

NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting – College of Forestry, Wildlife & Environment – Auburn University
August 10, 2023, 10:00am

Attendees:

Collette DeGarady - TNC	Jacob Barrett - Longleaf
Frank Cochran - NRCS	Jason Gardner - NRCS
Kirk Iverson – NRCS	Shannon Weaver – NRCS
Ad Platt – The Longleaf Alliance	Christine Cooley – NRCS
Leigh Peters – AL Forestry Foundation	Chris Davis – NRCS
Worku Burayu – NRCS	David Kelley – AL Forestry Commission
Julisa Rojas – NRCS	Brian Swimelar – The Trust for Tomorrow
Catherine Rideout – EGCPOV	Vickie Watkins – AACD
Emmie Burke – Houston SWCD	Jennifer Wells – NRCS
Brad Nail – AL Forestry Foundation	Rebecca Bearden – AL Geological Survey
Greg Guthrie – AL Geological Survey	Derek Alkire – NWTF
Rob Holbrook – East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture	Walker Williams – NRCS
Michal Jackson – Aunt Katie’s Garden & Urban Farm	Matt Hodges – USFWS
Rick Pate – AL Dept of Ag & Industries	Hassey Brooks – AL Dept of Ag & Industries
Raymon Shanga – Tuskegee University	Dorris Skipper – National RC&D
Anna Cornelius – National RC&D	Rafael Rodriguez – NRCS
Rachel Proveaux – FSA	Stephanie Fitzpatrick – FSA
Lisa Harris – CRYRWMA	Alana Reynolds – The Nature Conservancy
Dr. Ayanava Majumdar – AL ACES	Chuck Sikes- ALDCNR
Brian Grice- ALDCNR	Andrew Green - ALDCNR
Tim Albritton– NRCS	Jeff Thurmond– NRCS
Ben Malone– NRCS	Brandon McCray– NRCS
Dagmar Thurmond – US Forest Service	John McGuire – Tall Timbers Research Station

Moderator: Shannon Weaver, ASTC for Technology, NRCS

Ben Malone, AL State Conservationist, NRCS

- Started the meeting with going around the room and everybody introducing themselves
- Discussed budget – Inflation Reduction Act funding will increase the budget in the future, focusing on Climate Smart Practices - \$20B investment over a 10-yr period nationwide
- Expect staffing to be increased over the next several years
- Looking for “boots on the ground” partners to assist with conservation planning
- A lot of emphasis has been on health and wellness within NRCS
- Priorities – Climate Smart Agriculture, Urban Agriculture, and meeting people where they are (going out and visiting farmers and ensuring they understand NRCS programs)
- Promoting local working groups (NRCS and local land owner meetings – face-to-face engagement)

- Responsibilities of State Technical Committees:
 - Provide information, analysis and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities, and criteria for natural resource conservation activities and programs
 - Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs
 - Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications
 - Recommend state and national program policy based on resource data
 - Make recommendations to the state conservationists on requests and recommendations from local working groups
 - Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and facilitate education with producers training needs

Jacob Barrett, Technical Assistance & Training Specialist, The Longleaf Alliance

- Jacob discussed the 3-yr old Longleaf Establishment Survey – 2022 results
- The Longleaf Alliance is always willing to help NRCS
- Visited 34 individual stands in 34 counties
- Assessments are 1/100th of a plot
- Habitat is assessed along with plant composition....looking at major competitors (if any) to the trees in the future and make recommendations to land owners
- Looking for good ground cover that encourages a burn
- 74% survival average across all stands
- 26% of stands were burned at age 3...10 of the 34 sites
- The best predictor of success ---attend a LL Academy and/or a Learn and Burn
- Identify and eliminate invasives before site prep begins, even on tract periphery
- Continue strong emphasis on increasing and improving burning
- Follow up contacts matter. Longleaf is not a plant and forget species

Shannon Weaver, ASTC for Technology, NRCS

- Discussed new and proposed NRCS Conservation Practice Standards (CPS)
- CPS – a building block for our conservation plans
- Identify resource concerns – what is the farmer interest in?
 - 46 total resource concerns
- Often times a suite of practices are used for the resource concern
- Each CPS is identified with a respective code
- Interim practices are requested when a resource concern does not have a specific practice to address it – interim practices are requested...the State agrees to monitor that specific practice for 3 years and then must decide if that particular standard should be adopted as a national practice or withdrawn from use
- Discussed raised beds practice and annual forages for grazing systems

