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The Florida Forest Steward

A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals



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A Visit with Stewardship Landowners

Have you ever wondered how other forest stewardship landowners manage their lands for wildlife, timber, recreation, soil conservation and water quality? We visited Tom and Carlene Croft, who manage 100 acres of forest land in Madison County, to learn about their management practices. Initially, they viewed their land as a real estate investment, but they began to feel like it would be a place where they would enjoy both hard work and relaxation, and where they could help nature rebuild rich communities of plants and animals. Now the Croft's main objective is to enhance habitat conditions for game and non-game wildlife combined with timber management. As Carlene says they are now, "Living in the elements in God's country".

Friendly and helpful neighbors have told the Crofts a bit about the past uses of this land. The entire tract was homesteaded back in 1840. The original pine house burned down in a lighting strike in 1940. More recently, pines were planted in many of the areas that were once cultivated fields and pastures. Slash pine was planted on about 50 acres in 1974 and loblolly pine was planted on another 23 acres in 1981. The slash pine was clear-cut before the Crofts purchased the land.

Now, the Crofts' are working to reintroduce native plants that were displaced by cultivated crops, pasture, and dense pine plantations. As Tom puts it, they are "...trying to get everything started back that was supposed to be here".

Timber management is one of Tom and Carlene's goals. Initially, the Croft's purchase did not include the planted pine timber. However, after the previous owner harvested the pines, Tom had the logging debris pushed into piles and the land bedded. He chose not to use herbicides or fire in preparing the site, instead, the piles of logging debris were left to create more habitat diversity. In January, 1996, about forty acres were planted with bare root longleaf pine seedlings. Almost a year after planting, survival was about 80%.

Tom will burn the new plantation this winter while the longleaf are still in the grass stage to encourage height growth. Once the young pines are well established, he plans to burn each part of the stand on a two year cycle. The land where the longleaf pine are planted ranges from well-drained uplands to areas where there is seasonal standing water on the surface of the soil. Due to this site diversity, different plant communities will develop in different parts of the stand.

Mr. Croft envisions several thinnings and eventual harvest of mature timber a few small patches at a time, all while continuing regular prescribed burns. This regime would encourage rich plant and animal communities to develop in the pine stands and adjoining hammocks and swamp forests. The barrier that they will have to overcome is the difficulty in finding a buyer and a decent price for partial harvests on a fairly small acreage. Small-scale, highly-mobile logging operations will be necessary for thinning on ownerships such as the Crofts.

Wildlife habitat enhancement is also a goal of the Croft's stewardship plan. They have adorned and enriched the edges of the "camp" area where their house is with many kinds of plants, mostly native shrubs that attract butterflies, other insects, hummingbirds, songbirds, and deer.

They have set aside three wildlife food plots totaling about six acres. An area of about an acre was disced and sown with wild game maize, Alice clover, hairy indigo, Florida beggarweed, oats, wheat, and rye. Tom has allowed some volunteer persimmon trees to grow in the food plot because he knows that sweet, fleshy fruit is valued by many wildlife species. Another food plot is mainly aschynomene, a perennial legume that reseeds itself. Tom just disks it when the seed is mature.

The property lends itself well to Tom and Carlene's wish to encourage diversity. The areas that were clear-cut in 1994 wrap in and around areas of hardwood and cypress swamps, upland hardwood areas, and the loblolly plantation, such that no spot in the cleared areas is more than about 300 ft. from an area of wooded cover. This piece of land has a lot of "edge", the transition zones between open and wooded areas and between different forest types. Lots of "edge" can encourage animal and plant diversity.

The Croft's Stewardship Management plan includes several specific projects to help them meet their overall objectives of wildlife habitat and timber management. Tom and Carlene are well on their way towards putting all these ideas into practice:

- Manage the replanted cut over area and the area now in loblolly for wildlife habitat and timber production.
- Leave undisturbed the four areas of hardwood hammock and the three areas of cypress and hardwood swamp for wildlife cover and mast production.
- Maintain at least two clearings for wildlife food plots.
- Install wood duck boxes and houses for cavity nesting birds.
- Enhance recreation by adding a boardwalk through one of the cypress areas where the wildlife viewing platform was areas. Use the firebreaks for walking trails and access.
- Plant pond cypress in suitable locations near the existing swamp forest. Plant swamp chestnut oak in suitable locations to increase and diversify hard mast.
- Use prescribed fire in the pine stands to control the understory and encourage new growth of wildlife food plants.
- Establish and maintain a system of firebreaks so that only selected areas can be prescribe burned.
- Plant native trees, shrubs, and plants that were probably once present on this land.
- In favorable locations, experiment with planting native species from other areas of north and central Florida.

