

# FLORIDA LAND STEWARD



A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

WINTER/SPRING 2025 – VOLUME 14, NO. 1

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## Congratulations Rebecca and Manny Mendoza, 2025 Florida Land Steward Landowners of the Year

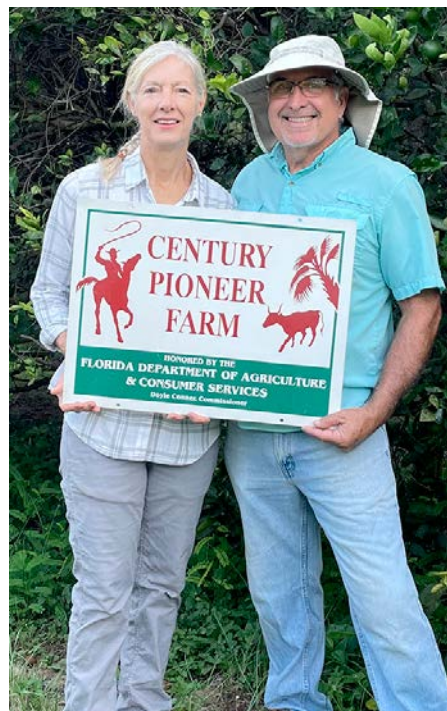
By Jason Ballard, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Manny and Rebecca Mendoza continue to carry on a long history of land stewardship on the 120-acre Jolly Palms at Mohawk property located in Lake County, on the north end of what is known geologically as the Lake Wales Ridge. The family history began in 1888 when Rebecca's great uncle, Charles A. Stokes, purchased the land and planted the first grove of citrus trees. The commercial citrus industry was on the rise in this area until the freezes over the 1894-1895 winter damaged a large percentage of groves and drove many producers out of business. Excellent fishing and hunting resources were found

in the area and that led Charles to open the Jolly Palms Hunting and Fishing Lodge in 1897. The lodge consisted of a main house and three cabins. The Orange Belt and Tavares & Gulf Railroads ran through the lodge's front yard to pick up mail and to drop off guests throughout the seasons. Business was steady and the following year in 1898, Harry K. Stokes (Rebecca's grandfather), arrived at the lodge to work as a hunting guide for his brother Charles.

### Jolly Palms Lodge and Cabins

The lodge was featured in the November 1900 *Field and Stream* Magazine article, "A Winter Flight to Florida". Not long after, W.T. and Laura Heddon of Heddon Fishing Lures arrived at the lodge to test their lures on the prized Florida largemouth bass that existed in the many surrounding lakes. A second outdoor magazine publisher, Forest and Stream, ran an article in 1906, also highlighting the great outdoor opportunities that existed here. The hunting lodge closed in the 1920's as Harry focused on his duties as a local bank president and Lake County Commissioner for 5 terms that ended in 1956. Harry's youngest son, Dick Stokes (Rebecca's father), graduated from the University of Florida in 1949 with a Forestry degree and joined the National Park Service (NPS) in 1950. Following a 30-year career with the NPS, Dick returned to the Jolly Palms full time and following the freezes of the 1980s, developed a Forest Management Plan,



Congratulations Rebecca and Manny Mendoza, 2025 Florida Land Steward Landowners of the Year. Photo by Rebecca Mendoza.

Funding for this publication is provided by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Florida Forest Service and a grant from the Florida Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee.

An Equal Opportunity Institution.

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Manny and Rebecca at the historic Jolly Palms Lodge & Cabins. Photo by Rebecca Mendoza.



Children Drew and Alex planting longleaf pine. Photo by Rebecca Mendoza.



Manny working on removing a patch of downy rose myrtle. Photo by Rebecca Mendoza.

in conjunction with the Florida Forest Service, to replace some of the old citrus groves with slash pine plantings. The property was also designated as a Century Pioneer Farm in 1990. Dick continually encouraged his brothers to hold the land instead of selling and around the early 2000's, the Stokes family (his widow Lillian, and daughters Rebecca and Laura) was able to acquire the remaining family land that exists today.

