



AMERICA'S LONGLEAF RESTORATION INITIATIVE 2013 RANGE-WIDE ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Longleaf pine forests once covered 90 million acres from Virginia to Texas. These forests provide world class habitat for a large number of native plants and animals, provide valuable forest economic opportunities for landowners, and are well adapted and more resistant to catastrophic loss from fire, storm events, and forest pests. In addition, longleaf forests offer compatible land uses for military training and testing that are important to national defense. For a variety of reasons longleaf forests declined to roughly 3 million acres by the late 1990s. Diverse public and private partners began working in earnest in the 1980s and are continuing today to restore longleaf pine forests back to the southern landscape. These efforts have halted the century long decline in longleaf pine and resulted in increasing trends over the past decade.

The *Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine* was released in 2009 and established an ambitious goal to increase longleaf pine forests to 8 million acres and improve the conditions of existing longleaf pine forests. Since the release of the Conservation Plan, a strong partnership of agencies and organizations has coalesced around longleaf conservation in an effort referred to as the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI). Achieving the restoration goals laid out in the Conservation Plan requires annually sustaining extraordinary levels of on-the-ground work. In 2011 the Longleaf Partnership Council (the Council) formed to provide the overall leadership for ALRI and provide a forum for communication among the partners.

The Council approved moving forward with this 2013 Range-wide Accomplishment Report to communicate the restoration work collectively accomplished by the partners involved in ALRI. This is the first range-wide comprehensive look at the annual restoration work that is occurring to bring back the iconic longleaf pine forest to the South. This report illustrates the scale of the on-the-ground work that is occurring, shows how public and private funds are being leveraged, and measures how the partnership's strategic priorities are being accomplished in moving toward achieving the 8 million acre longleaf restoration goal identified in the Conservation Plan.

Findings

The partners involved in the ALRI accomplished a remarkable 1.38 million acres of longleaf restoration work (planting, prescribed burning, mid-story treatments, etc.) in FY2013 and the collaborative partnership grew as the number of local implementation teams expanded to 15 and now cover all the identified Significant Geographic Areas (SGAs) across the range. These expanded teams and their members provide the prospect of generating even greater longleaf restoration results in the future, particularly on private lands. The teams increase collaboration among the local partners within the SGAs and provide additional capacity to share resources, conduct conservation planning and mapping, and increase outreach to private landowners.

Prescribed Burning

At 1.1 million acres, the prescribed burning accomplishments are impressive, and nearly meet ALRI's overall annual goal for prescribed burning for all ownerships. Accomplishments on public lands are nearly in line with the overall annual goals, while much work is needed to increase prescribed burning on private lands.





Longleaf Establishment

The estimated 156,000 acres established in 2013 exceeds the near-term annual goals for ALRI, with the large majority (86%) of these accomplishments occurring on private lands. The partnership will need to continue monitoring the net increases or decreases in overall longleaf pine acreages to gauge the desired annual longleaf pine establishment goal.

Accomplishments in Significant Geographic Areas

Approximately 70% of the overall accomplishments occurred within the SGAs, which complements the goals for these priority landscapes as envisioned in the Conservation Plan. Approximately 79% of the prescribed burning and 51% of the other improvement activities (mid-story treatments, invasive species treatments, and native understory plant establishment) are being accomplished in the SGAs. The accomplishments in the SGAs are primarily due to the impressive work occurring on the public lands that anchor these landscapes.

Private versus Public Lands

Some 77% of the overall accomplishments occurred on public lands, with prescribed burning on National Forest System lands and military installations being a primary driver. The remaining 23% of the overall work took place on private lands, which contain 61% of the overall longleaf pine acreage.

Broadening the Resource Base

While federal partners continue to be the major source of funding for longleaf restoration, substantial progress is being made in attracting non-federal funds with \$8 million in non-federal matching funds to the Longleaf Stewardship Fund (LSF) in the past two years and an additional multi-year Forestland Stewards Initiative getting underway. Enhanced collaboration among federal agencies is expected to result in successful proposals to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), while opportunities to contribute to Gulf Coast restoration are being aggressively pursued.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings, the following are areas of priority for the ALRI partnership to focus on in 2014-15:

- Place emphasis on increasing the acreage of prescribed burning and other improvement activities on private lands.
- Increase the capacity and coordination of private landowner technical assistance and outreach. Explore the economics and incentives for increasing the involvement of medium and large private landowners in the longleaf restoration effort.
- Continue to support the local implementation teams and the development of SGA conservation planning and mapping efforts.
- Incorporate processes for tracking and monitoring changes in the condition classes for longleaf pine forests, which includes the release of longleaf maintenance condition class definitions.
- Complete the ongoing coordinated effort to identify and map range-wide land protection priorities for longleaf pine. The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, Trust for Public Land, and the local implementation teams are working to develop this product.
- Continue to increase corporate and other private funding through the LSF and pursue opportunities for longleaf restoration to contribute to Gulf Coast recovery efforts.

All the findings and recommendations of the full report can be found on the ALRI partnership website: americaslongleaf.org.

