

Tall Timbers Land Conservancy: Ensuring a Century of Stewardship

Project Summary: Tall Timbers Land Conservancy uses working forest easements, conservation management plans and affirmative language in conservation easements to protect and steward working lands while enhancing wildlife habitat for diverse species.

Regional Setting: The 300,000-acre Red Hills region of north Florida and southwest Georgia extends from Tallahassee, Florida north to Thomasville, Georgia and from the Ochlockonee River east to the Aucilla River.

Land Trust Mission: To conserve the ecological, scenic and historical resources of the Red Hills region of southwest Georgia and north Florida, and its traditional land uses.

Service Area: Northern Florida (Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon and Madison counties) and southern Georgia (Brooks, Grady and Thomas counties).

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Biodiversity Values

The Red Hills area is a working landscape with the largest concentration of undeveloped plantation lands in the country and provides connectivity between wild lands along the Florida coast and to the north. More than a century of active management for game birds and timber production, which included periodic burning, protected some of the South's best remaining examples of the old-growth longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem on private lands. The area's 300,000-plus acres of plantation lands cumulatively function as a bioserve that provides the habitat connectivity and genetic diversity necessary for the survival of far-ranging mammals and migratory birds in both upland and

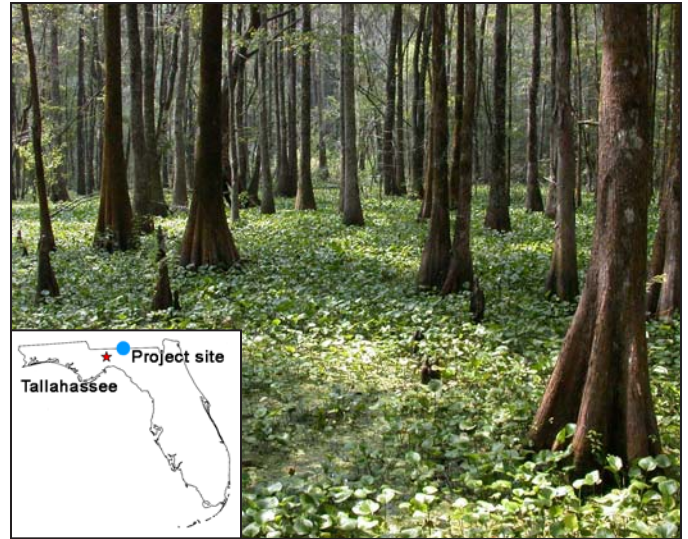


Photo: Shoreline of Lake Miccosukee, a bald cypress floodplain forest. Photo by C.K. Borg.

wetland ecosystems. The area protects habitat for such rare species as the red-cockaded woodpecker (federally endangered), the gopher tortoise (federally threatened) and numerous other at-risk native animal and plant species.

Conservation Strategy

Historically, naturally occurring fires in the longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem allowed the native flora and fauna to adapt to fire or become fire-dependent for survival. Landowners, managing for high quality timber production and exceptional game habitat, have used prescribed fire, selective timber harvest and native ground cover management practices to maintain those habitats over the last century.

The region is threatened by poorly-planned growth from the burgeoning metropolitan areas of Thomasville, GA and Tallahassee, FL. Tall Timbers Land Conservancy has developed four key strategies to conserve critical upland wildlife habitat and valuable wetland ecosystems by:

- Providing conservation planning services to local communities;
- Tracking development plans in the Red Hills region, including advocacy for wise placement of infrastructure (pipelines, landfills and wastewater spray fields);
- Protecting key properties with conservation easements and identifying scenic roads for county designation; and

- Developing specific habitat goals through research and education on various stewardship techniques (prescribed fire, selective timber harvest and native ground cover management).

Easements and Conservation Plans

The Tall Timbers Land Conservancy primarily uses conservation easements to protect land within the 300,000-acre Red Hills region, particularly the native longleaf-pine ecosystem.

Easements may include conservation management plans and affirmative clauses to ensure the long-term stewardship of the region's ecosystems. To date, more than 100,000 acres are protected by conservation easements. Easements by the Tall Timbers Land Conservancy are typically written to:

- Restrict commercial and residential development;
- Specify traditional rural uses, including farming, forestry, hunting and wildlife management;
- Allow selective timber harvesting and planting using a management plan with provisions that exceed best management practices; and
- Conserve special plant and animal habitats, wetland features and cultural resources.

For easements on larger parcels, the landowner and Tall Timbers staff develop a conservation management plan. The plan guides agriculture, forestry and wildlife management practices on the property, and recognizes the property's intrinsic conservation, economic and traditional values. The plan is developed with the easement and is signed and attached to the easement at closing. The plan may be revised over time only with the mutual agreement of the easement holder and the landowner and is reviewed on a five-year cycle.

In addition to the conservation management plan, Tall Timbers also uses affirmative language in its conservation easements to ensure that the habitat values of the region are maintained. Tall Timbers' template easement includes the following sample language:

"...The Management Plan will include at a minimum, 1) timber harvest goals and standards specific to longleaf pine stands, natural mixed loblolly, shortleaf pine stands and pine plantations; 2) management guidelines for Special Natural Areas identified in the Easement Documentation Report which include habitat for rare plants, animals or ecosystems, such as red cockaded woodpecker nesting cavities, hardwood bottoms and drainages, wetlands and riparian areas, etc.; 3) a prescribed burn program; and 4) other management practices conducive to the propagation and retention of native plants and wild

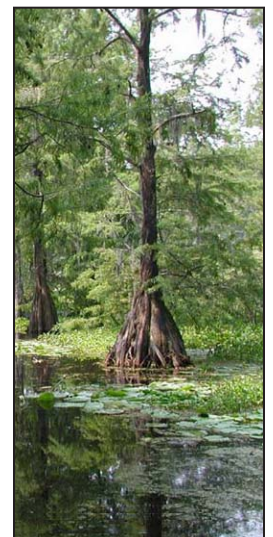
populations of game and non-game species of birds, mammals and fish and to avoid any inconsistent uses..."

"In the event that the Grantor fails to implement management activities set forth in the Management Plan including but not limited to, prescribed burning or Special Natural Area management, and such failure continues fifteen (15) days after written notice to Grantor without a schedule of implementation having been agreed to by the Grantor and Grantee, then Grantee, without further notice, shall have the right, but not the obligation, to implement such management activities at its expense using trained staff."

Research and Conservation

Tall Timbers Land Conservancy benefits from its unusual association with the Tall Timbers Research Station. The 4,000-acre facility has been preserving the forested landscape, biological diversity and natural beauty of the Red Hills region since 1958, when it was founded "... to foster exemplary land stewardship through research, conservation and education." Tall Timbers Research Station, an international leader in fire ecology, also focuses on research related to sustainable forestry practices, plant ecology, vertebrate ecology and game bird management.

The conservation efforts of Tall Timbers Land Conservancy benefit greatly from almost 50 years of research focused exclusively on the region's magnificent forests, abundant wildlife and rural land use traditions. This research is the basis for provisions that are incorporated into each easement's management plan. Conservation management plans are tailored to each property's specific habitat needs, such as the application of prescribed fire and selective timber harvesting to preserve the longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem and red-cockaded woodpecker colonies. Collaboration between research scientists and conservation biologists, science-based research and adaptive management strategies guide sustainable land management practices to ensure the long-term stewardship of wildlife and wildlands in the Red Hills region.



For More Information

- **Tall Timbers Research Station:**
www.talltimbers.org