U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED Standards Now Include Tree Farm and SFI Certified Wood

By Chris Demers, UF/IFAS School of Forest Resources and Conservation

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), the governing body for the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating system, recently announced that it will now begin encouraging responsibly sourced building materials through a new compliance path. This new path includes wood from family forests certified by the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). This is a significant change for the LEED standards and a breakthrough for Tree Farmers, the forest industry and other forest constituents across the U.S.

For many years, the USGBC only recognized the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification system as a responsible source of wood for its LEED green building rating system. If a builder wanted to use wood products and earn a LEED credit for a structure, they had to source from the FSC system. With the majority of certified forests in the U.S. certified by ATFS and SFI, this, in many cases, made it difficult for builders to justify using wood over more readily available steel and concrete.

It is estimated that about half the commercial buildings being built in the U.S. are being built to a green standard. Wood is considered to be a better building material choice for the environment compared to other materials. Steel and concrete require significantly more energy and generate more greenhouse gases, in their production and use for construction.

For more than a decade, private forest landowners across the U.S.; along with forestry groups, state forestry agency and industry representatives, and state and federal legislators; have urged USGBC to recognize all credible forest certification programs. Now, through this new path, LEED will allow builders to earn credits for using wood certified by any credible certification system recognized by the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) International, the global leader in development of technical standards.

Certified Tree Farms are now an accepted source of wood in a new pilot program of the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system.

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of voluntary and consensus based standards. ATFS, SFI, FSC, and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) are all recognized by ATSM.

More details about this and how forest landowners can show support for this breakthrough are at the American Forest Foundation site, https://www.forestfoundation.org/.

State Agencies Partner with New NRCS Program to Enhance Private Landowner Assistance

By Joe Prenger, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Tony Grossman, Florida Forest Service

The Florida Forest Service (FFS) and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) have been awarded a total of three projects through a new Farm Bill program aimed at encouraging partnerships between government agencies and local partners to better serve private landowners’ conservation needs. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program provides opportunities for state agencies, non-profits organizations, and private individuals to develop cooperative efforts to target Farm Bill conservation incentives to priority areas and resource needs. Working with various federal and state agencies, as well as non-profit groups, FFS and FWC have one ongoing, and two new projects that will help NRCS focus Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) funding on specific natural resource concerns around the state.

Regional Partnership for Conservation of Gopher Tortoise and At-Risk Species Habitat in Florida.

This project began in August of 2015, and will increase technical assistance and conservation planning to support implementation of EQIP and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) contracts.

Financial assistance through this project will be used to restore, maintain, and protect habitat for threatened and endangered species in the south central peninsula, including portions of Polk, Osceola, Manatee, Hardee, Highlands, Okeechobee, Sarasota, De Soto, Charlotte, and Glades Counties. The project targets habitats used by at-risk species in the focus area, particularly gopher tortoise, Florida panther, and Florida Grasshopper Sparrow. Outreach and technical assistance with applications will be provided to willing landowners interested in either EQIP or ACEP.

Partners will deliver resource assessment and written management plans that will provide the basis of EQIP financial assistance contracts to implement conservation practices, as well as monitoring and certification after implementation. In addition to FWC’s Landowner Assistance Program and the FFS’ Cooperative Forestry Assistance Program, the National Wildlife Refuge Association and Florida Conservation Group will provide technical assistance, with additional expertise drawn from Florida NRCS, University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Cooperative Extension Service, and others. Conservation practices promoted include: prescribed burning; firebreak establishment; brush management (i.e. mechanical treatments like roller chopping, mowing, etc.); and herbaceous weed control.