### Conservation and Stewardship Planning with Partners

Beginning around 2012, under pressure from surrounding development, it became evident to the family that they become more active stewards of the land. They contacted the Florida Forest Service and had a consulting forester update their Forest Management Plan. This action led to developing working relationships with numerous government agencies, nonprofit conservation organizations, and

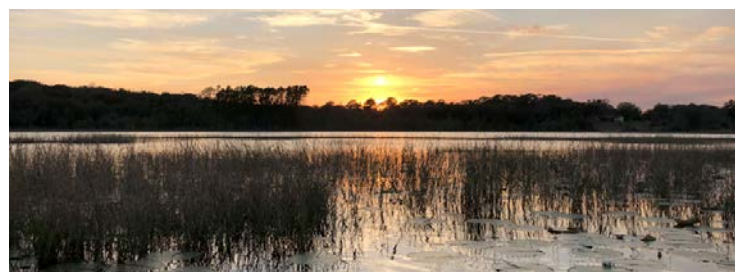
private agricultural businesses. The many partners involved in this journey include the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Florida Forest Service, Alachua Conservation Trust, Wildlands Conservation Inc., Quail Forever, Florida Native Plant Society, as well as McLean Family Farms (the family behind Uncle Matt's Organic juice) as their citrus consultant, and Miksa Honey Farms, as their beekeepers.

### Working the Land

Over the last 13 years, Manny and Rebecca have been involved in many conservation management practices on their working landscape that include harvesting the slash pine plantation that was previously planted by her father and reforesting that acreage with longleaf pine; brush management amongst oak encroached areas to allow room for

natural regeneration from existing longleaf pines; chemically treating and hand removing invasive plants such as downy rose myrtle, coral ardisia, Caesarweed, cogongrass, and natal grass; maintaining and improving the organic citrus groves; propagating native plants, especially native wildflowers; providing habitat for honey and pollinator production; reducing the hardwood encroachment and returning remnant sandhill and scrub areas back to groundcover rich environments; providing habitat for a host of plant and animal species that include state and federal listed species such as sand skinks, gopher tortoises, Brittons beargrass, scrub plum, and Lewton's milkwort; and improving habitat for other species such as eastern diamond-back rattlesnake, northern bobwhite quail, barred owl, sandhill crane, wading birds, songbirds, and Florida cooters.

Continued on next page



(Left) Gopher tortoise heading for its burrow. (Right) Sunset on Plum Lake. Photos by Rebecca Mendoza.



Manny and Rebecca have also been honored by FWC's Wildlife Habitat Recognition Program for their efforts in promoting wildlife habitat. Outside of the many natural resources focused efforts, they have also maintained the historic lodge house, a cabin, and a camelia

garden with two named varieties. One variety was named after Rebecca's grandmother, Laura Stokes, and one named for her mother, Lillian Hannah Stokes. The family continues to love this landscape as they work diligently to maintain and improve a sampling of what the habitat

and working landscape was at one time in this portion of Central Florida.

Join us for a tour of the property on April 25, 2025. Register online at [fls-tour-2025-04-25.eventbrite.com](https://fls-tour-2025-04-25.eventbrite.com).

## Ginger Feagle to Lead Florida Tree Farm Program



Ginger Feagle (right) with newly certified Tree Farm landowner, Kathleen Barber.

The Florida Tree Farm Program (FTFP) announces Ginger Feagle as the incoming president for a two-year term (2025-2026). Ginger has been a member of the FTFP's State Committee since 2016, representing private landowner interests in wildlife conservation by integrating habitat management during forestry operations. Ginger has recently served as the FTFP's vice president and has led the evaluation committee for Florida's Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year award, including the nomination for the 2022 National Tree Farm winner. Ginger brings her strength of identifying partnership opportunities and building professional relationships, especially when engaging with private landowners and foresters at events such as the Florida Forestry Association's Annual Meeting. Ginger also understands the necessity of balancing timber income with provisions for active property management, conservation, and family legacy.

