

SOIL AND PLANT SCIENCE DIVISION

Technical Soil Services

South Central Soil Survey Region

Nacogdoches, Texas, and Ruston, Louisiana, Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) Soil Survey Offices (SSOs)

Open Pine Forest Management for Wildlife Field Day

Purpose

The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV) hosted an open pine forest management tour on Thursday, December 7, 2023, at the Caney Lakes Recreation Area of the Kisatchie National Forest in Louisiana. The tour was geared towards a target audience of Arkansas and Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network members. Speakers from various professional backgrounds presented materials specific to goals outlined by the LMVJV, complete with tour stops that showcased scenarios to encourage conversations between presenters and attendees.

Background

The LMVJV is a non-regulatory partnership between private, state, and federal entities that was formed to help support bird populations within the Lower Mississippi Valley and West Gulf Coastal Plain/Ouachitas Region. The LMVJV accomplishes its objectives by communicating and encouraging practices of bird conservation. By working with like-minded agencies, it educates and connects landowners and agency partners to promote available conservation plans.

The LMVJV had a particular focus in mind when scheduling the Open Pine Forest Management for Wildlife Field Day: “Develop and refine skills to provide technical assistance to landowners/property managers, using various methods, treatments, and management practices of forest stands to benefit priority wildlife species.” To assist in this endeavor, LMVJV sought out specialists from natural resource, wildlife, forestry, and conservation agencies throughout Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas.

Austin Klais, conservation delivery coordinator, and Bill Bartush, West Gulf Coastal Plain partnership coordinator, both with LMVJV, planned the multi-stop field tour to include a variety of resource concerns and prompt conversations among participants regarding their agency and customer needs.

The first stop included a brief overview of the Conservation Delivery Network and an introduction to the Kisatchie National Forest and the concept of open pine management. The hosts led a discussion about the importance of site selection and species consideration. A focus of the tour was the Shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) species, as its numbers have been historically waning since the boom of loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) planting. Loblolly pine has overshadowed both shortleaf and longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) as the seedling of choice to replant clearcut forests because it grows at a faster rate and can be harvested earlier. Interested foresters and conservationists have been encouraging landowners to begin planting more shortleaf pine, which provides a high habitat value for wildlife. This species of pine is fire-adapted, requiring small-scale burns to thrive. These burns encourage a more open woodland or savannah system, which allows more sunlight to reach the understory. This helps native grasses and shrubs flourish, thereby benefitting a variety of wildlife species.



Figure 1. Example of a young loblolly pine stand in the Kisatchie National Forest.

The second stop built upon shortleaf pine restoration and management and included a presentation on the important role soils play in its success. Marc Bordelon, NRCS retired soil scientist and current ACES employee, and Tyson Hart, MLRA SSO leader, for the Nacogdoches and Ruston SSOs, discussed soils investigation methods and interpretations for different sites that are conducive to shortleaf pine. The soil scientists discussed ecological descriptions and Web Soil Survey as tools to provide valuable soils information.



Figures 2 and 3. Tyson Hart, MLRA SSO leader for the Nacogdoches and Ruston SSOs, educated the group about the importance of obtaining soils information for site selection (left). Marc Bordelon, NRCS ACES employee, readies his case of monoliths for display (right).

After a field lunch, the tour commenced with stops three, four and five, which focused on shortleaf regeneration, prescribed burns, landowner incentives for open pine, and various management options for precommercial to mature pine stands. Discussions centered heavily around achievement of desirable plant and wildlife communities in low basal plantings or those with different midstory environments. Members of the Wild Turkey Federation and various regional quail promotion entities spoke of bird management strategies for quail, turkey, and other priority birds.

Key Outcomes

Attendees of the meeting came away with enhanced knowledge of shortleaf pine, open pine management concepts, and different methodologies to improve desired understory vegetation and targeted wildlife species populations. One of the more valuable outcomes of the day was the networking opportunities provided. Interagency cooperation allows for focus on shared goals and encourages successful outcomes for all parties involved. This in turn helps shape landowner and producer potential and ensures they reap the benefits of multiple specialists' knowledge for their projects.