

FLORIDA LAND STEWARD



A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

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Restoring Longleaf at Little Creek Woods

By Bob Reid and Betsy Clark

My wife Betsy and I have a vision for Little Creek Woods, our 1,200-acre property in northwest Walton County, Florida; a vision we like to think extends at least 300 years into the future. I tell folks our journey as serious longleaf landowners began in 2000, when we bought the first of several contiguous tracts of timberland. But it actually started many years before when my dad, a University of Georgia Forestry School graduate, "introduced" me to the longleaf pine on our family farm in rural Carroll County, Georgia.



Bob Reid has a 300-year vision for his Little Creek Woods in Walton County, Florida. Photo by Tyler Jones.

Our farm, where I grew up, was at the edge of the longleaf pine's natural range, but we had a few relict and misshapen specimens, gnarled by years of winter ice storms. Dad's great respect for this magnificent tree infected me deeply, and has guided our efforts to restore the longleaf pine and the ecosystem it dominates.

When I was a high school senior Dad took me to UGA to show me around the campus. Some of the same Forestry School professors he'd had were still on the faculty, and it was an easy decision for me to "study forestry." So, I signed-up.

Unfortunately, Dad died during my freshman year and, after wallowing around a bit, I finally graduated with a Bachelor's degree in zoology. But each of my college summers I spent out west with the U.S. Forest Service, fighting forest fires. Forestry was in my blood, and fire was in my heart!

Growing Little Creek Woods

The first tract Betsy and I bought included about sixty acres of natural 50 year-old longleaf, but it was mostly hidden in 20 foot-tall yaupon holly and other brush. Fire had been excluded from the tract, and re-introducing fire was one of the first obligations we had. In the process

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we learned, to our great luck, that because this tract had never been farmed the original groundcover plants were still there, including wiregrass and associates.

Since that first purchase, we have slowly increased the acreage of Little Creek Woods by adding adjacent tracts as they became available and resources permitted. I should point out that I do have steady income as an Air Force retiree, and most of our land purchases have been tax-deferred exchanges for land I owned elsewhere, including my share of the Reid family farm and other properties we've acquired over the years. Little Creek Woods is not yet a source of income for us.

Learning about longleaf

Longleaf had been planted by the previous owner on much of the first tract we bought, but most of the land we've added since then was paper company land that had been planted to off-site loblolly and slash pines. Old stumps and broken turpentine pots confirm this was originally all longleaf, and that's what we aim to restore. Our nutrient-poor, deep sandy soils are not suited to other pine species.

Prescribed fire is our primary tool in this restoration. We also harvest wiregrass seed and propagate it and other species from our sites that still have original groundcover. Some of the off-site pine tracts are doing ok and will be carried to maturity before conversion to longleaf, while others are being clearcut and replanted now. Some loblolly tracts were so moribund that the pines had to be given away and were cleared in a fuel-wood chipping operation.

We have experimented a bit with novel ideas regarding longleaf restoration. During years with heavy seed drop, we have successfully transplanted tiny seedlings from fire breaks to understocked areas with just a hand trowel.

Mark Hains, in conjunction with Auburn's School of Forestry, is six years into a comparative growth study of longleaf, slash, and loblolly pines planted together on a bare sand ridge site. This summer we are working with Carol Denhof and Karen Brown on a test of wiregrass seed viability produced on identical sites but burned at different times during the growing season.

Some parts of Little Creek Woods are not suitable for longleaf, and on those we are working with nature to maintain appropriate habitats. These include fire-excluded hardwood groves, creek bottoms with majestic slash pines and pitcher plants, a small pond with bass and bream, and a few food plots inset with white oaks and bordered with crabapples.

We have already cleared and replanted several hundred acres to longleaf pine, and have restored the wiregrass groundcover on much of it. Little Creek Woods was recognized as the "2003 Stewardship Forest of the Year" by Florida Forest Service, and we have hosted tours by gopher tortoise, wildflower, butterfly, birding, and other nature oriented organizations. Our gopher tortoise population is especially notable.

