

# **2025 SFFGS/FLSAF SPRING SYMPOSIUM**

## **LANDSCAPE AND WORKING LANDS CONSERVATION**

**April 15-16, 2025**

**Stern Learning Center  
Austin Cary Forest**



**SCHOOL OF FOREST,  
FISHERIES, AND  
GEOMATICS SCIENCES**

**Presenting the 50<sup>th</sup> Spring Symposium!**



**WELCOME** and **THANK YOU** for joining us for the 2025 SAF / SFFGS Spring Symposium: *Landscape and Working Lands Conservation*!

This, the **50th Spring Symposium**, is a cooperative event of the **Florida Division of the Southeastern Society of American Foresters (SAF)** and the **University of Florida IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences (SFFGS)**. This year's event is a round-up of ongoing conservation and land management partnership projects like the Florida Wildlife Corridor, Sentinel Landscapes, Regional Conservation Partnership Programs, and others. We will also discuss new payment-for-ecosystem-services market opportunities and emerging wood product markets. This is a unique opportunity to learn about the many working lands conservation efforts happening around the state and beyond, and find opportunities where you and your clientele can engage with these important initiatives.

The Symposium will begin with a keynote address from 2025 Florida Agriculture Hall of Fame inductee, Mr. Jim Strickland, a Central Florida rancher dedicated to the conservation of Florida's ranchlands and natural resources for future generations. The meeting will also include our Florida Division SAF Awards presentation, social and dinner on April 15, and Florida Division SAF General Membership Meeting on the morning of April 16.

We appreciate the generous support of our **Sponsors**! Please take some time to visit with them during the breaks and thank them for their support. The **University of Florida IFAS Extension Bookstore** is set up in the Stern Learning Center Classroom on April 15. Browse the selection of forestry and natural resource related books, tools, and other resources our faculty, staff, and partners have produced.

This event has been approved for a total of **8.0 Cat. 1 CFEs**. If you need CFE credit, make sure you sign the CFE sign-in sheets for each day you attend. There will be one sign-in sheet for the first day and one for the morning session on the second day. Enjoy the program!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christopher M. Demers".

Chris Demers

Spring Symposium Chair

[cdemers@ufl.edu](mailto:cdemers@ufl.edu)

(352) 514-0819



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## Tuesday April 15 – Full Day Session

7:00 – 8:00 am	<b>Exhibitor Setup</b>
8:00 am – 5:00 pm	<b>Registration, Sign in (Patio Entrance)</b>
<b>Sponsor Exhibits</b>	Chair: Kari Hurst, Florida Forest Service
8:00 am	<b>Continental breakfast, exhibits, meet &amp; greet</b>
9:00	<b>Opening</b> , Dr. Terrell “Red” Baker, Director, UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences (SFFGS) and Chris Demers, Spring Symposium Chair, SFFGS <b>Welcome and update from the UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences</b>
9:15	Keynote: Jim Strickland, Florida Rancher <b>“The Importance of Working Lands in Landscape Conservation”</b>
9:45	<b>Refreshment and Break</b>
10:00	<b>The Florida Wildlife Corridor</b> – Moderator: Dylan Ballew, Student, SFFGS
10:05	Dr. Tom Hctor, UF Center for Landscape Conservation Planning <b>“Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN): Providing the Science Foundation for Landscape and Working Lands Conservation”</b>
10:50	Dr. Laila Racevskis, The Balmoral Group <b>“Payments for Ecosystem Services: Design and Implementation”</b>
11:20	Dr. Hance Ellington, UF/IFAS Range Cattle Research and Education Center at Ona Hanna Bowen, Conservation Florida <b>“Conservation and Landowner Assistance Initiatives”</b>
12:00 pm	<b>Lunch</b>