In March, Ginger will represent the Florida Tree Farm Program at the American Forest Foundation's National Leadership Conference in Portland, Maine. This national event will gather leaders, landowners, and family forest advocates with other state programs so they can strengthen and grow conservation impact on family forest lands. Ginger will also be updated on tools and processes of the American Tree Farm System to help her lead an efficient state program.

In her professional role as the Regional Coordinator for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Landowner Assistance Program, she works alongside private landowners and a team of biologists in North Central Florida who provide land management recommendations, coordinate educational workshops, connects to financial assistance, and increase landowner engagement. These activities are integral to the FTFP's mission to provide education and networking for family forest owners operating sustainable forestry practices with considerations for wood, water, wildlife, and recreation. During the next two years, Ginger plans to lead the FTFP by:

- Continuing to assist local tree farmers in the areas impacted by Hurricanes Idalia, Helene, and Milton through timber education and connection to partners with financial assistance.
- Increasing state committee engagement with certified Tree Farmers and Tree Farm Inspectors through communication and invitation to quarterly meetings (Glen St. Mary, Tallahassee, Quincy, and Perry).

- Encouraging nominations of landowners to be recognized as our Florida Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year. Nominations will begin in April with selection by June. A landowner tour will be celebrated in October during Working Forests Week.
- Continuing Tree Farm outreach efforts at festivals and events, including the Flatwoods Fire and Nature Festival and the Florida Forestry Association Annual Meeting.
- Continuing partnership with organizations such as the Florida Women Landowners Association to engage new Tree Farm participation, assist forestry education, and promote best management forestry operations.
- Continuing to support the Florida Land Steward quarterly newsletter's printing and USPS postage expenses so those who prefer a hand-held copy can be reached and the newsletter can be distributed at in-person workshops.
- Identifying grants and funding opportunities that will assist the FTFP in presenting workshop activities for landowners as well as Tree Farm Inspectors with their roles assisting landowners.

Continued on next page

- Preparing for the FTFP's next national assessment to maintain meaningful third-party certification under the American Tree Farm System's Standards of Sustainability, online at [www.treefarmssystem.org/view-standards](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/view-standards). To maintain

certification, a Tree Farm property must have an updated management plan and be reinspected every 5 years.

Please contact your County Forester or Tree Farm Inspector to schedule your reinspection or to learn more about

the Florida Tree Farm Program. You may also directly contact Ginger with any questions or suggestions at (386) 586-8249 or email [ginger.feagle@myfwc.com](mailto:ginger.feagle@myfwc.com).

## David Norton Recognized as 2024 Glen Harris Florida Tree Farm Inspector of the Year

By Chris Demers, UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences

The Florida Tree Farm Program is proud to recognize Mr. David Norton as the 2024 Glen Harris Florida Tree Farm Inspector of the Year. Dave began as a Tree Farm inspector around 1982 as the Florida Forest Service (then Division of Forestry) Bradford County Forester. Over the years he became very active in other leadership roles in the Florida and Georgia Tree Farm Programs. He served as Georgia's Tree Farm Chair for 2 years in the late 1990's, and in 2005 he became active in the Florida Tree Farm Committee, serving as its Chair in 2015-16. Throughout these years with the Florida Program he served as a district chair and an active inspector.

Dave got started as an inspector to promote good forest stewardship. He explains, "I have always felt a need to demonstrate to the public that good quality forestry practices are beneficial, even though, sometimes momentarily unsightly, and that landowners that were good tree farmers could demonstrate



David Norton, 2024 Glen Harris Florida Tree Farm Inspector of the Year.

forestry's benefits to the public – i.e. I got tired of blowing my own horn that forestry and foresters provided meaningful values. A majority of Tree Farm landowners that I encountered seemed to enjoy their property's recognition that came with their status as Tree Farmers, so I continued to encourage that."

