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# The Florida Forest Steward



A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

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Pine thinning, photo by Jeff Norment

## **Food Plots vs. Native Habitats: Finding the Balance**

By Leslie Adams, Chris Demers and  
Chuck McKelvy

For many landowners and hunters in the South, planting food plots for wildlife is second-nature just before the cool season begins. This season goes hand-in-hand with traditions of tilling up selected areas, applying fertilizer and planting succulent winter forages that attract wildlife, especially white-tailed deer. However, as anyone who is involved with these activities on an annual basis will attest, these treatments can be costly and time consuming.

Is all the money and hard work put into food plots necessary? Are there resources already on your property that can, with some lower intensity and less costly management, sustain the resident deer and other wildlife? You may not eliminate the need for supplemental plantings but you may decrease it by optimizing the full potential of the existing native browse and mast producing vegetation on your land.



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## **Wild critters prefer wild food**

As hunters and wildlife enthusiasts know, deer require adequate amounts of protein, calcium, phosphorus and other essential minerals to sustain their health, reproduction, body weight and antler development. The reproduction and growth of other sought after wildlife species such as turkey and quail are also dependent on an assorted diet including insects. Your property may already have a variety of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants that can provide these essential ingredients to a healthy wildlife population. The key is variety and proper management – the greater the variety of plants in your forest, the more mast and seasonal wildlife nutrition you can provide, if properly managed.

## **How's your natural produce aisle?**

The table on the following page summarizes the seasonal availability of some of Florida's native mast plants. Ideally, you want equal amounts of mast in every season, with a little bit more in the colder months when wildlife energy demands are higher. After taking stock of the habitats and associated vegetation on your property, consider what you can do to increase desirable mast producers and increase the nutritional value of exist vegetation.

## **Fire**

Prescribed fire is one of the most cost effective and versatile land management tools available. Growing season fires generally stimulate seed/mast production of grasses, forbs, blueberries, and runner oak. Fire increases the protein content and palatability of grasses, as well as the amount of mast produced by herbaceous

vegetation. Based on existing vegetative conditions, fire history of the site and objectives, the benefits of prescribed fire can be optimized to increase both mast/seed production along with nutrition and palatability of existing native vegetation.

Get a burn authorization before you burn. The Florida Division of Forestry (DOF) oversees Florida's prescribed fire program. Call your DOF Field Unit for a burn authorization. You can find your local Field Unit here:

[http://www.fl-dof.com/field\\_operations/index.html](http://www.fl-dof.com/field_operations/index.html) or in the State Government (blue) pages of your phone book.

If you are not experienced with the use of prescribed fire, consult a professional burner or take Florida's Certified Burner Training. Find out more here:

[http://www.fl-dof.com/wildfire/rx\\_training.html](http://www.fl-dof.com/wildfire/rx_training.html).

## **Discing and mowing**

Discing during the fall and winter months promotes a good spring and summer ground cover and attracts insects for a variety of bird species such as quail and turkey. Desirable food plants in the seed bank may include partridge pea, ragweed and beggarweed. You can diversify the vegetation in wildlife openings by rotationally discing different strips in different years.

Rotational mowing, by which different areas or strips are mowed at 2-3 year intervals (as opposed to mowing all open areas at the same time), will encourage a wider variety of plants, cover conditions and available mast.

***Seasonal importance of wildlife food plants***

(from "Making the Most of Your Mast" by Carolyn M. Sekerak and George W. Tanner)

<b><u>SPRING</u></b>	<b><u>SUMMER</u></b>	<b><u>FALL</u></b>	<b><u>WINTER</u></b>
Wild plum ( <u>Prunus</u> species)	Hawthorn ( <u>Crataegus</u> species)	Oak ( <u>Quercus</u> species)	Oak
Red maple ( <u>Acer rubrum</u> )	Saw palmetto ( <u>Serenoa repens</u> )	Dogwood ( <u>Cornus florida</u> )	Black walnut ( <u>Juglans nigra</u> )
Squawroot ( <u>Conophilus americana</u> )	Blueberry ( <u>Vaccinium</u> species)	Beech ( <u>Fagus</u> species)	Beech
Winged elm ( <u>Ulmus alata</u> )	Pokeweed ( <u>Phytolacca americana</u> )	Hickory ( <u>Carya</u> species)	Hickory
Poplar ( <u>Populus</u> species)	Pine ( <u>Pinus</u> species)	Pine	Poplar
Mushrooms & other fungi (e.g., <u>Amanita</u> , <u>Clavaria</u> )	Mushrooms & other fungi	Blackgum ( <u>Nyssa sylvatica</u> )	Blackgum
Blackberry ( <u>Rubus</u> species)	Blackberry	Magnolia ( <u>Magnolia grandiflora</u> )	Sumac ( <u>Rhus coppalina</u> )
Black cherry ( <u>Prunus serotina</u> )	Grape ( <u>Vitis</u> species)	Grape	Cherry laurel ( <u>Prunus caroliniana</u> )
Mulberry ( <u>Morus rubra</u> )	Holly, Gallberry ( <u>Ilex</u> species)	Holly, Gallberry	Holly, Gallberry
Native grasses (e.g., <u>Andropogon</u> , <u>Panicum</u> , & <u>Paspalum</u> species)	Native grasses (e.g., <u>Panicum</u> , & <u>Paspalum</u> species)	Native grasses (e.g., <u>Panicum</u> , & <u>Paspalum</u> species)	Waxmyrtle ( <u>Myrica cerifera</u> )
	Greenbriar ( <u>Smilax</u> species)	Greenbriar	Greenbriar
		Legumes ( <u>Cassia</u> & <u>Desmodium</u> spp.)	