## Tuesday April 15 – Continued

1:00 pm	<b>Sentinel Landscapes of Florida</b> – Moderator: Taija Santos, Student, SFFGS
1:05	David Wolfe, Florida Defenders of Wildlife Sheila McNamera, Central Florida Regional Planning Council <i>“Sentinel Landscapes in Florida: advancing sustainable land use practices around military installations and ranges”</i>
2:30	<b>Refreshment Break</b>
2:45	<b>Regional Conservation Partnership Programs (RCPPs)</b> – Moderator: Eric Deprez, Student, SFFGS
2:50	Dr. Susan Carr, Alachua Conservation Trust Michelle Smith, North Florida Land Trust Willy the Losen, Putnam Land Conservancy Jesse Frazier, Alachua Conservation Trust <i>“RCPP Accomplishments: Easements, Management Contracts, and Outreach”</i>
4:30	<b>Florida Division SAF Awards</b> , Chris Demers, SFFGS and Marshall Hilton, F4 Tech <b>Sponsor Recognition</b> , Kari Hurst, Florida Forest Service
5:00	<b>Social on Deck</b>
5:30	<b>Dinner by Hills BBQ</b>

## Wednesday April 16 – Morning Session

7:30 am	<b>Continental Breakfast</b>
8:00	<b>FL Division SAF Business Meeting</b> , Florida Division Society of American Foresters
9:15	<b>Land Management Partnerships and Emerging Wood Markets</b> – Moderator: Andrew Copeland, Student, SFFGS
9:20	Diane Alix, The Nature Conservancy Christian Wanamaker, SFFGS <i>“Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance and Citizen Science Initiatives”</i>
10:00	Kimberly Tillman, Alachua Conservation Trust <i>“Gulf to Atlantic Restoration Partnership”</i>
10:40	Jeff Peters, Sterling Solutions <i>“Building the Future: Sterling’s Impact with Mass Timber”</i>
11: 30	<b>Conclusion</b>

**The Symposium is approved for 8.0 Cat. 1 SAF Continuing Forestry Educations Credits.**  
Please make sure you sign the CFE attendance record provided at the end of each day.

# 2025 Spring Symposium Presenters

## Keynote Address



### **Jim Strickland**

**Florida Rancher**

stricklandranch@gmail.com

James “Jim” Strickland has six decades of ranching experience. Born into a family that has been ranching in Florida since the 1800s, Jim grew up working with his father along the west coast of Florida. When his father died in the 1970s, Jim took over the family cattle operations at the age of 17, primarily leasing land for cattle. He and his family own Strickland Ranch and Lost Girl Prairie Ranch; he is also the managing partner of Big Red Cattle Company and Blackbeard’s Ranch.

His passion for agriculture and conservation began at a young age, as increasing development pushed his operations farther and farther inland. He serves as co-chair of the Florida Climate Smart Agriculture Work Group, which focuses on addressing climate change impacts via agricultural land conservation and furthering research on the ecosystem services provided by agricultural land. He is also vice chair of the Florida Conservation Group, a science-based organization focused on protecting Florida’s ranchlands. In this capacity, he serves as a spokesman on ranchland conservation and on the need for conservation funding to protect Florida. He was honored this year to be included in the 2025 class of Florida Agriculture Hall of Fame inductees.

## The Florida Wildlife Corridor



### **Dr. Tom Hctor**

**Research Associate Professor and Director, UF Center for Landscape Conservation Planning**

tomh@geoplan.ufl.edu

Dr. Tom Hctor is director of the Center for Landscape Conservation Planning at the University of Florida. He is an expert on GIS applications for identifying conservation priorities and implementation actions for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services including focal species habitat modeling, reserve design, wildlife corridors, recommendations for expanding protected lands to address climate change impacts, and conservation strategies for ensuring effective conservation despite conflicts with land use change and habitat loss. He has served as principal or co-principal investigator on many regional-scale

conservation analysis and planning projects in Florida and the U.S. including the Florida Ecological Greenways Network and Florida Wildlife Corridor, the Florida Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project, Coastal Resilience for Florida Aquatic Preserves with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and Southeast Regional Longleaf Pine Ecological Connectivity with the Longleaf Alliance and Florida Natural Areas Inventory.