Being a Tree Farm inspector can be demanding. When asked about the most challenging parts about being an inspector, Dave says, "The first is not being able to inspect or review all of the Tree Farm

properties that we have enrolled over the years, and two, keeping up with all of the assessment wishes that go with certification. It is difficult to keep up with all of the enhancements that certification bodies create, while recognizing all of the good forestry that landowners have accomplished. I do believe, however, that American Forest Foundation/American Tree Farm System (ATFS) staff do a great job of lessening the audit load."

Dave says the most rewarding and enjoyable part about being an inspector is "visiting Tree Farm landowners and getting a tour to view all of their accomplishments!" He encourages private landowners to "keep up your great works!"

**CONGRATULATIONS** David Norton for this recognition. A big **THANK YOU** is in order to Dave and all our Tree Farm inspectors in Florida and beyond for all their time and outstanding service to private landowners and the ATFS!

## Don't miss out on news and events!

### A LOT happens between quarterly issues of this newsletter!

Sign up for the regular Florida Land Steward email updates so you don't miss out on assistance and educational opportunities. Send an email to [cdemers@ufl.edu](mailto:cdemers@ufl.edu) to be added to the listserv. Email updates are sent once a week or every other week and include the latest calendar of workshops, tours, webinars, 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 new UF/IFAS Florida Land Steward Program web site: [programs.ifas.ufl.edu/florida-land-steward](http://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/florida-land-steward).

## Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) Longleaf Pine Assistance Program



Longleaf pine. Photo by Chris Demers.

The GCPEP Longleaf Assistance Program includes **incentives for longleaf establishment, stand improvement, and prescribed fire**. It is available to landowners within the GCPEP project area. This includes **Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, and Holmes Counties west of the Choctawhatchee River in Florida; and Baldwin, Escambia, Covington, Conecuh, Coffee, Geneva, and Dale Counties west of the Choctawhatchee River in Alabama**. Habitat improvements must be within existing longleaf stands, mixed stands, or to establish new longleaf forests. Incentives can cover up to \$100/acre for establishment, up to \$50/acre for stand improvement, or \$15/acre for prescribed fire, not to exceed 50% of landowner costs. For more information contact Ad Platt, [ad@longleafalliance.org](mailto:ad@longleafalliance.org), (850) 982-8480.

## Minimum Acreage for Forest Stewardship Program Enrollment Decreased from 20 to 10 Acres

The Forest Stewardship Program, an assistance program of the Florida Forest Service, seeks to help private landowners address the improvement and maintenance of timber, wildlife, soil and water, recreation, aesthetics and forage resources. The Florida Forest Service has adjusted the minimum acreage required to enroll in the Forest Stewardship Program from 20 to 10 acres in order to provide stewardship assistance opportunities to a larger number of private landowners in Florida.

For more information about the Program, see the Forest Stewardship Program website on the Florida Forest Service's website at [www.fdacs.gov/Forest-Wildfire/For-Landowners/Programs-for-Landowners/Forest-Stewardship-Program](http://www.fdacs.gov/Forest-Wildfire/For-Landowners/Programs-for-Landowners/Forest-Stewardship-Program). Contact your local Florida Forest Service county forester to arrange a meeting and develop a management plan for your property.



## Tax Tips for Forest Landowners for the 2024 Tax Year

Many forestry activities conducted on your property can have tax implications. Generally, all income received is taxable unless explicitly excluded by tax law, and nothing is deductible unless a provision allows it. Understanding the forest-related provisions and integrating tax planning into your forest management can help lower your tax.