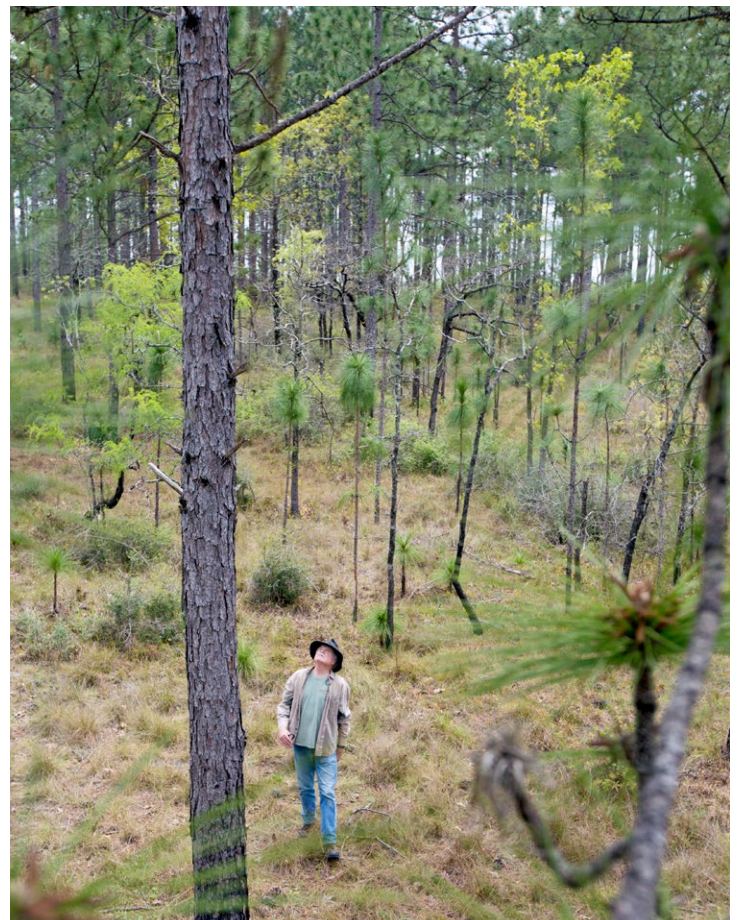
The most important and labor-intensive part of this whole initiative is FIRE. Properly applied, prescribed

fire is the main consideration in the management of longleaf pine, and it's our most active management tool. We could not maintain a longleaf pine forest without periodic fire.

We couldn't do it alone!

Anyone accepting the challenge of longleaf restoration will quickly learn you can't do it by yourself. You must have help. Probably the single most important helper a forest landowner can have is a competent consulting forester who knows how the system works. In our case, this has been the highly experienced Auburn forester, Ken Oser. Also important is direct contact with university extension services and government agencies that can assist in technical advice, cost shares, fire line establishment, control of invasive species, and the like.

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Longleaf pine is the species of choice on the fire-maintained uplands of Little Creek Woods. Photo by Tyler Jones.

Developing good relationships with adjacent landowners is also important, not only to ensure they know that what you are doing won't harm their interests, but to possibly encourage them to do a little longleaf restoration themselves. It also lets them know that when you do a prescribed burn, by reducing the likelihood of wildfire, you are benefiting them too.

This brings me back to the issue of fire in the woods itself. All of us grew up with Smokey Bear looking over our shoulder. For many years, fire in the woods was something to avoid at all costs. I was personally involved as "Smokey's assistant," working for the U.S. Forest Service as a wildland fire fighter for several summers in Idaho and Montana,

and it's taken a while for me to realize how wrong we were. Fire in the woods is both beneficial and inevitable, and it's better if done under our control and on our terms.

At Little Creek Woods we burn on average 200 to 300 acres each year. I'm a certified burner and direct all our burns myself. Betsy thinks I'm part pyromaniac, and that may be one of the requirements for successful longleaf pine restoration. There is no way to bring back and maintain the longleaf pine ecosystem without fire.

