

FLORIDA LAND STEWARD



A Quarterly Newsletter for Florida Landowners and Resource Professionals

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Saving the Southeastern American Kestrel

By Arlo Kane, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

As a kid growing up in Oregon, I remember looking out the car window on road trips watching red-tailed hawks sitting on fence post after fence post lining the old farm fields. They were waiting and watching for their next meal. When I moved to Florida as an adult, I missed the red-tailed hawks but enjoyed seeing another raptor, the American kestrel, although you are more likely to see it on powerlines than fence posts. The kestrel is not really a hawk but rather a falcon with long pointed wings and sleek bodies.

Thirteen species of kestrels can be found around the world, but only one, the American kestrel, resides

in the western hemisphere. Biologists further divided the American kestrel into 17 subspecies, and one of those is the non-migratory southeastern American kestrel found primarily in Florida. The northern subspecies is a migrant and winter visitor to Florida. Telling them apart is difficult outside of the breeding season when only the southeastern American kestrel resides in Florida. Kestrels breed from March through July, so if you see one during that time it is a southeastern American kestrel.

Kestrels measure only 9-12 inches tall, which may be why it was once called the sparrow hawk. Insects, anoles, and skinks are the prime targets for kestrels in Florida. Although kestrels will take an occasional sparrow, birds are not a prime target for these raptors. One study in Florida found they had a fond taste for lizards. Kestrels hunt from perches or by gliding and hovering. They will spend time on telephone poles or wires watching for prey then pounce. They don't chase small birds long distance like other raptors, so they won't hurt bobwhite quail populations. They prefer short grass fields and open longleaf pine stands where they can see their prey and fly easily across the landscape.

Kestrels are not forest raptors. They are more closely associated with early successional, open canopied grasslands. The longleaf pine savannas, sandhills, dry prairies and scrub are favored natural habitats.



The Southeastern American Kestrel thrives in open, low density longleaf pine grasslands. Providing this kind of habitat and/or installing nest boxes in pastures and agricultural fields can help this unique bird recover. Photo by FWC.

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They are also known to use parks, golf courses, pastures and orange groves because of the open habitat structure, but it is the longleaf pine-wiregrass community that is most associated with the southeastern American kestrel in Florida. Low density longleaf pine grasslands provide the best habitat for southeastern American kestrels. Densely planted longleaf stands can be thinned to enhance habitat conditions for this bird.

The southeastern American kestrel is in trouble. This subspecies has experienced the greatest declines of all North American Kestrel populations. Estimates show that this species has declined 82% to 95% in Florida over the last 50 years. Once found in seven southeastern states, it now resides mostly in Florida with a few scattered populations in South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama. Kestrels, like other birds included in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, are federally protected. This begs the question: why are they declining? Like many, if not most species of wildlife, habitat loss is the number one cause of decline. The longleaf pine-wiregrass community has been replaced over large areas by dense pine plantations, row crops, pastures, and urban sprawl.

Restoring the open grassland dominated, low density longleaf pine savannas is critical to restoring kestrel populations in Florida. Agricultural fields and pastures could fill the early successional structure but lack the most important feature: longleaf pine snags. Kestrels are secondary cavity nesters. They need snags with cavities hollowed

out by woodpeckers, who, unlike raptors, are built for excavating cavities. Longleaf pine snags last longer than snags from other species of pine and so provide better nesting opportunities. Nest boxes on poles and trees will help in pastures, agricultural fields, and other open habitats without snags. A nest box pilot project started by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in central Florida increased a local population by five-fold. You can find designs to build your own kestrel nest box online at <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/profiles/birds/raptors-and-vultures/american-kestrel/>

The southeastern American kestrel is a state listed threatened species. As such, they and their nests are protected. The FWC and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services recently developed agriculture and forestry Wildlife Best Management practices for state imperiled species. The kestrel is one of 16 species featured in these BMPs. The best management practices for kestrels include: leaving snags where they do not pose a safety risk, avoid felling known nest trees, and avoid prolonged heavy equipment operation (generally in excess of one day) within 490 feet of active, known, and visibly apparent kestrel nests from March through June. It is also a good idea to rake around snags before conducting prescribed burns to prevent them from burning.

