

The Quarterly Journal of the Florida Native Plant Society

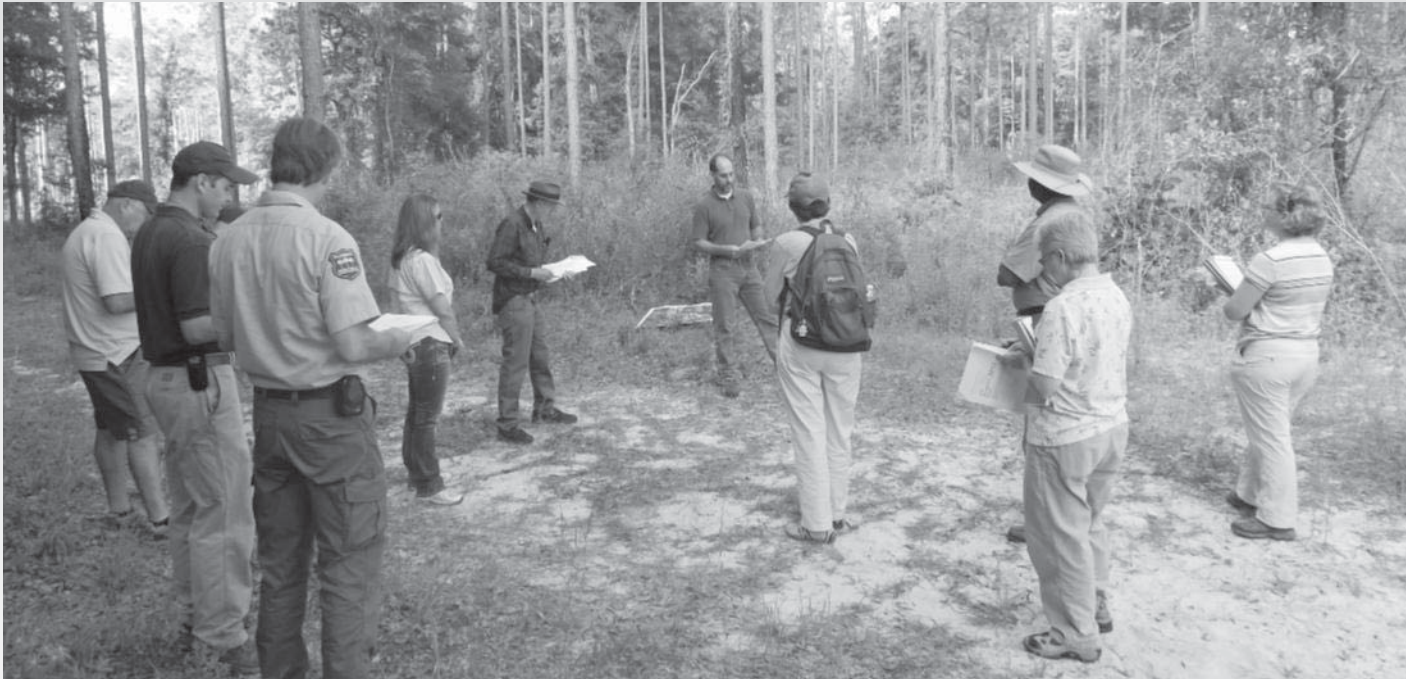


Palmetto



A Land Management Review Experience

Article by Gail Fishman and Scott Davis



Above: Land management review participants gather at Holton Creek Pine Plantation.

Thursday, May 30, 2013, began early, as Scott Davis and I drove from Tallahassee to the Suwannee River Water Management District office in Live Oak, Florida. We were representing the Florida Native Plant Society on the land management review team. Periodic reviews are conducted on lands purchased with public conservation funds such as P2000 and Florida Forever. As a non-government organization, FNPS has had a representative on each land review since 2010.

We arrived at the District office in plenty of time. The morning's coolness was about gone and we knew the day would become much hotter. Before the tour began, a short indoor presentation introduced each area we would visit including successes and problems that needed more attention. In addition to District staff and some

members of the governing board, others represented Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Trail Association, Florida Division of Forestry, Florida Natural Areas Inventory, Wild Turkey Federation, the prescribed fire contractor, a retired forester, and private landowners.

SRWMD manages some 7,640 square miles across all or part of 15 north-central Florida counties. We had time to visit only three places, a floodplain swamp on the Alapahoochee Tract, Holton Creek, and an upland pine plantation on Holton Creek. Needless to say we spent most of the day in a van riding over narrow rural roads past cornfields, pastures, and scattered planted pinelands and a fair amount of time jouncing over two-track dirt roads.