The future of Little Creek Woods

The overarching challenge we face now is how we keep this bit of restored nature going when we are

gone. Neither Betsy nor I, nor any of you reading this today, will still be here 100 years from now, but this piece of land will still be out there in Walton County, holding the world together. We are but transitory caretakers of this tiny bit of nature's wonder.

So, what do we do? Our children love the place, but all are tied-up with their own lives. We have toyed with the idea of deeding Little Creek Woods to The Longleaf Alliance for use as its permanent headquarters, and I even proposed this to Rhett Johnson years ago on our cabin porch at LCW. This hasn't happened yet, but we remain hopeful!

A New Approach To an Old Problem: Landowner-led Prescribed Burn Associations

By Ginger Morgan, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Fire is a critical component of Florida's natural landscape. Most of Florida's plants and animals have specific survival adaptations to flourish after frequent fires that historically were started either by lightning strikes or native peoples. However for the last century, fire

has been absent from many private lands. Absence of frequent fire has resulted in wildlife habitat loss and a buildup of hazardous fuels, increasing risk of wildfire. In order for private landowners to effectively manage their lands and restore native landscapes, they often are

encouraged by resource professionals to use prescribed fire, a planned event in which fire is initiated during preferred weather and site conditions.

Prescribed fire is a cost-effective method that mimics natural fire on the landscape in order to manage vegetation and conserve wildlife. Florida has a long, rich history of landowners using this tool. Today many landowners are eager to conduct prescribed fires but may lack the necessary assistance, equipment and training. They also may be concerned about legal liability. There are several options available to obtain assistance with prescribed fire, such as the Florida Forest Service (FFS) and private contractors, but availability to these resources can be limited. Unfortunately, growing demand on the FFS to conduct prescribed fire on public and private lands, and limits on staff and



Fire is a critical component of Florida's landscape and an important land management tool. Photo by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

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equipment resources, makes it challenging for that agency to meet all private landowner needs. In addition, use of private consultants may be cost prohibitive, especially for smaller property owners. In response to these issues, there is interest in establishing cooperative Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) in Florida.

What is a Prescribed Burn Association? It is a group of private landowners working together to conduct prescribed fires on each other's properties. These member-led groups can benefit from technical assistance and training by partnering with state resource professionals and university extension faculty. PBAs also can host trainings and become nonprofit entities that can accept donations and apply for grants to purchase equipment. Most importantly, these organizations work to build capacity by allowing landowners to safely and

confidently conduct prescribed fires on their properties with the assistance of fellow members. PBAs already have been initiated throughout the Midwestern United States with very positive outcomes.

The Landowner Assistance Program (LAP) at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has begun working to identify landowners, as well as natural resource professionals and other stakeholders, with an interest in establishing a Prescribed Burn Association in their area. The initial goal is establishing one or more pilot programs. Currently, the areas being considered are Alachua, Putnam and Marion counties in north central Florida as well as Gadsden County in northwest Florida. However the LAP is more than willing to work with landowners in other areas who are eager to form a Prescribed Burn Association.

Interested in cooperating with local landowners to achieve prescribed fires on your land and theirs? Want to learn more about Prescribed Burn Associations? Contact:

FWC LAP's Joe Vaughn in north central Florida at Joseph.Vaughn@myfwc.com, (352) 955-2241

or

LAP's Arlo Kane in northwest Florida, Arlo.Kane@myfwc.com, (850) 767-3616.

More about FWC's Landowner Assistance Program is at MyFWC.com/lap.

An FWC brochure "Prescribed fire benefits wildlife and people" is available at <http://myfwc.com/media/3056876/PrescribedFireBrochure.pdf>.

Connect and Receive Conservation Help from the USDA Online

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has an online web application that allows you to request conservation technical and financial assistance. Log on to the **Conservation Client Gateway** to apply for conservation program assistance, manage applications, review and sign documents, access conservation plans, maps and other documents. For more information, fact sheets, FAQs and a how-to video, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway. Producers can also contact NRCS at their local USDA Service Center office. Service center locations and program information can be found on the Florida NRCS Web site at www.fl.nrcs.usda.gov.



