



Longleaf for All: Barriers and Recommendations

In October of 2020, the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI) launched a new working group, *Longleaf for All*, as an ongoing commitment to be an advocate and partner for historically excluded, minority, underserved, and unserved landowners, as well as minority professionals in the field of forestry and longleaf restoration. Land ownership comes with an array of challenges; however, for minority and under-resourced landowners, additional barriers exist that result, in a cycle of perpetual land loss in the Southeast. *Longleaf for All* is working to identify and address the specific challenges that face underrepresented landowners such as access to resources, legal counsel, financial markets, and outreach. Using ALRI's network and platform, *Longleaf for All's* overarching goal is to increase minority participation in longleaf restoration and forestry related programs, practices, and activities and to help landowners reap the economic, ecological, and cultural benefits of owning forested land.

To address the concerns and issues faced by historically excluded, minority, and under resourced landowners, the *Longleaf for All* working group of diverse partners developed recommendations for ALRI's Longleaf Partnership Council that can improve the delivery of financial and technical assistance; reach landowners and build relationships more effectively; increase capacity and access to vendors, markets, and expertise; and enact long-term strategies for inclusion and opportunities. After the Longleaf Partnership Council reviews and approves these recommendations, the *Longleaf for All* working group will, over the coming months, prioritize the recommendations, develop measurable metrics/actions, designate lead partners for implementing each recommendation, and draft an implementation plan for review and approval from the Longleaf Partnership Council. The goal is that partners and decision makers will be able to use this document to evaluate their programs, consider the ideas, identify ways to participate, and implement some of the recommendations. Through demonstration projects in the longleaf range and refinement of the recommendations, we hope to eventually create positive change forestry-wide.

The working group has defined the challenges/barriers into four main categories: 1) property rights; 2) markets and finance; 3) outreach challenges from distrust and disconnection; and 4) property size and scale of properties.

- 1. Property Rights:** According to the Journal of Forestry (2019), of the 4 million family forest ownerships with over 10 acres in the United States, minorities comprise 6.6 percent of the ownerships and own 5.1 percent of the 265 million acres. Family forest owners are essential in achieving conservation priorities, such as longleaf restoration. Therefore, it is critical to prevent or address issues that impact and contribute to loss of family forest ownership. Families who own real estate as heirs' property (property owned by multiple family members who have inherited undivided shares in the property) are particularly vulnerable to the threat of loss. Put simply, third parties will acquire a small interest in heirs' property for the sole purpose of obtaining the legal right to petition the court for a partition sale (court-ordered sale) at which they will seek to be the winning bidder obtaining 100% ownership of the entire property. Heirs' property contributes to the racial wealth gap and is a strong example of structural and historic inequity. Heirs' property also has

greater difficulty qualifying for resources and programs that aid in stewardship of the property. These types of issues result in wealth loss for the family and, oftentimes, diminished conservation of family-owned forests. Succession planning is key to preventing and resolving ownership challenges. Businesses ensure continuity and resiliency through succession planning, and families would benefit from following suit.

A. Challenges/Barriers

- i) Southern African American families have suffered a significant loss of family-owned land purchased or deeded following the Civil War. African American landowners acquired 15 million acres of land between 1865 and 1910, but this was followed by steep declines in ownership. It has been estimated that 80 percent of the 5.5 million acres of land owned by African Americans in 1969 had been lost by 2001. By all accounts, this trend has continued and even been hastened by the recent recession, with estimates that African Americans own only 1 million acres today.
- ii) Due to difficulties associated with inheriting undivided shares of a property, the land often continues to be passed to family members by inheritance without a succession plan that supports ownership and land management changes. Real estate is a large component of intergenerational wealth, but many families facing Heirs' Property challenges often did not have the means or freedom to secure wills or titles when the land originally came into family ownership. Wills are important, but a more comprehensive strategy is required for family real estate. Typically, this strategy involves maintaining ownership of the family property through an entity such as a trust.
- iii) Limited resources, access, and education for solving heirs' property rights issues. Succession planning and resolving legal issues for heirs' property is expensive, and there is not a reliable ecosystem of service providers for heirs' property owners.

B. Recommendations

- i) Engage organizations and legal counsel experienced in title issues to assist more forest landowners with heirs' property challenges (ex. Center for Heirs' Property in South Carolina).
 - (a) Identify geographical need and assess existing organization capacity for title clearing services.
 - (b) Encourage and increase funding to organizations for clearing titles.
 - (c) Explore potential sources of funding for legal services to clear titles (federal, state, private, etc.).
 - (d) Identify and increase capacity for legal counsel (pro bono and paid), network organizations, and associations to specifically address title clearing in historically under resourced areas.
 - (e) Gather feedback from Center for Heirs' Property and others in this field on current needs and how Longleaf for All can assist with those needs.