Tom and Carlene come up to their forest land from their home in Sumter Co. as often as

they can and stay as long as they can, whatever the season. Their children and grandchildren join them several times each winter, but avoid the hot weather. Carlene enjoys bicycle rides with the grandchildren along quiet county roads near the property. Carlene has long been a bird watcher and, thanks to her, Tom is one now too. One of the great strengths of the Croft's stewardship is that they both love to engage in hard work, like brushing out a property line through thick underbrush, or slower-paced pursuits such as birdwatching. It's all recreation to them!

Congratulations on Certification!

Hats off to these landowners who have recently achieved Stewardship Forest certification:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Holmes County:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Tom Johnson * Sylvia Glover * Hampton Yates | <p><i>Jackson County:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Lane Smith |
| <p><i>Gadsden County:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Preston Robertson * Mike Simonson * Rich Pouncy <p>Choestoe</p> | <p><i>Walton County:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Dan Beraha * Gene Borcz <p>Twin Falls Plantation</p> |

Floridians Using BMP's

Did you know that 73% of north Florida is forested and 43% of that forest is in the hands of private non-industrial landowners? The health of our region's streams and lakes depends largely on how adjoining private non-industrial forest land is managed. How can north Florida landowners help protect the critical aquatic habitats? Adopting voluntary standards for land and water stewardship during silvicultural operations is one way to support a strong economy and unique aquatic community. All aquatic species can benefit from the use of Silviculture Best Management Practices (BMPs). Also, by adopting these voluntary measures, landowners make it less likely that they will have to face more regulation.

How are we doing? The results of a recent survey indicate that most Florida forest landowners are making an effort to maintain healthy aquatic habitats. In 1995 the Florida Division of Forestry (DOF) completed a statewide Compliance Survey on Silviculture Best Management Practices (BMPs). The survey evaluated BMPs on 187 individual forestry operations in 55 Florida counties. Statewide compliance was 96%. Compliance with Special Management Zone (SMZ) recommendations, which apply to all perennial and intermittent streams, was 97%.

To find out more about what you can do to follow BMPs on your forest land contact your County Forester. You can also direct your questions to Jeff Vowells, a forest hydrologist at the Division of Forestry at: 904-414-9935.

Innovative Management of Cattle and Timber

A few months ago, the Florida Chapter of the Society of Range Management toured the Lykes Brothers Ranch for an overview of its ambitious tree planting program. Here's a few of the interesting practices we heard about:

The ranch is planting about 5,000 acres per year on dry prairie and improved pasture, most of it with pine. All of the Glades County tract where the tour was conducted is leased for hunting. Cattle are grazed everywhere except where there are young pines less than three years old. Some prescribed burning is conducted, but the cattle, by grazing down the understory, reduce the need for fire. Three years after planting, cattle are placed on the land at a stocking rate of about 1 cow/30 acres on native range and about 1 cow/4 acres on improved pasture.

In the native forest on this land, longleaf pine and south Florida slash pine were the main commercial timber species. Now, north Florida slash, and even sand pine are being planted. In addition, the ranch managers are also trying "Caribbean" pine, (*Pinus caribaea*), which is a Central American species. All the planting is done at 4' x 12' spacing. Wildlife corridors are left with wide roads/firebreaks at least every 1/4 mile. For fertilization they are trying out inexpensive Class A granular sludge. They plan to thin the south Florida slash at age 10-12 and clear-cut at age 15-20.

The harvested timber is hauled to distant mills by rail. The ranch has to settle for lower stumpage prices than those received by north Florida landowners because of the distance to market. Were it not for the railroad, this ranch might not be able to sell pulpwood at all. Hauling by truck to mills that far away would be uneconomical.

The ranch has some eucalyptus plantations and its own eucalyptus nursery. We presume that the eucalyptus is being grown for pulpwood. The wood is also being used for mulch. The ranch grinds and markets their own mulch. Like many hardwoods, these eucalyptus coppice (resprout from the stump) after harvest. Once the eucalyptus trees are planted, the grower will get several wood harvests before needing to replant. Imagine how that must cut down on stand establishment costs!

One of the trade-offs that we all face is balancing production with the other aspects of land stewardship. The ranch is converting a lot of dry prairie to planted pine. (Despite the name, dry prairies can be inundated for extended periods.) While this may mean more deer--in areas where the young pines have not yet shaded out most of the other vegetation--one trade-off is that values associated with treeless native range ecosystems may be lost.