Worku Burayu, Agronomist, NRCS

- Discussed low tunnels system – a covered structure that effectively increases air and soil temperatures, protects crops against cold temperatures and mild freezes, sun, wind, and promotes vegetative growth
- Improve plant activity, protection from animals
- Dr. A brought up the dangers of the low tunnel system with the heat in the summer – temps can get to 130 degrees in the tunnel and have very bad effects on the crop – the low tunnels should be removed during high heat

Jason Gardner, ASTC for Programs, NRCS

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program – active announcement looking for proposals...due August 18th – looking for resource concerns that need to be addressed. Reach out to Jason for more information and how to apply
- Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities – 10 projects awarded in the state. Partners that are doing conservation based on climate smart activities. This is another avenue for partners to get assistance

Frank Cochran, EQIP Program Manager, NRCS

- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) – Utilize climate-smart agriculture and forestry mitigation activities
 - Subset of 39 conservation practices and associated enhancement
 - Examples – residue and tillage management, cover crops, nutrient management, prescribed grazing, riparian forest buffers, tree/shrub planting, forest stand improvement, energy efficiency
- CSP Conservation Stewardship Program
 - Must meet stewardship threshold
 - 5-year contracts
 - \$200K max obligation
 - Two obligation types – Acreage (crop and pasture) and NIPF
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - Farm Bill Funding Mandates – 10% wildlife, 50% livestock, 5% socially disadvantaged, 5% new and beginning
- Longleaf Pine Initiative – establishment and management of longleaf pine
 - Prescribed burning and management of existing stands prioritized
 - FY23 – 207 contracts: 125 coastal, 71 montane high, 11 montane medium, 36, 185 acres impacted
- WLFW - Gopher Tortoise – establishment of low-density longleaf stands and management of critical habitat for gopher tortoise
 - FY23 – 277 contracts, 62,242 acres impacted
- WLFW 2.0 – Bobwhite Quail – forest and grassland management practices to improve critical habitat for bobwhite quail

- FY23 – 10 contracts, 3,664 acres impacted
- Shortleaf Pine – establishment and management of shortleaf pine
 - FY23 – 6 contracts, 740 acres impacted
- White Oak – establishment and management of white oak
 - FY23 – 6 contracts, 669 acres impacted
- Livestock Mortality – 89 total contracts
- Conservation Planning Activities – 50 total contracts
- Irrigation Efficiency – 16 total contracts
- Urban Ag Initiative – high tunnel systems and associated practices for urban farms
 - FY23 – 19 contracts, 17.9 acres impacted
- National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) – practices improving both water quality and quantity
 - FY23 – 15 contracts, 648 acres impacted
- Joint Chiefs – cogon grass control and native species establishment
 - FY23 – 14 contracts, 676 acres impacted
- Source Water Protection – higher payment rate on selected practices to incentivize adoption to address water quality and quantity of Alabama water resources
- High Priority Practices – higher payment rate for 10 practices that are not readily adopted within the state and address water quality and quantity
 - FY23 – 20, 641 acres w/ \$4,122,465, 4-fold increase from FY21
- Conservation Incentive Contracts (EQIP-CIC)
 - Intended to be a bridge between classic EQIP and the CSP
 - Separate payment limits, 5-yr contracts, contain annual payments
 - Set up priority areas – must cover the entire state
 - Designate up to 3 resource concerns per area/land use
 - Use minimum of 5% general EQIP allocation (up to 20)
 - Use designated “climate smart” management practices
 - FY23 – high priority area was the state boundary
 - Eligible land uses – crop and pasture
 - Practices – crop: 328, 329, 340, 590, 595; pasture: 528
 - FY23: 22 applications (13 pasture/9 cropland), 9 contracts (8 pasture/1 cropland), 6,373 acres prescribed grazing, 289 acres cover crop, 1,378 acres nutrient and pest mgmt.
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – Streambank Restoration Initiative TNC
 - FY23 – 2 applications approved, design work has been completed
- AL EQIP FY24 and forward
 - Maintain emphasis on locally led process
 - Bolster partnerships that foster HU participation
 - Increase urban agriculture work
 - Increase adoption of source water protection and high priority practices
 - Expand conservation incentive contracts
 - Maintain soil health and irrigation efficiency momentum
 - FY24 program sign-up deadline: tentatively November 3, 2023

