

FLORIDA LAND STEWARD



A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

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2021 Jon Gould Florida Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year: Ben and Louann Williams

By Ginger Feagle, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The Florida Tree Farm Program is proud to congratulate Ben and Louann Williams of Putnam County as Florida's 2021 Jon Gould Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year. Each year, one Tree Farmer (individual or family) in the state is selected who exhibits exceptional forest stewardship to protect and improve our forest resources and promotes forest stewardship within their community. Across Florida, family forest owners like Ben and Louann care for the largest portion, more than half, of Florida's forests. Their efforts are crucial to the sustainability of our country's natural resources, such as clean water and air, wildlife habitat, carbon storage and a wood supply for the products Americans use every day.

After purchasing over 3,700 acres of former industrial timberlands in 2008, the Williams quickly realized they needed to learn the techniques to manage their land and affiliated natural resources, and they also needed to become a positive voice to communicate the value of forest management. As a family coming from 35-years in the seafood business, having started out commercial fishing for their livelihood on the St. Johns River, the Williams understood how government issues, the value of clean water, and the water cycle relate to the productivity of their land. Appropriately, they named their property "Wetland Preserve" to emphasize the land's connection to nearby water resources.

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An Equal Opportunity Institution.



Ben and Louann Williams at their Wetland Preserve, LLC property in Putnam County, Florida. Photo by Elizabeth Guthrie.

Ben explains, "Today, one of the most satisfying things for us is to be able to manage the land for income while at the same time be managing it for wildlife and ultimately to be able to help protect water quality. We understand as former commercial fishermen that it is important to protect both the resources and the culture that support your livelihood."

Every management decision at Wetland Preserve aims to provide sustainable timber products while integrating wildlife habitat improvements for pollinators, gopher tortoises, deer, turkey, quail, bear, fish, and songbirds. Ben and Louann have used sound management and restoration techniques, including Silviculture Best Management Practices to thin dense slash and loblolly stands, plant longleaf pine, remove non-native plants and animals, and introduce prescribed fire. All of these practices ultimately increase timber productivity and improve wildlife habitat by allowing sunlight to stimulate native groundcover, decrease hardwood competition,

avoid water quality impacts, and maintain the ecological balance (including the important role of nuisance species such as coyotes) as part of the natural ecosystem. To be successful in these activities, the Williams refer to the guidance of their professional consultant Leonard Wood (Jowett & Wood, Inc.) and Florida Land Steward Partners such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, St. Johns River Water Management District, and US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Williams stand strong in their commitment to protect Wetland Preserve for future generations by successfully pursuing and acquiring a Florida Forever Conservation Easement that allows them to continue their forestry and wildlife management practices while eliminating the incentives to develop the land. Within this agreement, the Williams have gone above and beyond normal protections by adding limitations on the potential harvest of hardwood oak hammocks and

cypress, even further protecting the wetland areas for which the property was aptly named.

Louann and Ben passionately promote the many stewardship organizations they are involved with including the Florida Forestry Association, Forest Stewardship Program, Florida Tree Farm Program, and the North Florida Prescribed Burn Association. The Williams enjoy sharing their trials and experiences with other landowners and are appreciative to those who have helped them along the way. The Williams provide nature-based education and recreational opportunities by hosting field tours, allowing hiking access via the Florida Trail, and organizing disabled veteran hunting events. Ben recently explained, "We always knew it was important, so we just continue to do the outreach - it seemed like the right thing to do. It was never like work, I don't think at any point someone left our property after taking advantage of the opportunities to come see what we

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(R) Prescribed fire is an important management practice at Wetland Preserve. Photo by Megan Ellis. (L) The gopher tortoise is one of many species benefiting from prescribed fire and other habitat management practices taking place at Wetland Preserve. Photo by Cliff Leonard, FWC.



(R) Ben and Louann are active in the leadership and activities of the North Florida Prescribed Burn Association. Photo by Ben Williams. (L) Florida Land Steward tour at Wetland Preserve in 2019.

are doing, where we felt like we've done some work. We actually felt like we've done a little bit to help the industry." It is because of their community outreach and land management ethic that they earned prior recognition as the 2019 Florida Land Steward Landowner of the Year.

On the Wetland Preserve's website (<http://benandlouann.com/>), the Williams proudly boast their property as "Conservation Compatible Forestry" and explain, "Conservation and stewardship are at the heart of how we plan for the future of Wetland Preserve and conduct daily management operations." Ben explained during the Award presentation at the recent Florida Forestry Association meeting, "We still have

friends in the commercial fishing industry, you don't think about it, but what you do supports other parts of the economy in Florida. Other people are dependent, these things are tied together. So, when we saw the Standards of the American Tree Farm System, we understood how they fit together. We are very supportive of that because it is supporting more than just trees and more than just forestry."

