

**SERPPAS Action Plan**  
**Private Lands Assistance Team**  
**In Support of Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine**  
**Submitted November 2, 2009**

- I. Team Co-leads: Linda Casey, Alabama State Forester, and Bill Puckett, State Conservationist, NRCS in Alabama
- II. Organizations Represented on Team: USFWS (Ronnie Haynes, Partners for Fish and Wildlife); NRCS (Bruce Wight, National Forester); Southern Region Cooperative Extension Service (Bill Hubbard); Longleaf Alliance (Rhett Johnson/Dean Gjerstad); US Endowment for Forestry & Communities, Inc. (Carlton Owen); Wildlife Mississippi (James Cummins); SEAFWA (Tim Ivey, Forest Land Resources Committee)
- III. Co-liaisons: Lark Hayes and Tom Darden
- IV. Background on Issues

The vast majority of forestland potentially available for restoration across the longleaf range is privately held. Despite the emergence of timber investment management organizations (TIMO's) and real estate investment trusts (REIT's) over the past decade or so, some two-thirds of the forest land in the South remains in the hands of individuals and family forest landowners, also call non-industrial private forest landowners. Accordingly, the success of the Conservation Plan requires making a persuasive case for retaining and restoring longleaf with these landowners and the service and consulting foresters who assist them.

The front-end costs of longleaf restoration are significant as is the need for technical assistance from those knowledgeable about longleaf systems. Many landowners would find these costs prohibitive but for some form of public support. Fortunately, an array of publicly funded landowner assistance and incentive programs also exists (many authorized in the federal Farm Bill) to improve stewardship of forestland. Various programs to assist in hurricane recovery also offer opportunities for financial assistance in restoring longleaf.

The State Technical Committees of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are especially important insofar as they help make decisions on the priority uses of several large programs. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife is another significant federal effort that carries out voluntary longleaf habitat improvement action. On the state level, landowner programs implemented by the state fish and wildlife agencies and the State Foresters also play key roles.

(Excerpted from the Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine (RCPLP) at pages 10-11.)

## V. Priority Actions for Next 12-18 Months

1. Actively engage federal and state agencies, (e.g., State Technical Committees, State Stewardship Committees, etc.), that guide or provide technical assistance and cost-share to forest landowners to encourage them to increase support for landowners (especially those in the Significant Geographic Areas) willing (a) to improve poor quality longleaf stands through thinning and burning, (b) to convert forests back to longleaf on appropriate sites and (c) to plant new acres of longleaf trees and restore understories. (RCPLP Objective B, Key Actions 5 and 6, p.12.)
2. In support of Priority #1, encourage longleaf advocates to participate on a state-by-state basis in the state foresters' development of the assessments and strategies to ensure that threats to longleaf are identified, that the Significant Geographic Areas identified in this Conservation Plan are considered as priority areas in the assessments and strategies for supporting longleaf restoration are included. (RCPLP Objective D, Key Action 14, p.13.)
3. In support of Priority #1, gain a more in-depth understanding of the longleaf restoration activities called for in CWCP/S's across the range and work with both the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and individual state agencies to identify and implement common priorities. (RCPLP Objective E, Key Actions 17 and 18, p.13.)
4. Select two or possibly three Significant Geographic Areas, or perhaps states, as demonstration areas in which to accelerate implementation of the preceding priorities.

Discussion: The recommendation of the four foregoing priorities by this Team is driven in large part by the Team's conviction that SERPPAS should consider taking a very targeted approach to implementation of the Range-wide Conservation Plan. While many Team members found the large number of Objectives and Key Actions in the Plan helpful, that comprehensive approach may be somewhat overwhelming. The Team believes that given the budget cuts many state agencies are facing and other factors, now is the time to sharply restrict priorities for the implementation phase. Accordingly, the focus should be on ensuring technical assistance and cost-share to willing landowners and selecting two or three locations to concentrate some extra resources and demonstrate success.

## VI. Next Steps with Timeline

1. Engage the national and regional and state leadership for all key land owner assistance programs with the aim of further informing them of the significance of longleaf restoration and promoting this as a worthy outcome of the programs they oversee. Initial stakeholders include Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Services Agency, USFWS (including Partners program and Landscape

Conservation Cooperatives), USFS/S&PF and state foresters, and state wildlife agencies.

2. Identify other key stakeholders who are supportive of achieving longleaf outcomes via landowner assistance programs and encourage their participation and engagement with above mentioned program managers. Among these stakeholders are Longleaf Alliance, National Wildlife Federation, the Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense Fund, Northern Bob-White Quail Conservation Initiative, the Conservation Fund, Partnership for Conservation of Southern Forestland, National Association of Conservation Districts and the joint committee of SEAFWA and SGSF (Southeastern Forestry and Wildlife Working Group), among many others.
3. Further collaborate with the Significant Geographic Areas team to identify appropriate models and otherwise to support focused implementation at two or three landscapes around the region to serve as demonstration projects.
4. With respect to a timeline, all the next steps should be initiated by January 31, 2010. Using the contributions matrix or successor tool, also roll up and evaluate all the proceeding activities within six months of the adoption of this action plan.

#### VII. Potential Areas of Connectivity with Other SERPPAS Teams

The Team is aware that its Priority #4 regarding selection of demonstration areas for accelerated implementation is closely related to the work of the SERPPAS Team on Implementation for Significant Geographic Areas. This Team looks forward to more discussion to integrate its demonstration efforts with that Team and others. Moreover, this Team recognized that significant education and outreach efforts to landowners and other decision-makers would be essential to implementing its four priorities. The Team is aware that Communications, Education and Outreach are identified in the Conservation Plan as a “cross-cutting approach” at page 23. Again, anticipating that multiple teams may generate education and outreach needs, this Team looks forward to participating in that ongoing discussion. Finally, this Team underscores the importance of the Economic and Market-Based Strategy in the Conservation Plan at page 14. More particularly, making available accurate information on the economics of longleaf to private landowners will be essential to interesting them in participating in assistance/incentive programs for managing longleaf.

#### VIII. Resources Needed

The additional resources needed will to some degree be dependent upon the interest and availability of the two federal family coordinators at USFS and USFWS, state agency representatives and NGO stakeholders to assist with the implementation of this action plan. At a minimum, it is highly desirable to have one or more designated points of contact for each state within the longleaf range to take responsibility for ensuring that the targeted agencies are informed about

the importance of longleaf. These points of contact would also assist in the roll up of accomplishments. In addition a network consisting of these state-level contacts should be stood up with one or more persons designated as managers of this private lands assistance network on a regional basis.

Funding to support standing up efforts in the selected landscapes is desirable. Efforts to support local team collaboration, securing funding for ‘action on the ground’ and providing key leadership in these landscapes will facilitate critical forward progress in implementation of the Conservation Plan.

#### IX. Accomplishments to Date

Consistent with Priority #1 above, the Team Co-leads have already reached out to the State Conservationists across the longleaf range in a teleconference of September 1, 2009 to ensure that these key decision-makers are aware of the Range-wide Plan and SERPPAS efforts to implement it. An equally important purpose of that call was to survey what activities are already underway in the various states by NRCS. A brief summary of those activities has been compiled and has provided information relevant to developing “next steps” for the Team’s priorities. A copy is appended as Attachment A.