

FLORIDA LAND STEWARD



A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

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Congratulations Ben and Louann Williams: Florida Land Stewards of 2019

By Joe Vaughn, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Jeremy Olson, St. Johns River Water Management District

Ben and Louann Williams have owned and managed the Wetland Preserve LLC since 2008. This 3,725-acre property in Putnam County is composed of mesic flatwoods, bottomland forest, floodplain swamp, and sandhill. It is adjacent to the Rice Creek Conservation Area which is owned by the St. Johns River Water Management District. Numerous seepage streams originate along the western ridge of this property and flow eastward into Rice Creek, a tributary of the St. Johns River. The property's inclusion in Florida Forever's Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway project area, as well as the North Florida Land Trust's Ocala to Osceola (O2O) Conservation Corridor, demonstrates its regional significance. Recognizing the land's ecological importance, Ben and Louann are working with the North Florida

Land Trust to actively pursue a conservation easement through the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program to protect the property from future development.

When the Williams purchased the land, most of the upland areas were heavily planted in slash and loblolly pine. Under the Williams' management, there has been a gradual conversion to longleaf pine in appropriate areas during routine silvicultural operations. Several of the slash and loblolly stands have been thinned from a basal area of 130 square feet per acre down to 55 square feet per acre. This reduction of the pine canopy allows more sunlight to reach the forest floor, stimulating the critically important native groundcover, an essential habitat

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Florida Land Stewards of 2019, Ben and Louann Williams, at their Wetland Preserve property in Putnam County. Photo by Karen Parker, FWC.



(Left) Thinned slash pine, photo by Karen Parker, FWC. **(Center)** A very rare sighting of the rusty red salamander (*Psuedotriton montanus floridanus*), photo by Jonathan Mays, FWC. **(Right)** Louann and daughter Ashley on a prescribed burn, photo by Joe Vaughn, FWC.

for many wildlife species. In addition, hardwood encroachment on the sandhill has been addressed using hexazinone herbicide, which targets woody species while preserving the desired native groundcover. Introduction of prescribed fire, plus aggressive programs to control feral hogs and invasive plant species, has further benefitted the natural communities and timber stands.

Ben and Louann have received assistance from the FWC, St Johns River WMD, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Forest Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service and, in turn, have reciprocated by hosting landowner tours and participating in numerous outreach events. Ben, Louann, and their daughter Ashley continue the outreach through their agritourism business, Custom River Excursions and Wetland Preserve LLC, and by hosting many field tours of their property for various civic organizations interested in wildlife and timber management. Ashley has offered wildlife educational opportunities to local students by bringing reptile and amphibian specimens to schools, allowing the students to get up close to nature while learning to appreciate our native wildlife. The family also has been interviewed many times by the media and other organizations, and in every interview their love and respect for the land comes through loud and clear.

Ben and Louann are keen observers of the wildlife and plants that

depend on their preserve, and their management takes the needs of these species into account. The last time an FWC Landowner Assistance Program biologist was on the preserve, Louann apologized for their "overgrown" forest roads, stating "The turkey hens and their poultts really use these roads for foraging (bugging habitat) during spring and we would hate to take that away from them, so we mow later in the year." The ability to understand animal behavior, and the willingness to accommodate it in their management decisions, speaks to the admirable land ethic this family possesses. The Williams family's desire to better understand their land and increase scientific knowledge of wildlife is also demonstrated by graciously allowing the FWC's research staff to conduct surveys for uncommon, threatened, or endangered species on their property over the last several years, providing critical population and location data on declining species.

Not only has stewardship of this ecologically important property greatly improved the timber resources, wildlife habitat, and water quality of Putnam County and the surrounding region, Ben, Louann, and Ashley are also involved in multiple conservation endeavors. They have been instrumental in developing the North Florida Prescribed Burn Association (PBA), Florida's first landowner-led prescribed fire cooperative, organized to increase safe private land burning through

training, experience, and networking. They are dedicating much effort to expanding this concept in Florida by initiating and then taking a leadership role in the formation of this PBA and promoting this concept at landowner outreach events. They also participate annually in the Florida Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services Operation Outdoor Freedom, where wounded veterans are given guided hunting opportunities on public and private properties.

