The Florida Forest Steward

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Private lands are an important part of red cockaded woodpecker habitat, photo by Jennifer Perkins.

Statewide RCW Safe Harbor Agreement Established

By Jennifer Perkins, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The pinelands of the southeastern U.S. are the year-round home to the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) but habitat loss and degradation has reduced its range by about 97%, putting this species on the Federally Endangered Species list since the late 1960s. This designation and RCW presence on many federal and private lands have resulted in a significant amount of research on the bird's biology and habitat.

Private properties in Florida may be home to as many as 10% of Florida's remaining RCW groups. In an effort to foster partnerships for the conservation of red-cockaded woodpeckers on private lands, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) signed a statewide RCW Safe Harbor Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in August 2006.

Private landowners and their properties are critical to conservation efforts targeting imperiled species.

Many private landowners are good land stewards who already conserve wildlife through their management efforts, but providing habitat for wildlife becomes an obligation when species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) occur on the property. For this reason, the ESA effectively creates a disincentive to private landowners who are often concerned about land use restrictions that may occur if listed species colonize their property or increase in numbers as a result of land management. This disincentive causes some landowners to avoid or limit land management practices that could otherwise enhance or maintain habitat for listed species. Some landowners even destroy unoccupied habitat to prevent occupation by listed species – even when they would otherwise prefer to keep habitat intact.

So why would I want to bother with RCWs?

The *Safe Harbor Program* was created to address these legitimate concerns. The concept was created by a cooperative effort between the USFWS and Environmental Defense, a non-government organization. The first Safe Harbor Agreement was established for the RCW in the sandhills of North Carolina. Participation in a Safe Harbor program assures landowners that their voluntary conservation actions will not result in increased land use restrictions in the future.

Here's how it works: under Florida's RCW Safe Harbor Agreement, a landowner is only required to protect the number of RCW groups present on the property (along with a minimum amount of foraging habitat) at the beginning of the agreement. This is termed the baseline responsibility. If a landowner increases the number of RCW groups on his/her property, for example, he/she is not legally obligated to protect these "surplus" groups. At any time – and with a 60-day notice to FWC – a landowner can alter the habitat of these "surplus" groups. In return for these regulatory assurances, the landowner agrees to conduct certain management activities such as prescribed burning, midstory hardwood reduction, and/or thinning of dense pine stands. Managing for RCWs promotes a healthy forest and is usually compatible with quail management, timber harvesting, and cattle ranching. Florida's RCW Safe Harbor program is available to landowners with habitat that is occupied by RCWs, or is likely to be suitable RCW habitat. Safe Harbor agreements are especially beneficial to landowners who want to maintain mature, open pine forests within or near established RCW populations.

What if I want out or want to sell my property?

Involvement in the program is completely voluntary and participating landowners may cancel the agreement at any time with a 60-day notice to FWC. The agreement is also transferable to a new owner if the property is sold. If the new owner signs a Safe Harbor Agreement, he/she will assume the same baseline responsibility as the original landowner. Thus, under a Safe Harbor Agreement, property value would not diminish if "surplus" RCW groups are grown. Involvement in Florida's RCW Safe Harbor Program in no way limits landowners' rights to sell their land.

What about red tape and getting some assistance?

Private landowners who sign up for this program will be included under FWC's umbrella permit. Inclusion under the umbrella permit is a streamlined process for landowners because most of the red tape is handled by the FWC. There are also many state and federal programs that can assist landowners in achieving their management objectives and conserving RCWs. Cost-share funds are available under programs such as FWC's Landowner Incentives Program (LIP), the USFWS' Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW), or through the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) or the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Also, new legislation will be introduced to Congress this year aimed at giving tax credits to private landowners who are willing to establish conservation easements or agree to restore, enhance or manage listed species habitat on their lands. The bill would also expand tax credits for landowners participating in furthering recovery plans under the ESA and would exclude from taxable income certain federal cost-share payments that landowners receive under other conservation programs. (See Idaho Senator Mike Crapo's website for more about these initiatives – http://crapo.senate.gov/media/newsreleases/release_full.cfm?id=266590)

How do I sign up?

If you are interested in a Safe Harbor Agreement for RCWs on land you own or manage and/or are interested in learning more about the program, please contact:

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Conserved Forest Ecosystem Outreach and Research Cooperative

By Dr. Shibu Jose, University of Florida School of Forest Resources and Conservation

The University of Florida School of Forest Resources and Conservation and Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation announce the formation of a new research and outreach cooperative called Conserved Forest Ecosystem Outreach and Research (CFEOR). The mission of CFEOR is to develop and disseminate knowledge needed to conserve and manage Florida's forests as healthy, working ecosystems that provide social, ecological and economic benefits on a sustainable basis.

The 10 founding members of CFEOR are: Florida Division of Forestry, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Park Service, Florida Wildlife Federation, National Forests in Florida, The Nature Conservancy, Northwest Florida Water Management District, Suwannee River Water Management District, St. Johns River Water Management District, and UF School of Natural Resources and Environment.

