The Florida Forest Steward

A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

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

Chris Demers *(editor), School of Forest Resources & Conservation, UF, P.O. Box 110410, Gainesville, FL 32611-0410, (352) 846-2375 or* ***cdemers@mail.ifas.ufl.edu***

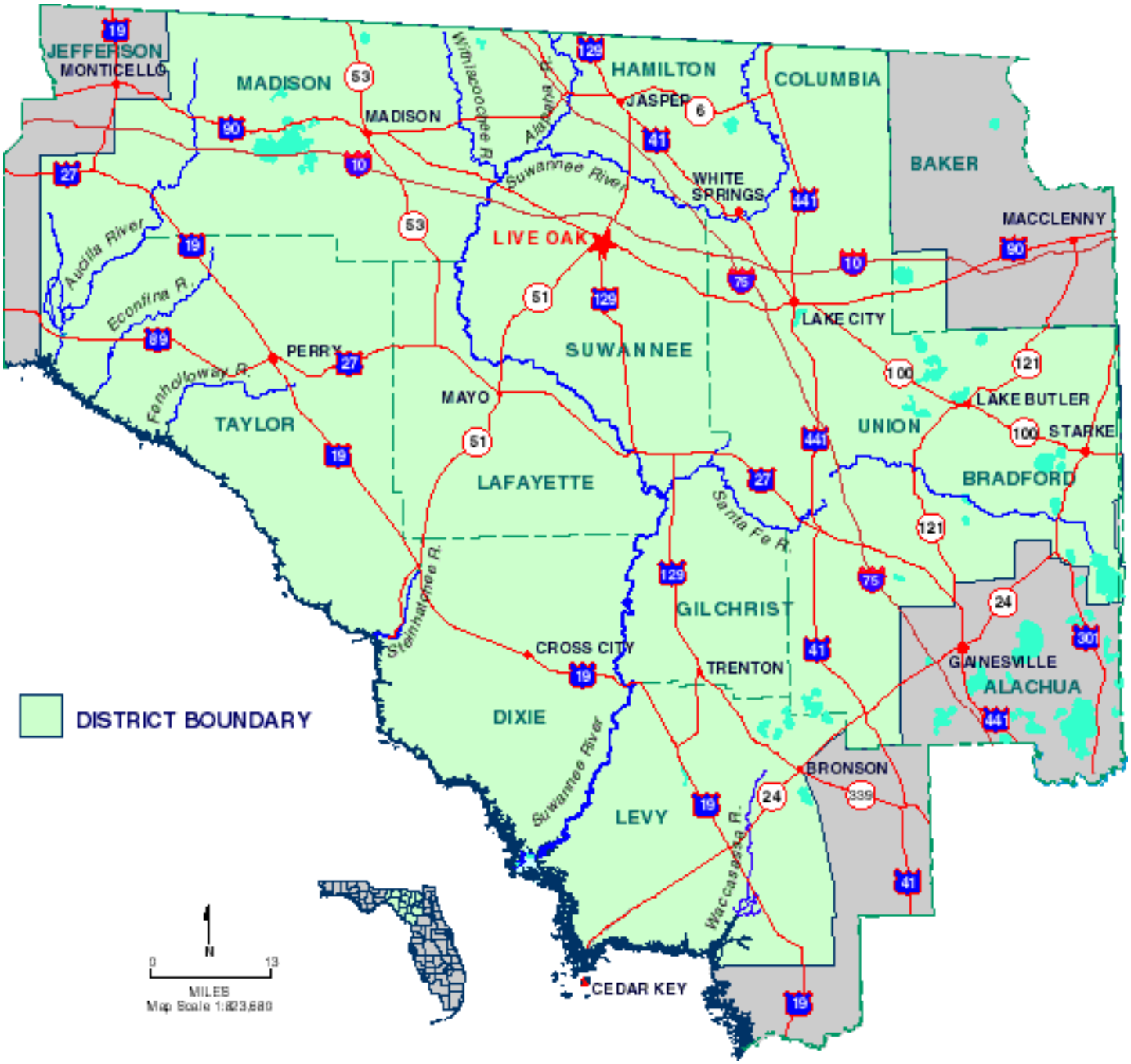
Alan Long *(co-editor), School of Forest Resources & Conservation, UF, (352) 846-0891 or* ***ajl2@ufl.edu***

Todd Groh *(co-editor), Florida Division of Forestry, 3125 Conner Blvd, Tallahassee, FL 32699-1650, (850) 414-9907 or* ***groht@doacs.state.fl.us***

Chuck McKelvy *(co-editor), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 3125 Conner Blvd, Tallahassee, FL 32699-1650, (850) 414-9911 or* ***mckelvc@fwc.state.fl.us***

New Private Landowner Initiative Program

Beginning November 1, 2002 a new cooperative program provides technical and cost-share assistance to north Florida landowners whose management objectives are focused on conservation and natural resource protection. The Private Landowner Initiative (PLI) program is the first of its kind in Florida and is open to residents within the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD). Property owners with 25 or more acres may apply to receive up to $25,000 in cost-share funds that will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis by SRWMD and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (partners.fws.gov).