Forest Stewardship Active Way Down South

The senior forester of the Division of Forestry for Myakka district (Manatee, Hardee, Sarasota, Desoto, and Charlotte counties) is excited about the Forest Stewardship Program and is actively promoting it. We wish him success in his efforts to interest landowners in that district--and adjoining counties--in the Stewardship Program. Only about 33 Forest Stewardship properties--around 11% of total Florida Forest Stewardship Program acres and 5% of the landowners--are located in the 24 counties south of Orange county. Yet, according to the US Forest Service publication, "Forest Statistics for Florida, 1995", those counties have about 23% of the private, non-industrial timberland in our state.

Although opportunities for timber production diminish as one moves into the southern part of our state, timber may be an attractive option on some southern Florida holdings. Many forest landowners manage mainly for wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, or grazing. For them, timber production is at best a secondary objective. Many such landowners can benefit from technical advice offered by the Forest Stewardship Program. The Program has much to offer landowners in central and south Florida and much to learn from them. It welcomes opportunities to work with more of them.

For More Information about the Stewardship Program in the Myakka District contact:

Timber Price Update

The 4th quarter Timber-Mart South report just arrived. Average stumpage prices in Florida in the last three months of 1996 were \$39/cord for pine pulpwood, \$75/cord for pine C-N-S, and \$99/cord for pine plylogs. These prices were up \$3, \$9, and \$9 respectively from the third quarter of 1996. As previous newsletters have pointed out, stumpage prices are highly variable and the actual price for a particular timber sale is affected by one or more of the following factors: tract size; volume per acre; timber size and quality; access and proximity to mills.

Please Note that.....

- The Timber-Mart South Report is copyrighted and the new subscription agreements do not allow us to reproduce a more complete quarterly price summary as we have done in past issues. However, the complete summary will be made available to County Extension Directors. Contact their offices for additional information.
- We're still waiting for the release of the 1997 Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP) cost shares

Forest Certification Standards Being Discussed

As Dr. Henry Gholz and others summarized at a recent seminar at the University of Florida, forest certification is a good example of a forest management issue that originated in the tropics and has become a hot debate in this country within a relatively short time. Opinions abound on the certification of forest management practices.

The original intent of certification in developing countries was to encourage a sustainable forest products industry where it had not existed before. What does this mean? The 1992 international Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro defined sustainable forestry as:

"managing our forests to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs by practicing a land stewardship ethic which integrates the growing, nurturing, and harvesting of trees for useful products with the conservation of soil, air and water quality, wildlife and fishhabitat, and aesthetics."

These objectives should look familiar because they are very similar to the goals of the Forest Stewardship program.

The certification process would guarantee to the consumer that all practices used in growing and processing certified wood products were sustainable from the silvicultural operations of the forest landowner to the final manufacturer, and all the processes in between. Needless-to-say this has the potential of being a very complicated process. Still in the early stages of development, there are many unanswered questions, especially in developed countries, to consider: Who does it? Why should I do it? What are the practical aspects? Will it be a duplication or enhancement of current programs? How will it be viewed by the consumer? and How do you come up with a scheme that accommodates the range of different forest landowners and range of forest products?

The Tropical Forest Management Trust, headquartered in Gainesville, recently teamed up with Tall Timbers Research in Tallahassee, to coordinate the process of developing

forest certification standards for the Southeast. The contact organization for the program will be the Trust coordinated by Pamela Gore In addition, Steve Lindemann is the liaison at Tall Timbers.

Over the next 18 months, the organization will be making forestry contacts in the region, distributing information about issues related to the process of forest certification, establishing a database of stakeholders, working with forest professionals to discuss relevant standards and holding public discussion meetings.

To find out more about the project, please contact:

The Tropical Forest Management Trust

6124 SW 30th Ave
Gainesville, FL 32608
tel: 352-331-2007
fax: 352-331-3284
e-mail: pg@trd.com

Confused about Wetlands Management?

Here's help. A new extension publication entitled "Forested Wetlands: Regulations Affecting Management" is now available. This 10 page paper describes the current guidelines, regulations, and permitting processes for forest management activities in Florida's wetlands, including a list of agency contacts. The publication is available through your local Cooperative Extension Office. Refer to the title and CIR 1178

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A University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service and Florida Division of Forestry joint project:

Paul Cambell (editor), School of Forest Resources & Conservation, UF, P.O. Box 110420, Gainesville, FL 32611-0420 Tel: (352)-846-0878

Anne Todd Bockarie (co-editor), School of Forest Resources & Conservation, UF

Alan Long (co-editor), School of Forest Resources & Conservation, UF

Charles Marcus (co-editor), Florida Division of Forestry, 3125 Conner Blvd, Tallahassee, FL 32699-1650



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