

# FOREST STEWARDSHIP BRIEFINGS

Timber ◇ Wildlife ◇ Water ◇ Soil ◇ Best Management Practices ◇ Forest Health ◇ Recreation ◇ Aesthetics

## BOTTOMLAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been advancing protocols for formal management of Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) or Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) lands in Texas. In previous years, the concept has been to allow natural forces to work on the forested stand within the easement; no forest stand improvement options offered as a general practice.

Options for stand improvement (such as reduction of non-native species, promoting native species, improving habitat for priority species, etc.) are now being discussed by NRCS and Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV). The goal is to improve stand conditions for priority wildlife species.

Over the past six months, partners have increased efforts to inform, evaluate, and develop better management guidelines in Texas that would allow timber harvest operations in accordance with a Forest Management Plan for Forested Wetland Conservation Easements, connecting private lands and other conservation areas.

Timber harvest may be allowed on Conservation Easements when consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement of habitat for migratory birds, other wildlife, and additional ecological functions. Rather than establishment, planting, and allowing natural forces to work, guidelines are being developed for management of hardwood stands to benefit priority wildlife species in the western periphery of the West Gulf Coastal Plain.

In alliance with this philosophy, all timber harvesting operations must be carried out according to a Forest Management Plan

(FMP) that is approved by NRCS. Key elements of this FMP may include:

- A landowner will request permission for timber harvest through the local NRCS District Conservationist.
- The Zone Biologist and Zone Forester (or appropriate State Office staff) will make a site visit to determine if a timber harvest is needed and justified to benefit designated wildlife species.
- If harvest is justified, the landowner will ask a wildlife biologist, consultant forester, or other resource professional to submit a written Forest Management Plan that is compatible with objectives of the WRP/WRE.
- Prior to plan development, the landowner's agent will meet with the Zone Biologist and Zone Forester to discuss its contents.
- On tracts greater than 10 acres, the landowner will provide a timber cruise conducted by a registered or state accredited forester.
- Approved harvesting methods will emphasize and facilitate natural regeneration of oaks and other tree species that provide significant wildlife food and shelter in bottomland hardwood forests.

If a timber harvest is approved, harvesting operations will utilize Texas Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP's) to control erosion, protect water quality, maintain biodiversity, and ensure the wetland functions and values of the WRP/WRE easement are protected. A combination of shelterwood, single tree, and group selection harvesting methods may be used.

*from LMVJV article dated March 4, 2021*

*For more information:*

- [http://bit.ly/WRP\\_WRE](http://bit.ly/WRP_WRE)

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

*Forest Legacy Program*

*Kudos and Shout Outs*

*Oak Wild Disease in Texas*

*Texas Water Action Collaborative*

*After the Storm*

## FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

*from Texas A&M Forest Service Press Release dated March 25, 2021*

*For more information:*

- <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/Newsroom>
- <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land/forest-legacy/program>
- <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/ForestLegacy>

The Southern Region of the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program acquired 23,327 acres in 2020, utilizing nearly \$23 million in the form of competitive grants for conservation easements and fee simple purchases. Through this program, Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) acquired Fox Hunters Hill, a \$1.6 million conservation easement consisting of over 2,387 acres of sustainably managed forestland adjacent to the Sabine National Forest.

The Forest Legacy Program was created in 1990 to protect forested lands that may be at risk due to urban development and deforestation. Through the program, TFS works with landowners on a “willing buyer / willing seller” basis to help them keep their forests forested; enhance sustainable forest management; support strong markets for forest products; enhance soils and water values; protect biological diversity, recreation, wildlife habitat; and more.

The Forest Legacy Program focuses on protecting privately owned forests with significant environmental and economic importance – especially forests that are susceptible to becoming non-forested land. East Texas is particularly at risk as urban populations continue to increase, expanding from city centers into working forest lands. The likelihood of keeping those forests working – both economically and ecologically – is greatly reduced in the

face of rapid urban expansion. Conservation easements change that.

“A conservation easement is an interest in land acquired to protect certain conservation values,” explained Gretchen Riley, TFS Forest Legacy Program Coordinator.

Fox Hunters Hill is just 1 of 10 projects completed across the south in the past year through this program. It borders a 213,000-acre complex of protected lands off the Angelina and Sabine National Forests in East Texas, and it contains one of the last undeveloped coves of the Toledo Bend Reservoir. It also lies within the Longleaf Ridge Conservation Area along a rare geologic formation that runs between the two largest lakes in Texas.

The Toledo Bend Reservoir is a drinking water source for many communities in East Texas and Western Louisiana, and Fox Hunters Hill helps maintain water quality for that source. It is also known for having some of the last remaining stands of historic longleaf pine ecosystems in Texas.

Fox Hunters Hill is the seventh conservation easement acquired within the state of Texas by the Forest Legacy Program, including the Burleson Wetlands, Turkey Creek, and Longleaf Ridge. Altogether, these lands comprise a total of 33,000 acres throughout East Texas.

## KUDOS AND SHOUT OUTS

In their recent newsletter, the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team (TLIT) recognized the significant contributions of the staff with the East Texas Plant Materials Center (ETPMC) and the East Texas Natives (ETN) Project.

