together state air quality and fire program directors from 8 southeastern states with regional and national-level EPA personnel for Smoke Summit II. This workshop helped foster collaboration and build relationships as we address challenges associated with smoke management and national air quality policies. The Center also reached the 10-year anniversary of our Ecological Forestry Workshops, a professional development course that focuses on longleaf restoration and management

for federal, state, NGO and private land managers from across the Southeast. The Center continues its work with the next generation of natural resource professionals and celebrated the milestone of having over 100 graduate students that have completed advanced degrees at Ichaaway. Finally, the Center's research program continues to contribute to the deeper understanding of longleaf pine ecosystems, with longleaf-related projects on water yield in longleaf pine forests, gopher tortoise ecology and conservation, carbon cycling and wildlife responses to longleaf restoration.

Longleaf Alliance Academies

The Longleaf Alliance (LLA) held a total of ten Longleaf Academies in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina in fiscal year 2015. The Academies consisted of the flagship course, Longleaf 101, as well as Understory Restoration 201, Herbicides & Longleaf 201, and the first-ever Fire & Longleaf 201. The Fire & Longleaf academy was created to provide training on how to better apply fire for beneficial effect in managing longleaf systems. The LLA also developed a new course: Longleaf Legacy 201. This course will focus on techniques for successful generational transfer and is scheduled to debut in late 2016.

The LLA developed the Longleaf Academy program in 2008 to better prepare foresters, landowners, and other natural resource professionals to address management problems and issues specific to longleaf pine ecosystems. Three years later, in response to

the requests from Longleaf 101 academy graduates, the LLA began to develop more in-depth academies focusing on specific topics. Currently, the advanced academies consist of three 201-level academies and one at the 301-level: Understory Restoration 201, Herbicides & Longleaf 201, Fire & Longleaf 201, and Gopher Tortoise 301, respectively.

By the end of fiscal year 2015, the Longleaf Academy program had conducted a total of 56 academies with more than 1,325 attendees. In addition to the academies, the LLA staff has conducted 73 presentations to over 2,800 partner representatives and landowners throughout the historic longleaf range and plans to continue to conduct 10–11 academies annually. See www.longleafalliance.org for more information.

Florida's Longleaf Pine Geodatabase Update

The Florida Forest Service continues to partner with Florida State University's Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) to map 2.2 million acres of longleaf pine forested ecosystems across the state. The Florida Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Geodatabase for 2015 included updates based on FNAI field projects and several partner data sources. Attributes and summaries for conservation lands and land cover were added and the database format was revised. The Rapid Assessment Data Collection Model was also updated and field data collection tools are available upon request. A new interactive web mapping application was created by the FNAI to display the contents of the longleaf geodatabase. More information about the geodatabase project may found at:

www.FreshFromFlorida.com/LongleafGeodatabase

Strategic Priority 4. Maintain and Broaden the Resource Base

2015 Longleaf Stewardship Fund

NFWF awarded approximately \$4.7 million in grants through the Longleaf Stewardship Fund to further restoration of the longleaf ecosystem in 2015. Twenty-three projects across the 9-state historic longleaf range were selected to receive funding that will ultimately reforest 11,600 acres and enhance over 163,000 acres of longleaf pine habitat, while leveraging over \$6.4 million in additional funds from grant partners. Additionally, it is expected that the Fund will provide more than



Figure 9. The Florida Forest Service and Florida Natural Areas Inventory provided Rapid Assessment Data Collection training for foresters (top) and developed an interactive web-based mapping application (bottom).

2,500 private landowners with educational and technical assistance related to longleaf restoration and available cost-share programs, with 380 landowners ultimately entering into stewardship programs on private lands.

“The progress made over the past decade in restoring the longleaf ecosystem is truly remarkable,” said Jeff Trandahl, executive director and CEO at NFWF. “The \$4.7 million in Longleaf Stewardship Fund grants will continue to build on that record of success and serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of public-private partnerships in conserving America’s natural wonders.”

Tenth Biennial Longleaf Alliance Conference – Mobile, AL

The 10th Biennial Longleaf Conference and 9th Eastern Native Grass Symposium were held in Mobile, AL October 21-24, 2014, co-hosted by The Longleaf Alliance and The Eastern Native Grass Alliance. This marked the return to the site of the initial conference and an opportunity to celebrate the significant accomplishments of the last 20 years and recognize the work and energy of some 375 contributors to longleaf and grassland ecosystem restoration. Significant participation and input from universities brought new students and researchers into these efforts, new friendships were formed, and together the two organizations established a remarkable synergy which will lead to new gains in restoring longleaf-grassland ecosystems. As an introduction and lead-in to the Conference, we also hosted a celebration of five years of successes across the longleaf range achieved through the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative.