Mike Long, Director of the DOF, is the chair of the Steering Committee and new members are being actively recruited including other agencies, industry,

consultants, private landowners and municipalities. These organizations will be working collectively with scientists from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and other UF units to address a wide range of issues including:

•Restoring Florida forest ecosystems;
•Evaluating water quality and quantity;
•Valuing forest ecosystems;
•Assessing visitors & recreation management strategies;
•Promoting biodiversity, wildlife and fish populations;
•Controlling invasive, exotic species;
•Cost effective conservation planning through public-private ventures;
•Exploring innovative market opportunities;
•Understanding and using prescribed fire; and
•Enhancing threatened and endangered species.

University leadership for CFEOR will come from four co-directors: Dr. Janaki Alavalapati (SFRC, Economics and Policy), Dr. Shibu Jose (SFRC, Ecology), Dr. Taylor Stein (SFRC, Recreation and Ecotourism) and Dr. George Tanner (Wildlife Ecology and Conservation). If you would like to learn more about CFEOR, please email Dr. Shibu Jose at sjose@ufl.edu.

What's Killing the Red Bays?

By Bud Mayfield, Entomologist, Florida Division of Forestry

Two trees in the laurel family, namely red bay (*Persea borbonia*) and sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) are dying rapidly in coastal areas of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. The cause is what has become known as **Laurel Wilt Disease** (because it seems to favor plants in the laurel family): a fungus (*Ophiostoma sp.*) vectored by an Asian ambrosia beetle (*Xyleborus glabratus*). Both the beetle and fungus are recent introductions into the United States. At the present time there is no known method to halt the spread of this disease.

History

In 2002 the Asian ambrosia beetle was discovered for the first time in a monitoring trap near Savannah, Georgia. The beetle is a native of India, Japan and Taiwan. By late 2003, red bay trees were dying in coastal South Carolina; the beetle was found on those dead and dying trees and was suspected to be related to the mortality. Sassafras trees were also impacted. The *Ophiostoma* fungus was also found in all diseased trees and inoculation experiments confirmed the fungus was the cause of mortality. Examination of the beetle confirmed the fungus was present in all examined beetles. Evidence strongly suggests the beetle was the vector for moving this fungus from tree to tree.

Will the disease affect other trees?

Other trees in the laurel family include swamp bay, silk bay, avocado, pondspice (*Litsea aestivalis*) and southern spicebush (*Lindera melissifolia*), a federally endangered species. In the field, the pathogen has been recovered from dying sassafras, southern spicebush and pondspice (these finds were in GA and SC). The pathogen and the redbay ambrosia beetle have also been recovered from a dead avocado seedling, one of several we planted in Jacksonville for monitoring purposes (causality of death in this instance was uncertain and further monitoring/testing of avocado is ongoing). What the level

of impact will be on these species in the field is uncertain; seedlings of several species in the Lauraceae that have been artificially inoculated in the lab (USDA Forest Service) become diseased.

What are red bays good for?

The seeds of red bay are eaten by turkeys, quail, deer, songbirds and bears. Red bays are host plants to three butterflies: palamedes, Schaus and spicebush swallowtails. The palamedes is obligate to the red bay as the eggs are laid on the leaves and the emerging caterpillar eats the leaves. Red bays have limited commercial use but the wood is sometimes used in cabinetry and boat building and the trees are occasionally used in landscaping. Leaves are used in Southern cooking to flavor gumbos.

Beetle and fungus biology

Much about the biology and disease cycle is still uncertain and/or unstudied but this is what is understood so far: the vector for the *Ophiostoma* fungus is an ambrosia beetle. There are 20 species of ambrosia beetles in the U.S., nine of which are exotic and eight of these cause no economic or ecological harm. Ambrosia beetles are usually attracted to dying trees but the Asian variety seems to attack healthy trees. The beetle burrows into the cambium layer and deposits the fungus which then multiplies, inhibiting the tree from moving water and nutrients. The beetle may leave the tree after the initial visit, but once the tree dies, a large number of beetles return to the infected tree to eat the fungus. It may take only a single beetle visit to inoculate the fungus into the tree.

Rate of spread

The initial observation of dead red bay trees in South Carolina was in late 2003. By 2005, the beetle and disease were confirmed in seven counties in northeast Georgia, five counties in South Carolina and Duval County in Florida. The spread of the disease to Florida happened without the disease being observed in southern Georgia. By the end of 2006, the disease had spread to five counties in South Carolina, 15 counties in Georgia and eight counties in Florida. One of the counties in Florida, Indian River County, is approximately 140 miles south of any known infestation. Researchers in South Carolina estimate the rate of spread is approximately 20 miles per year. The rate of spread in Florida far exceeds this estimate. Transportation of the beetle via inadvertent human actions (e.g. in firewood, in shipment of timber products, or stuck on a vehicle or train) over distances greater than the flight distance also seems to be occurring.

Can it be stopped?

Unfortunately there is currently no method to control the disease but efforts can be made to slow down the spread of the disease through sanitation and limited movement of infected plants. This could be supplemented by chemical control in limited circumstances (high value trees) if products and techniques are eventually demonstrated to be effective. Research trials evaluating some systemic fungicides are now being initiated. Slowing the spread of the disease could buy some time for the development of longer-term solutions like biological control, genetically-resistant trees, or improvements in mechanical and chemical controls.

