



THE
LONGLEAF
LEADER

2020

**Our 25th Year of Blazing a
Trail for Longleaf Restoration**

By Tiffany Woods, Partnership Chair, The National Wildlife Federation

News from the Longleaf Partnership Council

Dear Fellow Longleaf Friends,

As I write this letter, I can't help but look forward to what this New Year will bring America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI), the Longleaf Partnership Council, and our longleaf community. There is much to celebrate! This is a very exciting time for me personally and professionally—I have recently returned to work at the National Wildlife Federation after giving birth to my firstborn son, Deacon Robert (celebrations galore!). As a first-time parent, I can attest that I am approaching my work in longleaf pine and wildlife habitat restoration with a newfound sense of purpose and drive. I now see a wider and longer path before me, as I hope that I will walk hand-in-hand with my son so that he can one day come to appreciate the work of the many landowners, organizations, and institutions in this coalition. A southerner through and through, it encourages me to know that we are working tirelessly for future generations to enjoy, revel in, and carry on our work in a landscape like none other.

Upon this return, I have assumed the chair position of the Longleaf Partnership Council under the mentorship of Past-Chair, Gary Burger of South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and we have elected our Chair-Elect, Chris Erwin of American Forest Foundation. A large focus of this leadership team, among many others, will be planning and hosting celebrations for ALRI's 10-year anniversary this March in Washington, D.C. The purpose of this event will be to commemorate the many successes that our diverse and unique partnership has garnered over the past decade, as well as elevate and share our story as the most successful model for shared stewardship in the country.

We hope that you are as excited as we are to look back upon the accomplishments of the past ten years while also looking forward to new opportunities in the coming years. We have come a long way since 2009, as over 1.2 million acres of new longleaf has been planted, and over 10 million acres of longleaf burned. But we still have a long way to go.

This Initiative set a goal of restoring 8 million acres of longleaf by 2025, and we are looking at new and resourceful ways to get more acres on the path to restoration, as plantings alone will not be enough.

There are exciting times and projects ahead; for instance, you will see many national forests working to restore longleaf in the US Forest Service's "Million-Acre Challenge." Efforts on private lands are still going strong, and projects such as a new growth and yield model are underway to provide us with the tools we need to see restoration through. However, challenges remain, as we face losses from natural disasters such as Hurricane Michael and Florence, and we still face uphill battles with conversion and multiple other threats. Know that I will approach my role as chair to acknowledge and address these opportunities and challenges alongside you.

It is a new year, and I would like to leave you with the phrase that will be my personal mantra this year: "Be grateful for what

you have, be fearless for what you want." Whatever your role or interest is in this field, I challenge you to look out onto the longleaf landscape and appreciate what is there, and then to purposely and fervently approach what comes next to ensure its longevity. There is no time like today.

My best wishes into the New Year,
Tiffany



Tiffany Woods, 2020 Longleaf Partnership Council Chair

By Ryan Bollinger, *The Longleaf Alliance*

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL LIT SUMMIT / TNC LONGLEAF ALL HANDS MEETING!



▲ *Alison McGee highlighting partnership successes in landscape scale land protection along the Altamaha River, GA. Photo by Colette DeGarady, TNC.*