Continued on next page
**Working lands for Florida panther conservation: ranchers helping endangered species in the face of adversity**

Although still endangered, the Florida panther population has increased significantly in southwest Florida from an estimated 30 panthers in 1995 to approximately 100-180 today. This success is due to many factors, including habitat protection/management and genetic restoration. As a consequence of this success, panthers have been expanding their range on public and private lands. At the same time, changes in native habitat structure, increases in non-native plant density, and conversion of agricultural lands to more intensive uses contribute to the loss and fragmentation of Florida panther habitat and inhibits recovery. Restoring suitable natural pine flatwood forest, hardwood hammock forest, and freshwater wetland forest habitats and enhancing corridors within the Panther Focus Area contribute to the recovery of this species. Moreover, providing incentives to private landowners for managing habitat for panthers has far reaching benefits for many species of wildlife. The Florida panther is considered an “umbrella species”, and restoration of this large, wide-ranging cat’s diverse habitat types contributes to the wellbeing of many other wildlife species. Specifically, listed and candidate species such as the Florida scrub jay, Florida bonneted bat, indigo snake, gopher tortoise, Audubon’s crested caracara, and wood storks all benefit from properly managed panther habitats and contribute to maintaining a biodiverse ecosystem for future generations.

This project seeks to develop a system that values habitat management services which benefit the Florida panther and its prey and that are easy to implement and communicate to landowners. Landowner understanding is essential so that they are able to predict potential future compensation and adopt practices and actions that would maximize public benefits and net profit so that ranching and working lands remain financially viable and compatible with Florida panther conservation efforts. Project biologists from FWC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will work with landowners to plan and fund habitat improvement practices that restore, enhance or maintain native plant communities for the benefit of the endangered Florida panther in conjunction with healthy cattle production.

Practices such as invasive plant treatment, mowing, roller chopping and prescribed burning are planned to manage native pine flatwoods, grasslands, and forested wetlands which are used by panthers for hunting and shelter. Female panthers primarily den in saw palmetto patches found within pine flatwoods, and changes in structure of this habitat can affect reproductive success. Healthy pine flatwoods are comprised of an open South Florida slash pine canopy over interspersed saw palmetto patches and mixed grasses and forbs. Unfortunately, due to changes in hydrology, land use, and fire frequency, much of this habitat is overgrown by both native and invasive plants. Mechanical practices such as mowing and roller chopping can be used for initial vegetation control prior to prescribed burning, but burning is essential to maintaining this habitat in the best condition.

Calf loss to predation is a serious concern to ranchers who provide habitat for the Florida panther. In 2014, Caitlin Jacobs and Martin Main from the University of Florida published a report of their study entitled: “Calf Depredation by the Florida Panther in Southwest Florida.” This report documented the impacts of panther predation on calves at two southwest Florida ranches. Ms. Jacobs developed a panther habitat hunting model which can be used to determine the predation risk assessment value for each ranch. In general, she determined that the predation risk decreases with increased pasture size and increased herd size. As such, biologists and landowners can develop grazing plans that move pregnant cows in larger herds into larger pastures during calving season, where feasible, to minimize the potential for calf depredation.

The Florida panther is considered an “umbrella species”: its habitat contributes to the wellbeing of many other wildlife species.
Natural resource managers training to enhance the sustainable management of private forest land

This project seeks to expand the partnership between the NRCS, FWC, UF/IFAS, and FFS to train both public sector and private sector natural resource managers to enhance private forest land management in Florida. Through the partnership, the NCRS will provide financial assistance to landowners and the FFS to increase the capacity of resource managers to offer technical assistance to the 400,000 forest landowners in Florida.

The FFS and partners plan to train 800 public sector resource managers and related staff to educate the general public about NRCS programs that offer technical and financial assistance for forest landowners. The FFS will also provide training to private consulting foresters and biologists that want to serve private landowners using Farm Bill Conservation Programs. Training topics will include NRCS programs and conservation practices that address important resource concerns on forest land, technical service provider (TSP) requirements, and preparing a Conservation and Forest Stewardship Plan. Resource concerns to be addressed include inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife, plant and animal health, insufficient water, soil health, and water quality degradation on the 10 million acres of private forest land in Florida. The results will be demonstrated by monitoring the increase in forest management plans and practices implemented using Farm Bill programs.

This project will provide technical assistance to private forest owners to increase the number of landowners using Farm Bill Conservation Programs. Training topics will include NRCS programs and conservation practices that address important resource concerns on forest land, technical service provider (TSP) requirements, and preparing a Conservation and Forest Stewardship Plan. Resource concerns to be addressed include inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife, plant and animal health, insufficient water, soil health, and water quality degradation on the 10 million acres of private forest land in Florida. The results will be demonstrated by monitoring the increase in forest management plans and practices implemented using Farm Bill programs.