As a prelude to the Conference, the Longleaf Partnership Council gathered for their fall meeting, reviewing priorities and progress, and setting strategies for continued progress in mapping of private longleaf stands, increasing capacity for prescribed burning, and refining the economics of management and markets. Notable changes in leadership included the retirement of Glen Gaines (USFS), Vernon Compton (GCPEP/LLA) completed his three year appointment on the Leadership Team, Mike Black (NBCI) moved from Chair to Past Chair, Kevin McIntyre (JWJERC) assumed the role of Chair, and Troy Ettl (TNC) was welcomed as Chair-elect. Dedicated time was also devoted to gathering the LIT-Coordinators from across the range for their own focused discussions on how to build teamwork through communication and alignment of their efforts.

Since 2012, the Longleaf Stewardship Fund has invested more than \$14.1 million in projects that will restore more than 47,400 acres, improve more than 552,000 additional acres of longleaf pine forest, and benefit numerous native species that rely on those forests. The grants awarded by the Longleaf Stewardship Fund in 2015 continue to build on the success of this public-private partnership, further expanding the restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem through collaborative and results-oriented actions.



Figure 10. Smokey Bear keeps a watchful eye over a prescribed burn demonstration in Wilmington, NC. Photo credit – Jessie Birkhead/TNC.

Wilmington's "Fire in the Pines Festival" is Big Success

Four thousand people learned about the importance of controlled burning during the Fire in the Pines Festival in Wilmington, North Carolina. The highlight of the festival was a successful controlled burn, which was lit by local television meteorologist Gabrielle Deabler. Another celebrity — Smokey Bear — was also on hand for the event.

This marked the sixth "Fire in the Pines Festival," and the second held at Halyburton Park in Wilmington. Organizers say moving the festival to a more urban setting has helped boost attendance. Originally, the festival was held in a smaller town about 30 miles from Wilmington. The festival is a family event – including kid-friendly activities such as face painting, crafting, and hayrides as well as displays of live raptors and reptiles. The North Carolina Forest Service provided some of the most popular displays — including a giant Smokey and a helicopter.

In return for a beach bike raffle ticket, attendees were encouraged to fill out a survey regarding their attitude toward controlled burning and how they found out about the festival. Nearly 90% of those surveyed agreed that controlled burns reduced wildfires, benefited plants and animals, and could be conducted safely.

Although organizers had paid for some print and radio advertising, the majority of attendees said they found out about the festival from a friend or *via* Facebook.

Event sponsors included The Nature Conservancy, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, PepsiCo, International Paper, and the North Carolina Prescribed Fire Council. For more details about the event contact TNC's Angie Carl or Zach West at (910) 395-5000.

Kisatchie Quarter Release — LA State Quarter Depicts Wild Turkey and Longleaf Pine

In a great tribute to the Kisatchie National Forest and to the conservation efforts that take place there, a new Louisiana State Quarter was unveiled in April of 2015. The image depicts a wild turkey flying over bluestem grass with a backdrop of longleaf pine. Over 2200 people attended the celebration as the new State quarter was unveiled. This was truly a great moment for the Kisatchie National Forest and a fitting tribute to the conservation efforts that have brought back the magnificent wild turkey and the beautiful longleaf pine forest.

The Kisatchie National Forest is truly a turkey hunter's destination. The turkey population is healthy and the habitat is outstanding. The Forest's timber management program and the vigorous prescribed burning program produce outstanding longleaf pine forests and in so doing, guarantee an environment where the wild turkey will flourish. The Kisatchie works closely with the National Wild Turkey Federation and the LA Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to manage turkey populations, including support for research studies that enables managers to improve turkey populations and habitat. Cooperative efforts by these and other partners have led to a better understanding of hen nesting habits and the movements of gobbler turkeys.



Figure 11. The Kisatchie Quarter was the twenty-seventh coin to be issued in the America the Beautiful State Quarter series.

Several years of planning and teamwork involving the Kisatchie National Forest and the United States Mint were required to establish this State quarter depicting a wild turkey with a majestic longleaf pine in the background. Now, people across the nation are walking around with wild turkey and longleaf pine quarters in their pockets. It is a great day when a federal conservation agency and its partners are involved in a program that truly has long lasting effects. The Louisiana turkey quarter is one such wonderfully unique program which will impact the conservation community for many years to come.