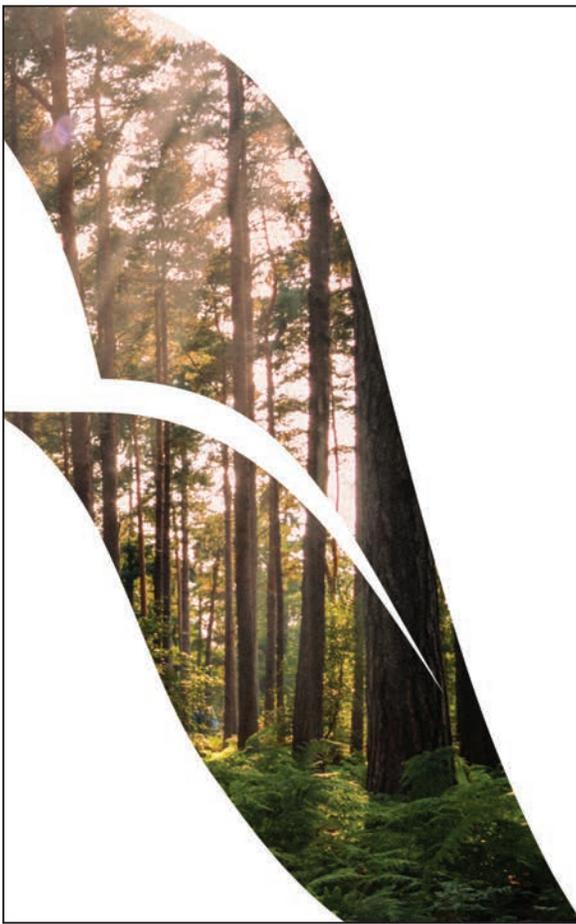
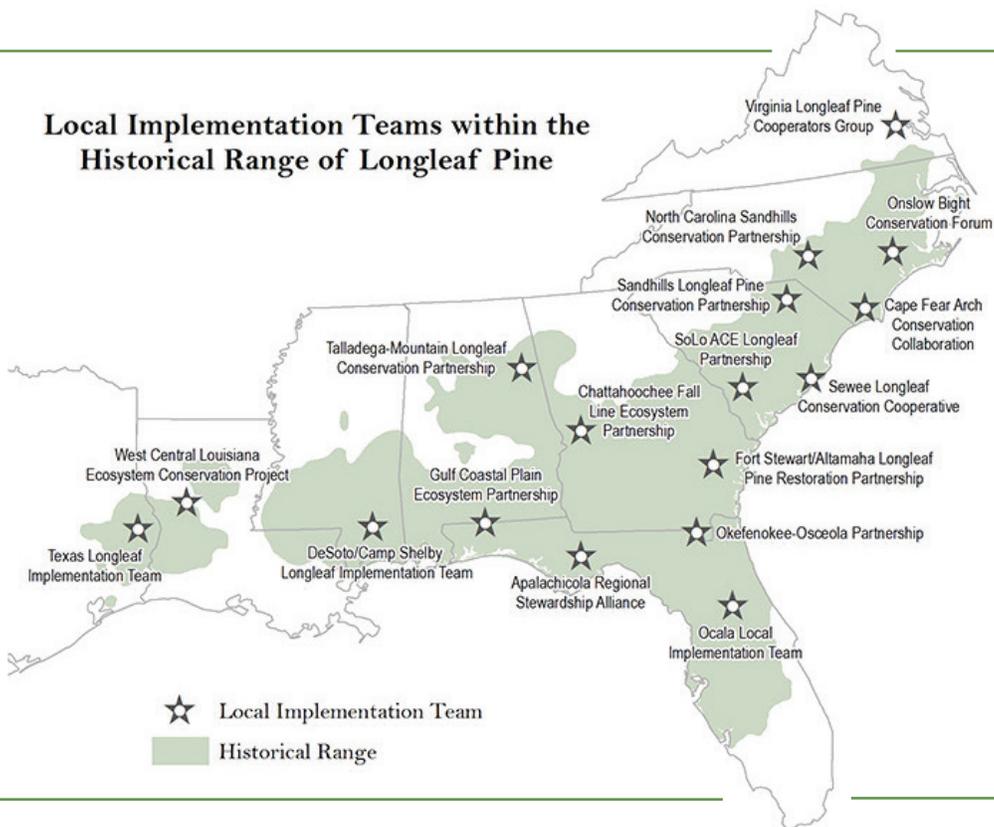
◀ *Kyle Jones presenting on the US Forest Service's Shared Stewardship Initiative. Photo by Colette DeGarady, TNC.*