Mark Howell, AL ACEP Coordinator, NRCS

- Discussed the ACEP (Agricultural Conservation Easement Program)
- Sign-up batching determined per Farm Bill announcement....date for 2024 is TBD
- Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) – need cooperating sponsoring entity to proceed with program
- Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) - \$1.4M in 2023 – 439 acres
 - Enrolling 3 easements, converting 30-yr easement to permanent, and repairing multiple existing easements
- Wetland Restoration and Criteria and Guideline (2024) – available for review by request
- Healthy Forest Reserve Easements – working through process to enroll 2 HRFE in Baldwin County to convert loblolly forest to longleaf

Q&A

- Question was asked about the National Water Quality Initiative...do the watersheds have to be based on a watershed plan? Shannon Weaver responded – yes they do.
- Question was asked how can partners help NRCS get funding to the ground where it needs to go and assist with conservation? Specifically with regards to climate smart programs. Brandon McCray answered: The best way is to set-up Agreements between NRCS and the partner. Meeting and discussing the details and moving forward with a plan of action.
- Dr. “A” Ayanava Majumdar (bugdoctor@auburn.edu) discussed Alabama Extension Commercial Horticulture
 - Many resources are available – Facebook – Alabama Extension Commercial Horticulture, Alabama Vegetable IPM, Alabama Farmer Connection. Twitter - @AlabamaIPM, Instagram – Farming Basics. Use the Farming Basics App for your IPM needs.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

Forestry & Wildlife Sub-committee

August 10, 2023

Meeting summary

Longleaf accomplished numbers were reviewed, and future opportunities were discussed.

Tim Albritton discussed the possibility of the NRCS providing financial assistance with a 3rd prescribed burn in longleaf. The details can hopefully be worked out in the winter programs meeting with Frank Cochran.

TNC Project was discussed by Colette DeGarady with TNC and Jerry Hanks with Complete Forestry, LLC.

Ad Platt discussed several training opportunities with The Longleaf Alliance and mentioned the revised version of the **Longleaf for the Long Run - Economic Opportunities Landowners Need to Know**. (See link)

<https://longleafalliance.org/longleaf-for-the-long-run/>

John McGuire with Tall Timbers discussed the burn workshops coming up in the future see dates below.

2023 Rx Fire Training Courses

Sep. 26 | USDA Office | Moulton, AL

Nov. 6 | University of West Alabama | Livingston, AL

Nov. 8 | Solon Dixon Center | Andalusia, AL

Nov. 14 | USDA Office | Autaugaville, AL

Wild Pig Project - Different colors used to denote different projects.

First one includes three main Farm Bill funded joint project areas with APHIS. Aphis does trapping for landowners free and we gave money to Soil and Water to provide 70 percent cost share on traps to landowners.

These areas include southwest wiregrass and blackbelt. I could dig up the maps but they have changed since the original and mine are out of date. Soil and water handles the project and they have the most current maps.

More specifically the areas in that project are Baldwin/Escambia; Houston/Henry/Geneva/Dale; blackbelt includes Sumter.

Second one is Soil and Water also has cost share in some counties, but you need to ask them which ones. State money is being used.

Third one NRCS EQIP pays for prebaiting and scouting at the rate of about \$900 per landowner and that is available in every county through NRCS.

Additional Longleaf CRP Program information sent in by FSA after the meeting:

Presently, we are unable to pull in the actual acres for the CP-36 Longleaf that has been re-offered and any new offers.

Currently we have a total of **9,286.64** CP 36 acres for the state.

We had a total of 1852.43 acres which expired and were eligible for re-offer. Of this total I am not sure, how many acres was actually re-offered.

As soon as the State Practice Summary report is made available in COLS software, I can provide you with an exact total.

This was provided by Stephanie M. Fitzpatrick, Agricultural Program Specialist, FSA.