To be eligible to participate, landowners must already have a **Forest Stewardship Management Plan** for their property, or develop one, in cooperation with the Florida Division of Forestry (DOF) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Types of practices that are eligible for assistance under the PLI program include:

-enhancing or restoring wetland and riparian (streamside) areas;

-creating and improving habitat for native fish, wildlife, and plant species;

-practices that benefit soil and water conservation; and

-restoring components of the historic longleaf pine ecosystem.

Scott Gregor of the DOF is the PLI Coordinator. Scott earned his Bachelor of Science in Forest Resources from the University of Georgia in 2000 and is interested in exploring different ways of keeping rural communities economically viable while conserving and protecting natural resources. “There’s a lot of excitement about this program, because everybody wins,” explains Gregor. “Wildlife habitat is improved, wetlands and water quality are protected and landowners get the help they need.” Applications and information about the PLI program are available through the PLI coordinator and county foresters, or on the “Features/Programs” page at the SRWMD’s web site at **www.mysuwanneeriver.com**

Applications will be accepted and reviewed by the PLI coordinator on an ongoing basis. Scott Gregor’s office is located at the SRWMD headquarters in Live Oak and can be contacted at 386-362-1001 or toll free at 800-226-1066.

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Mottled Duck Vs. Mallard

By Diane Roth Eggeman, Waterfowl Biologist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

The Florida mottled duck is one of approximately 25 closely related, mallard-type species worldwide and is one of only a few nonmigratory ducks in North America. Hunters favor this bird because of its large size and palatability. The conservative, one-bird daily bag limit reflects biologists’ concern for this species’ population status. Mottled ducks in Florida probably never were extremely abundant. Rapid changes in Florida’s landscape during the past 50 years, mostly resulting from agricultural and urban development, raise concerns about the status of mottled duck habitats. However, probably the biggest immediate threat to the conservation of Florida’s mottled duck is hybridization with introduced mallards. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is attacking this problem on several fronts. There are ways that every concerned citizen, duck hunter or not, can help.

Background

The conservation of Florida’s mottled duck is important for a number of reasons. The range of Florida’s mottled duck is restricted to peninsular Florida. Information from several decades of banding studies combined with recent information from a radio-telemetry study indicate no movement of birds out of this range. Furthermore, Florida mottled ducks are genetically distinct from mottled ducks that occur in Louisiana and Texas. This is confirmed by genetic studies of birds in the three states. Therefore, Florida’s mottled duck is unique and occurs nowhere else in the world.

Additionally, the breeding population of Florida's mottled ducks is relatively small, our best estimate being 30 to 40 thousand birds. The mottled duck is a defining member of the unique suite of species characteristic of the prairie wetlands of southern Florida. These birds are highly valued by wildlife observers and are one of only four species of waterfowl that regularly breed in the state.

Mallards, a species that is closely related to mottled ducks, occur naturally in Florida only as a winter resident. They migrate north to breed in the spring, and thus are reproductively isolated from mottled ducks. However, captive-reared mallards are being released by humans in large numbers in Florida, and these feral birds remain in Florida year-round. These resident mallards are not part of Florida's native wildlife, and, like most exotic species, are causing problems. Released mallards inter-mix with mottled ducks, and the two species interbreed. FWC biologists frequently observe mixed flocks and pairs and the resulting hybrid offspring. The hybrid offspring are fertile.

Every mallard released in Florida can potentially contribute to the hybridization problem. Because of the relatively small size of the Florida mottled duck population, complete hybridization of the population is a serious concern. Of a sample of 228 mottled ducks collected near Lake Okeechobee, an estimated 5% showed hybrid characteristics.