Southern Pine Beetle Activity Increases in Florida

By Jeffrey Eickwort, Forest Health Section Supervisor, Florida Forest Service

Southern pine beetle (*Dendroctonus frontalis*, or SPB) can be one of the most destructive insects in southeastern pine forests, but in most years it is rarely encountered. The last major SPB outbreak years in Florida occurred from 1999 to 2002. At the peak of that outbreak, 2,892 infestations (or "spots") were documented in a single year, killing pines across nearly 17,600 acres. By comparison, only 175 SPB spots (covering a total of 1,129 acres) were detected in Florida during the entire thirteen years that followed. As SPB outbreaks have historically occurred on a 7-12 year cycle, it seems that our state is "overdue" for an outbreak year.

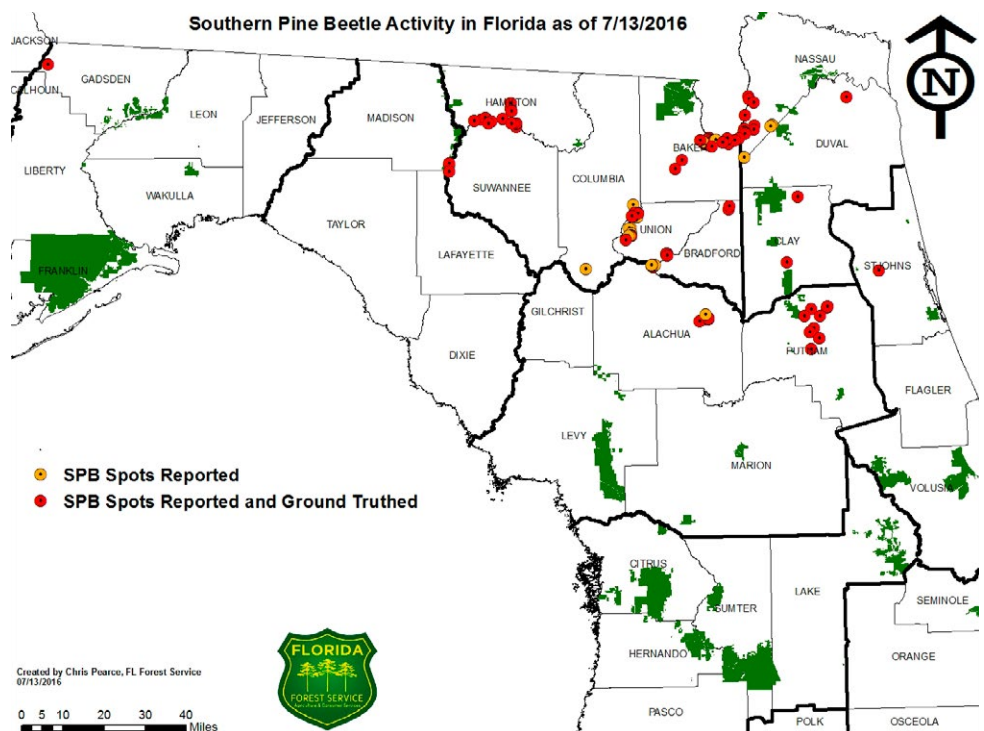
The SPB activity for 2016 got off to a very early start. The first active spots were found in January, following a period of unusually warm winter temperatures. As we've moved into the spring and summer, new spots have been detected in new areas at an increasing rate. As of this writing, more than 150 infestations have been documented, covering over 550 acres in twelve counties, and more possible locations are being investigated each week. The recent temperatures have been ideal for rapid SPB development, which peaks at 85-90° F. County Foresters, Pilots, Forest Health Section staff, and other FFS field personnel are actively conducting aerial surveys and ground checks, and landowners in many locations are conducting suppression/salvage harvests.