How can you help restore habitat for southeastern American kestrels? You can begin by thinning pine stands to a more open, low density



Nest boxes on poles and trees will help kestrels in pastures, agricultural fields, and other open habitats without snags. Photo by FWC.

canopy, and using prescribed fire to promote grasses and herbaceous vegetation. You can also install nest boxes in pastures and agricultural fields. Cost share programs through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service can help offset the cost of conducting habitat restoration and installing nest boxes. Contact your Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Landowner Assistance Program biologist or local NRCS district conservationist for more information. Find your regional FWC Biologist at <http://myfwc.com/conservation/special-initiatives/lap/contact-us/>. Find your NRCS Conservationist at <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>

The ProForest (Proactive Forest Health & Resilience) Initiative

By Paloma Carton de Grammont, University of Florida IFAS



This year the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) partnered with multiple institutions and programs dealing with forest health to initiate ProForest (Proactive Forest Health and Resilience). The mission of ProForest is to assist landowners, land managers, and other forest stakeholders in promoting the resilience of forests and managing emerging threats.

Florida's natural, planted, and urban forests are increasingly facing serious threats from multiple agents. A constant suite of new pests arrives through our numerous ports and high volume of trade flow. On average Florida receives one new pest every month, while native diseases and pests are currently on the upswing (i.e. southern pine beetle). Some of these new pests, such as the Laurel wilt disease, are decimating entire tree populations. Climate variability is an increasing concern and can pose challenges. For example, this spring more than half of the state was undergoing some degree of drought, increasing the risk of wildfires and pest outbreaks. Land use changes are also taking place at a rapid pace. It is estimated that by 2060 2.7 million acres of native habitat will be converted to other uses (Florida 2060). The combined effects of these factors pose significant challenges to landowners, land managers, as well as land management and conservation agencies and organizations.

These emerging threats also bear significant economic and social costs. It is estimated that, nationally, forest and tree pests and diseases cost

landowners and city and state governments \$1.5 billion in annual damages (Dale et al. 2001). Forests are a major driver of Florida's economy. In 2003 the total value of the industry's sales was estimated at \$7.78 billion, including \$382 million in timber sales on private lands (Hodges et al. 2005). Pulp and paper products support up to 70% of the income paid to 90,000 jobs in a single year (FDACS 2010). Timberland in the state also provides essential ecosystem services such as aquifer recharge, carbon storage, wildlife habitat and many recreational opportunities for Floridians and visitors.

Addressing threats to forests is a major challenge that requires collaborative and proactive solutions. The ProForest initiative is providing a framework for collaboration among scientists, managers, and decision-makers so that research and educational efforts across biophysical and social sciences can be integrated. Through collaborative research, ProForest aims to develop and transfer innovative solutions to support forest management decisions. This involves understanding the impacts of global change on forest ecosystems and their services, developing novel concepts and techniques to promote forest resilience, as well as prescribing and supporting proactive management of emerging pests and diseases.

Finally, through a new graduate degree in Forest Health, it aims to train new generations of forest health professionals.

To learn more about ProForest and how you can support it, visit <http://proforesthealth.org>. The webpage also includes information on research and events, and provides multiple resources on forest health and pest and disease identification, which you can also follow on Facebook and Twitter @ProForestUF. Please contact Dr. Paloma Carton de Grammont, ProForest Coordinator, for any questions or comments (palomacgl@ufl.edu).

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Florida Tree Farm Program Update

By Greg Marshall, Florida Forest Service; Jon Gould, Florida Tree Farmer; and Chris Demers, University of Florida IFAS

Today there are 15.5 million acres of forest land in Florida. Seventy-one percent of that area is owned by private landowners and 29% is public. The economic impact of forestry is estimated to be around 14.5 million dollars and provides 74,500 jobs and over 5,000 products to consumers. The Florida Tree Farm Program plays a critical role in providing certified wood for the forest product industries in Florida and neighboring states. In order to enhance the Program's capacity to meet the demand for certified wood and assist Tree Farmers in sustainable forest management, the Florida Tree Farm Program became incorporated in 2017 as a 501c3, non-profit organization. The Program has a renewed focus on landowner engagement, education and outreach with partners, and some fundraising.

In 2015 the American Forest Foundation, the administering

organization of the American Tree Farm System, initiated a "State's Voice State's Choice" initiative. This process sought to respond to the diversity of programs and interests throughout state Tree Farm programs across the country. Through this process each state Tree Farm committee engaged with stakeholders to determine if the third-party certification track is the best fit with their particular state's Tree Farm program.

After a year of discussions with Tree Farmers, partners and stakeholders in Florida, the Florida Tree Farm Committee decided to stay on the certification track. The certified pathway comes with costs and logistics for each state. In order to meet these obligations the Florida Tree Farm restructured as an incorporated, non-profit, charitable organization.

