

The Nature Conservancy and the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team hosted a field day at the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary for members of the Texas Longleaf Taskforce. Located near Silsbee Texas, the Sanctuary (preserve) is on the banks of Village Creek and harbors diverse flora and fauna representative of the Big Thicket. Landowners and natural resource professionals toured the preserve to learn how the Conservancy has used adaptive management to restore and manage the upland forest, wetland forest and aquatic communities of the 5,654-acre project.

The preserve is managed with the mission of The Nature Conservancy in mind-to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. The Sandyland project includes a conservation easement with Campbell Global that commits to creating a sustainable longleaf pine project and conservation of associated communities of American Beech-Southern Magnolia slope forest, bottomland hardwood forests, baygalls, oxbow ponds, and Bald Cypress-Water Tupelo swamp.

Established in 1977, the preserve has been under fire management since 1978. The Nature Conservancy has used a combination of dormant and growing season burns to restore upland longleaf forests and wet longleaf savanna. Burning has been used in conjunction with mechanical and chemical treatments to limit woody shrub invasion and promote a herbaceous-dominated understory. The group was also able to view the preserve's equipment cache and Type 6 Engine.

Tour participants viewed the results of recent burns and saw the response of vegetation to growing season burns and the use of an 18 to 24- month frequency of fire application. With on-site longleaf still in the candling stage, the tour included discussion on the importance of limiting/ceasing fire operations during this crucial period for longleaf growth. Late summer/fall environmental conditions were also discussed as another critical period to monitor moisture for stands to avoid stressing trees and causing direct mortality.

Preserve staff and The Conservancy's State Fire Manager, Larry Belles, were on hand to answer questions and are available to assist anyone wishing to secure their basic training under National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWGC) guidelines. Longleaf Implementation Team Leader Kent Evans was also in attendance and is available to assist landowners with their forest management needs.

The Sandyland Preserve is open daily to the public with no fee. Six miles of trails are available for hiking and nature study. More information is available online at www.nature.org/texas

With additional interest The Nature Conservancy will offer tour in the fall (date to be determined). Contact Wendy Jo Ledbetter at wledbetter@tnc.org or at (409) 658-4300 to sign up.