Back at the end of August, Longleaf Local Implementation Team (LIT) leads, the Longleaf Partnership Council leadership team, and longleaf partners from across the range came together for a joint LIT Summit / The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Longleaf All Hands Meeting to discuss progress and solutions for longleaf protection, management, and restoration. The summit was co-facilitated by Ryan Bollinger (LIT Consul, The Longleaf Alliance) and Colette DeGarady (Longleaf Pine Whole System Director, TNC) and held on St. Simons Island, Georgia. The gathering brought a better awareness of current work occurring across the range, increased understanding of priority strategies for America's Longleaf, and provided a space for fellowship and enhanced relationships and communication for partners to tackle current challenges for longleaf restoration and management. Many topics were discussed including, but not limited to, the power of partnerships, effectively communicating to different audiences and connecting partners, US Forest Service (USFS) shared stewardship, economics of

longleaf, Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and working with industrial landowners, new mapping initiatives and tools, and breakout sessions focused on prescribed fire, the new Longleaf Partnership Council groundcover working group, and potential RCW status change. Alison McGee led a field trip to the Altama Plantation WMA highlighting the landscape scale land protection successes along the Altamaha River over the last 20+ years, and Georgia Department of Natural Resources partners showed off a few of the restoration efforts on-site.

Thank you to all who participated and contributed to the meeting outcomes making it the best LIT Summit to date! Also, a special thank-you to Gretchen Coll, Kelli Flournoy, Pam Crosby, and Alison McGee for supporting event planning and running logistics. The energy in the room and conversations were infectious and inspiring. It's a pleasure working with such a motivated group striving towards the same goal of restoring longleaf ecosystems across the range.

Local Implementation Teams within the Historical Range of Longleaf Pine



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The Alabama Natural Resources Council 2019 Conference Field Tour

By *Tim Albritton, NRCS State Staff Forester, Auburn, Alabama*



Mr. Sherer riding the tractor between 10' rows of longleaf pine, raking straw into round bales. Photo by Tim Albritton.

The 2019 Alabama Landowner Conference partnered with the Chilton Forestry Planning Committee to host a landowner tour. The tour focused on 'alternative revenue sources from your forestland.'

The first stop was on David Sherer's property where he and his father have a longleaf pine straw enterprise in south Chilton County. They have developed this agroforestry system of intensively managed working trees to provide additional income from their forest.

They are currently raking and baling over 300 bales per acre/per year and have a very good market in the Birmingham area. Mr. Sherer demonstrated his straw rake and baler for the group. The landowners attending had many questions and found the tour quite interesting.

The longleaf plantations were planted by Mr. Sherer, and understory treatments were made to improve the harvest.

A special thanks to David Sherer and his father for hosting the event.

Buffer Lands Protecting NAS-Whiting Field Added to Blackwater River State Forest

By *Vernon Compton, The Longleaf Alliance and Doug Hattaway, The Trust for Public Land*



Coldwater Creek through Wolfe Creek Forest. Photo by Vernon Compton.

The Trust for Public Land, partnering with the Navy, Florida Forest Service, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and Santa Rosa County, completed the acquisition of 1,272 acres of the Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever project, which will be managed as part of the Blackwater River State Forest. The property includes frontage on Wolfe Creek and Big Coldwater Creek, a state-designated paddling trail, and widely used creek for kayaking, canoeing, and wildlife viewing. The acquisition also furthers the effort of reestablishing longleaf pine in its historic range. The project was funded through the Navy and the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program and the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program administered by the Florida Forest Service.

The Trust for Public Land Senior Project Manager Doug Hattaway stated, "This is a great example of collaborative private-public partnerships furthering both base buffering and conservation and recreation goals and filling in gaps of resource management areas." NAS Whiting Field is the busiest aviation complex in the world, accounting for nearly one million annual flight operations, including primary flight training and advanced helicopter training for more than 1,200 students. NAS Whiting Field Commanding Officer Captain Paul Bowdich indicated the acquisition importance by highlighting, "These additional 1,200 plus acres are located underneath flight track training profiles and are within a military airport influence area. The execution of this project complements our effort to sustain military mission training and preserve the environment in perpetuity." Florida Forest Service State Forester Jim Karels added, "This land acquisition further aids in prioritizing the protection of Florida's vital ecological and economic resources. Restoring the natural longleaf pine forest and the use of prescribed fire will greatly improve wildlife habitat, reduce wildlife threats, and aid in water quality." Santa Rosa County Commissioner Don Salter, a long-time champion of base buffering that protects NAS Whiting Field, stated: "The acquisition will allow the County to continue to preserve some of the most valuable natural resources and further the land buffering around NAS Whiting Field from incompatible development."

