

SERPPAS Involvement in Implementing the Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine

SERPPAS Subcommittee on Longleaf Forest Conservation

Presented by: Elizabeth Agpaoa, Regional Forester USDA, Forest Service, Southern Region



A report to identify the potential roles of the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability in range-wide conservation of longleaf pine forests in the South



Background

The *America's Longleaf Initiative* was established to seek opportunities to maintain, improve, and restore the longleaf pine ecosystem across its historic range. The initiative directly supports and converges with interests of the SERPPAS project “Sustaining the Land of the Longleaf Pine”. The Conservation Plan for restoring longleaf pine was formally released at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference on March 19, 2009. The release of the Plan is the culmination of input by more than 120 resource professionals and several years’ effort by the Regional Working Group formed under the banner of America's Longleaf. The Regional Working group is a voluntary collaborative of Federal, state and non-government organizations with interests and efforts to restore longleaf forests.

Identifying the SERPPAS Role in Longleaf Conservation

At the November 12, 2008 meeting of the SERPPAS Principals in Raleigh, NC, The USDA Forest Service agreed to lead an effort involving interested Principals or their representatives to determine specifically how SERPPAS could engage in implementation of the Conservation Plan. Recommendations resulting from this process are the subject of this report.

Members of SERPPAS with an interest in longleaf ecosystem restoration constituted a Longleaf Subcommittee. Members of the Subcommittee met three times (March 12, and April 7 and 28, 2009) *via* net conference to identifying SERPPAS roles and responsibilities in achieving the actions laid out in the Conservation Plan (See Appendix C for participants).

Seven areas were identified by the subcommittee (including specific key actions from the Plan) that would be appropriate for SERPPAS to lead. These specific key actions are necessary to further the goals of the Longleaf Conservation Plan and will capitalize upon the unique assemblage of organizations in SERPPAS working at a multi-state or regional scale. These key actions cannot be accomplished by one entity alone, but will require coordination and support of multiple players of SERPPAS.

The seven areas for action are:

1. Address Smoke Management and Air Quality (Fire Management Strategy,)

2. Continue “Contributions Matrix”- (Implementation and Monitoring)
3. Expand and Coordinate Inventory and Mapping (Public and Private Lands, Fire Management and Significant Geographic Areas Strategies and Themes)
4. Support Landscape Implementation Teams (Implementation)
5. Coordinate Assistance to Private Lands (Private Lands Strategy)
6. Coordinate Climate Change Research (Climate Change Strategy)
7. Coordinate Tree Seedling and Understory Plant material Supply (Overstory and Understory Strategy)

Issue papers on each of these subjects are included in Appendix A identifying specific actions called for in the Conservation Plan.

It is envisioned that each issue area would be led by one or more SERPPAS Principals. Team leaders would be designated on a voluntary basis for each of the issue areas. The team leaders will assume responsibility for recruiting other team members and for moving the issue areas toward implementation over the next 12-18 months. Lead SERPPAS Principals would be responsible for helping guide and support team leaders and would report action implementation status at future SERPPAS meetings. Team leaders are encouraged to recruit additional members with relevant skills or resources, including those who may offer diverse perspectives. Additional team members may be recruited

from the longleaf subcommittee of SERPPAS, from other SERPPAS participants or from other sectors, including the NGO community. Involvement of and coordination with those entities already actively involved in the *America's Longleaf Initiative* (see Conservation Plan and www.americaslongleaf.org) is expected. Over time, additional roles and responsibilities may be identified, implementation actions will be taken, and progress reports will be made to the SERPPAS Principals periodically.

In addition, activities currently underway or planned were documented and compiled by representatives of the agencies and organizations participating on the subcommittee. The results of the ongoing activities are compiled in Appendix C of this report. This compilation is not a comprehensive list of all activities underway in the five state SERPPAS region, nor does it identify efforts for longleaf conservation in the four states not currently covered by SERPPAS. However, the "Contribution Matrix" tables provide a snap-shot of the broad range and diverse efforts underway to help maintain, improve or restore longleaf by those responding to the subcommittee's request for information. The following agencies and organizations are shown in the matrix:

- ▷ The Alabama Forestry Commission
- ▷ the Georgia Forestry Commission
- ▷ the Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- ▷ the Florida Division of Forestry
- ▷ the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources
- ▷ the US Fish and Wildlife Service
- ▷ the USDA Forest Service
- ▷ the Natural Resource Conservation Service
- ▷ the Environmental Protection Agency
- ▷ The Nature Conservancy, and
- ▷ The Conservation Fund.



Longleaf Pine Coordinate Climate Change Research

Background

Scientific studies are needed to better understand the future effects of climate change on forests in general and longleaf in particular. Such information can serve to better inform longleaf restoration efforts. The Climate Change Tree Atlas (2007) developed by the USDA Forest Service predicts the relative frequency, density, and dominance of various tree species under future climate conditions. The conclusion of that study was longleaf pine would be the clear “winner” among all the southeastern pines (including loblolly, shortleaf and slash) by a very wide margin in response to climate change. This is consistent with the fact that longleaf is more resistant to drought and high temperatures. However, many questions remain in understanding the likely effects of climate change on the longleaf pine ecosystem as well as the role longleaf restoration could possibly play in mitigating climate change or adapting to such change.

Applicable RCPLP Key Actions:

Climate Change Strategy, Objective A, Key Actions 1-3 (page 20):

- ▷ **RCPLP Key Action 1**—Promote more extensive scientific study of the potential effects of climate change on the longleaf ecosystem, including the tree species, plants and animals, and ecosystem function.
- ▷ **RCPLP Key Action 2**—Promote further study of the contributions that longleaf restoration and management could play in carbon sequestration and adaptation to climate change. Such study should include development of a standardized carbon accounting system and baseline inventories for longleaf systems to promote marketing and crediting of longleaf sequestration efforts.
- ▷ **RCPLP Key Action 3**—Promote further study of the potential climate change impacts from the increased level of prescribed burning done to restore and maintain healthy longleaf ecosystems. Also, promote further study to gain a better understanding of the climate change impacts of frequent fire management versus catastrophic wildfires.

Subcommittee Recommendations

In Spring 2008, a Memorandum of Partnership (MOP) was signed between SERPPAS and the Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU) network to provide research and technical assistance as needed for the SERPPAS partners. To date, this partnership has supported several SERPPAS projects including the RCW Translocation Project (University of Georgia/Clemson University researchers), regional planning research in eastern North Carolina (UNC/NCSU researchers), and longleaf pine mapping (Auburn University researchers), just to name a few. It is the opinion of the SERPPAS Subcommittee on Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Restoration the SERPPAS-CESU Partnership can serve to coordinate climate change-related research between universities, federal agencies, and other CESU partners to better understand the effects of climate change on the longleaf ecosystem. Furthermore, the Subcommittee recommends that US Forest Service and NOAA be invited to take leadership in overseeing implementation of key actions listed above along with the CESU.