FY2023 Forestry Facts – Longleaf Pine Initiative

EQIP:

Initial Allocation: \$2,126,000

March Funds Assessment: \$2,000,000

June Funds Assessment: \$2,000,000

Total: \$6,126,000

207 Contracts:

- 125 Coastal Plain
- 71 Montane – High Priority
- 11 Montane – Medium Priority

36,185.7 Contracted Acres

Practices:

394 – Firebreak 2,901,857 Ft (\$694,163)

338 – Prescribed Burning ** 22,895 Ac (\$689,010)

490 – Site Preparation 11,980 Ac (\$1,612,226)

612 – Tree Planting 12,831 Ac (\$2,470,235)

666 – Forest Stand Improvement 2,506 Ac (\$90,127)

315 – Herbaceous Weed Treatment 1,441 Ac (\$407,203)

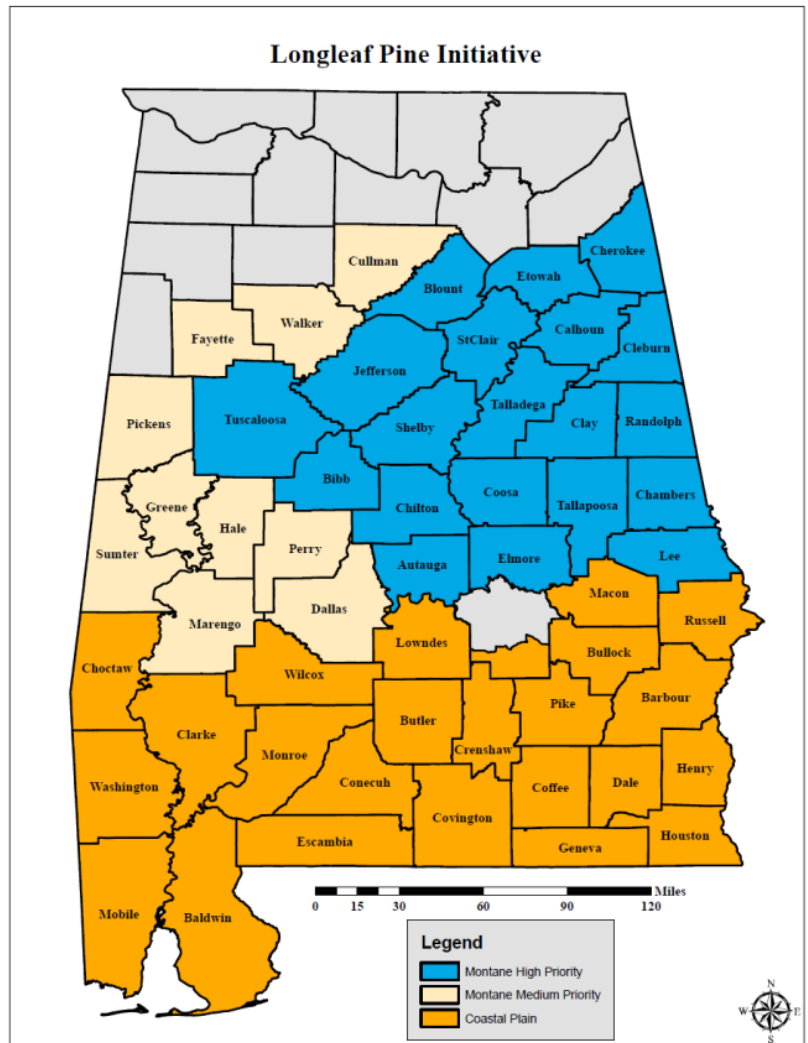
314 – Brush Management 159 Ac (\$29,329)

649 – Structures for Wildlife 37 (\$1,265)

**cannot discern between management and site prep burns

35 Counties: *Autauga, Baldwin, Barbour, Blount, Bullock, Chambers, Cherokee, Chilton, Choctaw, Clark, Coffee, Conecuh, Coosa, Covington, Crenshaw, Dallas, Elmore, Escambia, Geneva, Henry, Houston, Lee, Marengo, Mobile, Monroe, Perry, Pike, Randolph, Russell, Shelby, Talladega, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa, Washington, Wilcox*

Longleaf Pine Initiative



CSP:

Allocation: \$1,500,000

General CSP addition: \$370,883

Total: \$1,870,883

13 Contracts

18,036.6 Contracted Acres

Practices:

E314A – Brush Management to improve wildlife habitat - 30 Ac (\$469)

E315A – Herbaceous weed treatment to create plant communities consistent with the ecological site - 32.5 Ac (\$455)

E338B – Short-interval burns to promote a healthy herbaceous plant community – 7,232.4 Ac (\$597,997)

E338C – Sequential patch burning – 1,074.7 Ac (\$185,105)

E391C – Increase riparian forest buffer width to enhance wildlife habitat – 70.2 Ac (\$129,139)

E612B – Planting for high carbon sequestration rate – 318.9 Ac (\$207,336)

E612C – Establishing tree/shrub species to restore native plant communities – 224.5 Ac (\$185,306)

E666D – Forest management to enhance understory vegetation – 856.5 Ac (\$241,339)

E666F – Reduce forest stand density to create open stand structure – 392 Ac (\$126,233)
E666O – Snags, den trees, and coarse woody debris for wildlife habitat – 93 Ac (\$5,228)
E666P – Summer roosting habitat for native forest-dwelling bat species – 70.1 Ac (\$15,595)

5 Counties: *Barbour, Escambia, Mobile, Russell, Washington*

RESOURCES FOR LANDOWNERS

ALERT – Alabama's Longleaf Ecosystem Restoration Team. More than 1 dozen technical experts from multiple agencies within the state are available to respond to your information needs. Find them here:

A host of additional resources are gathered on The Longleaf Alliance website.

<https://longleafalliance.org/category/outreach-resources/>

August 12...Buena Vista, Georgia 9 AM - 1 PM ET.

Forestry and Wildlife Expo at Marion County Middle/High School, 1 Eagle Drive. Topics include: Pond maintenance, Quail habitat, Growing season burning, and Native snakes. The goal of this event is to connect local landowners with local resources that can actually do the work. For more information contact RT Lumpkin (478) 957-8307 or rlumpkin@gfc.state.ga.us.

September 7...Chilton County 9 AM - 4 PM.

Alabama Prescribed Fire Council Annual Meeting at the Jefferson State Community College, Clanton Campus, 1850 Lay Dam Road, Clanton. Landowners and land managers welcome to attend. Fee: \$50; lunch included. For more information contact Tyler Sibley at (334) 481-2155 or tsibley@alaforestry.org. (Ad will attend for TLA, with a sponsor booth.)

September 12...Online 12 Noon CT.

ForestHer Webinar Series: Establishing Early Successional Communities for Wildlife will be presented via Zoom. This lunch and learn is for women that own forestland or are just interested in learning more about forestry. All landowners are welcome. Speaker: Bence Carter, Alabama Extension. Pre-registration required. For more information contact Becky Barlow at (334) 844-1019 or becky.barlow@auburn.edu.

September 13...Online 12 Noon - 1 PM CT.

Drone Applications in Forest Vegetation Management will be presented via Zoom. Registration required. For more information contact Norm Haley at (256) 574-2143 or nvh0001@aces.edu.

Sept 25, 2023 GA Rx Council Meeting in Columbus, GA

Hurricane Preparedness and Disaster Recovery Webinar-UF-IFAS (3 videos)

TLA's new brochure, **Longleaf for the Long Run - Economic Opportunities that Landowners Need to Know**, is here: <https://longleafalliance.org/longleaf-for-the-long-run/>

UPCOMING LONGLEAF ACADEMIES:

Longleaf 101 – Sept. 6-8 Aberdeen, N.C.

Understory 201 – Oct. 3-4 Joseph W. Jones Ecological Center, Newton, GA.

Groundcover 201 – Oct. 17-19 Berkeley, S. C.

Longleaf Webinar Series – November (Virtual) Herbicides and Longleaf

SAVE THE DATES

2023 Rx Fire Training Courses

Sep. 26 | USDA Office | Moulton, AL

Nov. 6 | University of West Alabama | Livingston, AL

Nov. 8 | Solon Dixon Center | Andalusia, AL

Nov. 14 | USDA Office | Autaugaville, AL

Contact
Josiah Gullatte at
josiahgullatte21@gmail.com

NRCS Staff and
Partners