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For more information on any of these projects, please contact
Joe Prenger
joe.prenger@myfwc.com
or
Tony Grossman
Anthony.Grossman@FreshFromFlorida.com

Online Burn Request System Saves Time
John Saddler, Prescribed Fire Manager, Florida Forest Service

On average, the Florida Forest Service issues just over 80,000 open burn authorizations each year. When conditions are right for burning, the phone lines are flooded with requests for authorization. For burners, this can mean being put on hold or even having to call back when lines are open.

In an effort to reduce the number of telephone calls, the Florida Forest Service has implemented a web-based open burn authorization system called WebOBA. Using this system, certified burners can go online and place a request for a burn authorization. Once the request is placed, our field staff will be able to view the request and authorize the burn without having to talk to the burner. This system will increase the efficiency of the authorization process.

WebOBA is only available for certified acreage and certified pile burners. More information can be found by typing WebOBA in the search field at www.FloridaForestService.com.
FORCES Program Provides Assistance to Forest Landowners in Vicinity of Military Bases

FORCES is an initiative among the Florida Forest Service (FFS), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Defense military installations (DOD), forest landowners, and other agencies and organizations to promote long-term conservation of private woodlands. The program encourages landowners to maintain working forests to provide undeveloped buffers that support the mission of nearby military bases.

Many military bases are concerned about the conversion of forestland to commercial, residential, and industrial development near their bases. This development could impact training and mission responsibilities. FORCES provides a strategy to encourage private landowners to maintain, manage, and potentially expand forestland that meets the objectives and interests of the landowner and supports the mission of the military base.

Landowners within a FORCES project area are provided a management plan with specific guidance and technical advice concerning the management of their woodlands tailored to their objectives. Following approval of their management plan, landowners are officially recognized and acknowledged by the military base as a member of the FORCES partnership. Benefits to landowners may include: Certificate of recognition by the base, signs for the property if desired, invitation to special events and workshops sponsored by the base, higher point ranking when applying for cost-share programs, the honor of actively supporting the men and women who protect our nation’s freedom.

You can enroll in a FORCES partnership if you own at least 10 acres of forest land or open land being converted to forest, are located within a FORCES project area, and agree to maintain the property in uses such as woodlands and farm.

Currently, FORCES is active in the Florida panhandle with plans to expand to lands near Florida’s remaining military bases in the near future. If you are interested in learning more about being a FORCES partner, contact Danny Stevens, FFS NW Region Coordinator, (850) 561-7250 or Arlo Kane, FWC NW Region Coordinator at (850) 265-3676. The FFS or FWC will then prepare a management plan that meets the mutual interests of the landowner and the military base and addresses long-term conservation objectives.

SAVE THE DATE!
National Private Lands Partners Day in Sebring, FL
October 4-6, 2016

The ninth annual Private Lands Partners Day will be in Sebring, FL on October 4-6. This is the Nation’s premiere event for showcasing public-private conservation partnerships. This year’s event will showcase the northern Everglades as a model for successful private lands conservation. The event will include visits to some of the farms and people engaged in private land management, and presentations by conservation leaders in Florida and nationally. See http://partnersforconservation.org/ or contact Partners for Conservation executive director, Steve Jester, at info@partnersforconservation.org for more information.

Get Email Updates!
Don’t miss out on upcoming events and news! Send an email to cdemers@ufl.edu to be added to the Stewardship listserv. Updates are sent every week or two.
TIMBER PRICE UPDATE

The timber pricing information below is useful for observing trends over time, but does not reflect current conditions at a particular location. Landowners considering a timber sale are advised to solicit the services of a consulting forester to obtain current local market conditions.