Their forest management is certified sustainable by the American Tree Farm System. They participate in the FWC's Black Bear Stakeholder Group for their region. Ben also represents the private sector on the Oyster Water Quality Task Force for the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve. And last, but not least, is their willingness to provide access to the Florida Trail through their property. These are just some of the ways the Williams family highlights the critical role that private landowners play in the preservation of Florida's natural resources and economy.



Wetland Preserve is a certified Tree Farm and Stewardship Forest, photo by Ben Williams

Landowner Enrollment in Florida's Wildlife Best Management Practices Continues to Grow

By Josh Cucinella, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

A large portion of Florida's rural land is privately owned, and many private landowners manage their land in ways that support fish, wildlife, and their habitats. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) recognizes that this private land stewardship is important to maintaining Florida's wildlife populations. Florida's Wildlife Best Management Practices (WBMP) for State Imperiled Species provide simple steps to help owners and managers of forestry and agriculture operations to achieve even better outcomes for fish and wildlife, while offering peace of mind that they are working to balance wildlife needs and resource utilization.

The WBMPs are provided under two distinct programs, depending on landowner objectives: Forestry WBMPs and Agriculture WBMPs. These voluntary programs are administered jointly by FWC and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' (FDACS) Office of Agricultural Water Policy and the Florida Forest Service (FFS). Since the WBMP programs began (2014-2015), combined enrollment has steadily grown to nearly 4 million acres, two-thirds of which is in private ownership. The WBMPs are organized around protecting 16 state imperiled species (i.e., species designated State Threatened [ST] because they are rare or declining), but the practices can benefit a broad range of species, both rare and common.

There are many good reasons to voluntarily enroll and implement WBMPs. An important feature of WBMP enrollment for many landowners is the elimination of the enrollee's liability if an 'incidental take' of an identified species occurs during the course of regular agricultural or forestry operations, and when recommended practices



Wildlife Best Management Practices for State Imperiled Species provide simple steps to help owners and managers of forestry and agriculture operations to achieve positive outcomes for wildlife species, like the gopher tortoise, while offering peace of mind that they are working to balance wildlife needs and resource utilization. Photo by Cliff Leonard, FWC.

described in the WBMP manuals are followed (see links to manuals below). Incidental take means to harass, harm, or kill imperiled wildlife while engaged in an otherwise lawful activity such as operations related to forestry or agriculture. Without participation in one of the WBMP programs, a landowner must obtain a permit to impact an imperiled species (Incidental Take Permit), which may cost money and slow down operations.

WBMP enrollment provides landowners with valuable information on which species may be impacted by their operations and provides guidance on what they can do to minimize potential impacts. Mr. Jon Gould, a private landowner in Northwest Florida who decided to enroll his land in the Forestry WBMP program in 2015, explains, "At the time, I thought it sounded like something good to be involved in and could provide us some protection if they ever had to do work where there happened to be gopher tortoises. I was also interested in learning about what species FWC thought may be impacted by forestry and what practices they would recommend."

WBMPs are not difficult for landowners to put into practice. Mr. Gould describes what the Forestry WBMP program looks like on the ground, "Only one [species] that is really on the property is the gopher tortoise, and we have quite a few of them. I grew up with gopher tortoises on the east coast, and I just really like them. So, we do what we can to watch out for them, especially the little ones. I mow in some stands when I can't burn, and I will always avoid any burrows and their adjoining aprons. Occasionally we get a kestrel, but none this year. The loggers leave the snags and the planters just go around them during machine planting. Woodpeckers use the snags, and occasionally even a bluebird family."