Mallard releases in other parts of the world have devastated local populations of closely related species. The New Zealand grey duck is an example. Mallards did not occur in New Zealand naturally, but were released to provide hunting stock. Now, approximately 95% of the population of gray ducks are hybrids. The Hawaiian duck is another example. This endangered bird is probably 100% hybridized on the island of Oahu, and likely only exists, genetically intact, on the island of Kauai. Meller's duck in Madagascar is also highly endangered, and the remaining birds are being hybridized by introduced mallards. The situation in Florida is comparable to these examples in that we have a small, isolated population of a close relative of the mallard. If we can reduce mallard releases in Florida, attrition will gradually reduce the feral mallard population, and hybridizations and the abundance of mallard genes in the mottled duck population also should decrease.

What is Being Done About It?

In its March 2001 meeting, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) prohibited the release of mallards on licensed hunting preserves, effective July 1, 2001. An exception is that commercial operations involved in this activity within the past three years (four preserves) would be allowed to continue mallard releases until 2008. Despite these prohibitions, mallard releases will continue, likely by well-intentioned individuals releasing small numbers of ducks on private ponds or community lakes for aesthetic purposes. The best way to reduce these releases is through a public information/education campaign. FWC is distributing a new brochure about this problem and is planning other educational efforts to spread the word. Permitting requirements for directly controlling feral mallard populations may also be relaxed. Biologists are working to develop a genetic method to monitor the extent of hybridization. Once equipped with a reliable genetic technique, wildlife biologists hope to periodically sample the mottled duck population in Florida to better assess the proportion and distribution of hybrids. If funding is available, FWC biologists will initiate a study of the sale and trade of captive-reared mallards in

Florida in order to develop an effective, efficient strategy for reducing the problem.

How Can You Help?

The obvious way to help is to not release mallards and not support existing feral mallards by feeding or sheltering them. Most importantly, spread the word to your friends and neighbors that releasing and supporting feral mallards threatens Florida's mottled duck population. If your golf course or neighborhood association's lake or pond has mallards, notify the managers of the problem and your concerns and ask for their commitment to not release any more mallards in the future. Most people do not realize the problems or the fact that releasing mallards is illegal. You can contact one of FWC's waterfowl offices (850-488-5878, 321-726-2862) for more information or for brochures.

All mallards, wild and feral, are protected by federal law and cannot be touched without the proper permits. If ponds or canals near you have mallards during the summer, these are feral introduced mallards. These birds can be removed by Department of Agriculture--Wildlife Services officials who have the proper permits (call 352-377-5556).

For more information on the biology and conservation of mottled ducks and other Florida waterfowl, visit **wld.fwc.state.fl.us/duck/**.

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Wildlife Plant Feature: deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*)

Deerberry is a deciduous shrub that grows in a variety of habitats from Florida to Texas, all the way north to the Lake States and east to New York. It is an important food source for quail, turkey, deer and many other species of birds and mammals.

Form: multi-stemmed deciduous shrub, commonly 3- 6 ft tall, spreading from runners to form loose clusters of scattered plants.

Leaves: alternate, deciduous, variable sized, often wavy, oval to lance-shaped leaves; 1-3 inches long; dull green on upper surface; often distinctly gray-blue on lower surface.

Flowers: March-June; drooping clusters of small, white flowers.

Fruit: July-August; drooping, spherical, berry, that turns from green to dark purple.

Wildlife value: Plants in the Vaccinium genera are an important component of the summer diet of wild turkey, bobwhite quail, scarlet tanager, American robin, northern cardinal, eastern bluebird, brown thrasher and other birds. Black bear, white-tailed deer and many other small mammals also eat the fruit to varying degrees. Sparkleberry (Vaccinium arboreum) takes on a more tree-like form and is another important plant in this genus.

Reference

Miller, J.H. and K.V. Miller. 1999. Forest Plants of the Southeast and their Wildlife Uses. Southern

Weed Science Society. Champaign, Ill. 454 pp.

For more information on wildlife food plants see the reference above or the University of Florida's 4-H Companion Plant page at **www.sfrc.ufl.edu/4h/Trees_Plants/Plants/plants.html**

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Plant a Tree For Butterflies

The butterfly population has suffered this year. Millions of butterflies were lost this past year during their migration through Mexico due to a severe winter storm. The loss of native habitat and overuse of pesticides has further contributed to their decline in numbers*. Butterflies are one of our vital pollinators. Planting native trees that supply larval food for butterflies can help to balance out the environmental factors that have adversely affected the Florida population.