#### Presentation

#### ***"Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN): Providing the Science Foundation for Landscape and Working Lands Conservation"***

Tom will discuss Florida regional landscape conservation science and planning in the context of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network and Florida Wildlife Corridor, with a focus on relevance to protecting working lands including silviculture. Strategic prioritization is an important implementation strategy including the identification of threats from development conversion and protection opportunities given criteria for existing conservation land protection programs. Ecological connectivity does not end at the Florida border, and he will also discuss current and potential future work to cross state lines into Georgia and Alabama with specific relevance to longleaf pine ecosystem conservation and restoration.



#### **Dr. Laila Racevskis**

**Senior Consultant, The Balmoral Group**

LRacevskis@balmoralgroup.us

Dr. Laila Racevskis is an expert in community engagement, natural resource economics and policy. She brings 17 years of experience working with agricultural and natural resource management issues in Florida, including 10 years conducting research for the Florida Legislature where she built a strong background in state and local government policy. She also has as extensive experience in facilitation, consensus-building and collaborative decision-making processes.

#### Presentation

#### ***"Payments for Ecosystem Services: Design and Implementation"***

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) programs are voluntary programs in which private landowners are provided a financial incentive. The incentive is linked to specific activities on their lands to provide or improve ecosystem services, such as habitat connectivity, aquifer recharge, or water quality. In the face of continued high development pressures within ecologically sensitive areas around the state, innovative land conservation approaches like PES provide another tool in the land conservation toolbox for policymakers and land managers. PES programs can provide near-term natural resource protection, compensate landowners to maintain working lands, and support community economic development. This presentation will provide an overview of the key elements of PES program design and implementation, including administrative framework, payment structure, contract design, and stakeholder outreach and engagement.



## **Dr. Hance Ellington**

**Assistant Professor, Grazinglands Wildlife Specialist, UF/IFAS Range Cattle Research and Education Center at Ona**

[e.ellington@ufl.edu](mailto:e.ellington@ufl.edu)

Dr. Hance Ellington is an assistant professor of rangeland wildlife ecology at the University of Florida Range Cattle Research and Education Center. His research and extension program is focused on understanding rangeland wildlife behavior and habitat needs to improve human-wildlife interactions and enhance wildlife habitat on working

landscapes. Along with collaborators at Archbold Biological Station, Conservation Florida, and the University of Florida, he leads the multidisciplinary Working Rangelands Resiliency in the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape project.



## **Hannah Bowen**

**Private Lands Stewardship Manager, Conservation Florida**

[hannah@conservationfla.org](mailto:hannah@conservationfla.org)

Hannah Bowen is a plant ecologist with expertise in temperate forests, Gulf Coast mangroves, and Florida scrub. She earned her M.S. in Ecology from the Institute of Ecology in Veracruz, Mexico (2022) before joining Archbold Biological Station as a Research Assistant, where she fell in love with the unique plants of the Lake Wales Ridge. With a background in organic agriculture and agroforestry, she now leads Conservation Florida's Private Lands Stewardship program in

Highlands, Okeechobee, Polk, and Osceola counties.

### Presentation

#### ***"Conservation and Landowner Assistance Initiatives"***

In this presentation we propose a pathway for long-term resilience in a portion of the Florida Wildlife Corridor in the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape that involves maintaining the viability of working landscapes while maximizing their ecosystem value. We will discuss the management needs in this landscape, the burdens that managers face in implementing comprehensive land management, and how our private land stewardship program and our applied research program at the UF/IFAS DeLuca Preserve addresses both the short- and long-term needs for long-term resilience in our landscape.

## Sentinel Landscapes of Florida



### David Wolfe

**Consultant, Defenders of Wildlife**

[dwolfe-consultant@defenders.org](mailto:dwolfe-consultant@defenders.org)

David Wolfe is a consultant with Defenders of Wildlife and is serving as the Private Lands Stewardship Coordinator for the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape. He received a Master's degree in Ecology from the University of Georgia in 1992 and then worked for 28 years in the non-profit conservation sector, first with TNC and then with Environmental Defense Fund. David has vast experience working with public and private landowners, scientists, and diverse stakeholders to design and implement programs to restore, conserve, manage and monitor habitats for at-risk species and he has worked extensively with regulatory assurance, financial incentive, and market-based programs for species recovery and habitat conservation.