Congratulations to the Trust for Public Land, Navy, Florida Forest Service, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and Santa Rosa County for their collaboration and partnership efforts that resulted in success with this important project.

Ft. Stewart/Altamaha Longleaf Partnership Update

By Brannon Knight, The Orianne Society



Chuck Martin, TNC Moody Forest Preserve Manager, leading a field tour during the Landowner Appreciation Day. Photo by Carol Denhof.

On November 9 The Orianne Society partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and The Longleaf Alliance to host a landowner owner appreciation day on Moody Forest Natural Area. This property is jointly owned between the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR) and TNC. This annual event is designed to show our appreciation to the conservation-minded landowner the Orianne Society works with by simply saying, “thank you.” Their collaboration allows us to improve threatened and endangered species habitat on private lands throughout the Fort Stewart/ Altamaha Corridor. They allow us access to their lands for survey work and land management activities such as prescribed burning. The event included a presentation on longleaf pine genetics presented by International Forest Company. It highlighted research that is currently being done to improve longleaf pine seedling genetics. After the presentation, we ate lunch and then took a tour of Moody Forest. The tour highlighted ongoing restoration efforts at Moody, such as the restoration of the old-growth longleaf pine forest and a groundcover demonstration site we planted in 2016. The successful private land cooperator partnership allowed up to burn over 2,500 acres on private land throughout the significant geographic area in 2019. It is our goal to increase this acreage in 2020 to better conserve imperiled species and habitats.

Improving Aquatic Connectivity Along the Chattahoochee Fall Line

By Alex Lamle and LuAnn Craighton, The Nature Conservancy



This failed dam is being removed and the site restored to improve aquatic connectivity in the Chattahoochee River watershed on Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) lands near Fort Benning. Photo by Alex Lamle.

The Nature Conservancy has a unique opportunity to improve aquatic connectivity in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) River Basin because of the significant amount of land we have under permanent conservation protection in the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) area bordering Fort Benning. For 20+ years, the Conservancy and partners have focused on restoring the longleaf pine ecosystem in this area. Historic management practices in this region have affected both upland forests and sensitive aquatic ecosystems that are heavily impacted by surrounding land-use. Small dams and reservoirs across the landscape fragment aquatic habitat, severely impacting the native fish communities.

This dam removal project in the ACUB landscape presents an opportunity to restore connectivity and hydrologic function in the Chattahoochee River watershed. All three project dams are breached, contributing significant amounts of sediment to the system, which negatively impacts habitat

downstream. Additionally, the Conservancy is partnering with researchers at Columbus State University to conduct pre- and post-restoration monitoring of water quality and aquatic community response.

There is a well-known link between healthy forests and water quantity and quality. Proactive stewardship of the forested uplands surrounding these projects will continue with an emphasis on longleaf ecosystem restoration. This project provides an opportunity to examine how land management plays a role in the health of these complex aquatic systems.

This exciting aquatic restoration project is well underway, with completion anticipated in 2020.

For more information on aquatic connectivity issues, contact: Sara Gottlieb, Director of Freshwater Science & Strategy, sgottlieb@tnc.org.

North Carolina (Onslow Bight, Cape Fear Arch & Sandhills LITs) Update

By Hervey McIver, *The Nature Conservancy*,



McLeod property. Photo by Jeff Marcus.
Salters Creek Landing property. Photo by Janice Allen.