Although this year's numbers are still very small compared to 2000-2002, they raise the question: does the increase signal the beginning of a new outbreak period? That is

still impossible to predict with any confidence, because much is still unknown about the factors that influence the timing of SPB outbreaks. The best science-based prediction tool available is the annual SPB Spring Pheromone Trapping Survey, which estimates the likelihood of SPB activity in the coming year, based on the February-March abundance of SPB as compared to the predatory beetles which feed on them. The Forest Health Section already has plans to increase the number of trap locations for this survey in 2017.

When SPB activity is occurring, there are well-known factors that influence the risk of losses at the stand level. Densely-stocked pine stands (>80 ft²/acre basal area), particularly consisting of mature

loblolly or shortleaf pine, are most at risk. However, other pine species and age classes are often infested when the local SPB population is high. In the region of north Florida where SPB has historically occurred, the FFS Southern Pine Beetle Assistance and Prevention Program offers cost-share reimbursements and incentive payments to private landowners who conduct practices which can prevent losses due to SPB, such as thinning of over-stocked stands, prescribed burning, and planting less-susceptible pine species (longleaf or slash). This program is currently accepting applications through July 29. In Florida, SPB activity has never been documented south of the natural range of loblolly pine, which extends down to Pasco and Orange Counties.



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 **2nd Quarter 2016** Timber Mart-South report were:

Florida Stumpage Prices

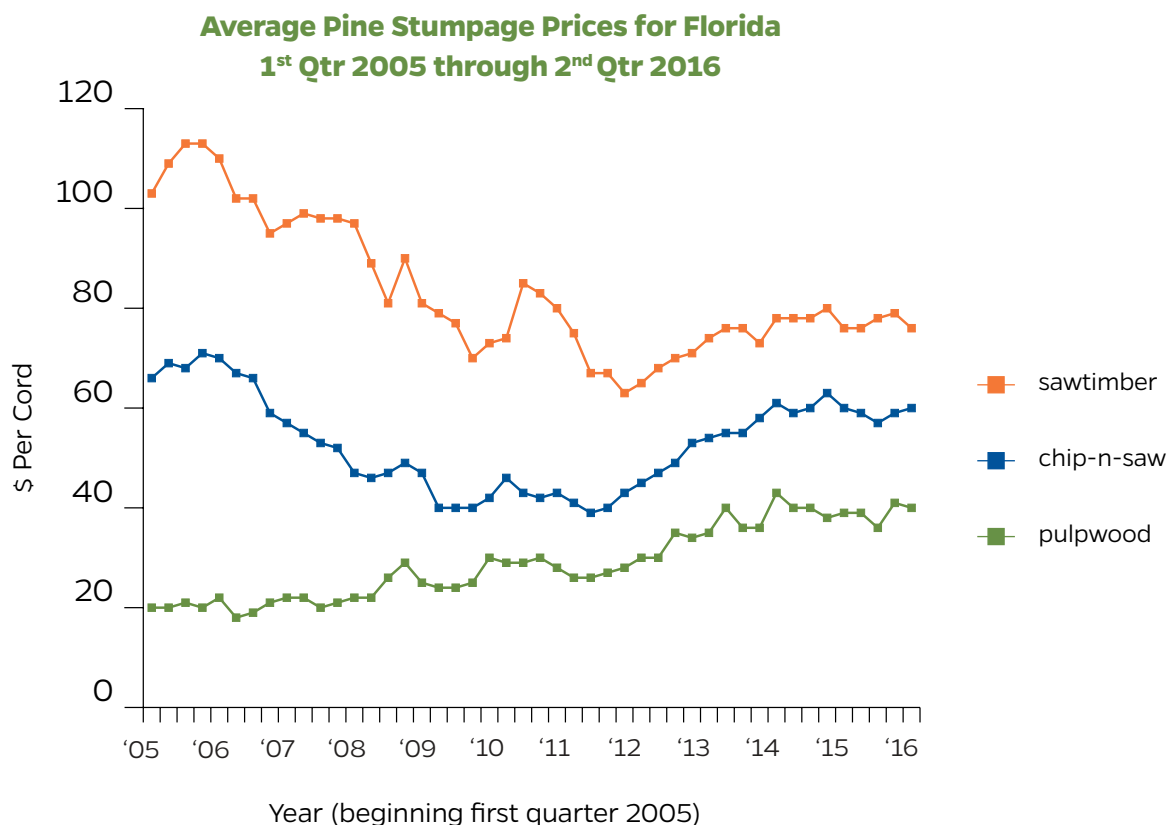
Pine pulpwood: \$40/cord (\$15/ton), same as 1st Qtr. 2016