## Thinning

Thinning dense pine plantations allows sunlight to reach the forest floor which in turn promotes growth of herbaceous plants, grasses, shrubs and vines. Residual pine densities of 50 to 70 ft<sup>2</sup>/acre are slightly low for maximum timber production, but is optimal for striking a balance between timber and wildlife considerations. These target densities favor understory plants that are beneficial to wildlife while still providing for achievable forest management objectives. Follow-up treatments with periodic prescribed burning will increase ground cover development and the nutritional value of forage and mast.

## Diversity is key

Your forest will support more wildlife if it has a variety of stand ages and plant species at both the ground level and canopy. Pines and hardwoods, although not always economically compatible, are a very good combination for creating habitat diversity. Protection of hardwood hammocks or clumps, hardwood stands along streams or around wetlands, and productive, mast-producing individual trees like oaks, persimmons, plums, magnolias, sumacs, and others can greatly influence habitat condition and wildlife use of any property.

Wildlife populations also benefit when stands of different ages are available, because each age represents a different stage of plant succession, favoring different plant and animal species. In addition to diverse wildlife habitat,

multiple age classes of trees can bring a more periodic and stable stream of income from timber harvests.

## Conclusion

Once you optimize the full potential of the natural food sources on your property through proper habitat management, you may discover some savings in the time and money you need to spend on supplemental food plots. However, this is not an either/or type of decision. It's about balance. The realities of poor soils, pest plants like hairy indigo in the seedbank, expanding wildlife populations, and loss of habitat to urbanization in many areas may warrant some supplemental food plantings to satisfy nutritional needs. Research indicates that planting just one percent of a property with supplemental food plants can increase wildlife productivity and observation frequency. Before embarking on any strategies that include supplemental plantings, proper soil testing is recommended.

## References

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## **New Rule Protects Landowners with Presumption of BMP Compliance**

by Roy Lima, Watershed Forester,  
Florida Division of Forestry

A recently adopted rule that has been incorporated into Florida Administrative Code entitles forest landowners to a presumption of compliance with state water quality standards if they file a Notice of Intent (NOI) to implement best management practices (BMPs) in their silvicultural operations. Since Rule 5I-6 was adopted and made part of Florida's Administrative Code on February 11, 2004, the Division of Forestry has been trying to get the word out to landowners.

All Florida landowners are covered under the Florida Right-to-Farm Act, which prohibits local governments from establishing ordinances that regulate or restrict agricultural and silvicultural activities. However these activities must be in compliance with established BMPs. There is another benefit to landowners implementing these BMPs. For example, should a state water quality violation occur while the landowner is using the BMPs, they would be covered or protected from that violation. Critical to the process is the landowner's filing of a Notice of Intent with the Division of Forestry. Both public and private forest landowners can file a NOI simply by submitting a two-page form to the Division of Forestry's hydrology section in Tallahassee. These forms can be downloaded from DOF's internet web site at <http://www.fl-dof.com/Conservation/Hydrology>.

As of August 2005, the Division of Forestry has received NOIs that encompass more than 4.4 million acres

of forestland, ranging from small private non-industrial landowners to large ownerships like Rayonier, International Paper Company, Plum Creek Timber Company, and the Suwannee River Water Management District. The Division of Forestry has also submitted the Notice of Intent to implement BMPs covering all state forests in Florida.

Florida forest landowners have an excellent track record when it comes to BMP compliance. The Division of Forestry has been conducting statewide surveys every two years since 1981 and the most recent survey in 2003 showed there was 97 percent compliance with forestry BMPs. Since 1981, the average overall compliance rate has been 92 percent. The Division is expanding its BMP outreach efforts to make sure that landowners are made aware of the adoption of Rule 5I-6 F.A.C. Although filing of the NOI is completely voluntary, it is an important way landowners can increase their liability protection against state water quality standards violations.

