

FLORIDA LAND STEWARD



A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

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David Findley Named 2016 Florida Outstanding Tree Farm Inspector of the Year

By Bonnie Stine, Florida Forest Service

After graduating from Alabama A&M University, Jacksonville native David Findley started work with the Florida Forest Service as a Forester at Tate's Hell State Forest in April 2012. In February 2015 he moved to the Gadsden/Liberty County Forester position and was promoted to Senior Forester. David quickly took

on the role of Tree Farm inspector and, during the past year, conducted 26 Tree Farm inspections and certified several new forest properties in the American Tree Farm System in Gadsden and Liberty Counties. David also has coordinated and presented Tree Farm and other program information at numerous landowner workshops including a Leon County workshop during Working Forests Week last October. David's enthusiastic commitment to providing professional forestry technical information to help forest landowners achieve sustainable forestland was recognized by the Florida Tree Farm Committee, and

he was named Florida Tree Farm Inspector of the year in August of 2016. Official award recognition was held on October 14, 2016 at the Register Family Partnership Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year tour in Leon County. **Congratulations David! Keep up the great work!**



David Findley receives his award recognizing him as the 2016 Florida Tree Farm Inspector of the Year at the Register Family Partnership Tree Farm Tour on October 14, 2016. Photo by Phil Gornicki.

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Living with Wildlife: The Ordeal of Lucky the Yellow Rat Snake

By Joe Sage, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

On a ranch south of Sebring, there is a beautiful specimen of a yellow rat snake named Lucky. Lucky is a wild male rat snake, around six feet in length, that spends its time hanging around the barns and houses on this 50 acre ranch that contains a mixture of pastures, bay swamps, marshes, ponds, and oak hammocks. Lucky shares this home with domestic animals, including horses, donkeys, cows, and llamas, as well as a variety of wildlife, including deer, turkey, sandhill cranes, wading birds, raptors, and a number of other snakes. Lucky is unique among his kindred, not only for the fact that he has a name and is not only tolerated but loved by his hosts, but most interestingly by the fact that he has a 3 inch surgical scar on his side, about 3 quarters of the way down his body. This is the story of how Lucky got his scar.

The story starts when a new chicken coop stocked with egg-laying hens was constructed near the barns where Lucky was known to hang out. As anyone who keeps chickens in this part of the world can tell you, eggs are irresistible for hungry snakes big enough to consume them, as they are easy to acquire and jam packed full of energy and nutrients. Unfortunately for the snakes, most folks who keep chicken eggs are unwilling to share, and many end up meeting their end for trespassing in a chicken coop. Although rat snakes are unwelcome visitors in the chicken coops of this particular farm, they are tolerated to a certain extent thanks to the farm owners and their appreciation for all things wild sharing their farm. They also have a professional wildlife biologist (the author) with a special love of snakes. On the occasion that snakes manage to get into the coop, I get the call to come over, catch the snake, and relocate it to the other side of the property. Although we have had repeat offenders, most snakes that we've moved don't come back. Lucky, on the other



Lucky, the yellow rat snake. Photo by Joe Sage.

hand, became a frequent intruder with visits frequent enough that the tolerance of the farm owners was reaching its limit.

During the fall of 2015, egg production in the chickens dropped off, as is normal during the shorter days, and the farm owners began to experiment with ways to try to encourage their hens to lay more. One method they tried was to place several wooden decoy chicken eggs in the nest boxes inside the coop, as the presence of eggs can sometimes encourage chickens to become broody and lay more. These wooden eggs were amazingly similar to the real thing from the outside, and even in the hand they could fool you. Apparently they were similar enough to the real thing that even Lucky was fooled, because one night he managed to sneak into the coop and swallowed one of the decoy eggs. We found him inside the coop next morning, with a familiar egg-shaped lump in his belly. A quick count revealed that one of our decoy eggs was missing, and palpating his lump confirmed that he did indeed have a wooden egg in his stomach.

Lucky was in a real bind since the egg is completely indigestible and had managed to move far enough

down into his digestive tract that it was impossible to palpate back towards his mouth or to try to induce him to regurgitate. Being too large for him to pass, at this point Lucky was doomed to die a slow death from bowel obstruction.