Summary and Discussion

The extensive network of public and private sector partners involved in ALRI accomplished over 1.92 million acres of on-the-ground activities to further the conservation of longleaf pine in 2015. These reported accomplishments represent an increase of about 24% over the 2014 totals and an impressive 40% over the totals reported for fiscal year 2013. While some of this increase can be attributed to continued improvements in reporting from the involved partners, it is clear that the efforts of the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative is having an impact in getting new acres established and improving the condition of existing longleaf pine forests. Approximately 64% of the reported work occurred within the 18 SGAs, due largely to the accomplishments that occurred on the public lands that anchor these areas and the efforts of the 17 Local Implementation Teams that are mostly dedicated to these SGAs. Despite an economic climate that is not especially conducive to such endeavors, an estimated \$129 million of public and private sector funds were utilized in 2015 to achieve this success. This represents an increase of nearly \$11 million over 2014.

This Report marks the third consecutive year of accumulating and reporting the annual activities and range-wide successes in restoring, maintaining, and enhancing longleaf forests. While improvements to the extent and efficacy of the reporting process made since 2013 have certainly resulted in increased reported acreages, the Council has been pleased that the results show consistency and resiliency of the restoration work being accomplished from year to year (Figure 12). Consistent annual increases in activities such as prescribed burning that serve to maintain the condition of existing longleaf forests, as well as in activities such as understory restoration and midstory treatments that are geared toward improving existing forests or actually moving marginal degraded lands into the longleaf forest classification are especially heartening for the dedicated practitioners and supporters of ALRI.

Public vs. Private Lands

The need to increase longleaf pine restoration activities on private lands cannot be overstated. While privately-owned lands represent only 56% of the total forested acreage nationwide, private forestland ownership in the South makes up 87% of existing forests. Currently, however, only 61% of longleaf acreage occurs on private lands, indicative that many landowners have opted in the past to plant other forest types instead of longleaf. Furthermore, despite the fact that 61% of longleaf is under private ownership, only 30% of the estimated overall accomplishments in 2015 occurred on private lands. While the 30% figure is an impressive improvement over the 23% reported in both 2013 and 2014, there continues to be a disparity in the restoration work needed to establish, maintain, and improve existing longleaf pine forests on private lands.

2013-2015 Comparison of Selected Treatments

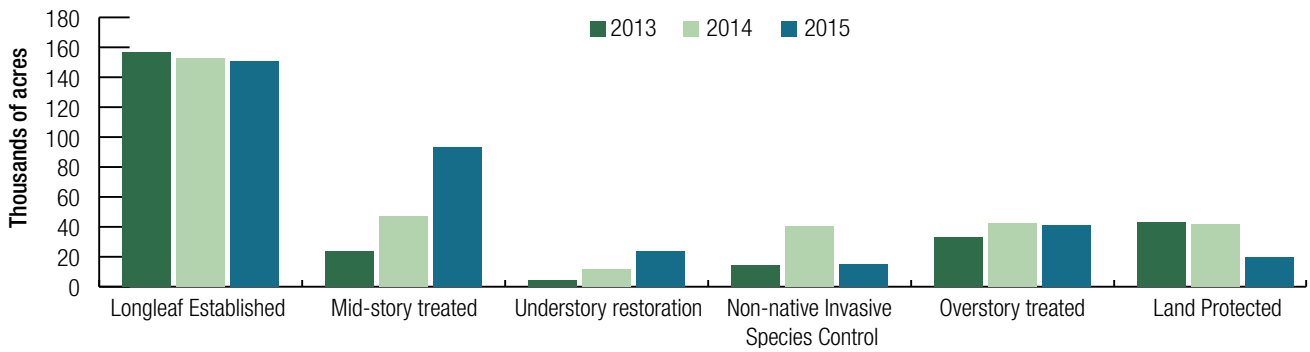


Figure 12. Comparison of longleaf restoration and improvement activities over the past three years since the initial development of the Range-wide Accomplishment Reports. Because fire acreage was much greater in scale than other activities, it was not included in this graph in order to better illustrate those depicted here.

ALRI is optimistic, however, that much of this disparity can be attributed to planting decisions made in past decades, and that many landowners will strongly consider planting longleaf pine in future rotations.

Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning showed a dramatic increase over 2014, with over 1.58 million acres burned. This follows an upward trend since ALRI initiated the annual accomplishment reports in 2013. As previously discussed, much of this can be attributed to improved reporting from the state of Alabama, which recently began asking burn permit applicants if their burns were going to be conducted in longleaf pine. This simple request contributed heavily to an increase of nearly 130,000 acres reported on private lands in Alabama. There is great optimism that similar recently implemented efforts to specifically identify longleaf burning acreages in the states of Georgia and South Carolina will also result in improved acreage reporting so that this critical activity can be better assessed.

Prescribed burning in longleaf forests on public lands was nearly 1.24 million acres in 2015, which fell almost squarely in the center of ALRI’s targeted 1.1–1.4 million acre short-term range for public lands. Overall, it is estimated that prescribed fire is being regularly applied across more than three million acres of public lands in potential longleaf pine ecosystems in 2- to 5-year rotations.

Nearly 350,000 acres of prescribed burning was reported on private lands in 2015, which easily fell into ALRI’s targeted short-term range for private lands. The

private land short-term goals were developed based on prescribed fire application on a 2–3 year rotation across 20–25% of the private longleaf-dominated forest acres (2.9 million acres). While 1.58 million total acres of prescribed fire activity represents an impressive increase over previous years, with increasing establishment acres come the need for even greater prescribed fire application. Though improved reporting has increased our ability to accurately assess our activities, the importance of increasing frequent prescribed fire application in restoring and maintaining longleaf pine ecosystems cannot be overstated.

Longleaf Establishment

An estimated 151,000 total acres of longleaf establishment occurred in 2015, exceeding the short-term overall annual ALRI goal. A total of 128,000 establishment acres were reported on private lands, which easily surpassed ALRI’s targeted range. Longleaf establishment on public land, however, fell from 33,000 acres in 2014 to 23,000 in 2015, which fell short of our targeted range. Although annual longleaf establishment rates are remaining steady at above 150,000 acres, which marks astounding progress, rising prices for agricultural products, renewable energy development, and urbanization has been underestimated in recent reports. With this in mind, we are again reporting current longleaf pine forested acres at 4.7 million, which is the same acreage estimated in the *2014 Range-wide Accomplishment Report*. ALRI is currently working with the USDA Forest Service to evaluate Forest Inventory and

Analysis data to more accurately account for gains and losses in longleaf acreage and better determine current actual range-wide acreage of longleaf pine forests.

Broadening the Resource Base

Various opportunities to expand sources of funding continue to be pursued. One of the most promising opportunities is the effort to integrate the restoration of longleaf pine forests into the overall Gulf Coast restoration work as part of the RESTORE Act and penalties resulting from Deep Water Horizon oil spill settlements. The longleaf landscape is a highlighted priority in the newly authorized Regional Conservation Partnership Program and continued efforts to develop projects in all three funding pools (National, CCA, State) by ALRI partners are needed. The Longleaf Stewardship Fund, continued to grow in fiscal year 2015, but there is a need to attract new corporate sponsors in future years. The Fund is a key resource in supporting and sustaining the collaborative work of local implementation teams. The ALRI partnership will continue to look for successful long-term opportunities to engage large acreage landowners in conservation of longleaf pine on private lands.

2016–2018 Priority Needs/Looking Ahead

In 2012, the Longleaf Partnership Council developed Strategic Priorities and Action 2013–2015 as a step-down document to guide activities and identify focal areas more broadly defined in the *Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine*. The goals of the document are to:

- ▷ Recommend strategic priorities and actions needed during the 3-year period to move the Initiative toward reaching the restoration goals in the Plan
- ▷ Provide outreach information to interested parties that describes the partnership and its work
- ▷ Provide mechanisms to demonstrate progress and measure accomplishments
- ▷ Affirm the current roles and contributions of the various individual agencies and organizations

The four specific items identified in *Strategic Priorities and Actions 2013–2015* formed the basis for evaluating and reporting accomplishments in this 2015 Range-wide Accomplishment Report.

An updated document, *Strategic Priorities and Actions 2016–2018*, was developed in fiscal year 2015 to continue this focused approach of recognizing more immediate needs and setting short-term goals that support the Conservation Plan. Focusing on specific action items not only facilitates increasing overall acreage of longleaf pine and improving conditions of existing longleaf pine ecosystems, it also lays the groundwork for even greater advances toward ALRI goals by improving outreach, coordinating on-the-ground restoration activities, and expanding the resource base to broaden the scope and efficiency of our activities. The updated document will also serve as the framework for reporting accomplishments over the next three years based on the following five focal areas:

1. **Advance Key Outcomes:** A. Significantly increase acres of longleaf pine ecosystems by establishing new forests as well as comprehensively identifying and converting existing mixed stands with a longleaf component to longleaf-dominant stands. B. Improve and maintain existing acreage of longleaf pine ecosystems, with an emphasis on increasing the acreage of prescribed fire accomplished annually.
2. **Understand the Baseline:** Complete range-wide longleaf pine mapping to guide planning efforts.
3. **Public Lands Strategy:** Continue existing efforts and look for ways to expand opportunities to advance longleaf restoration on public lands.
4. **Private Lands Strategy:** Continue existing efforts and expand opportunities to advance longleaf restoration on private lands.
5. **Strengthen the Partnership:** Look for opportunities to strengthen the Partnership and expand efforts to bring in new partners and stakeholders that are supportive of the goals established in the *Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine*.

Strategic Priorities and Action 2016–2018 can be downloaded from the ALRI website (<http://www.americaslongleaf.org/>)

Table 1. 2015 Longleaf Pine Accomplishment Report Summary by State

Category Data Source— (Team Member)	Performance Measures																
	Longleaf Establishment			Prescribed Burning		Mid-story Treatments		Native Understory Plant Establishment		MNIS Treatments		Overstory Treatments		Acquisition/Easements		TOTAL	
	Total Acres Reported	Projected Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA
Texas	8		8	37,373	1,197	414	414	0	0	0	8	8	0	0	37,803	1,627	
Louisiana	3,133		2,045	102,817	67,759	1,432	752	8	8	304	7,374	4,316	0	0	115,068	74,880	
Mississippi	334		113	77,597	57,222	5,986	5,325	0	0	1,120	5,756	5,756	1,085	1,085	91,878	70,621	
Alabama	3,036		1,911	88,816	87,485	1,189	1,161	19	19	827	5,316	4,866	80	80	99,283	96,234	
Florida	9,981		8,036	676,449	466,820	14,767	7,819	781	489	9,825	8,346	8,335	4,489	2,984	724,638	498,430	
Georgia	3,520		1,382	76,763	59,066	1,516	356	89	20	505	1,209	224	8,354	8,354	91,956	69,563	
South Carolina	1,723		1,675	80,010	57,454	3,891	908	77	77	103	4,258	3,587	36	0	90,098	63,794	
North Carolina	986		966	95,203	88,505	1,279	1,235	187	187	0	3,557	3,431	2,179	2,172	103,391	96,496	
Virginia	287		0	1,837	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,124	0	
Total Public Lands	23,008		16,136	1,236,865	885,508	30,474	17,970	1,161	800	12,684	35,824	30,523	16,223	14,675	1,356,239	971,645	
Texas	1,620		1,041	3,234	2,550	1,300	1,273	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,154	4,864	
Louisiana	1,880		807	20,070	9,717	1,683	945	23	10	102	1,539	361	122	122	25,419	12,004	
Mississippi	8,240		2,914	16,319	7,460	38,723	435	10	10	20	200	200	0	0	63,512	11,039	
Alabama	11,867		8,917	205,302	111,998	1,331	1,183	4,898	4,898	0	265	235	0	0	223,663	127,231	
Florida	6,081		3,560	15,688	5,894	2,702	1,155	418	80	1,265	216	191	0	0	26,370	11,575	
Georgia	28,199		3,574	27,808	4,136	12,058	3,436	16,762	3,637	100	250	250	0	0	85,177	15,083	
South Carolina	12,035		10,149	37,417	33,153	2,746	2,250	198	180	860	1,472	1,264	338	103	55,066	47,878	
North Carolina	5,607		5,257	17,608	16,772	1,975	1,193	579	181	21	1,230	853	3,118	3,118	30,138	27,394	
Virginia	539		0	2,211	0	0	0	0	0	0	236	0	0	0	2,986	0	
Total Private Lands	76,068		36,219	345,657	191,680	62,518	11,870	22,888	8,996	2,368	5,408	3,354	3,578	3,343	518,485	257,068	
Grand Total — All Lands	150,808		52,355	1,582,522	1,077,188	92,992	29,840	24,049	9,796	15,052	41,232	33,877	19,801	18,018	1,926,456	1,228,713	