"The Florida Tree Farm Program commends Ben and Louann Williams for their outstanding commitment to sustainable forestry," said Tony Grossman, President of the Florida Tree Farm Program. "The Williams are great examples of Floridians who combine wood, water,

wildlife, and recreation values with working their land and sharing with others to lead the way."

The Florida Tree Farm Program greatly appreciates the positive impact that Ben and Louann Williams provide to Florida landowners as the 2021 Jon Gould Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year.

To learn more about the Williams' management, see their featured article in the Florida Land Steward Newsletter (Winter/Spring 2019 Vol 8 , Number 1), which can be accessed at https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/media/programsifasufedu/florida-land-steward/newsletter/FL_Land_Steward_8.1.pdf.



The American Tree Farm System®, a program of the American Forest Foundation, is administered locally by the Florida Tree Farm Program. The American Tree Farm System® is the largest and oldest sustainable woodland program in the United States designed specifically for family forest owners. The program provides over 69,000 family forest owners with tools, education, and a community of shared interest to support their conservation goals. Enrolled Tree Farmers, in return, care for their land, meeting rigorous Standards of Sustainability that are internationally endorsed

and recognized to assure the provision of wood supplies, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and clean water. Collectively, there are nearly 18 million forested acres within the ATFS program in the United States. The American Tree Farm System and the American Forest Foundation share a mission to deliver meaningful conservation impact through the empowerment of family forest landowners. To learn more about the Florida Tree Farm Program, visit their website <https://www.treefarmsystem.org/florida> or contact Ginger Feagle, Ginger.Feagle@MyFWC.com.

Association of Consulting Foresters Consultant's Corner: Invasive Plants

By David S. Lewis

Invasive plants, animals, and insects have become a major headache for rural landowners throughout the United States, and Florida has been described as the "Jurassic Park" of invasive species. Invasions of nonnative plants into the landscape of southern forests continue mostly unchecked. These nonnative, invasive plants have spread, and they decrease forest diversity and productivity as well as degrading wildlife habitat. Some of the introductions of these species were accidental but many were brought in as ornamentals, livestock forage, erosion control (like the kudzu vine), or soil enhancers. Without their natural predators from their home habitat, many of these species' populations grow out of balance. The seeds or spores of these plants are often spread inadvertently by mowers and road graders along roads, canals, and railroad tracks.

The most cost-effective way for landowners to avoid problems with invasive plants is to identify and control them very early after their introduction to a property. This requires a lot of vigilance on the part of the landowner, coupled with the ability to act quickly and decisively. They can often be treated effectively

if they are found and treated early and aggressively. In other words, hit 'em hard and hit 'em fast! Costs to treat small infestations are usually manageable but can quickly spiral out of control and become cost prohibitive to eradicate once the species gets a foothold.

Recognizing and identifying invasive plant species is the first hurdle for landowners to overcome. If you see a tree, vine, or plant on your land that seems new or unusual, there's a good chance it is nonnative and invasive. There is a long list of these in Florida, but some of the most common "bad actors" are cogongrass, kudzu, Japanese climbing fern, Chinaberrytree, Japanese Privet, tallowtree, bamboo, mimosa, tropical soda apple, Brazilian peppertree, melaleuca, and Japanese Honeysuckle.

A great resource for identifying invasive plants is A Field Guide for the Identification of Invasive Plants in Southern Forests (USDA General Technical Report SRS-119). This guide is available for download at <https://srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/35292>. It has some very good and helpful pictures of the most common invasive plants. Finding and identifying these culprits is one thing but

eradicating them is a different matter. Although herbicide applications are the most recommended remedy, and often the most (or only) effective treatment, sometimes there are other ways to get the job done. Among those methods are

intensive grazing, prescribed burning, and mechanical means such as mowing, disking, mulching, and chain saw removal. Combining these methods in some fashion is often needed to get the upper hand in the battle against invasive plants. In very small infestations, simply pulling or digging them up can work.

Another helpful publication from the USDA is A Management Guide for Invasive Plants in Southern Forests (<https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/36915>). Also see the University of Florida's Invasive Species Program portal at <https://invasivespecies.ifas.ufl.edu/> for resources on invasive plants, insects, reptiles, and other taxa. There are also invasive plant publications on AskIFAS: https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/entity/topic/invasive_weeds, and technical and cost-share assistance can be found on the Florida Invasive Species Partnership site at <https://www.floridainvasives.org/>.