Although Lucky had proved to be an unrepentant thief of chicken eggs and had nearly worn out his welcome, his beauty and gentle nature appealed to the farm owners and they felt terrible when it became clear that his fate was likely sealed. He had never offered to bite during any previous encounters, and didn't seem to mind being handled all that much. Even folks who were a bit more timid around snakes had been comfortable enough to handle him. It seemed a waste for such a fine specimen of a rat snake to die in such a foolish way.

Yellow rat snakes are common in central Florida and are not endangered. They are numerous enough that they can occasionally even be a bit of a pest, such as when they raid chicken coops, or crawl inside electrical boxes and cause shorts. To spend a lot of time and resources in order to save one individual rat snake may seem a foolish waste of time, especially considering that it would still face all the risks that his wild relatives face, such as predators, disease and the like. The rational thing to do would have been to leave Lucky to his fate, and move on. However, we decided to take our chances and see what we could do to help him.

The farm where Lucky lives has had many domestic animals living there over the years, and so the farm owners have good relationships with several large and small animal veterinarians throughout the area. To our surprise, more than one of our regular veterinarians were willing to help. We took Lucky to a veterinarian in Lake Placid, who was

Continued on next page

willing to try to surgically remove the egg in his clinic, at little to no cost. Our charitable veterinarian had little experience with snakes (and in fact was a bit afraid of them), but he saw an opportunity to do something unique compared to his normal daily practice. His confidence was increased by having the author present since, as a Master's student, I had conducted research involving surgical implantations of radio transmitters in a large number of snakes, and so I was able to contribute some practical and anatomical knowledge.

Lucky came through the procedure like a champion. The trickiest part of any surgical procedure with a reptile is the anesthesia; since snakes are cold blooded, and their metabolism varies greatly depending on a number of factors, determining how much anesthetic is enough, and how much is too much is challenging. In this case, Lucky went down smoothly, maintained good vitals throughout the procedure, and came off the anesthesia afterwards about as quickly and easily as any snake I'd ever seen. We encountered no complications during the removal of the egg itself, and in fact there was very little blood. The entire procedure lasted less than a half hour, and in the end, we had a very groggy, but very alive

yellow rat snake on our hands, minus one bowel obstruction! It was at this point that Lucky received his name.

After his surgery, Lucky spent the a week in my living room, in a "recovery suite" built out of a large Tupperware container, heat pad, plenty of towels, and a hide box, while he recovered from the procedure. During his stay with me, he defecated several times indicating his digestive tract was healing properly, but implicating him in past crimes, as his stool was full of egg shells.

Snakes are tough animals, and it didn't take much time at all for Lucky to recover to the point that he could be released. Given all the effort that we had gone to, we decided that Lucky should be pardoned for his egg-thieving crimes and be allowed to continue to live at the farm. He was released into the hay room in our horse barn. We even left him a present of a couple of chicken eggs there in the hay and wished him luck.

During Lucky's recovery, the chicken coop underwent renovations to prevent further trespass by snakes. Gaps smaller than a half inch were filled with caulk, while larger gaps were filled with half inch hardware cloth. The same cloth

was used in place of standard chicken wire, and the bottom of the coop was extended to six inches below the ground surface to prevent anything from digging in below. Wooden extensions were installed on all the doors to avoid any gaps when closed. In the end, we constructed a snake proof chicken fortress and, to this day, no snake has managed to breach its defenses.

It has been nearly a year since Lucky went through his ordeal and he is still spotted regularly around the barns. He is easy to tell apart from other members of his species, thanks to his surgical scar, and still tries to raid the chicken coop, but as of yet has not managed to break through the snake-proofing renovations. Lucky still manages to get the occasional chicken egg, when they are laid outside of their coop, and seems to have decided that humans are not so bad, being more tolerant since his ordeal. On one occasion, while holding a smaller female rat snake that had been caught in the barn where Lucky likes to spend his time, he came out of his hiding spot and attempted to court her, even though she was still in my hands!