The annual tax tips publication; prepared by Yanshu Li, Tamara Cushing, and Gregory Frey; is intended to be an informational and educational resource for you and your tax advisor. It is not intended as financial, tax, or legal advice. Please consult with your tax advisor concerning your tax situation. Access Tax Tips for Forest Landowners for the 2024 Tax Year at: [www.fs.usda.gov/land/taxtips.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/land/taxtips.pdf)



# 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.

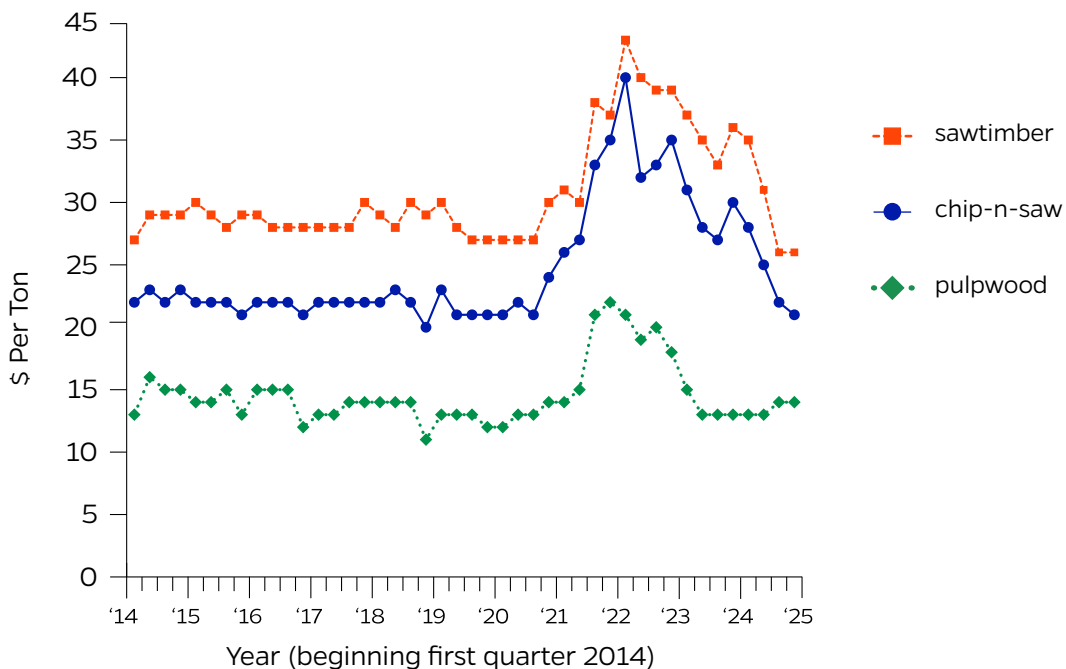
Average stumpage prices for the three major products in Florida, as reported in the **4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2024** Timber Mart-South report were:

Florida Stumpage Prices	
<b>Pine pulpwood:</b>	\$14/ton, same as 3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr. 2024
<b>Pine C-N-S:</b>	\$21/ton, ↓ slightly
<b>Pine sawtimber:</b>	\$26/ton, same

## Trend Report

Average stumpage price trends were generally mixed this quarter with wet weather constraining supplies in the western portions of the Southern region while dry conditions persisted in the east. Average stumpage prices for the three major timber products in Florida remained largely unchanged from 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2024. Markets for structural wood products improved this quarter while conditions weakened for pulp producers. Marketing challenges persist for timber producers in many areas of the state. We've been through some tough slumps before. This region is still the wood basket for world and we are optimistic that some evolution in the wood products and other markets may yield some new opportunities. Stay connected to information, continue to enjoy your land, and keep planting those trees.

**Average Pine Stumpage Prices for Florida (\$/Ton)**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2014 through 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2024**



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 [www.tmart-south.com](http://www.tmart-south.com) for information on subscriptions.