- (f) Initiate a pilot project focused on title clearing services in an unserved area, using the Center for Heirs' Property as a model.
- ii) Expand the Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Network (SFLR) Program and other similar programs.
 - (a) Assess the need and identify steps for SFLR Program expansion into Louisiana and Florida which currently lack such capacity.
 - (b) Explore partnerships between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), such as Southern University and A&M College in Louisiana and Florida A&M University in Florida, and other NGOs to deliver SFLR Program in these two states.
 - (c) Educate professionals that service landowners so they can convey information about the SFLR.
- iii) Explore adding heirs' property specialists (assisting in clearing titles to properties/farms) as technical service providers (USDA NRCS) and train other outreach specialists.
- iv) Develop and fund more peer-to-peer organizations that have experience educating the community in landowner property issues, using the Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association as a model.
- v) Expand the Uniformed Partition of Heirs' Property Act across the Southeastern states so that on the ground work can be done even without a clear title.
- vi) Create asset maps and other online networking tools of available resources including landowner groups, legal counsel, and other resources to assist landowners, such as a geographical display that pinpoints resources and locations.
- vii) Increase awareness to landowners on property rights.
 - (a) Partner with organizations and place outreach coordinators in areas of need to engage with landowners.
 - (b) Increase workshops and other education opportunities for landowners to learn about property rights topics including estate planning and management plans.

2. Markets and Finance: Global markets for forest products are evolving at an increasing pace. Longleaf was once over-harvested for lumber to rebuild much of the South following the U.S. Civil War. Today, customers around the world demand not only solid wood and pulp and paper products but see the additional values generated by longleaf ecosystems including carbon, water, and biodiversity. There are numerous public and private programs, tools, and resources available to aid landowners and forest businesses, but one of the major hurdles these customers face is a lack of knowledge and understanding in accessing these opportunities. Understanding the supply chain model, facilitating access to all markets, and working collaboratively to address the barriers preventing access will allow landowners to realize the full economic potential of a forestry enterprise. The greatest challenge may be building understanding, trust, and financial sustainability for both landowners and forestry businesses in the same community, helping to foster wealth creation and asset building.

A. Challenges/Barriers

- i) The supply chain is not conducive for minority landowners to participate and limits market accessibility.
- ii) Lack of trust from minority landowners due to exclusion from the supply chain process.
- iii) Low financial returns from timber harvesting, often unjustly so.

B. Recommendations

- i) Develop a supply chain map that includes key elements of strain and opportunity and provides education and resources for both landowners and the *Longleaf for All* working group members.
- ii) Provide professional development opportunities to vendors to understand the challenges of limited resource landowners, such as American Forest Foundation working with the Alabama Professional Logging Managers Program to ensure loggers received one year of professional development continuing education units to work with Limited Resource Landowner Education and Network (LRLEAN) and its landowners, thereby gaining trust and shared understanding between all parties.
- iii) Engage distribution/supply chain companies in discussions and bring vendors into the conversation, such as Proctor and Gamble and Enviva, that are already addressing environmental and social justice issues internally and among customers.
- iv) Empower landowners to recognize the economic benefits of forest management and see themselves as business owners.
 - (a) Partner with the Small Business Administration to assist with development of business plans and obtaining loans.
 - (b) Explore opportunities with Farm Service Agency to engage its partners to work with landowners in developing business plans.
- v) Encourage landowner programs to develop metrics to capture small acreage and minority landowner engagement.
- vi) Develop communications resources on the basic foundations of the forestry market.

3. Outreach: Minority landowners have historically been excluded from resources and programs that lead to successful forestry management. Limited experience with forestry, a history of inequality and distrust, and limited access to forestry professionals have perpetuated this situation. Over time, under-participation in sustainable forest management has resulted in land loss and low economic returns from land. Targeted outreach efforts can play an impactful role in building awareness of the value and practice of healthy forest management, rebuild relationships of trust, and increase participation in forest stewardship. ALRI and other partners will work to provide outreach related to longleaf forest restoration and management.

A. Challenges/Barriers

- i) Lack of trust of government agency staff and professionals in forestry.
- ii) Inexperience with forest management and limited access to information and technical assistance.
- iii) Limited awareness and low participation in available financial assistance programs often due to barriers associated with cost share requirements.
- iv) Limitations to receiving adequate technical assistance due to a lack of knowledge and confusion with navigating cost-share opportunities through the various partners/programs.
- v) Lack of program funding from agencies and partners for initial participation in forestry practices.