Monitoring plots on Ft. George Island (Duval County, Florida) show 92 percent mortality of red bay trees. All red bays above 6 inches in diameter have died. Given this mortality rate, one researcher has characterized this as an ecological disaster. While no one was willing to predict the long term impact of the loss of red bays (and possibly other laurel species), all researchers agreed it will have major impacts including changes in fire behavior, loss of dependent species and probable economic consequences.

In light of the possibility of losing red bay, seed collection efforts are being initiated by the USDA Forest Service National Seed Laboratory. Seeds will be put in long-term cold storage for potential reintroduction in the future, if and when red bay goes extinct in the field and the vector/pathogen die out due to lack of hosts. These types of seed collections are already underway for other species threatened by exotic pests (like ash and hemlock).

The Florida contact for information about this disease is Dr. Bud Mayfield, Florida Division of Forestry, (352) 372-3505 x119, mayfiea@doacs.state.fl.us

Succession Planning: What Does the Future Hold for Your Forest Property?

By Chris Demers, University of Florida School of Forest Resources and Conservation

This year's Master Tree Farmer mini-series, "Preparing for the Next Owner" explored issues that are heavy on many landowners' minds and they are therefore prominent on the radar screen of extension foresters, agency foresters, landowner and industry associations and others who serve this important group of citizens. The reality is this: millions of acres of family-owned forest land will change hands in the United States within the next decade and many of these transfers will happen with virtually no planning. Although many landowners wish to keep their land in the family and pass it on to the next generation, few have taken the necessary steps to make that happen. The USDA Forest Service projects that, nationwide, about 23.2 million acres of forestland will pass out of forest use over the next 50 years. Most of these acres will be privately owned, nonindustrial forest lands converted to residential subdivision.

In many cases succession planning is the missing link in the chain of intended land tenure and management that landowners may envision. Succession planning is a challenging set of tasks that involves legal, economic, environmental and social issues. Estate planning is an important part of the process but estate planning alone will not ensure that the property will be owned and managed as you envision it to be. When forest land is at stake, differences among family members in values, goals and management skills can lead to unintended results. Deliberate communication and planning that involves the entire family is needed to ensure that each member's values are understood and the transfer of the property to the heirs is equitable. To complicate matters, many family forest lands are located at the edge of metropolitan areas where development pressure and associated tax burdens compound the challenge of planning for the property's future.

-continues after workshop announcement-

The "Preparing for the Next Owner" miniseries addressed many of these issues and others. DVDs of this program will be available for sale on the Master Tree Farmer regional Web site: http://mastertreefarmer.org/ later this spring or summer. Until then there are some important resources available now that can help you get started in the process of family forest succession planning:

Ties to the Land: Your Family Forest Heritage, on the Web at: http://www.familybusinessonline.org/resources/ttl/home.htm. Created by the Austin Family Business Program at Oregon State University, Clinton Bentz and others, this project offers creative resources to guide family forest owners through a smooth transition of their forest property from one generation to the next. Several of these resources were provided as part of the Preparing for the Next Owner series.

Cover Your A$$ets: Estate Planning, Conservation Planning and Income Options for Forestland Owners: An award-winning University of Florida – IFAS Extension project, this 2-DVD / 1-CD set contains prerecorded workshop presentations on these topics, other media and many printable resources and Web links to relevant material. It is available for sale ($40.00 plus shipping) from the UF-IFAS Extension Bookstore: http://www.ifasbooks.ufl.edu/ or by phone: 1-800-226-1764 (Visa and Mastercard accepted).

Timber Price Update

The timber pricing information below is useful for observing trends over time, but does not necessarily 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. Note that price ranges per ton for each product are included in parentheses after the price per cord.

Stumpage price ranges reported across Florida in the **1st Quarter 2007** Timber Mart-South (TMS) report were:

- Pine pulpwood: $17 - $27/cord ($6 - $10/ton), ↑ (on average from 4th Quarter 2006)
- Pine C-N-S: $52 - $63/cord ($20 - $24/ton), ↓
- Pine sawtimber: $87 - $109/cord ($33 - $41/ton), ↑
- Pine plylogs: $89 - $110/cord ($33 - $41/ton), ↓
- Pine power poles: $143 - $183/cord ($53 - $68/ton) ↓
- Hardwood pulpwood: $5 - $20/cord ($2 - $7/ton), ↓

Trend Report

On average South-wide stumpage prices for all products are down from a year ago with the exception of pulpwood which is up by more than 10% from first quarter 2006. The average stumpage price of chip-n-saw has decreased the most over the year with an average decline of over 10%. The continuing drought across most of Florida will likely keep prices depressed over the next quarter because of easy accessibility to many stands. Regional prices seem to reflect the market indicators for the major products over the first quarter 2007. Housing starts and product prices, market indicators for sawtimber, are down, while the pulp and paper manufacturing sector is relatively strong.