Extension agents, county foresters, forestry consultants, wildlife biologists, and other natural resource professionals can also be great resources to assist landowners in coming up with a plan to attack and eradicate invasive species. Choose a consultant or natural resource professional who has experience with invasive plants and their control and listen to their advice. It can often take several years of hard work and expense to eliminate a particular invasive plant problem, so it requires a healthy dose of determination and grit. Generally, the first year is the most expensive and then the cost tends to decline each year if the plan is working and you don't go to sleep at the wheel.



Cogongrass is among the worst invasive weeds in the world. Photo by David Lewis.

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Pond Pine: The Underdog Fire Pine

By Joshua Faylo, Conservation Programs Manager, Florida Forest Service

One of Florida's lesser known pines, the pond pine (*Pinus serotina*), has a potential to be used in habitat restoration along with the longleaf pine. Pond pine has been harvested as timber and as a pulpwood product, but it has rarely been cultivated or reforested in most of the Southeastern U.S. Without natural regeneration, this tree species has likely been removed from the landscape at a greater rate than it has regenerated over time, which doesn't bode well for our fire dependent ecosystems. However, over the past few years, it has received some attention, being used in longleaf pine ecotone restoration with the hopes that it could help limit woody wetland encroachment by providing fuel to help carry fire further from the uplands into wetter sites.

Pond pine can easily be mistaken for loblolly or slash pines and is known to hybridize with those species. One of its most discerning characteristics is that it can often have epicormic sprouts of needles all along its trunk and branches, particularly as a response to fire and other stresses. The cones are round, almost egg-shaped, and very serotinous; requiring fire to melt the resin that would otherwise seal the cone shut. Heat from fire also seems to bend open the scales of the cones, thus allowing the seeds to drop.

Occasionally, pond pine can have a fourth needle in a fascicle compared to the two to three needles per



Pond pine with pitcher plants.

fascicle of slash pine and the consistent three needles per fascicle of loblolly and longleaf pines. As with most other botanical classification, it is the reproductive structure which provides the most consistent distinction from the other pine species. Slash pine cones tend to be more elongated and red (4 to 5 inches long). Loblolly will tend to have prickles on their slender and more golden brown cones (4 to 5 inches long). Pond pine cones will usually not have prickles and they will tend to be more yellow-golden brown and egg-shaped.

The Role of Pond Pine in Habitat Restoration

St. Marks River Preserve State Park, formerly St. Joe Paper Company land, may be the first place to

include pond pine in its ten-year management plan. Efforts there are focused on restoring longleaf pine and a more healthy fire regime to the landscape. The preserve also features a seepage slope with pitcher plants. Pond pine was established to help carry fire to these wetter sites and improve the habitat for these plants. Other conservation and environmental organizations have sought out pond pine as part of their restoration efforts as well. Where the intent is to restore fire to the system, pond pine is a great facilitator. With time and outreach we may see pond pine used alongside longleaf and other species for the restoration of the fire dependent ecosystems in which it can play a crucial role.

Don't miss out on news and events!

Sign up for the regular updates! Send an email to cdemers@ufl.edu to be added to the email listserv. Florida Land Steward email updates are sent once a week or every other week and include the latest calendar of workshops, tours and other events; a link to the current issue of this quarterly newsletter; updates on cost-share and other assistance programs, opportunities, and resources; and other stewardship related news and information.

All the latest news and events are online at the UF/IFAS Florida Land Steward Program web site: <https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/florida-land-steward/>

TIMBER PRICE UPDATE

The timber price 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 **3rd Quarter 2021** Timber Mart-South report were:

Florida Stumpage Prices

Pine pulpwood: \$21/ton, ↑ from 2nd Qtr. 2021

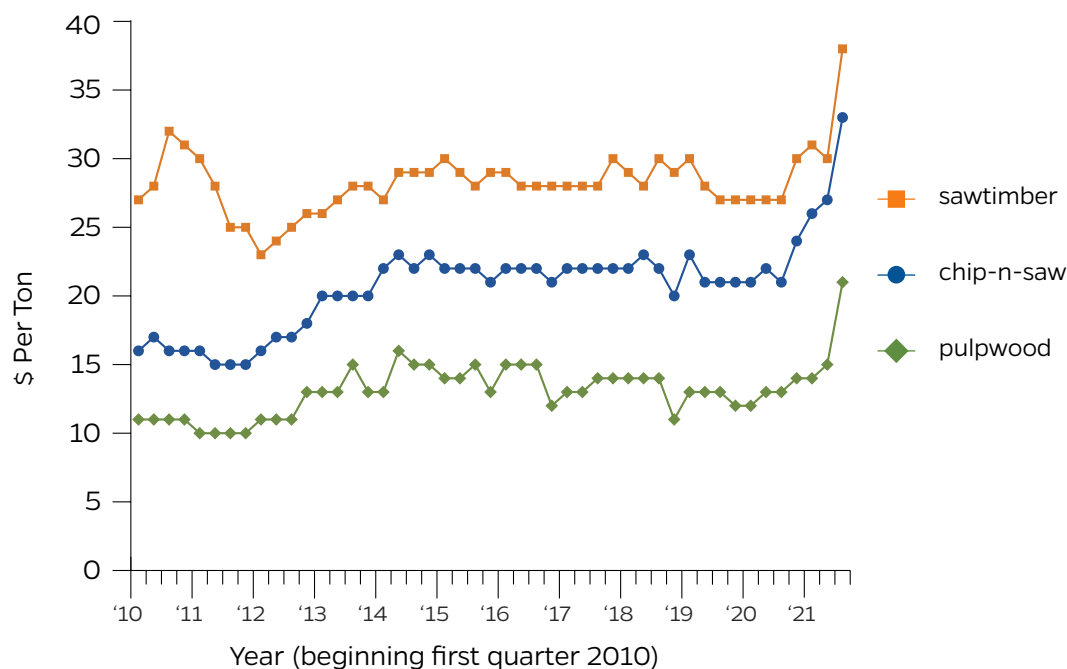
Pine C-N-S: \$33/ton, ↑

Pine sawtimber: \$38/ton, ↑

Trend Report

Steady demand and constrained wood supplies caused by continued extremely wet conditions in many areas have again resulted in a boost in timber stumpage prices in the third quarter of 2021. This was amplified in Florida, where average prices made an unusually large jump in excess of about \$5 per ton for the three major pine products. Interestingly, and according to the Timber Mart-South report, the increase in sawtimber stumpage prices this quarter was accompanied by cooled market conditions and an over 50% decline in the retail prices of softwood lumber. This trend in stumpage prices may be too good to continue but we'll be watching what the last quarter of 2021 brings.

Average Pine Stumpage Prices for Florida (\$/Ton)
1st Qtr 2010 through 3rd Qtr 2021



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 LANDOWNERS

More information about certification in these programs is available at:

<https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service/For-Landowners/Programs/Forest-Stewardship-Program>

<https://www.treefarmssystem.org/florida>

<https://myfwc.com/lap>

These landowners have achieved certification in the Tree Farm, Forest Stewardship, and/or Wildlife Habitat Recognition Program and demonstrate excellent stewardship of their land resources.



Charles Kelly, Escambia County



Duane Spears (R) with Lanie Carter, Gilchrist County



Joe Parell, Washington County



Rod Allen, Escambia County



Stephanie Hudson (R) with Cathy Hardin, Escambia County



Steve Couturier, Jackson County



Tom Flowers, Escambia County



Stephen Melvin, Calhoun County

Upcoming Events

Date	Event, Location, Contact
Nov. 18	Florida Ag Expo. 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, 14625 Co Rd 672, Wimauma, FL 33598. This event is a partnership between AgNet Media, Inc. and the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. It also includes the Florida Tomato Committee, Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association and others. <i>See https://floridaagexpo.net/ for details.</i>
Nov. 18	Florida Land Steward Webinar: Gopher Tortoise Recipient Sites - Conservation and Financial Benefits. 2 to 3:30 p.m. ET. Provided by the UF/IFAS Florida Land Steward Program and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Want to help conserve the gopher tortoise and financially benefit from your efforts? Join us to learn more about opportunities to generate additional revenue from your land while benefiting a threatened, keystone species. Private landowners' contributions are essential to the conservation of this important ecosystem engineer and applying for a recipient site permit has never been easier. Approved for 1.5 Cat. 1 SAF CFEs. <i>Details and registration are at: https://ufl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_NZFtntLWSsCh20I8ZCO_Qw</i>
Dec. 1	Best Management Practices for Forestry in Florida Webinar. 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET. Provided by Florida Forest Service. This is a free technical training to educate forestry professionals, landowners, and land managers about Florida's Silviculture Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality, and the Forestry Wildlife Best Management Practices for State Imperiled Species (WBMPs). Approved for 5.5 Cat. 1 SAF CFEs. <i>Details and registration are at: https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/8878303924514554369</i>
Jan. 29, 2022	Sarasota County FIRE FEST. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. ET, rain or shine, Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve 1800 Mabry Carlton Parkway, Venice, FL. FIRE FEST provides a first-hand look at how prescribed burns protect our communities and property from wildfires, as well as maintain Florida's natural ecosystems for present and future generations. A part of Prescribed Fire Awareness Week, this is a fun opportunity for the whole family to learn how fire is used carefully and effectively on our natural lands, right here in Sarasota County. <i>For more information call (941) 861-5000. Information will be posted at https://www.carltonreserve.org/fire-fest/</i>

More events, news, and information can be found at programs.ifas.ufl.edu/florida-land-steward

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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