Lucky is lucky in more ways than he'll ever know. It is very rare that a situation involving wildlife in need comes together so smoothly and successfully as it did for Lucky, or that a group of like-minded people would come together and be willing to offer the amount of time and resources that went into helping this one snake

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission licenses a network of private wildlife rehabilitators who volunteer their time and money to help care for sick or injured wildlife in need. In most cases, situations like Lucky's would be referred to one of these rehabilitators. If you have questions regarding how you can help sick or injured wildlife in need, you can call FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline, at 888-404-FWCC (3922), or contact the nearest FWC regional office to you (<http://myfwc.com/contact/fwc-staff/regional-offices/>). You can also consider donating your time or money to a wildlife rehabilitator in your area, as many of them struggle to keep up with demand, and are covering expenses out of their own pockets. Contact information for local rehabilitators is also kept at FWC's regional offices.



Lucky ready for surgery, wooden decoy egg apparent in belly.
Photo by Joe Sage.

We Would Like to Hear from You

From the Editors



The main purpose of the Florida Land Steward Newsletter is to communicate with forest land-owners and others who have an interest in forestry and natural resources in Florida through articles that will inform and educate you on issues to help you manage and enjoy your land and promote sustainable land management in Florida. This covers a broad spectrum of topics that are intended to interest our readers. However, there may be some specific topic of interest to you that has not been covered in the newsletter or, possibly, was covered in an edition several years ago. Also, you may have read a past article and had a

question or comment or you would like some additional information on the subject. You may have even had a specific experience related to the subject that would be of interest to other readers.

The editors would like to encourage you to contact us with any questions, comments, or suggestions. The email addresses and phone numbers of the editors are listed at the bottom of the back page of the newsletter. Back editions of the newsletter are also available on our website at <http://floridalandsteward.org>. We would like to hear from you!

Invasive Exotic Species Feature: Emerald Ash Borer

By Alicia Campanella

The Emerald ash borer (*Agrilus plannipennis*) is one of the most devastating factors affecting ash trees across much of the U.S. today. Native to Asia, it is thought to have been introduced to the US in the 1990's by accident, in a shipment of wood arriving from Asia. First reported in the state of Michigan, the emerald ash borer (EAB) uses ash trees for its food and life cycle. Due to the wide distribution of ash species in the U.S., the EAB has found suitable habitat in many states and with serious consequences. The damage is so extensive in some areas that it can be seen in aerial photographs.

Though it has not been found in Florida, entomologists and land managers are on the lookout for EAB as it has already affected ash trees as far south as Virginia. In 2016 it was reported for the first time in Delaware, Nebraska and Texas.

Identification and Life Cycle

The adult EAB is a winged, green, metallic/iridescent colored beetle with 6 legs. It has an elongated thorax and measures approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in length. Its larvae are pale to white colored, flattened, and have segmented bodies with visible brown mouthparts.

While defoliation is a sign of an infected tree, the EAB does not eat the leaves. Adult beetles lay their eggs in the bark. The emerging larvae burrow into the stem of the tree, penetrating the bark, cambium and phloem of the tree. As they tunnel into the sap, they enter the pupae

Continued on next page



Adult Emerald ash borer. Photo by Leah Bauer

stage, eating as they develop and disrupting the circulation of water and vital nutrients throughout the tissues of the host tree. After developing inside the tree, the adult beetles exit the tree, chewing holes from their chamber through the bark, leaving a characteristic D-shaped exit hole. Signs of infection are loss of leaves in the canopy, S-shaped passages underneath the bark, and D-shaped exit openings in the bark.

Preventing EAB - Don't Move Firewood!

Prevention efforts are paramount in Florida and much of the focus is on **firewood**. Many insects and diseases can't move very far on their own, but when people move firewood they can jump hundreds of miles. New infestations can destroy forests, property values, and cost huge sums of money to control. **Firewood is the most common means of EAB spread.** Many public parks that offer camping opportunities are aware of the problem and are asking campers not to bring firewood with them to the park.

Tree planting programs may also be a concern as new ash trees, especially those introduced here from other states, could be infected with EAB eggs or larvae. Anyone planting ash trees from other states should be extremely cautious and verify that their trees are not infected with EAB before they are planted.