Table 2. 2015 Accomplishment Longleaf Pine Report Summary by Ownership

Category Data Source— (Team Member)	Performance Measures														TOTAL	
	Longleaf Establishment		Prescribed Burning		Mid-story Treatments		Native Understory Plant Establishment		NNIS Treatments		Overstory Treatments		Acquisition/ Easements			
	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA	Total Acres	Acres in SGA		
National Forest System (US Forest Service)	5,513	4,156	463,088	380,120	10,579	9,210	293	293	2,434	2,016	23,675	20,073	80	80	505,662	415,948
Savannah River Site (U.S. Forest Service)	643	643	19,387	19,387	66	66	10	10	73	73	3,506	3,506	0	0	23,685	23,685
National Wildlife Refuges (USFWS)	1,865	1,046	48,118	31,689	297	297	171	80	151	151	81	81	0	0	50,683	33,344
Military Installations (DoD)	4,122	3,113	311,834	247,411	8,990	4,938	44	44	1,206	846	4,946	4,045	14,900	13,395	346,111	273,792
National Parks/Preserves (NPS)	8	8	822	822	416	416	0	0	5	0	39	8			1,290	1,254
State Forests (State Foresters)	3,009	2,877	236,718	125,372	765	629	6	6	7	7	534	534	0	0	241,039	129,425
WMAs (State WL Directors)	2,738	176	69,843	22,155	6,989	178	308	157	8,605	2,738	2,638	1,871	1,243	1,200	92,364	28,475
Other State/Local Lands	3,020	2,027	26,984	9,760	2,349	2,213	10	10	1	0	405	405	0	0	32,769	14,415
Longleaf Stewardship Fund Projects (NFWF will provide)	2,090	2,090	60,071	48,792	23	23	250	200	202	202	0	0	0	0	62,636	51,307
Total Public Lands	23,008	16,136	1,236,865	885,508	30,474	17,970	1,161	800	12,684	6,033	35,824	30,523	16,223	14,675	1,356,239	971,645
State Forestry Agencies (State Foresters)	4,203	2,077	1,120	250	68	0	0	0	0	0	132	48	0	0	5,523	2,375
State Wildlife Agencies (State Wildlife Directors)	151	0	9,218	1,495	972	0	13	0	131	0	0	0	0	0	10,485	1,495
WHIP (NRCS)	4,515	2,613	11,314	6,817	2,927	1,170	603	335	0	0	211	0	0	0	19,570	10,935
EQIP (NRCS)	37,931	22,382	45,417	30,396	44,184	4,147	6,467	3,342	1,739	1,325	1,728	1,217	0	0	137,466	62,809
Other (NRCS)	25	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	25	50	50
Total — NRCS	42,471	25,020	56,731	37,213	47,111	5,317	7,070	3,677	1,739	1,325	1,939	1,217	25	25	157,086	73,794
Conservation Reserve Program (Farm Service Agency)	15,271	1,814	15,855	8,692	9,767	3,504	15,461	5,063	68	67	101	0	0	0	56,523	19,140
Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (USFWS)	1,695	323	2,630	714	1,286	973	121	96	108	23	479	191	0	0	6,319	2,320
Corporate Lands — private funds only (State Foresters) — Outside Cost-Share Programs	2,237	1,426	2,578	1,287	31	0	0	0	0	0	86	86	0	0	4,932	2,799
NGO Programs — private funds only (appropriate NGO) — Outside Cost-Share Programs	227	196	23,618	7,129	1,006	372	0	0	120	70	654	250	3,215	3,215	28,840	11,232
Private Landowners — private funds only (State Foresters) — Outside Cost-Share Programs	3,268	2,450	212,519	118,295	839	759	150	150	202	121	1,582	1,127	338	103	218,998	123,005
Longleaf Stewardship Fund Projects (NFWF will provide)	6,545	2,913	21,388	16,605	1,438	945	73	10	0	0	435	435	0	0	29,879	20,908
Private Landowners — Projected Acres	51,732														51,732	0
Total Private Lands	127,800	36,219	345,657	191,680	62,518	11,870	22,888	8,996	2,368	1,606	5,408	3,354	3,578	3,343	570,217	257,068
Grand Total — All Lands	150,808	52,355	1,582,522	1,077,188	92,992	29,840	24,049	9,796	15,052	7,639	41,232	33,877	19,801	18,018	1,926,456	1,228,713

2015 Accomplishment Report Team

The development of this report required contributions and extensive work from many partners at the regional and state level. The Accomplishment Report Team would like to express gratitude to all those who took the time to compile and draft accomplishment estimates and narratives for the report. The Team thanks the leadership of the Longleaf Partnership Council as well as the State Coordination Teams leads and various other contributors to this Report. Thanks also to the Department of Defense and the staff at Booz Allen Hamilton for assistance in drafting, editing, layout, and printing of the report.

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America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative
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ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT**