Partnerships are the foundation of significant land conservation in the 21st century, and well-grounded conservation plans focus public and private partners towards creating resilient landscapes. In North Carolina, 7,895 acres were protected during 2019 within the longleaf range, adding to a growing network of conservation lands. In the Sandhills, the Army helped buffer training areas through two Nature Conservancy acquisitions totaling 470 acres that include mature and young longleaf pine stands.

Within the Coastal Plain, the Marine Corps assisted the protection of over 5,500 acres of land, including Salters Creek Landing. The NC Coastal Land Trust purchased this property near Piney Island bombing range, which contains over 1,200 acres of longleaf flatwoods and savannas on relic ridges surrounded by forested wetlands and salt marsh. Most of Salters Creek Landing will become Wildlife Resource Commission Game Lands. Two properties were protected near Croatan National Forest, including

the best marl outcrops in the state along Island Creek. Several more tracts elsewhere in the region were also protected.

These conservation acquisitions follow our collective vision of expanding, buffering, and connecting important conservation areas. All lands will be managed by state or land trusts with longleaf restoration and controlled burns as goals.

Okefenokee/Osceola Longleaf Implementation Team (O2LIT) Update

By Rebecca Shelton, *The Nature Conservancy*



Landowner outreach meeting attendees. Photo by Rebecca Shelton.

The O2LIT had a productive year full of prescribed burning, off-site pine thinning and removal, longleaf planting, and landowner outreach.

Within the northern portion of the O2LIT, in the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, the site preparation and fuel reduction of 519 acres were completed along the western portion of the refuge. These areas will be hand planted in the 2020 spring season, with containerized longleaf pine seedlings, putting over 269,000 seedlings in the ground. Additional areas for restoration will be identified as the season progresses.

In the southern portion of the O2LIT, the Osceola National Forest completed the removal and/or thinning of 2,722 acres of pine for the year. The thinned/removed acres total approximately, 21,834 CCF (hundred cubic feet) or 2,183,400 cubic feet of pine. Regarding restoration efforts, the Osceola planted 741 acres of longleaf pine, putting 384,579 seedlings in the ground. To reduce fuel density, promote understory restoration, and optimally manage the fire-dependent communities, controlled burns were conducted on over 22,130 acres.

Regarding landowner outreach, The Nature Conservancy and cooperative partners, including the Alachua Conservation Trust, Florida Forest Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, North Florida Prescribed Burn Association, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, participated in a landowner meeting last August at the South Prong Plantation in Baker County, Florida. The purpose of this meeting was to provide the opportunity to learn how to effectively manage timber and wildlife goals and to determine the needs and desires of landowners within and adjacent to the O2LIT area. This meeting connected over 20 participants, including private landowners, land managers, contractors, and conservation partners, with the potential to influence restoration on over 40,000 acres of private land.

Ocala Local Implementation Team Update

By Ivor Kincaide, Alachua Conservation Trust



Field tour during the Groundcover Restoration 201 Academy. Photo by Ivor Kincaide.

Alachua Conservation Trust and the Florida Forest Service hosted two Longleaf Alliance academies last July and October in the Ocala LIT. Longleaf 101, at the Withlacoochee Training Center, brought a diverse group of beginners to learn about longleaf history, biology, establishment and management strategies. Thirty-five participants from across the Ocala LIT came together in Gainesville at the Austin Cary Forest's Stern Learning Center, for Groundcover 201. Land managers from multiple public agencies as well as six private landowners who all are interested in completing groundcover restoration projects learned about specific restoration projects and toured a successful direct seed restoration project near Cross Creek, Florida. In October and November, the Ecosystem Restoration Team assisted our Florida Forest Service partners with burning out around Red-cockaded woodpecker cavity trees in preparation for large-scale burns at Goethe State Forest, the second-largest longleaf site on state lands in our LIT.

South Carolina Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership Update

By Susan Griggs, Natural Resources Conservation Service



KW Johnson talks with attendees at a tour stop during the SC Tree Farm Field Tour and Awards Ceremony, an event that was held at his 277-acre farm located in Chesterfield County. Johnson is a landowner partner with the SLPCP. Photo by Susan Griggs.

The Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership (SLPCP) walked alongside local landowner Dr. KW Johnson as he hosted the South Carolina Tree Farm Field Tour and Awards Ceremony October 3, 2019.

During a tour stop, SLPCP Coordinator Charles Babb presented partnership information and how he is helping Johnson implement prescribed burning.

Johnson was the 2018 South Carolina Tree Farmer of the Year, a title awarded to him for the hard work and stewardship ethic he has bestowed on the property that was once owned and worked by his parents.

In honor of his parents Hazel and N.W (Fish) Johnson, Johnson officially designated the 227-acre property the Johnson Experimental Forest (JEF). He envisions the JEF as a future laboratory for students to see examples of forestry best management practices, wildlife management techniques, recreation options (hunting and fishing), and practices that improve water quality and reduce soil erosion.

Johnson gives credit to many people that have helped him. "There are so many people that have helped me develop this property into what I've always envisioned," said Johnson, "I certainly wouldn't be standing before you without their help."

However, the property isn't just for foresters or forestry students. Johnson designated a community park with paths and picnic tables so that visitors can enjoy the area that his family has enjoyed for decades.

It is an area that will always be available, as Johnson was the first person in Chesterfield County to sign an easement with the Pee Dee Land Trust. The easement ensures it will be here for future generations to enjoy, learn, and discover what the magic of the forest is all about.

South Lowcountry – ACE Basin (SoLoACE) Longleaf Partnership Update

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



One-year-old gopher tortoise released at Aiken Gopher Tortoise Preserve. Photo by Lisa Lord.

Winter is here between the Edisto and Savannah Rivers, and planting and burning seasons are in full swing.

In October, The Savannah River Ecology Lab continued their gopher tortoise head-starting work and released another 33 one-year-old tortoises at the Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve. We also supported the Lowcountry Landowners Association's meeting and Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service's Women Owning Woodlands (WOW) workshop as well as the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council's Annual meeting. Carol Denhof and Lisa Lord taught an Advanced Master Naturalist Training on Longleaf Ecosystem Plant Identification to 17 Lowcountry Master Naturalist graduates in September at Webb Wildlife Center. And, we are on track to cost-share around 900 acres of planting and 1,300 acres of prescribed burning this planting and burning season.

We are grateful to our partners for their continued support of this project: The Longleaf Alliance, Clemson University, Ducks Unlimited, The Hitchcock Woods, International Paper Company, Lowcountry Land Trust, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, USDA/NRCS, The Nature Conservancy, Nemours Wildlife Foundation, Private Landowner Cooperators, Spring Island Trust, Savannah River Ecology Lab, SC Audubon Society, SC Department of Natural Resources, SC Forestry Commission, South Carolina Tree Farm

Committee, Upper Savannah River Land Trust, U.S. Army Corps of engineers, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service/Savannah River Forest Station.

Texas Longleaf Implementation Team (TLIT) Update

By Bill Bartush, *Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture and American Bird Conservancy*



April 2019 Groundcover Field Day, Roy E. Jenny Sanders, new Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, Hardin Co. TLIT Coordinator Silsbee Texas. Photo by Wendy J. Ledbetter.



The Nature Conservancy and the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team sponsored a "Longleaf Groundcover" Field Day in April 2019 for Master Naturalists and private landowners. More than 700 plant species have been recorded for the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary and conservation easement lands, providing an excellent opportunity for learning. Plant specialists and students interacted in various longleaf micro-habitats to understand the variety, complexity, and interrelationship of the community to the health of the ecosystem.