These two partnered programs work to identify and propagate native plants that can be sold commercially for restoration purposes. The ETPMC in Nacogdoches County, led by Manager Alan Shadow, has five active plant releases and is currently focused on development of understory

species for longleaf and shortleaf pine habitat restoration.

Tyler Wayland, who serves on the TLIT Steering Committee, heads up East Texas Natives, a program of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute. ETN partners with the ETPMC to develop additional native seed sources specifically focused on restoration of areas impacted by energy development.

TLIT commends the work of these two critical programs, and is very thankful for their support.

*from TLIT newsletter dated February 12, 2021*

*For more information:*

- <http://bit.ly/EastTexasPlantMaterialsCenter>
- <http://bit.ly/EastTexasNatives>
- <https://txlongleaf.org>

## OAK WILT DISEASE IN TEXAS

Oak wilt is one of the most destructive tree diseases in the United States, killing millions of trees in 76 counties of Central, North, and West Texas. Texas A&M Forest Service urges Texans to help stop the spread of oak wilt by avoiding pruning or wounding oak trees from February through June.

Oak wilt spreads easiest in the spring because of high fungal mat production, high insect populations, and the high susceptibility to disease for oaks. In spring, red oaks that died of the disease last summer and fall may produce spore mats under the bark. With a fruity smell, these mats attract small, sap-feeding beetles that can later fly to a fresh wound of any oak and infect it, starting a new oak wilt center.

Any new wound can be an entry point for infection including those produced by pruning, construction activities, livestock, land or “cedar” clearing, lawnmowers, string trimmers, and storms. To decrease the attractiveness of fresh wounds to insects, always paint fresh wounds on oaks, no matter the time of the year.

Oak wilt is often detected by yellow to brown veins in leaves of infected live oak trees. During the spring, evergreen oak trees will naturally shed their old leaves, while simultaneously growing new leaves. Oak wilt foliar symptoms are different from this seasonal transition in that they affect every leaf. For red oaks, pale young green or brown leaves can be observed during the spring in infected trees.

While red oaks are most susceptible to oak wilt and play a key role in the establishment of new disease centers, live oaks and white oaks can also move the oak wilt through root grafts. Prevention is key, but early detection is crucial to limiting the spread of oak wilt.

The recent winter storm caused significant ice damage across Texas, and oak trees were not an exception.

“Wounds created by the ice storm are no longer fresh and do not need to be painted; however, any new wounds created during cleanup must be painted immediately,” said Texas A&M Forest Service Biologist, Robert Edmonson.

*from Texas A&M Forest Service Press Release dated March 10, 2021*

*For more information:*

- <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/content/article.aspx?id=31484>
- <https://texasoakwilt.org>
- <http://bit.ly/OWicedamage>

## TEXAS WATER ACTION COLLABORATIVE

A coalition of industry, nonprofit, and governmental organizations announced the launch of the Texas Water Action Collaborative (TxWAC). The group will work to invest in efforts along the Upper Trinity River that yield positive returns for water quality and quantity.

Leading conservation organizations for the collaborative include Texan by Nature (TxN), Trinity River Authority (TRA), Tarrant Regional Water District (TRWD), and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Molson Coors Beverage Company is joining as a corporate partner and using its previous work with NRCS as a template to guide corporate funding opportunities and develop proposals for conservation organ-

izations’ projects and programs that need further development and funding in the Upper Trinity River region.

Coca-Cola and Bonneville Environmental Foundation’s (BEF) Business for Water Stewardship Program have worked together with Molson Coors to bring many private-sector funders to the table.

“To balance the water contained in our beverages, we support more than 60 replenishment projects in watersheds and communities throughout the U.S.,” said Jon Radtke, Water Sustainability Program manager, Coca-Cola N. America. “This collaborative will allow us to leverage collective expertise and support to achieve greater results at scale while securing a sustainable water future for the region.”

*from NRCS and TxN Press Releases dated March 22, 2021*

*For more information:*

- <http://bit.ly/TxWACarticle>
- <http://bit.ly/TxNarticle>

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**Editorial Advisor:**

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## AFTER THE STORM

Storm damage to trees in your area? Wondering what long-term effects could be from the freeze? What about windstorm damage? Check out the links below:

- ◆ <https://soundcloud.com/treesarekey/keys-to-winter-damage>  
- Podcast dated Feb. 2021; how to care for trees at this critical time
- ◆ <https://soundcloud.com/treesarekey/patience-is-key>  
- Podcast dated Feb. 2021; wait before taking drastic measures on your damaged trees
- ◆ <https://soundcloud.com/treesarekey/keys-to-freeze-damage>  
- Podcast dated 2018; long-term impact of freeze on trees
- ◆ <https://soundcloud.com/treesarekey/keys-to-proper-pruning>  
- Podcast dated 2017; proper pruning of trees
- ◆ <https://soundcloud.com/treesarekey/keys-to-restoration-pruning> - Podcast dated 2018; restoration pruning of trees
- ◆ <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/afterthestorm> - TFS website page
- ◆ <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/content/article.aspx?id=31467>  
- TFS News Release dated March 1, 2021



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