



Longleaf Pine Smoke Management and Air Quality

Background

The 15-year goal for the Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine (RCPLP) is to increase longleaf from 3.4 to 8.0 million acres, with commensurate increases in prescribed burning expected. As described in the RCPLP, the issues surrounding air quality transcend jurisdictional boundaries and organizational authorities. Fire is one of the most essential components of natural longleaf ecosystems. Restoring fire as a management tool involves many challenges. Some are regulatory in nature such as the need to address air quality. Other challenges such as applying fire to an increasingly urban and fragmented landscape where landowner objectives vary are more practical in nature. Even more fundamentally, a lack of public understanding of the positive role of fire is widespread. Neither the essential, ecological role of fire nor the tradeoffs between fire management smoke and wildfires are universally recognized. In order to meet the goals of the RCPLP, each of these challenges must be addressed and solutions found to allow the expanded use of fire management.

Applicable RCPLP Key Actions:

Fire Management Strategy, Objective B, Key Actions 3 and 4 (page 17):

- ▷ **RCPLP Key Action**—Through education and outreach, advance awareness of fire’s influence in shaping and sustaining native ecosystems, as well as the benefits of frequent fire management as opposed to wildfire.
- ▷ **RCPLP Key Action**—Work cooperatively with the U.S. EPA and the state air quality agencies to address smoke management for fire management and to facilitate increased burning while complying with state air quality laws. Recognize the positive aspects of fire management on air quality in state plans. A key activity is the participation in the development and/or updating of Smoke Management Programs prepared by state air quality and land management agencies.

Subcommittee Recommendations

It is the opinion of the SERPPAS Subcommittee on Longleaf Pine that only a concerted effort by the SERPPAS Principals can overcome the many challenges that impact this essential component of longleaf. Therefore, the Subcommittee recommends the issue of air quality, relative to the management of the longleaf ecosystem, be adopted as a SERPPAS organizational priority. Furthermore, the Subcommittee recommends that EPA Region 4 and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control be asked to take leadership in reinvigorating earlier discussions on air quality and convening key stakeholders, including State Air Quality Agencies, State Foresters, USDA Forest Service, Department of Defense, representatives of State Fire Councils, USFWS, and other interested parties, with the goal of identifying and resolving potential sources of conflict between Longleaf Pine ecosystem restoration and improving the Region’s air quality.