When Mr. Gould avoids gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*, ST) burrows during his mowing activities (especially if done during specific times of year) and leaves dead standing trees (when safe) to provide nesting cavities for Southeastern American kestrels (*Falco sparverius paulus*, ST), he is doing his best to minimize his impact to the imperiled species, which is the goal of the WBMP programs.

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Because he is enrolled and implementing the recommended practices, Mr. Gould would not be held liable if an incidental "take" occurred while working on his land.

If you would like to take advantage of one of the WBMP programs, the enrollment process is simple and starts with completing a Notice of Intent (NOI), which is a short, one-time application. You can download the WBMP manual for forestry (<http://bit.ly/ForestWBMPs>) or agriculture <http://bit.ly/AgriWBMPs>) for descriptions of all the practices, the

NOI, and instructions on how to enroll your land.

FWC's Landowner Assistance Program (LAP) biologists are available to assist private landowners with enrollment into the WBMP program, to provide wildlife habitat management guidance, or to connect landowners with additional land management resources. Please contact Anthony Grossman, Anthony.Grossman@MyFWC.com, for more information or visit FWC's Landowner Assistance Program's website at MyFWC.com/LAP.



Standing dead trees, where safe to retain, can provide nesting cavities for the Southeastern American kestrel. Photo by Jack Rogers, FWC.

ACF Consultant Corner: A Consultant Looks at Michael through the Eyes of a Landowner

By Joe Shiver, Florida Chapter Association of Consulting Foresters

As the owner of a small consulting forestry company in the Live Oak – Lake City area, I make my living providing forest management assistance. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Michael, my thoughts eventually turned to considering what services a consultant might be able to provide for a landowner in this difficult situation. As a native of the Panhandle from Calhoun County and the current owner of the family tree farm, I realized I would probably be my own biggest client. I sure hope the old adage about a man who represents himself having a fool for a client doesn't apply here!

Damage assessment was the first priority, but before I ever saw the timber I began calling timber buyers in anticipation of needing a salvage harvest. Making the drive from Suwannee County to Calhoun, I began to worry as we started to see damage near Quincy. My heart sank nearing Blountstown as I saw huge hardwoods and pines blown over or snapped like toothpicks. When we turned in to the old home place, I was stunned to see the 45-year-old

cedars I had helped plant as a boy lying twisted and mangled across the drive. Making the damage assessment on our roughly 250 acres of merchantable planted pines was easy; it was a total loss. It was very clear that a salvage harvest was desperately needed.

Not every case is that cut and dried, and a consultant can assist in deciding which stands need to be salvaged and in what order. For example, our 35+ year-old slash and loblolly pines were more than 95% damaged with most trees being broken or completely uprooted. Those trees needed to be salvaged as soon as possible. This could mean selling the timber at extremely reduced prices, or in some cases giving it away, in order to salvage as much value as possible and reduce the site preparation costs for reforestation. On the other hand, our 11-year-old planted pines had a higher percentage of trees that were only leaning or partially uprooted and still with significant root-soil contact. While these trees will ultimately need to be salvaged, the soil contact will allow them to stay green longer,

and it may be possible to delay the harvest until stumpage prices have somewhat recovered, thus increasing the salvage value and decreasing the loss.

A local consultant will be able to assist in securing a buyer for the timber to be salvaged. Local consultants deal with local timber buyers on a regular basis, and therefore, have contacts with timber buyers that the average landowner probably doesn't. Former Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam recounted the old saying that "extreme circumstances call for extreme measures". With more timber on the ground than the local mills could use in ten years, these are certainly "extreme circumstances", and it's clear that a significant portion of the damaged timber won't be salvaged. Reforestation costs on un-salvaged tracts could approach \$1,000/acre, so landowners need to utilize every resource available: consultants, personal contacts, calling in favors, or whatever it

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might be, to try to ensure a salvage harvest for their timber.