# CONGRATULATIONS CERTIFIED LANDOWNERS

More information about certification in these programs is available at:

[www.fdacs.gov/  
Forest-Wildfire/  
For-Landowners/  
Programs-for-  
Landowners/Forest-  
Stewardship-Program](http://www.fdacs.gov/Forest-Wildfire/For-Landowners/Programs-for-Landowners/Forest-Stewardship-Program)

[www.treefarmssystem.  
org/florida](http://www.treefarmssystem.org/florida)

[myfwc.com/lap](http://myfwc.com/lap)

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



Henry Markham, Marion County



Sharon Pankau (right) with Ashlee White, Santa Rosa County



Chip Ramsey, Alachua County



W.R. Townsend (left) and Mike Simpson with Tristan Ross (center), Baker County



Lindsey Jones (right) of Spurlin Farm with Ginger Feagle, Clay County

**UF/IFAS**

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**Upcoming Events**

Date	Event, Location, Contact
Feb. 18	<b>Wild Pig Meeting.</b> 10 a.m.-12 p.m. ET at the Florida Forest Service Office at 5353 NE 39th Ave, Gainesville, FL 32609. Provided by North Central FL Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area. Join us for a presentation by UF's Dr. Hance Ellington and an update on FWC's Private Lands Tool Cache program. We invite you to bring a sack lunch and hang out after the meeting to network with resource professionals. <i>RSVP to <a href="mailto:lanie.carter@myfwc.com">lanie.carter@myfwc.com</a>.</i>
Feb. 22	<b>North Florida Outdoor Expo.</b> 10 a.m.-3 p.m. ET at Cuscowilla Nature and Retreat Center, 210 SE 134 Ave, Micanopy, FL 32667. Provided by UF/IFAS Extension North Florida Livestock Agents Group. Join us for all-day activities and education, interact with outdoor vendors and specialists, and take guided interactive nature tours. <i>See <a href="https://2025nfoe.eventbrite.com">2025nfoe.eventbrite.com</a> for details and registration.</i>
Mar. 5	<b>The Urban/Rural Interface Webinar.</b> 12-2:00 p.m. ET. Special planning challenges arise in areas where human development meets up with undeveloped wildland. Join us for a discussion of the economics of development in FL, human/wildland interface planning and land conservation strategies to protect working rural lands managed with frequent prescribed fire, and using trail systems to link urban and rural areas. <i>See <a href="https://1000fof.org/floridawildlifecorridor">1000fof.org/floridawildlifecorridor</a> for details, registration, and available continuing education credit.</i>
Mar. 13-14	<b>2025 Florida Urban Forestry Institute, Online Presentation: Piecing Together Urban Forestry.</b> This year's theme focuses on "Piecing Together Urban Forestry." This year's virtual program will include talks on various "pieces" that help promote, manage, and grow a healthy urban forest. <i>See <a href="https://fufc.org/urban-forestry-institute">fufc.org/urban-forestry-institute</a> for details and registration.</i>
April 15-16	<b>2025 Spring Symposium: Landscape and Working Lands Conservation.</b> University of Florida Stern Learning Center at the Austin Cary Forest Campus. Provided by the UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences and Florida Division Society of American Foresters (SAF). This year's event will be a round-up of the various landscape and working-lands conservation initiatives and partnerships going on around Florida. SAF Continuing Forestry Education Credits pending approval. <i>Visit <a href="https://2025-spring-symposium.eventbrite.com">2025-spring-symposium.eventbrite.com</a> for details and registration. Contact Chris Demers, <a href="mailto:cdemers@ufl.edu">cdemers@ufl.edu</a> to get the updates.</i>
April 25	<b>Florida Land Steward Tour at Jolly Palms at Mohawk, Lake County.</b> Join us for a tour of the property of our 2025 Florida Land Stewards of the Year, Rebecca and Manny Mendoza. We'll explore their beautiful and historic, 120-acre Jolly Palms at Mohawk property located in Lake County, on the north end of what is known geologically as the Lake Wales Ridge. <i>Visit <a href="https://fls-tour-2025-04-25.eventbrite.com">fls-tour-2025-04-25.eventbrite.com</a> for details and registration. Contact Chris Demers, <a href="mailto:cdemers@ufl.edu">cdemers@ufl.edu</a> to get the updates.</i>

**More events, webinars, webinar recordings, news, and information can be found at [programs.ifas.ufl.edu/florida-land-steward](https://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, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Florida Tree Farm Program:

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