Tree Farmers likely won't notice some of the changes happening with the Program but we do want to make sure Tree Farmers and other interested landowners are informed of these developments, and that the Florida Tree Farm Program continues to demonstrate that forest landowners are practicing excellent forest stewardship. Thanks to the efforts of numerous inspecting foresters, Florida Forestry Association, Florida Forest Service, the forest industry, University of Florida IFAS Extension, and other partners, the Program includes over 1,200 certified Tree Farms comprising over 956,000 acres in Florida. For more information on the Program, or if you need your Tree Farm re-inspected, visit the Florida Tree Farm Program website at <https://www.treefarmssystem.org/florida>.

ACF Consultant's Corner: Marking Gun-in-Hand

By John Holzaepfel, ACF, CF, CA, Natural Resource Planning Services, Inc.

In the last ACF column article, I left you with a quote from Aldo Leopold, so as a segue, I will begin this article with one more from a piece that he subtitled "Axe-in-Hand".

"I have read many definitions of what is a conservationist, and written not a few myself, but I suspect that the best one is written not with a pen, but with an axe. It is a matter of what a man thinks about while chopping, or while deciding what to chop. A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land."

~ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1949)

For a consulting forester, perhaps the best equivalent of the axe is the tree marking gun and paint. With it, we can impact the forested landscape for years, and in some cases, many decades to come. The actual tool is not too important in terms of choice, though different foresters tend to prefer different paint guns and tree marking paint brands for reasons of economy, durability, and personal preference.

Some foresters opt not to mark timber as it often does not make economic sense when a logger-select harvest will suffice and overall stand density targets are more important than individual tree selections. Other foresters, however,

still see marking timber as an enjoyable blend of forestry art and science, employing timber marking when advantageous to meeting landowner objectives. For the forester it comes with the added benefit of keeping one physically fit! Personally, I have always enjoyed marking timber, prefer it even to cruising timber. There certainly have been times even in the not too distant past when marking pine stands with dense understories of gallberry, lyonia, and saw palmetto tied together with grape or smilax vines, that I would doubt this sense of enjoyment when in the heat

Continued on next page

of the battle. However, seeing the stand subsequently thinned and the offending understory temporarily laid flat becomes a great emotional salve and the toil is soon forgotten.

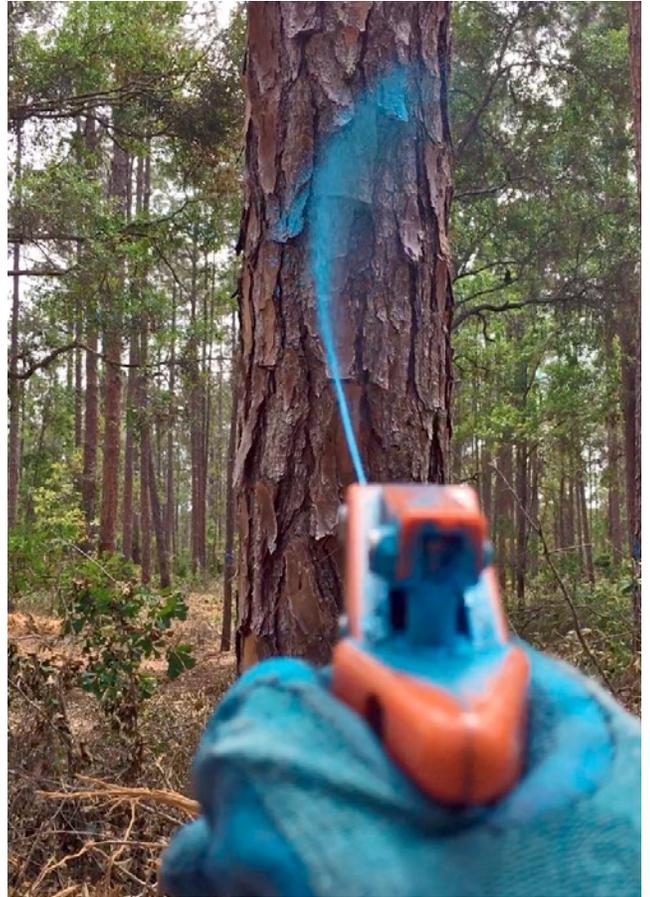
A forester must see both the individual trees and the forest stand, knowing which trees in the stand have the most potential to respond favorably to a thinning harvest and increase in value for the client, reading clues in the tree bark and crown. We must watch for tree form plus signs of disease. We must consider the species of tree and their location in respect to other trees of the same species or other species. If the harvest is intended to regenerate a new crop of timber, we consider the potential for the residual "shelterwood or seed trees" to provide seed and pass along favorable genetics – this often being particularly important in natural stands that support higher genetic diversity.