The next priority would be estimating the value of the timber lost. If a salvage harvest can be made for all the timber, this estimate is easily obtained. The loss would be the market value of the timber prior to the hurricane, less the salvage value received. If no salvage harvest is conducted, and recent volume data isn't already available, the valuation requires a timber cruise. Downed trees make vehicular and foot access for timber cruising very difficult. I know this from personal experience, but a local consultant can design and conduct a suitable timber cruise to estimate timber volumes. The consultant's knowledge of the local timber market will be helpful in applying appropriate stumpage rates to the estimated timber volumes to produce a final valuation. Determining a casualty loss for income tax purposes is a bit more complicated, because it's based on the landowner's basis in the timber. A consultant can help with this, but a tax professional should be consulted as well.

In many cases, consultants may use drone imagery to help assess and document damage, and to plan for management activities. It's a good idea to document everything with adequate photographs, and the emerging use of drones in forest management is a new, relatively inexpensive tool that foresters can use to assist their clients. It's especially helpful in this instance where ground access is limited by the mangled mess of downed trees.



Hurricane Michael. (NASA Earth Observatory images by Joshua Stevens, using data from GOES-16)

The final recovery step for the forest landowner is to plan and execute a reforestation program. Again, consultants generally have a broader base of contacts with site preparation and tree planting contractors than do most individual landowners. Consultants can help a landowner "think outside the box" and recommend practices to clear and work around un-salvaged timber to get seedlings in the ground as efficiently and inexpensively as possible. They can also help with information and applications for cost share assistance from programs like the Emergency Forest Restoration Program, administered

by the Farm Service Agency, or the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Hurricane Michael created an extreme situation that will require years and even decades of recovery. I encourage my fellow landowners to do everything possible to salvage their timber; use every contact and every available resource, call in whatever favors they're owed, think outside the box for solutions, and, in the words of the late NC State basketball coach, Jim Valvano, "Don't give up, don't ever give up!"

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 2018** Timber Mart-South report were:

Florida Stumpage Prices

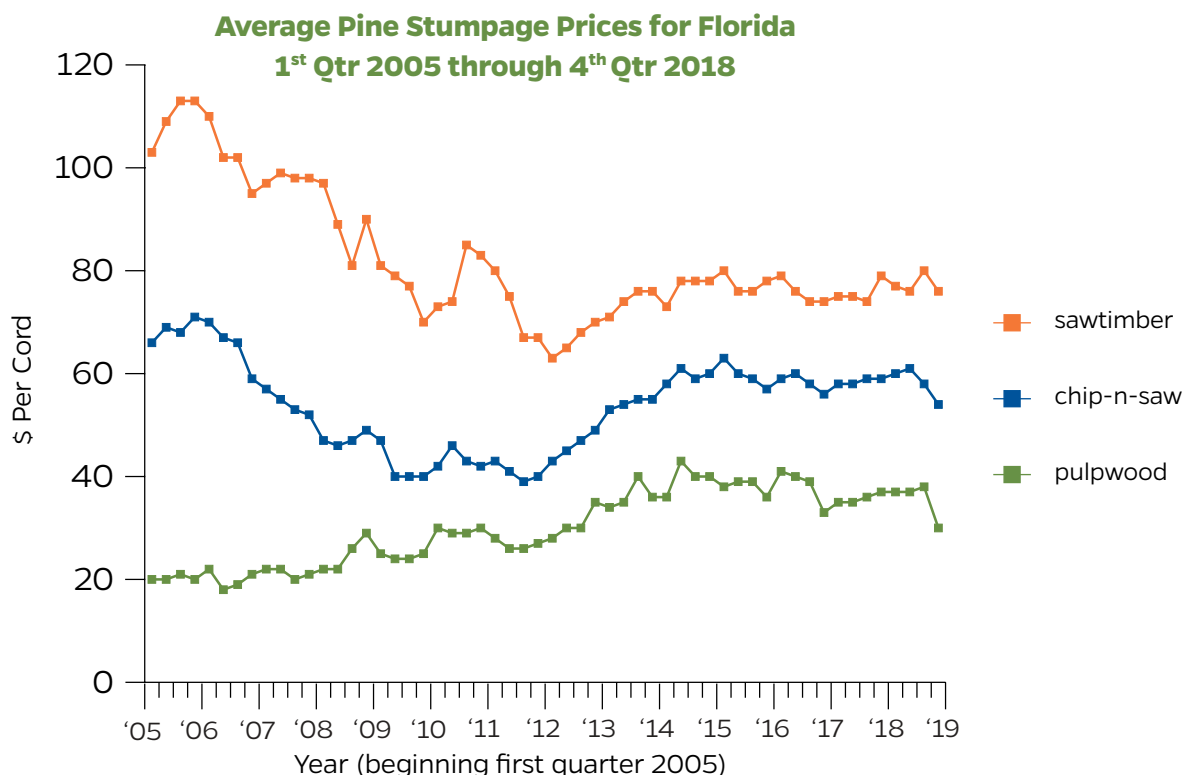
Pine pulpwood: \$30/cord (\$11/ton), ↓ from 3rd Qtr. 2018

