

Conservationists plan to save America's shortleaf pine forests

MOBILE, Ala. (June 16, 2016) - A coalition of conservation experts, nonprofit organizations and government agencies has announced the publication of a long-awaited five-year plan to stem the rapid decline of number of shortleaf pine-dominant forests.

Released during the annual meeting of the Southern Group of State Foresters, the Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan culminates two years of efforts by the Shortleaf Pine Initiative and is the first strategy produced to improve the shortleaf pine ecosystem across its entire range.

"This plan marks the first concrete steps in restoring these highly valuable shortleaf pine forestlands," said Mike Black, director of the Shortleaf Pine Initiative. "Thanks to the work of our many partners, we now have a practical roadmap for restoration, with scalable, achievable goals specifically tailored to the regional needs of the ecosystem."

Shortleaf pine has a rich tradition as an important trade good in the history of the U.S., but due to poor management practices throughout the 1800s and competition from other tree species, the shortleaf pine range has dwindled from 70-80 millions in 1896 to a mere 6 million acres today.

Ecosystems dominated by shortleaf pine also serve as an important habitat for five threatened or endangered species, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker, as well as 20 species of concern among conservationists.

Launched in the spring of 2013, the Shortleaf Pine Initiative is a collaborative, strategic and energetic response to the dramatic decline of shortleaf pine forests and associated habitats that once covered a vast area from eastern Texas to Florida and up the eastern seaboard to New Jersey. The Shortleaf Pine Initiative represents a broad range of public and private organizations as well as key state and federal agencies currently working in the shortleaf pine ecosystem.

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