More Kids in the Woods Opens the Doors to the Great Outdoors

By: Susan Blake, US Forest Service

In January, nearly 500 kids from Tallahassee area schools braved the great outdoors during a week-long U.S. Forest Service event developed under the “More Kids in the Woods” program.

The Forest Service’s “More Kids in the Woods” program evolved as a result of a decline in outdoor activities among children. Today kids are more technology savvy and nature plays less of a role in their lives. With this in mind, partnerships were developed between the U.S. Forest Service, American Recreation Coalition and the National Forest Foundation to proactively support and promote a common belief that children need to be connected to nature.

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) co-sponsored the event and it was hosted at the Beau Turner Youth Conservation Center (BTYCC). The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) oversees the outdoor learning center at BTYCC which hosts many outdoor initiatives. Other agencies participating included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Forest Service.

“This was really natural for us because it dovetails into our outreach mission,” said Brian M. Zielinski of the NWTF. "It's a great opportunity to expand our hunting heritage theme and a great way to reach youth in the Tallahassee area."

The five-day outdoor event consisted of archery and BB gun ranges, a wild turkey education station, a forestry station, and a wildlife interpretive information station with 100 students attending each day. In addition, the Florida Forest Service demonstrated a prescribed burn at the end of each day.

"I have learned so much about the woods," said Maria Joyner a student at Fort Braden Middle School. "I thought I knew a lot before, but I learned about wildfire and longleaf pine. It's amazing!"

"The Forest Service uses 'More Kids in the Woods' projects to encourage children to learn more about the natural world and to experience outdoor activities along with exposing them to a variety of career paths in natural resources," said Natural Resources Manager Carl Petrick of the National Forests in Florida.

"This week was great! It was a wonderful example of the impact multiple agencies working together can have in providing youth the opportunity to learn and experience nature in a fun, safe and interactive environment," said Education Coordinator Kelly Langston of the Beau Turner Youth Conservation Center.

For more information please contact Susan Blake at sblake@fs.fed.us.
Restoration of Plant Communities in Former Pine Tree Plantations


As human populations encroach on more remote areas, tree plantations are frequently converted into suburban developments or conservation lands. The purpose of the current study was to compare the effects of restoration treatments on the abundance and biodiversity of two former pine plantations in northeast Florida. Restoration methods, which varied greatly in both environmental impact and effort from minimal (non-manipulated control plots) to thinned (removal of 90–97% of Slash Pines and exotic plant species) to cleared (mechanical removal of all vegetation to the substrate surface), were compared using replicated 100-m² plots. Although sites exhibited variation in plant densities and relative guild abundance, restoration treatment produced a significant increase in plant abundance and relative composition of plant guilds. Plant abundance was 2–3 times higher in cleared plots compared to thinned and control plots, respectively; not surprisingly this was because cleared plots had large numbers of small herbaceous seedlings as well as a shift in their plant communities to graminoid species, which are typically less shade tolerant than other plant guilds. Moreover, the relative abundance of vines was substantially lower in cleared plots compared to control and thinned plots, which retained all or some of their tree and shrub cover, thereby providing support structure for climbing plants. While plant diversity (Shannon index) exhibited a significant time-by-treatment interaction because cleared plots initially had only 65–80% of the plant diversity compared to control and thinned plots, cleared plots reached or exceeded them in biodiversity by the last two sampling dates, although cleared plots at one site showed a large decline on the final sampling date. In general, both study sites reflected high levels of graminoids in cleared plots, while thinned plots showed more even increases across plant guilds. Lastly, pine tree diameter (i.e., plant growth rate) was greater and canopy cover was lower in thinned plots compared to controls, although the differences were only significant for one site. Results from this study indicate that thinning former pine plantations with selective removal of exotics will provide maximal plant biodiversity and tree growth rather than utilizing more cost- and labor-intensive clearing of sites.

(C) 2011 BioOne. All rights reserved. To read the full article CFEOR members click here.
Upcoming Events


- **Florida Chapter of the Wildlife Society and Florida Exotic Pest Council Annual Spring Conference on April 16-19, 2012** at the Ocala Hilton in Ocala, Fl. Additional details will be forthcoming in future conference reminders as well as on [wwwfltws.org](http://wwwfltws.org) conference page website.

- **39th Annual Natural Areas Conference— Keeping Natural Areas Relevant and Resilient, October 9-12, 2012** in Norfolk VA. For more information go to [http://www.naturalarea.org/12conference/](http://www.naturalarea.org/12conference/)

- **Florida Native Plant Society 32nd Annual Spring Conference, May 17-20, 2012** in Plant City, FL. For more information go to [wwwfnps.org](http://wwwfnps.org).

- **The 21st International Pepper Conference, November 4-6, 2012** in Naples, Fl. For more information contact the Hendry County Extension, Gene McAvoy, 1-863-674-4092 or [gmavoy@ufl.edu](mailto:gmavoy@ufl.edu).