### Sheila McNamara

**Regional Resiliency Manager, Central Florida Regional Planning Council**

[smcnamara@cfrpc.org](mailto:smcnamara@cfrpc.org)

Sheila McNamara is the Regional Resiliency Manager for the Central Florida Regional Planning Council where her responsibilities include working with members of the Heartland Regional Resiliency Coalition and community partners to conduct vulnerability assessments and implement resiliency initiatives. She also manages the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape partnership, coordinating more than 30 diverse partners to protect continuity of military missions, preserve agricultural working lands, and protect wildlife and natural resources by partnering with private landowners. Sheila has more than 25 years of experience identifying and building key relationships for strategic planning and implementation, attributing her success to transparent conversations and engagement of diverse groups including local, state, and federal government entities, the public, stakeholder groups, subject matter experts, academia, and political leaders.

### Presentation

#### ***"Sentinel Landscapes in Florida: advancing sustainable land use practices around military installations and ranges"***

Sentinel landscapes are areas where conservation, working lands, and national defense interests converge. They are anchored by at least one military installation or range and contain high priority conservation lands for State and Federal agencies and communities. The purpose of the Sentinel Landscape initiative is to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, bolster agricultural and forestry economies, increase public access to outdoor recreation, and enhance landscape resilience. The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership is a coalition



of federal agencies, state and local governments, and private organizations that work with willing landowners and land managers to advance sustainable land use practices around military installations and ranges.

## Regional Conservation Partnership Programs



### **Dr. Susan Carr**

**Strategic Conservation Manager, Alachua Conservation Trust**

[susan@alachuaconservationtrust.org](mailto:susan@alachuaconservationtrust.org)

Born in Gainesville Florida, Susan Carr spent most of her life living in and studying the natural areas of North Florida. More recently, Susan is trying to protect remaining natural and rural parts of North Florida through her work with the Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT), a nonprofit land trust based in Gainesville Florida. As a program manager at ACT, Susan works to match conservation programs with conservation-minded landowners. Institutional fund raising is a critical part of this, and Susan works with Federal and State programs to bring millions of dollars for land protection in North Florida. Susan's professional history includes work with nonprofit environmental organizations, academia and the Federal government. Susan has a B.S. in Botany from the University of Florida, a M.S. in Plant Biology from Louisiana State University, and a Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation from UF. Her graduate research focused on floristic diversity of fire-maintained pinelands across Florida and fostered her deep appreciation for Florida's natural landscapes.



### **Michelle Smith**

**Operations and Grants Manager, North Florida Land Trust**

[msmith@nflt.org](mailto:msmith@nflt.org)

Michelle Smith joined the North Florida Land Trust (NFLT) team in December 2023 as the Operations and Grants Manager. In this role, she supports the President, the Board of Directors, and NFLT Operations, as well as managing NFLT's RCPP Cooperative Agreements. Michelle's professional journey in conservation began in the summer of 2020 when she joined Heartland Consulting as a contract employee for the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS). She was later promoted to Easements Realty Specialist, contracted through The Trust for Tomorrow. At USDA-NRCS, Michelle developed unique skills and knowledge that she now applies at NFLT.



## **Willy the Losen**

**CEO and Conservation Director, Putnam Land Conservancy**

[plcputnamlandconservancy@gmail.com](mailto:plcputnamlandconservancy@gmail.com)

Willy the Losen is a lifelong resident of north-central Florida. He studied environmental engineering at the University of Florida. Willy is a founding member of the Putnam Land Conservancy, a local non-profit charity land trust dedicated to protecting the natural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources of Putnam County and surrounding North and Central Florida. Willy is honored to have served as the Putnam Land Conservancy's Conservation Director and CEO since 2016.



## **Jesse Frazier**

**Conservation Practice Specialist, Alachua Conservation Trust**

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Jesse Frazier facilitates the land management programs of two Regional Conservation Partnership Programs (RCPP) on private lands. In coordination with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, he facilitates and coordinates land management practices and/or conservation easements via site visits, documentation of current and future land uses, and landowner objectives.