Average stumpage prices for the three major products in Florida, as reported in the 1st Quarter 2016 Timber Mart-South report were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Stumpage Price</th>
<th>Change from 4th Qtr. 2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pine pulpwood</td>
<td>$41/cord ($15/ton)</td>
<td>↑ from 4th Qtr. 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine C-N-S</td>
<td>$59/cord ($22/ton)</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine sawtimber</td>
<td>$79/cord ($29/ton)</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trend Report

Average stumpage prices for the region were mixed but most averages were up a little bit from last quarter in Florida. Both pine sawtimber and chip-n-saw prices in Florida averaged the highest in the Southern region this quarter. U.S. building construction remains a principal driver of the wood products industry. Over the last three years total housing starts have increased about 10% per year.

Timber Mart-South is compiled and produced at the Center for Forest Business, Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia, under contract with the Frank W. Norris Foundation, a non-profit corporation serving the forest products industry. See http://www.tmart-south.com/ for information on subscriptions.
CONGRATULATIONS
CERTIFIED FOREST STEWARD AND TREE FARMERS

These landowners have a current Forest Stewardship and/or Tree Farm management plan for their property and have demonstrated excellent stewardship of their land resources.

Dan Winchester, Gadsden County
Bernard Paugh (C), Barry Stafford (R) and consultant Jim Robertson (L), Jackson County
Kirk Gowan (L) and David Findley (R), Gadsden County
Jim Robertson (R) and Barry Stafford (L), Jackson County
Will Prestero (R) and David Findley (L), Gadsden County
Terry Kever, Gadsden County

For more information about becoming a Certified Forest Steward or Tree Farmer, contact your Florida Forest Service County Forester, consultant or learn about it at:
http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service/For-Landowners/Programs/
or
http://www.floridaforest.org
### Upcoming Stewardship, Small Farm and Other Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event, Location, Contact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 18-19</td>
<td><strong>44th Annual Spring Symposium: Advances in Southern Pine Silviculture.</strong> UF Austin Cary Forest Learning Center. Sponsored by UF/IFAS School of Forest Resources and Conservation and Florida Society of American Foresters. See <a href="http://sfrc.ufl.edu/the-44th-spring-symposium/">http://sfrc.ufl.edu/the-44th-spring-symposium/</a> for more information</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 19-22</td>
<td><strong>Florida Native Plant Society Annual Conference.</strong> Daytona Beach Resort and Conference Center, Daytona Beach, FL. For more information contact Don Spence at <a href="mailto:conference@fnps.org">conference@fnps.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td><strong>Workshop: Does Money Grow on Your Trees?</strong> 8:45 am to 2:00 pm CT, Molino Community Center, 6450 Highway 95-A North, Molino, FL 32577. Provided by Florida Forest Service. Free, lunch included. For more information or to RSVP, contact Cathy Hardin, Escambia County Forester, (850) 587-5237 or <a href="mailto:cathy.hardin@freshfromflorida.com">cathy.hardin@freshfromflorida.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2</td>
<td><strong>Longleaf Pine Forest Restoration &amp; Management Workshop.</strong> 8:30 am to 3:30 pm ET, Greenwood Plantation, Thomasville, GA. Presented by Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance and Greenwood Plantation. $5 fee. For more information or to register by phone contact David Godwin at Southern Fire Exchange, (850) 893-4153 ext. 261.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 15</td>
<td><strong>Timber Sale Basics and Market Trends Workshop.</strong> 10:00 am to 3:00 pm ET, Columbia County UF/IFAS Extension Office, 971 W Duval St., Suite 170, Lake City, FL 32055. Provided by Florida Forest Service. Contact Stan Shepard at (386) 243-6236 or <a href="mailto:Stanley.Shepard@FreshFromFlorida.com">Stanley.Shepard@FreshFromFlorida.com</a> to pre-register.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 15</td>
<td><strong>Invasive Exotic Species Workshop.</strong> Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve Training Center, 108 Island Drive Eastpoint, FL 32328. Provided by Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance and Florida Forest Stewardship program. $10 fee covers materials and lunch. FDACS Pesticide applicator CEUs and SAF CFEs pending approval. Contact Anita Grove at the training center at (850) 670-7708. <a href="mailto:Anita.Grove@dep.state.fl.us">Anita.Grove@dep.state.fl.us</a> for info or to sign up.</td>
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For many more events and information see: [floridalandsteward.org](http://floridalandsteward.org)