In addition to these measures, many land managers are participating in trapping programs in which brightly colored sticky traps are placed in ash tree canopies to attract and collect the beetles. Fortunately EAB are a desirable food for some birds like woodpeckers, which will consume many EAB's per day. Good woodpecker habitat could be a useful part of controlling this insect.

If you believe you may have found an emerald ash borer, or recognize signs of EAB damage to an ash tree, please contact the Florida



Emerald ash borer damage. Photo by Steven Katovich

Department of Agriculture and Consumer services at 1-888-397-1517.

For more about this and other insects whose means of spread is with firewood, see <http://www.dontmovefirewood.org/>. For more information about invasive exotic species, funding, and regional efforts to prevent and control infestations in Florida see the Florida Invasive Species Partnership web site at <http://www.floridainvasives.org/>.

Get Email Updates!

Don't miss out on upcoming events and news! A lot happens between issues of this quarterly newsletter. Send an email to cdemers@ufl.edu to be added to the stewardship listserv. Updates are sent every week or two and include the latest calendar of workshops, tours and other events, a link to the current issue of this newsletter, updates on cost-share and other assistance programs and resources, and other stewardship related information.

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 **4th Quarter 2016** Timber Mart-South report were:

Florida Stumpage Prices

Pine pulpwood: \$33/cord (\$12/ton), ↓ from 3rd Qtr. 2016

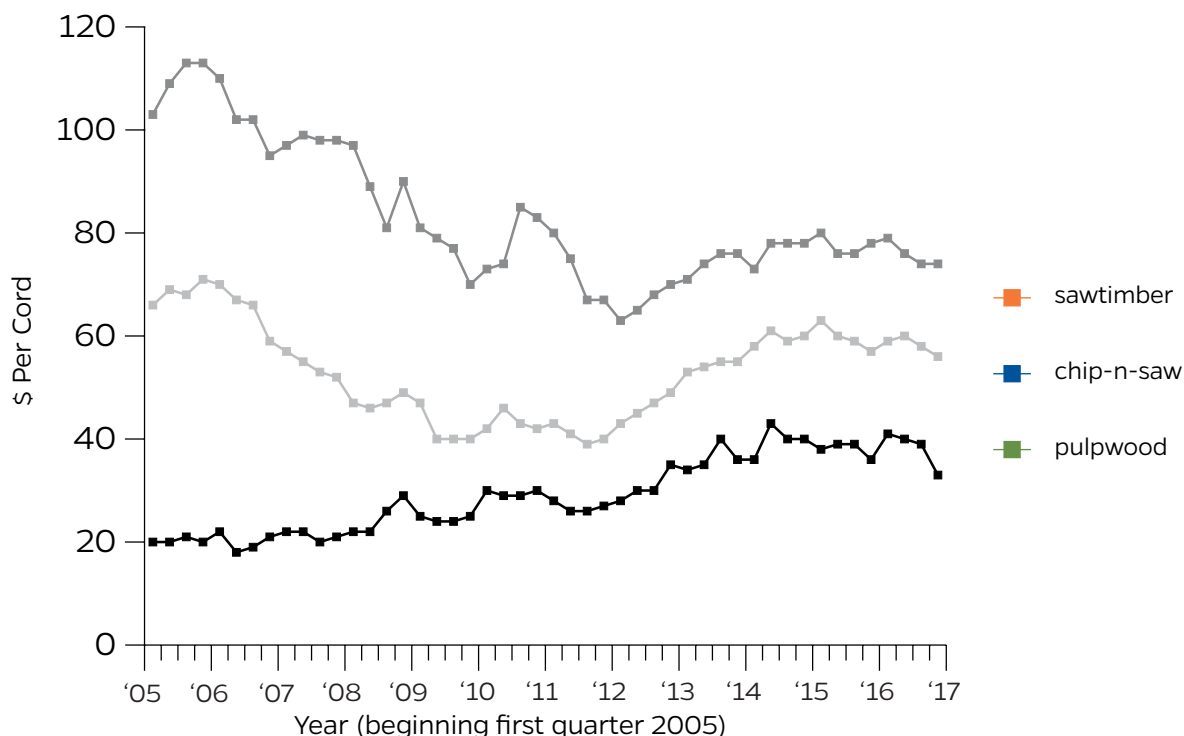
Pine C-N-S: \$56/cord (\$21/ton), ↓

Pine sawtimber: \$74/cord (\$28/ton), same

Trend Report

Dry weather, extreme in some areas, prevailed across much of the Southeastern U.S. in the fourth quarter, keeping stumpage prices down for all timber products. Despite the negative trend lines for the quarter, market indicators remained stable and supportive. Pine and hardwood lumber prices improved and U.S. building construction continued to improve with housing starts up from the same period last year. Log and lumber exports continued their increase and the U.S. dollar remained relatively strong in the last quarter of 2016.

Average Pine Stumpage Prices for Florida
1st Qtr 2005 through 4th Qtr 2016



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.



John Rudniansyn (L) with Greg Barton, Marion County



Jackie Lanum and Holmes Hendrickson with Tyler Trent (R), Holmes County



Alison and Jim Browne with Phillip Garrett (L), Calhoun County

Upcoming Stewardship, Small Farm and Other Events

Date	Event, Location, Contact