A great choice would be the various oak species that are readily available at Florida nurseries: Chapman's oak (*Quercus chapmanii*) , sand live oak (*Quercus geminita*), laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), willow oak (*Quercus phellos*), and live oak (*Quercus virginiana*). Many other Florida native trees also provide larval food or nectar for butterflies. By adding some of these species to your property, you also provide color and texture diversification that enhances the beauty of your forest. Many of these trees provide flowers and fruit that also attract other wildlife. The following are great choices: scrub hickory (*Carya floridana*) , pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), may-haw (*Crataegus aestivalis*), sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*), Carolina laurelcherry (*Prunus caroliniana*), black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), flatwoods plum (*Prunus umbellata*), sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), American elm (*Ulmus americana*), Florida willow (*Salix caroliniana*), and red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*) (nectar source). Mixing these species in or around pine plantations will increase the attractiveness or your forest for wildlife.

* Butterfly population decline information from "American Butterflies" Fall 2002 issue. The publication by the North American Butterfly Assoc., Author Jeffrey Glassberg (President NABA, Editor of "American Butterflies" and well known butterfly book author).

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Timber Price Update

This information is useful for observing trends over time, but does not necessarily reflect current conditions at a particular location. Landowners considering a timber sale would be wise to let a consulting forester help them obtain the best current prices

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Stumpage price ranges reported across Florida in the 3rd quarter 2002 Timber Mart-South (TMS) report were $16-$26/cord for pine pulpwood, $44-$73/cord for pine C-N-S, $72-$103/cord for pine sawtimber, and $99-$114/cord for pine plylogs. On average, prices were up slightly for all products except for plylogs, which were about the same as 2nd quarter 2002 prices. Hardwood pulpwood prices ranged from $9-$20/cord, which was up slightly from those of the previous quarter. A more complete summary of 3rd quarter 2002 stumpage prices is available at your County Extension office.

Trend Report

Our timber price trend graph now reflects average quarterly Timber Mart-South stumpage prices for three major pine log classes for all of north Florida since the beginning of 1996. Numbers on the horizontal axis indicate the year (first digit) and quarter (second digit), so 61 indicates the first quarter of 1996.

Click on the link to see the **graph** - use the "Back" function to return here.

On average, south-wide stumpage prices remained steady from the 2nd quarter with the exception of mixed hardwood sawtimber, which increased more than four percent over the last quarter. The average south-wide pine sawtimber stumpage price decreased from last quarter, due to surpluses in areas with southern pine beetle outbreaks and cutbacks attributed to the lumber market being flooded by duty-free Canadian imports before May 22nd, but remains above prices a year ago.

According to a Florida Forestry Association report, the glut of pulpwood is projected to continue, as pine harvesting will continue to flood the market with timber over the next 10-15 years. Programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) have led to increases in pine plantations across the South. This, combined with fewer mills from permanent capacity shutdowns, has resulted in production cutbacks and a greater wood supply. Canadians have also flooded the lumber market which has impacted saw timber demand.

The good news this quarter for sawtimber prices is that after three consecutive months of decline, housing starts in September soared 13.3 percent to a seasonally adjusted rate of 1.84 million units.

The upswing marked the highest level since 1986 and the largest monthly increase since July 1995. Single-family starts in September jumped 18.2 percent from the month prior, reaching the highest level since 1978. Despite poor consumer confidence and concerns about another recession, mortgage rates, now at 40-year lows, continue to attract home buyers.

Canadian Softwood Trade Update

According to a recent Florida Forestry Association report, the U.S. has embarked on a new strategy to engage directly with the Canadian provinces most affected by the softwood trade dispute in hopes of achieving desired reforms in Canadian lumber practices. In exchange, the U.S. would reduce countervailing duties currently imposed on Canadian softwood lumber imports proportionate with the reforms implemented. The concept of engaging provincial rather than the federal government in trade dispute resolution is fairly unique, but possible under U.S. law. The Canadian government believes the strategy is worth pursuing. The U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) recently announced that it will issue policy bulletins to provide a framework for determining whether a province's timber pricing is market-based. If it can be proven that a province's lumber practices have been adjusted to be consistent with the policy bulletins, DOC can use its discretionary authority to reduce or eliminate countervailing duties in proportion to the changes.

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Stewardship Mailing List Emergency - We Still Need Your Help

We're still looking for updated addresses. U.S. Post Offices in some parts of the state are no longer delivering to route-box addresses (example: RR 1 Box 234). They will only deliver to 911 addresses: a house number followed by a road, street, drive, lane, circle, place, etc. (example:123 Hound Dog Rd). PO Box addresses are good too. If you currently have a route-box address and know your 911 address, please take a moment to send your 911 address to Chris Demers at University of Florida, PO Box 110410, Gainesville, FL 32611; or ***cdemers@mail.ifas.ufl.edu***. If you don't know your 911 address, ask your local post office. If your 911 address is not yet available, simply send it to us when it is. Thanks very much in advance for your help!

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