B. Recommendations

- i) Host workshops, meetings (virtual and in person), and hands on training specific to challenges faced by minority, underserved, and unserved landowners that help landowners navigate the various cost-share opportunities, forest management basics, etc.
 - (a) Partner with trusted community leaders and organizations to identify landowners who may be interested and advise on educational topics most beneficial to landowners.
 - Craft appropriate messaging for workshops to properly resonate with local landowners.
 - Train representatives/educators on outreach techniques from practitioners who have had success in reaching minority, underserved, and unserved landowners.
 - Structure educational opportunities to optimize financial benefits with ecological benefits.
 - (b) Utilize and provide support to technical assistance providers in the region that can establish long term relationships to build trust with minority, underserved, and unserved landowners.
 - Get technical assistance providers and district conservationists back on the land as much as possible to learn landowners' stories and needs.
 - Attend local established group meetings to meet landowners where they live.
 - (c) Secure funding to support workshops and meetings focused on minority and unserved landowner outreach.
- ii) Hire a professional outreach coordinator/company to develop a marketing and landowner recruitment campaign with a desired message, audience, and communication strategy tailored for each state and community, such as the American Forest Foundation's WoodsCamp model and Keeping Forests recent efforts.

- (a) Secure funding for marketing/messaging/outreach through charitable donations or the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Longleaf Landscape Stewardship Fund project proposals.
- (b) Hold training workshops on successful outreach techniques for engaging minority, underserved, and unserved landowners.
- iii) Establish consistent collaboration between agencies to reach minority audiences.
 - (a) Use a targeted approach based on community, state, or region.
 - (b) Establish a forum (virtual, in-person, or hybrid platform) for agencies (especially extension/outreach and state forestry professionals) to share current practices and lessons learned, identify ways to collaborate and leverage resources, and understand existing working relationships with landowners.
 - (c) Develop a training platform for partners that provide assistance with outreach.
 - (d) Develop a list of professionals experienced in outreach specific to minority landowners and individuals.

4. Property Size and Scale: Average forest size holdings for African American forest owners is recognized to be significantly smaller when compared to white property ownership. Size of forest holdings can affect which cost-share or property tax programs are available to forest owners, as well as the feasibility of some forest management practices, such as timber harvests. As the industry moves towards increasing efficiency and decreasing liability, smaller forest landowner's access to markets, vendors, and technical knowledge, which are supported by industrial forestry practices, have been greatly reduced. This results in increased difficulty in finding crews/vendors willing to work with landowners.

A. Challenges/Barriers

- i) The forestry industry is geared toward maximizing value and leaves out smaller landowners.
- ii) Historically, most small landowners have been excluded from traditional funding sources such as the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) due to the time/benefit ratio.

B. Recommendations

- i) Encourage bundling/clustering smaller acreage properties needing forest management activities to make more appealing to vendors and/or meet contract acreage requirements.
- ii) Identify resources for landowners to complete management activities for healthy forests. For example, state forestry agencies could prioritize and pick up small contracts.
- iii) Incentivize forest consultants, technical service providers, and vendors to work with smaller acreage landowners.
 - (a) Partner with agencies/organization to fund management plans and explore adjustable payment schedules for qualified landowners based on acreage.

- (b) Host workshops and trainings to inform forest consultants, technical service providers, and vendors on programs available for small acreage landowners.
- iv) Establish incentives within management strategies for vendors to work with smaller landowners and eliminate minimum acreage requirements.
 - (a) Partner with agencies/organizations to fund setup fees for vendors to perform management activities on geographically clustered landowner properties.
 - (b) Explore flexible incentive payments (i.e. cost-share rates) for smaller acreage landowners.
- v) Utilize communities of partners working together in specific landscapes that can help landowners determine the best cost-share program to meet specific needs.
 - (a) Reach out to existing cost-share providers and networks for ideas on what works, where the challenges lie, difficulties in coordinating, etc.
 - (b) Use local implementation teams (LITs) to communicate with and educate landowners on cost-share programs. For example, a cost-share subcommittee within LITs can meet regularly to discuss current funding opportunities and strategies to engage landowners.

In conclusion, *Longleaf for All* hopes that the information shared in this document will aid the longleaf community and ALRI in reaching their goals to restore longleaf pine across the Southeast. These recommendations are referenced in ALRI's Strategic Priorities and Actions 2022-2024 document, and we will continue to share this resource with federal and state agencies, funders and foundations, and other stakeholders looking for ways to make positive change at the landscape level and support pilot projects in the range. This work will only be successful with the collaborative approach that is a keystone of ALRI, and we are encouraged with the many partnerships and projects already taking place to further efforts on the ground. Looking ahead, *Longleaf for All* will work to establish metrics, implementation plans, and demonstration projects to address barriers and create positive change that will result in long-term, positive impacts for current and future generations.

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