Pine C-N-S: \$60/cord (\$22/ton), same

Pine sawtimber: \$76/cord (\$28/ton), ↓

Trend Report

Wet weather across much of the Southeast U.S. and improving lumber markets helped to dampen the price slump that sawtimber and chip-n-saw stumpage typically incur from the first quarter of the year to the second. Softwood lumber prices remain above those from a year ago and hardwood lumber prices have increased for the third consecutive quarter. U.S. building construction continues to improve with housing starts up from a year ago.



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 STEWARDS AND TREE FARMERS

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>

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.



Laveenia Elder with Stan Shepard, Columbia County



Samantha Whitcraft (center) with Kim Burch (L), John Holzaepfel, and Lucky, Citrus County



Jim Moses (L) with Paul Williams, Suwannee County



Lloyd Adams, Columbia County



John Mears (L) and Julia Pike with Barry Stafford, Jackson County



Wayne Bailey (R) with Chris Otremba, Lake County



Lamar and Rebecca Christenberry with Cathy Hardin (R), Escambia County



John and Wanda Faro, Marion County



Patrick Bradley with Cathy Hardin, Escambia County

Upcoming Stewardship, Small Farm and Other Events

| Date | Event, Location, Contact |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Aug 25, Sept 22, +more dates | Your Legacy, Your Land Monthly Webinar Series , provided by American Forest Foundation. <i>See http://mylandplan.org/content/your-legacy-your-land-monthly-webinar-series for details and registration.</i> |
| Aug 30- Sept 1 | Florida Forestry Association 2016 Annual Meeting: "Working Forests Work" , Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, Amelia Island, FL. <i>See http://floridaforest.org/annual-meeting/ for details or call (850) 222-5646.</i> |
| Sept 15 | Invasive Exotic Species Workshop , 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. <i>Contact Anita Grove at the training center at (850) 670-7708, Anita.Grove@dep.state.fl.us for info or to sign up.</i> |
| Sept 27 | Forest Stewardship Workshop: Use Prescribed Fire Safely and Effectively , 8:30 am to 3 pm CT, Blackwater State Forest Bear Lake Pavilion, Munson, FL. Join us to learn the the proper planning necessary for a successful prescribed burn. A burn demonstration will be planned and executed if conditions allow. \$10 fee covers lunch and materials. <i>Register on-line at https://fsp-workshop092716.eventbrite.com/. You can also reserve a space by contacting Bethany at the UF/IFAS Extension Santa Rosa County Office at (850) 675-6654.</i> |
| Oct 4-6 | Private Lands Partners Day: The Northern Everglades - The Land, Water and People , Chateau Elan Hotel and Conference Center, Sebring, FL. Hosted by The Partners for Conservation, interact with landowners, producers, and conservation agency leadership from across the country to share stories of partnership and visit ranches that are models for successful public-private partnerships. <i>Contact info@partnersforconservation.org for more information.</i> |
| Oct 6 | Forest Stewardship Tree/Forest Plant ID Field Day , 9 am to 3 pm ET, Morningside Nature Center, Gainesville, FL. Join us to learn some strategies to help you identify trees, shrubs and herbaceous species. We will cover some basic skills and put them to work in woods. Cost is \$10 per person, lunch and materials included. <i>Please register on-line at https://fsp-workshop100616.eventbrite.com/. You can also reserve a space by contacting Chris Demers, cdemers@ufl.edu, (352) 846-2375.</i> |

For many more events and information see: floridalandsteward.org

The Florida Land Steward Newsletter is a University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service, Florida Forest Service, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Florida Tree Farm joint project:

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