Those who do not have access to the internet can request a copy of the form by contacting the forest hydrology section in Tallahassee. The number is (850) 414-9935 or 414-9934.

## **Second Sign-up for Forest Land Recovery Program Funds**

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Forestry is holding a *second sign-up* for enrollment in the Forest Land Recovery Program (FLRP) **from November 1 – December 31**. This program, authorized under the 2005 Military Construction Appropriations and Emergency

Hurricane Supplemental Appropriations Act, is available to non-industrial private forest landowners on a 75-25 (agency:landowner) cost share basis. Eligible practices include, but are not limited to: site preparation, tree planting, and debris removal activities.

Landowners who own at least 10 acres but no more than 5,000 acres of land in Florida and who have a practice plan will be eligible to receive funding assistance under FLRP. A maximum of \$25,000 will be available for each qualifying landowner as reimbursement for incurred expenses for approved practices. A total of \$6,000,000.00 will be available to forest landowners statewide.

Landowners can obtain application forms from their local Division of Forestry office. The Division of Forestry's foresters will provide technical assistance to landowners and will be the local contact person for participating landowners.

**For more information, contact Randy Hill, Conservation Programs Manager, in Tallahassee at (850) 414-9907, your local County Forester, or visit [www.fl-dof.com](http://www.fl-dof.com).**

### **2006 Advanced Master Tree Farmer Satellite Program Announced**

Mark your calendar and plan to attend Master Tree Farmer – Level 2. The live satellite broadcast of Master Tree Farmer Level 2 will be **Tuesday evenings, 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm Eastern Time (6:00 pm to 9:00 pm Central Time), February 7 through March 21** at participating downlink

sites. Twenty-two sites are on board to participate in Florida. A listing of these sites and tentative schedules is available on the Florida Forestry Information Bulletin Board at: <http://www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/ffws/bul.htm>

Several Florida sites will be participating on a tape-delay schedule 2-3 weeks after the live broadcast.

This program is designed for landowners, Extension agents and others who have participated in the Master Tree Farmer Basic Course (Level I) or who have a working knowledge of basic forest management concepts. The course is organized by a committee of Extension foresters based at various southern forestry schools. Assistance with course design and development has also been provided by the USDA Forest Service and the state forestry agencies and associations in the South.

#### **Master Tree Farmer – Level 2 Topics:**

**Session 1: Managing the Forest Site**

**Session 2: Forest Management Options for Your Land**

**Session 3: Forest Health**

**Session 4: Controlling Unwanted Vegetation**

**Session 5: Water Quality and Best Management Practices for Your Land**

**Session 6: Forest Measurements and Forest Products**

**Session 7: Wildlife Habitat Management and Landowner Success Stories**

Registration in Florida will be handled by the Florida Forestry Association. Fees will be announced in the registration brochure, to be mailed by Thanksgiving. Fees will include access to the satellite program, notebook and speaker note materials, and other local costs associated with hosting the program.

For more information about the program, contact Chris Demers, Florida MTF 2 Coordinator at (352) 846-2375. The regional MTF 2 Web site (<http://www.mastertreefarmer.net>) will contain valuable information as it becomes available.

### 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. Note that price per ton for each product is included in parentheses after the price per cord.