Pine C-N-S: \$54/cord (\$20/ton), ↓

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

Trend Report

Hurricane Michael devastated the central Florida Panhandle region and parts of Georgia and Alabama in October 2018, impacting nearly five million acres of timberland. As reflected in this report, forest product markets were impacted significantly. Extensive salvage operations across the region have resulted in reduced stumpage prices across all the major products. Ironically, and despite these trends, Florida sawtimber and chip-n-saw average stumpage prices again ranked highest in the Southern region this quarter. Many are still recovering from Hurricane Michael. We will continue to share information on available disaster recovery assistance and related news and events on Florida Land Steward email updates. Send an email to Chris Demers, cdemers@ufl.edu to be added to the distribution if you are not on it.



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/tree_farm.php

These landowners have achieved certification in the Tree Farm, Forest Stewardship, and/or Forces Forest Programs and demonstrate excellent stewardship of their land resources.



Chet Grimsley (right) with Ryan Hensel, Wakulla County



Jason Chaney, Escambia County



Jim Jernigan with son Jarett, Santa Rosa County



Keith Miller (left) with Eric Strickland, Hardee County



Mike Vandenberg, Santa Rosa County



Michael Price with Ashley White, Santa Rosa County



Vincent Milstead with grandson Mason, Escambia County

Upcoming Stewardship, Small Farm and Other Events

Date	Event, Location, Contact
Feb 23	Florida Scrub-Jay Festival , 10 am to 3:30 pm, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Children's crafts and games, nature exhibits, live animals, watercolor exhibit, live music, presentations, and guided nature walks. <i>See https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Merritt_Island/ or contact the Visitor Center at (321) 861-0669.</i>
Feb 26-28	Prescribed Fire for Wildlife, a Workshop for Private Landowners , UF/IFAS North FL Research & Education Center, 155 Research Rd, Quincy, FL 32351. Provided by UF/IFAS, the Florida Chapter of the Wildlife Society, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. \$25 fee per person. Details and registration are at https://fltws.org/new-events/2019/2/26/prescribed-fire-for-wildlife . <i>For additional information, contact Holly Ober, Holly.Ober@ufl.edu</i>
March 1	Florida Land Stewards of 2019 Tour at Ben and Lou Ann Williams' Wetland Preserve , Putnam County. Join us for a tour of the property and meet some amazing landowners. \$15 fee covers materials and lunch. Register online at https://fsp-tour030119.eventbrite.com .
April 30-May 1	2019 SAF/SFRC Spring Symposium: Family Forests: Sustaining a Legacy . We'll explore the benefits, challenges, and issues around family-owned forests in Florida and the region. Details and registration at https://46-saf-sfrc-spring-symposium.eventbrite.com .

For many more events and information see: floridalandsteward.org

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

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