Feb 15	Pond Management Workshop , 1 to 5 pm ET, UF/IFAS Research and Education Center, 155 Research Rd, Quincy, FL 32351. \$10 fee. <i>Contact UF/IFAS Extension Gadsden County at (850) 875-7255 to register. Contact ZaDarreya Wiggins, zaderreya.wiggins@famu.edu for more information.</i>
Feb 16	2017 Cool-Season Forages & Wildlife Food Plot Field Day , 9:30 am to 3:00 pm ET, UF/IFAS Extension Marion County Ag Center, Ocala, FL. \$20 early bird registration by Feb 10. <i>See link above for registration or call (352) 671-8400.</i>
Feb 19	Red Hills Fire Festival , Free outdoor celebration, 11 am -3 pm ET, Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy, 13093 Henry Beadel Drive, Tallahassee, FL, 32312. <i>Contact Brian Wiebler, (850) 363-1079.</i>
Feb 23	Breakfast on the Back Forty: Wild Turkey Management Workshop , 8:00 am to 12:00 pm CT, forest property located 1 mile south of Hwy 85 N near Laurel Hill, FL. Breakfast provided, pre-register by February 16. <i>Contact Billie Clayton at (850) 767-3634.</i>
Mar 6-7	ForestHER Workshop , Coffee County Extension Office, 1055 E Mckinnon St, New Brockton, AL 36351. Provided by Alabama Cooperative Extension. Hands-on workshop will help women learn about forests and forest resource management. \$70 fee. <i>Contact Bence Carter, (334) 894-5596, jbc0057@aces.edu</i>
Mar 9	Forest Stewardship Tour at Lloyd Adams' NuView Properties in Columbia County , 9 am to 2 pm ET. \$10 fee. <i>Get info and register at https://fsp-tour030917.eventbrite.com/ or call UF/IFAS Columbia Extension County at (386) 758-1030.</i>
Mar 16	Forest Stewardship Workshop: Sell Your Timber for what it's Worth , 9:00 am to 3:00 pm ET, UF/IFAS Extension Nassau County Office, 543350 US Highway 1, Callahan, FL 32011. \$10 fee. <i>Details and registration at http://fsp-workshop031617.eventbrite.com/ or call UF/IFAS Extension Nassau County (904) 530-6353 to reserve a space.</i>
April 21	Invasive Exotic Species and Control Workshop (pdf link) , 9 am to 3 pm, UF/IFAS Extension Marion County Auditorium, Ocala, FL. \$10 fee. <i>Register at https://fsp-workshop042117.eventbrite.com/ or call UF/IFAS Extension Marion County at (352) 671-8400 to reserve a space.</i>
May 22-25	GIS Workshop: Applied Geospatial Solutions in Natural Resources , Tall Timbers Research Station, 13093 Henry Beadel Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32312. <i>Email Theron Terhune, theron@ttrs.org for details.</i>
June 12-15	Advanced GIS Workshop: Python scripting and GIS Programming , Tall Timbers Research Station, 13093 Henry Beadel Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32312. <i>Email Theron Terhune, theron@ttrs.org for details.</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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