Marking timber takes time and costs money. While the economics do not often favor marking timber to optimize rate of return on the timber investment, it can make economic and/or ecological sense in select situations, and especially for forests in long rotations with diverse landowner goals. In these cases, there is no doubt that the choice of "cut and leave", whether by forester or logger, will also impact the forest aesthetics and health; not just the health of the trees, which is of paramount importance, but also the ecological health of the land.

For the management of a typical Stewardship Forest or Tree Farm, there are many questions to ask

and decisions to be made, some of them more directed at these ecological objectives. That is to say, other factors beyond economics-driven timber management can be of elevated importance to the non-industrial private landowner versus a more traditional industrial or timberland investment ownership. For example, are we seeking a monoculture of a single-aged and single species of pine to simplify forest management and maximize economic return, or might the landowner desire to elevate other factors like species richness and age diversity, and potentially encourage more frequent yet less economically significant harvests?

If we are managing for ecological goals in a forest community with southern yellow pine species like longleaf pine, are we leaving a sufficiently dense stand of pines with favorable live crown ratios to provide adequate needle drop to enhance prescribed burning, yet not too dense a stand of pines to inhibit the heat of the fire to pass through the crown layer? Is the crown coverage low enough to encourage growth of an herbaceous understory preferred by certain species of wildlife like gopher tortoise, yet still



With a marking gun and paint, a forester writes his signature on the land. Photo by John Holzaepfel.

high enough to capture a reasonable potential for timber production and keep the property well-postured for greenbelt? The choices and decisions are as varied as the biotic and abiotic stand conditions and the landowner goals.

So, should you have your timber marked or not? Unfortunately, there is no blanket statement to answer this question. But sometimes, the marking gun is still the right tool for the job when a forester writes his signature on the land!

Get Email Updates!

Don't miss out on upcoming events and news! A lot happens between issues of this quarterly newsletter. Send an email to cdemers@ufl.edu to be added to the stewardship listserv. Updates are sent every week or two and include the latest calendar of workshops, tours and other events, a link to the current issue of this newsletter, updates on cost-share and other assistance programs and resources, and other stewardship related information.

TIMBER PRICE UPDATE

The timber pricing 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.

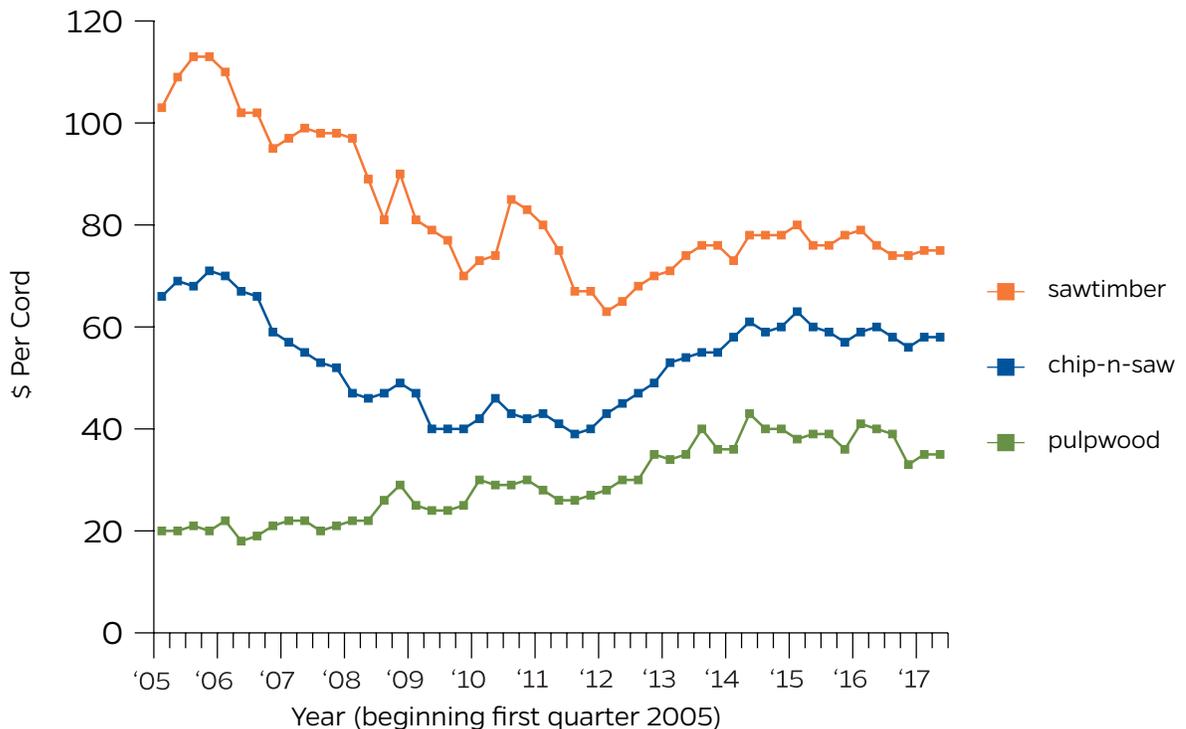
Average stumpage prices for the three major products in Florida, as reported in the **2nd Quarter 2017** Timber Mart-South report were:

Florida Stumpage Prices	
Pine pulpwood:	\$35/cord (\$13/ton), same as 1 st Qtr. 2017
Pine C-N-S:	\$58/cord (\$22/ton), same
Pine sawtimber:	\$75/cord (\$28/ton), same

Trend Report

Second quarter average stumpage prices for the three major timber products in Florida were the same as those in the first quarter of 2017. Despite the wet weather in Florida and across much of the region, stumpage prices did not improve and were down for most products in the Southeast. This was attributed to a continued oversupply at many mills from the wide access to wood during the dry months. Market drivers remain strong. Southern pine beetle activity has increased with several infestations reported in Florida this quarter. As always, monitor your pine stands and consult your forester if you suspect a forest health issue.

**Average Pine Stumpage Prices for Florida
1st Qtr 2005 through 2nd Qtr 2017**



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 FOREST STEWARDS AND TREE FARMERS

For more information about becoming a Certified Forest Steward or Tree Farmer, contact your Florida Forest Service County Forester, consultant or learn about it at:

<http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service/For-Landowners/Programs/>

or

<http://www.floridaforest.org>

These landowners have a current Forest Stewardship and/or Tree Farm management plan for their property and have demonstrated excellent stewardship of their land resources.



Ronald Williams (R) with Barry Stafford, Jackson County



Jeff Moore, Gadsden County



Roger and Donna Champion with Dave Poletti, Jefferson County



Ed Libby (R) with Dave Holley, Nassau County

Upcoming Stewardship, Small Farm and Other Events

Date	Event, Location, Contact
Aug. 29-31	2017 Florida Forestry Association Annual Meeting & Trade Show , Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort, Miramar Beach, FL. <i>Details at http://floridaforest.org/annual-meeting/</i>
Sept. 15	Conservation Easement Workshop , UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County office, Kissimmee, FL. <i>Details to come. Check the Florida Land Steward calendar at http://floridalandsteward.org/calendar.html for updates.</i>
Sept. 28	Invasive Exotic Species and Control Workshop , 9 am to 3 pm CT, UF/IFAS Extension Okaloosa County Office, Crestview, FL. Join us to learn about identifying and controlling some of the most troublesome invasive exotic plants and animals. Earn pesticide applicator CEUs and forestry CFEs and connect with partnership and assistance opportunities! Presented by the Six Rivers Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area and Florida Forest Stewardship Program. <i>\$10 fee includes materials and lunch. Contact UF/IFAS Extension Okaloosa County at (850) 689-5850 to register.</i>
Oct. 5	Forest Stewardship Tour at David and Cindi Stewart's Sandhills Farm , Jackson County, 9 am to 2 pm CT. Join us for this walking tour to learn about longleaf pine regeneration, prescribed fire, forest groundcover and habitat enhancements for a variety of wildlife species. Take this opportunity to meet your County Forester, UF/IFAS Extension County Agent, Landowner Assistance Biologists, and other resource partners that can provide management assistance, cost-share opportunities, forest certification and many other resources. <i>\$10 fee. Register at https://fsp-tour100517.eventbrite.com/ or contact UF/IFAS Extension Jackson County at (850) 482-9620. Please register by September 22.</i>
Oct. 13	Turpentine in Florida: Past, Present, Future? 9:30 am to 3:30 pm, Austin Cary Forest, Gainesville, FL. The Association of Consulting Foresters, University of Florida, and Society of American Foresters are pleased to host a program on this important part of Florida's past, present, and future. Includes tour of the new A. Chester Skinner Jr. Turpentine Education Site at the Forest. <i>Mark your calendar. SAF CFEs are pending. \$15 fee covers program and lunch. Register at https://tinyurl.com/y9u2d9ze</i>
Oct. 20	2017 Florida Tree Farm of the Year Tour at Osceola Pines , property of John and Allison Nash, Levy County. <i>Check the FL Land Steward Calendar at http://floridalandsteward.org/calendar.html for updates. Contact Florida Forestry Association, (850) 222-5646 to register.</i>

For many more events and information see: floridalandsteward.org

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