District lands are deemed multiple use with a primary emphasis on water resource protection as well as maintenance and restoration of natural areas, and recreational public use. At each stop, staff provided an overview of their management practices regarding restoration and monitoring of endangered or threatened species followed by time to ask questions. They fielded many queries.

SRWMD is charged with managing and restoring some heavily degraded forest areas. Prescribed fire, usually conducted by a contractor, is the tool used most often; chopping, mowing, and herbicides or some combination are also employed. Different methods and timing are determined for each site. The District uses employees, volunteers, and contractors to get the job done. Although specifics are written into contracts, unless

someone from the staff oversees the work the outcome may not be met. Using contractors for planting trees may meet a short-term fiscal goal but could cost more in the long run in time and money.

pinus. Standing beside the small area, I thought about how the land might have appeared on a similar afternoon a century earlier. I imagined widely spaced, tall longleaf pines, each bearing turpentine scrapes and collection cups. Young pines

Also, many contractors erroneously treat native plant species, often mistaking them for an exotic invader.

We found it difficult to judge the total amount of herbicide being used for site preparation and invasive control. Eighteen acres on Holton Creek were prepped with herbicide in 2012, and it appears that at least an additional 1,100 acres were treated during 2011 – 2012.

Monitoring for endangered and threatened species is conducted on a three year rotation and incidental observations may be included. The report states that “Staff is reviewing this data to determine if there are opportunities for increased efficiency in monitoring.” We hope they find that increased monitoring is needed and at different seasons of the year. With the current exclusion of any environmental presence on any Water Management Board, more concern for endangered species is doubtful. Shrinking budgets and no environmental voice make the districts smaller, weaker, and less capable of protecting our water and other natural resources.

After returning to the offices we were asked to complete a scorecard. This provided an opportunity to relate our conclusions in written form for the staff, and was an exercise not to be taken lightly.

It is imperative that FNPS continue to participate in land management reviews. The benefits are many – we can be on the ground with land managers and hear their plans – and sometimes their woes. We can show support, offer our expertise, and provide informed comments and suggestions to help them manage state lands more effectively. 🌱

About the Authors

Gail Fishman lives in Tallahassee, where she works as a writer and naturalist. She is the author of *Journeys Through Paradise: Pioneering Naturalists in the Southeast*. Gail is a ranger at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge and helped establish the St. Marks Refuge Association.

Scott Davis has a degree in biology from Florida State University, and works as a ranger at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. His interests include botany, herpetology, and native landscaping. Scott is a member of FNPS' Magnolia Chapter.



Above: Scott Gregor and Scott Davis.

For example, a few acres were prepped for planting longleaf seedlings in 2007. Unfortunately, most died. The site was replanted the next year., and again, the majority of seedlings died. The exact reason could not be pinpointed, and possible causes range from the effects of mechanical planting to drought. After the second attempt, replanting was abandoned. We observed several grass-stage longleafs within the planted area, a single large longleaf, perhaps about 60 years old, and another about 10 years old. Nearby we spied the flattened crown of a truly old tree. The trunk showed two nearly healed over cat-faced turpentine scars. How this tree managed to escape the saw when this spot was cleared of old growth longleaf is a mystery. I am fond of these survivors from another era.

Afternoon temperatures had climbed into the high 80s. Low humidity enhanced the dry, pleasing fragrance of the

would have been shooting up among the older trees, for natural regeneration was not discouraged back then. I could see numerous gopher tortoise burrows and the track of a large indigo snake. Many birds foraged in the canopy and ground-cover. But that was then. Now I wonder at how long it will take to put it all back.

Fire, chopping, and herbicide. Getting rid of hardwoods. Replacing groundcover plants. These are the first steps in bringing back longleaf. Fire must be part of the plan since many species have evolved with this natural event. Chopping and herbicides are less desirable in our opinion, since small mammals and reptiles may be at risk from the chopper. We are concerned about herbicides, especially in the hands of contractors. Too often native plants are killed because it is just plain hard to target one plant without hitting adjacent plants, especially if those plants are small and hidden.



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The Palmetto

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Editorial Content

We welcome articles on native plant species and related conservation topics, as well as high-quality botanical illustrations and photographs. Contact the editor for guidelines, deadlines and other information.

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The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society is to conserve, preserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

Official definition of native plant:

For most purposes, the phrase Florida native plant refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

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