### Presentation

#### ***"RCPP Accomplishments: Easements, Management Contracts, and Outreach"***

By leveraging collective resources and collaborating on common goals, Regional Conservation Partnership Programs (RCPPs) demonstrate the power of public-private partnerships in delivering results for agriculture and conservation. RCPP projects are implemented using USDSA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) contracts and easements with producers, landowners and communities, in collaboration with project partners. NRCS provides funding to partners to support conservation activities with eligible producers and landowners on eligible land. This panel of partners will provide an overview of some RCPP projects in Florida and how these are advancing their conservation goals in the regions they serve.

## Land Management Partnerships and Emerging Wood Markets



### **Diane Alix**

**Field Projects Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy in Florida**

diane.alix@tnc.org

Diane Alix is a Field Projects Manager for the Nature Conservancy's Florida Chapter. In her current role, she coordinates projects that bring together partners to advance conservation in the region, focusing on restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem, prescribed fire, and invasive species management. Her background is in wetland ecology and wildlife conservation. She spent nine years working for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on three

wildlife management areas in the panhandle. In that role, she became very familiar with many of the species unique to the Florida panhandle, as well as the importance of both fire and water in shaping this landscape. Diane has a MS in Wildlife Science from Auburn University where her research focused on the impacts of land use on amphibian communities in southern Alabama. Prior to moving south, she earned her BS in Natural Resources from the University of Connecticut, where she gained experience working with shorebirds, invasive plants, and land management techniques to benefit native species.



### **Christian Wanamaker**

**Volunteer Training Coordinator, Invasive Species Citizen Science Project, UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries and Geomatics Sciences**

cwanamaker22@ufl.edu

Christian is the Volunteer Training Coordinator for the new Invasive Species Survey Group at the University of Florida: a program which trains citizen scientists to help land managers collect better species survey & distribution data to inform effective management. He previously worked for the UF/IFAS Assessment for Nonnative Plants, and is also a Master's student in Interdisciplinary Ecology, studying

the ecology of invasive grasses.

### Presentation

#### ***"Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance"***

The Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance (ARSA) is an established public and private landowner collaboration that addresses conservation needs on over one million acres, from Bay to Jefferson County through the Georgia line. Formally organized by a Memorandum of Understanding since 2010, ARSA leverages resources for the mutual benefit of all, through prescribed fire and invasive species management assistance, training, equipment and personnel sharing, and coordination of landscape scale restoration opportunities. Christian will introduce the University of Florida's Invasive Species Survey Group project.



## **Kimberly Tillman**

**Partnership Coordinator, Alachua Conservation Trust**

[kimberly@alachuaconservationtrust.org](mailto:kimberly@alachuaconservationtrust.org)

Kimberly is a seasoned wildlife biologist with 19 years of expertise in natural resource management, conservation, and education. She currently leads the Gulf to Atlantic Restoration Partnership (GARP), a collaboration of 39 federal, state, and non-governmental organizations dedicated to preserving and restoring the historic range of the Longleaf Pine ecosystem in North Florida and Southeast Georgia.

### Presentation

#### ***“The Gulf to Atlantic Partnership”***

The Gulf to Atlantic Restoration Partnership (GARP). This presentation will cover the location of the landscape partnership as well as the history and development of the boundary and mission. We will cover its important involvement with one of the most successful large-scale conservation efforts, the America’s longleaf initiative. How these projects and actions are funded and who can participate.



## **Jeff Peters**

**Mass Timber Specialist, Sterling Solutions**

[jeff.peters@sterlingsolutions.com](mailto:jeff.peters@sterlingsolutions.com)

Jeff is a licensed structural engineer and general contractor based in Florida, where he has applied his diverse expertise in construction and design since 2007. His extensive knowledge spans all construction materials, viewed through both engineering and contractor perspectives. Over the past decade, he has played a pivotal role in the light-frame and mass timber sectors, notably contributing at

WoodWorks. There, he provided crucial technical support to developers, as well as design and construction teams involved in commercial and multi-family wood building projects. He actively participates in local initiatives aimed at advancing wood building design. In his current role as a Mass Timber Specialist with Sterling Structural, he continues to support the community of architects, engineers, and contractors by providing technical sales and design support on cross-laminated timber (CLT) projects across the country.

