

# Executive Summary

Longleaf pine forests once covered an incredibly vast range. From the Atlantic Coastal Plain of southeastern Virginia to the West Gulf Coastal Plain of Texas, these systems encompassed more than 90 million acres of the North American landscape. These forests represented an extraordinary diversity of cultural, ecological and socio-economic values, making them some one of the great coniferous forests of the world.

Today, longleaf pine forests are a mere remnant of their former majesty—less than three percent of the original acreage remains. A number of threatened or endangered species depend on these remnant areas for their existence.

In 2005, a group of longleaf conservationists articulated the need for a focused, range-wide restoration approach which they named *America's Longleaf—A Restoration Initiative for the Southern Longleaf Pine Forest*. A Regional Working Group of diverse organizations was formed in October 2007 to develop the *America's Longleaf Initiative*. The vision of *America's Longleaf* is sustaining functional, viable longleaf pine ecosystems with the full spectrum of ecological, economic and social values inspired through a voluntary partnership of concerned, motivated organizations and individuals.

This Conservation Plan was developed by a Writing Team assigned by the Steering Committee of the Regional Working Group. The foundation for the Conservation Plan was built through a Charrette workshop of over 80 professionals in March of 2008.

## Goals

The 15-year goal for this Conservation Plan is an increase in longleaf acreage from 3.4 to 8.0 million acres, with more than half of this acreage targeted in the range-wide “Significant Geographic Areas”<sup>1</sup> in ways that support a majority of ecological and species needs.

Within this overall goal, the Conservation Plan calls for:

- ▷ *Maintaining* existing longleaf ecosystems in good condition

- ▷ *Improving* acres classified as “longleaf forest types” and with longleaf trees present, but missing significant components of understory communities and fire regimes to support representative communities of longleaf ecosystems, and
- ▷ *Restoring* longleaf pine forests to suitable sites currently in other forest types or land classifications.

## Guiding Principles

Guiding principles that shape how *America's Longleaf* will approach the range-wide conservation of longleaf ecosystems and this Conservation Plan include:

- ▷ **Strategic, Science-based Approach**—The success of *America's Longleaf* hinges on a strategic, science-based approach to conservation
- ▷ **Site-based Conservation Efforts in the Context of Sustainable Landscapes**—All habitat-based conservation actions must ultimately affect habitat availability and condition at the site level
- ▷ **Involvement by Public and Private Sectors**—The conservation of longleaf pine forests demands the combined interest and attention of public and private entities and individuals that manage land or otherwise affect land use
- ▷ **Partnerships and Collaboration**—A successful Initiative will require ongoing cooperation, collaboration and a perspective that is firmly focused on longleaf conservation at the range-wide level.

[1] This plan uses the term Significant Geographic Areas to encompass both (1) Significant Landscapes for Longleaf Pine Conservation for the sustainability of biodiversity and species richness at a range-wide scale, and (2) Significant Sites for Longleaf Pine Conservation, smaller important areas for the conservation of longleaf communities and longleaf-dependent species. For more information on definition and selection of these areas, see the Significant Geographic Areas discussion in this Plan.

- ▷ **Conservation Plan as a Framework and Catalyst—**  
The Conservation Plan is intended to provide a range-wide framework for longleaf ecosystem conservation, by identifying the most significant actions to conserve these systems, and by serving as a catalyst to further conservation actions in a strategic and outcome-oriented fashion.

## **Strategies and Cross-cutting Approaches for Longleaf Conservation**

Within the Conservation Plan are sections that detail the strategies, objectives and key actions to achieve the goal for maintaining, improving and restoring longleaf forests range-wide.

Six strategies are articulated, but just as with ecosystems, many are interconnected. The strategies identify objectives and key actions to address issues, opportunities and challenges for

- ▷ Public Lands
- ▷ Private Lands
- ▷ Economic and Market-Based Financial
- ▷ Fire Management
- ▷ Understory and Overstory Regeneration
- ▷ Climate Change

In addition, three cross-cutting approaches that relate to all six strategies are described.

- ▷ The Significant Geographic Areas approach is a first attempt to identify those areas, from a range-wide view, that should receive focused and targeted attention in order to achieve the conservation goals of the Conservation Plan
- ▷ The Communication, Education and Outreach approach is designed to support the six strategies
- ▷ The Evaluating Conservation Outcomes approach also applies to all actions called for in the Conservation Plan.

## **Conservation Plan Implementation**

Implementation of this Conservation Plan is intended to be accomplished through voluntary collaborative efforts of the organizations represented on the Regional Working Group and many others associated with longleaf across the range. Participants in of the Regional Working Group and others will work regionally and nationally to advocate on behalf of longleaf conservation, and also will support and encourage local, on-the-ground efforts which will ultimately be the key to success.