

Current Management

Longleaf pine forests evolved with frequent, low-intensity fires started by both lightning and Native Americans. Today, however, in order to address safety concerns and meet management objectives, fire must be prescribed by skilled land practitioners under exact climatic conditions.

Although they may look dangerous, prescribed fires are an essential tool for the management of game and nongame habitat within longleaf pine forests. Without these frequent fires, vines and shrubs (otherwise killed back by fire) quickly invade the forest. Over time the appearance of the longleaf forest transforms from open and park-like to dense and impenetrable. In essence taking fire out of the longleaf pine forest is like taking rain out of the rain forest.



↑ A trained professional setting a controlled fire

With these prescribed fires, we are setting controlled, low-intensity, wood-fires to remove forest litter and thus reduce the risk of infrequent, yet dangerously intense, catastrophic wild-fires.

In some instances it is necessary to remove invasive, non-native plant species in order to restore a longleaf pine stand to its open aspect. Techniques for restoration may include the use of herbicides or mechanical removal of undesirable trees and shrubs.

Removal of hardwood trees may be necessary for restoration



Herbicides may be used to stop invasive plants (like kudzu)



For more information contact:



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The Longleaf Pine



Fire Forest



Longleaf Pine Forest

The forest seen by early explorers to the southeastern U.S. shared several fundamental characteristics;

- Tall, majestic, and ancient stands dominated by a single species of tree; the longleaf pine
- A conspicuous lack of midstory trees and shrubs presented a scenic vista through the forest
- A well developed ground layer, dominated by bunch grasses helped to create a park-like appearance
- A high diversity of plants in the ground layer
- Numerous wildlife species that were dependent upon the open pine forest
- Frequent fires that skimmed across the ground's surface acted as the thread which held the longleaf pine forest together
- Found across a variety of habitat types; from the ridges of 2000 foot tall mountains to sea level forests

Up until a few hundred years ago as far as one could see there was a seemingly unending wilderness of

longleaf pine in the Southeastern U.S. stretching all the way to eastern Texas to southern Virginia. For comparison's sake, today, one would have to drive for 3 days before they left the range that was once dominated by longleaf pine.

Historical Management

A longleaf pine tree can produce beautiful heart pine lumber, highly valued for its rot resistance and strength. Some have gone as far to call longleaf pine "one of the finest timber trees the world has ever known." It wasn't long before investors saw dreams of green gold in the virgin forests of longleaf pine. By the turn of the 20th century, most of the longleaf pine forest was bled by the turpentine industry or logged from the southern landscape to supply timber for a growing nation.



Logging and gathering turpentine in the ancient longleaf forests



Forests converted to intensive production

Many remnant longleaf forests were either lost to urban or agricultural development or replanted with dense rows of fast growing pine species such as slash or loblolly. Few made efforts to replant the native forests of longleaf pine. Instead, most of the logging was done with the idea to "cut out and get out".



Typical cutover longleaf forest

Biological Importance

Accounts by explorers and naturalists to the Southeast described the native forest as "a plain mostly forested in long leaved pine, the earth covered with grass, interspersed with an infinite variety of plants". Today, close about 97% of this once magnificent longleaf pine forest has been destroyed.



Gopher Tortoise



Black Bear

Wild Turkey



Abundant wildflowers