The TLIT is also pleased to welcome Jenny Sanders as the new TLIT Coordinator. Jenny Sanders has degrees

in Rangeland Ecology and Wildlife Management from Texas A&M University. She brings unique skills and experience to the Longleaf Team, starting with her M.S. program, which explored motivations for landowner participation in conservation programs, and later as the Conservation Program Coordinator for the Texas Wildlife Association. In that position, Jenny worked to build and nurture partnerships with state and federal agencies, other non-profits and private interests in large scale conservation efforts, including the Leon River Restoration Project, Trinity River Initiative, Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program, and more. More recently, Jenny worked in the communications realm, promoting constituent and landowner engagement in advocacy initiatives and implementation of conservation easements. Jenny enjoys serving as a spokesperson for programs she is passionate about, and restoration of native ecosystems in a way that supports landowner goals and success is certainly a passion.

The Longleaf Alliance brings ‘Longleaf 201 Academy: Fire and Longleaf’ to Louisiana

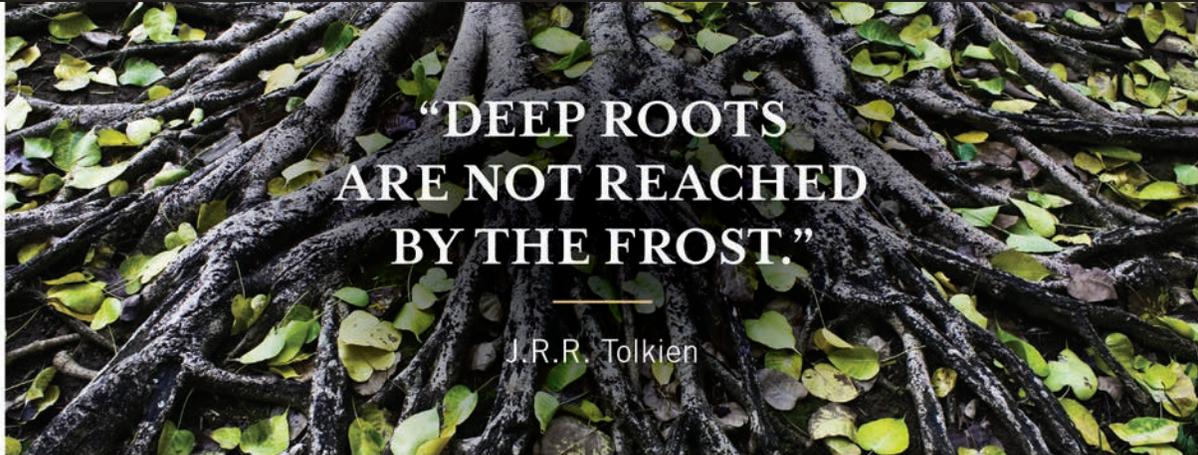
By Dan Weber, Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy



Field tour during Fire & Longleaf 201 Academy. Photo by LLA.

The Longleaf Alliance (LLA) brought the “Longleaf 201 Academy: Fire and Longleaf” to Louisiana last August. Hosted by the West Central Louisiana Ecosystem Partnership (WLEP), it was attended by private landowners, university students, and agency professionals from Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi. Lectures covered the history of longleaf and all aspects of fire from burning techniques, fire weather and burn plans to smoke management, prescribed burn certification, and post-burn monitoring. Benefits to wildlife and special situations such as burning young longleaf and areas with heavy duff layers were discussed. The group visited a longleaf restoration research plot on Kisatchie National Forest’s Palustris Experimental Forest and a nearby private landowner’s longleaf restoration site. The attendees had management responsibility for 167,169 acres of land, making these workshops potentially high leverage educational opportunities. The WLEP, 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, oversees longleaf and other ecosystem restoration efforts within the Fort Polk/Kisatchie National Forest Significant Geographic Area (SGA). This was the third Academy that the WLEP has brought to the SGA in partnership with LLA in an ongoing effort to increase awareness and the comfort level with returning fire to the landscape. The workshop was made possible in part with funding from NFWF, and The Wild Turkey Federation provided a limited number of scholarships for participants.



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COVER Sun shines through smoke during a sandhill restoration prescribed burn at Townsend Wildlife Management Area
in Long County, Georgia. Photo by Randy Tate.

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