### Presentation

#### ***“Building the Future: Sterling’s Impact with Mass Timber”***

Integrating mass timber into projects offers a fully domestically sourced solution to reducing carbon emissions in the built environment. These engineered wood products not only store carbon throughout their lifespan but also enhance occupant well-being by bringing the warmth and benefits of natural materials indoors. This presentation will highlight mass timber as a key solution



for the Southeast region, emphasizing its viability and sustainability. It will also showcase real-world project examples that demonstrate the performance and aesthetic benefits of mass timber. Additionally, the presentation will discuss the importance of responsible sourcing and how Sterling prioritizes U.S.-grown timber to support sustainable forestry practices. Beyond providing CLT for buildings, Sterling is constantly exploring new ways to innovate with its product lines, expanding mass timber applications across various sectors.



## 2025 Awards

### Florida Division Society of American Foresters

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#### **Stephen Spurr Award: Dr. Ludie Bond**

The Stephen Spurr Award is presented to an individual for technical contributions to forestry in Florida. This award recognizes achievement(s) in technical areas that significantly impact the practice of forestry or forest resources. Ludie is recognized for her PhD research, which culminated in recommendations for improving fire science communication to the public to increase acceptance of prescribed fires on public and private lands and improve fire science policy. This award is named in honor of Dr. Stephen H. Spurr, former President of University of Texas and author of several forestry books, including Forest Inventory, Photogrammetry and Photo-Interpretation, Forest Ecology, a frequently used textbook, and American Forest Policy in Development.

#### **Young Forester of the Year: Aaron Smith**

The Young Forester of the Year Award is presented annually to a young forester, residing in Florida, who demonstrates leadership in forestry and community. This award recognizes active participation and outstanding achievement in all aspects of SAF, forestry or natural resource related organizations, civic groups, church, special community projects and achievements in a professional forestry position.

## 2025 Student Awards

#### **Graduating Senior Award: Dylan Ballew**

Dylan has served as Chair of the Student Chapter for the 2024/2025 academic year, and has provided excellent leadership. He attended SESAF 2025 in Alabama, the 2024 National Convention in Colorado, and SESAF 2024 in Georgia, as well as the 2025 Forest Landowners Association policy event in Washington DC, and the 2024 Florida Forestry Association conference in Amelia Island, Florida. Dylan is active in Forestry Club, including attending 2025 Conclave in Alabama, and helping host 2024 Conclave in Florida. After graduation he will start a position with IFCO-PRT supporting the seedling nursery.

#### **Rising Senior Award: Trenton Waters**

Trenton has served as Chair-elect of the Student Chapter for the 2024/2025 academic year, and attended SESAF 2025 in Alabama, and the 2024 National Convention in Colorado, as well as the 2024 Florida Forestry Association Annual Meeting in Amelia Island, Florida. He is also active in Forestry Club, including attending 2025 Conclave in Alabama. This summer Trenton will be interning with F&W Forestry's Orange Park office.

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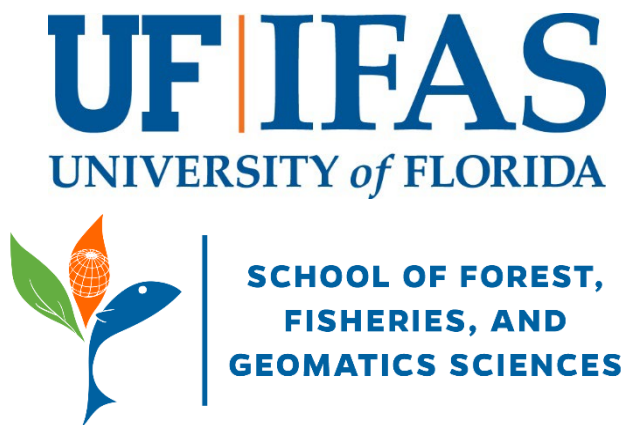


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