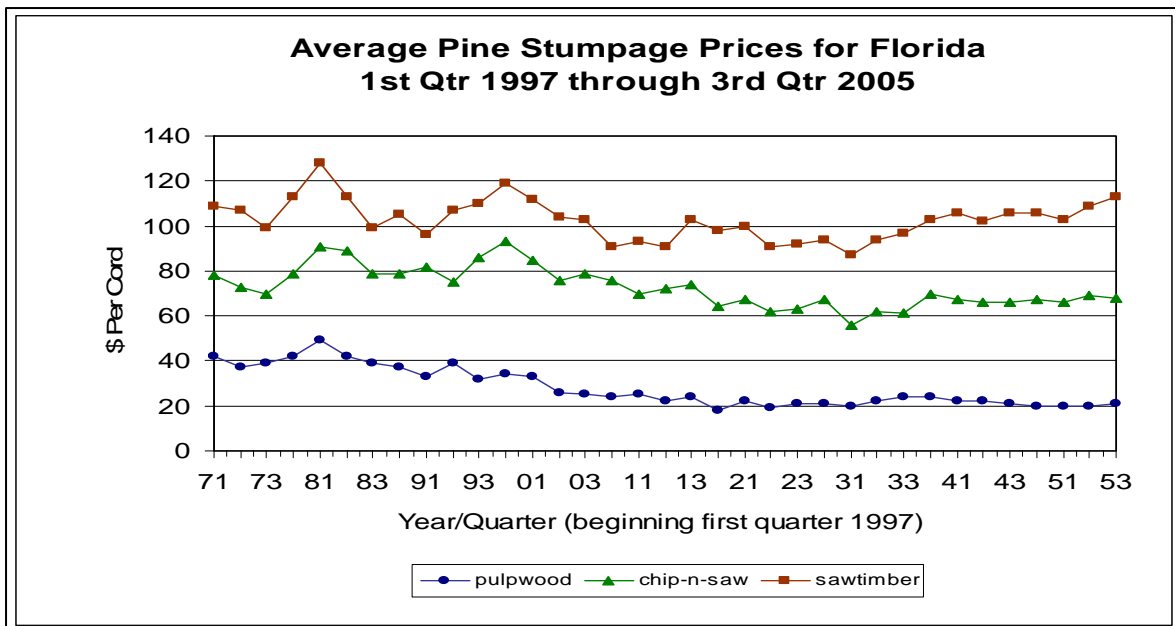
Stumpage price ranges reported across

Florida in the **3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2005** Timber Mart-South (TMS) report were:

- Pine pulpwood: \$16-\$27/cord (\$6-\$10/ton), ↑ from 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2005
- Pine C-N-S: \$58-\$79/cord (\$22 - \$29/ton), ↓
- Pine plylogs: \$111 - \$137/cord (\$41 - \$51/ton), ↑
- Hardwood pulpwood: \$17 - \$33/cord (\$6 - \$11/ton), ↑
- Pine sawtimber: \$103 - \$121/cord (\$38 - \$45/ton), ↑

### Trend Report

Despite the catastrophic Gulf Coast hurricane season, average 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter stumpage prices across the southern region seemed to be relatively unaffected. With the exception of chip-n-saw prices, which continue a gradual decline, average stumpage prices for the major products in Florida increased. Hardwood timber markets continue to strengthen across the region, with hardwood pulpwood reclaiming its premium over pine pulpwood this Quarter.



## Upcoming Events

DATE	EVENT
<b>December 2:</b>	<i>North Central Region Upland Game Bird Workshop and Field Day, 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm at Range 17 Farms in Levy County.</i> Will include information on the technical assistance services offered to landowners by the Florida FWC. Topics include quail management, food plots, and prescribed fire, and a bird dog demonstration will be featured. Registration \$6 per person and includes a supper. Contact Ms. Tonya Brown at 386-758-0525 to reserve your spot.
<b>December 9:</b>	<i>Forest Stewardship Property Tour, at Alford Arm Greenway, Leon County,</i> Topics will include rotational disking, food plots, longleaf pine planting, prescribed fire, wildflowers, kudzu control and fire ant control. Call Genice Roberts, Leon County Extension Office at 850-487-3004 or by email at <a href="mailto:RobertsG@leoncountyfl.gov">RobertsG@leoncountyfl.gov</a> to register.
<b>December 15:</b>	<i>Rural Tourism Workshop Series Presents: Are You Being Served? A Workshop for Building Customer Service and Hospitality Skills, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Walton County Extension Office in DeFuniak Springs.</i> A catered lunch is included. The workshop will also be broadcast live over web-based interactive video at the Jackson County Extension Office. The workshop registration fee is \$10. Pre-registration is required. For more information or to register, call Connie Laws, Extension Educator, at 850-892-8172 or e-mail <a href="mailto:cslaws@ifas.ufl.edu">cslaws@ifas.ufl.edu</a> .
<b>January 27, 2006:</b>	<i>Forest Stewardship Special Videoconference: Additional Income Options for Forestland Owners, 3 - 7 PM ET at 10 locations across FL.</i> We'll focus on pine straw, hunting leases, forest grazing and other enterprises. Flier is enclosed with newsletter. Contact Chris Demers at 352-846-2375 or <a href="mailto:cdemers@ifas.ufl.edu">cdemers@ifas.ufl.edu</a> for more information.
<b>February 7 - March 21:</b>	<i>Master Tree Farmer, Level 2.</i> Dates for the live broadcast are scheduled for Tuesday evenings from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm ET at participating locations in Florida and across the South. Several sites will be participating on a tape-delay schedule. Details are on-line at <a href="http://www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/ffws/bul.htm#satellite">http://www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/ffws/bul.htm#satellite</a> .
<b>February 10:</b>	<i>Forest Stewardship Property Tour, at Windy Hill Ranch, property of Ron Fisher, Walton County;</i> details to come. Contact Chris Demers for more information.
<b>March 28-29:</b>	<i>37th Annual SAF/SFRC Spring Symposium, Gainesville, FL.</i> The theme will focus on Biomass/Bioenergy. Presentations will be of interest to all professional foresters, students and others. Mark your calendar and plan to attend. The first detailed announcement will be coming out in November.

**For more information about Florida's Forest Stewardship Program and forest management visit the Florida Forestry Information Web site at [www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/ffws/ffwshome.htm](http://www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/ffws/ffwshome.htm)**

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