FSC US CONTROLLED WOOD REGIONAL MEETINGS NATIVE LONGLEAF PINE SYSTEMS

FSC REGION Southeast

HCVS IN FSC A High Conservation Value (HCV) is a biological, ecological, social or cultural value of outstanding significance or critical importance. FSC is working to ensure that our system helps to maintain and enhance the special places that support these values. For more information on HCVs, see the Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values.[1]

WHY ARE NATIVE LONGLEAF PINE SYSTEMS CONSIDERED AN HCV? Their rarity - Native Longleaf Pine Systems were once one of the most widespread forest types in the US but were reduced to less than 5% of their original range, becoming one of the rarest forest systems in the world. This historical reduction was driven by suppression of fire and conversion to other forest types. These forest systems are associated with high animal and plant diversity, including many rare, threatened and endangered species. These types of HCVs were identified using guidance associated with the FSC US Forest Management Standard, with support from other information sources and expert consultation.

SUMMARY OF NATIVE LONGLEAF PINE SYSTEMS These fire-dependent systems include longleaf pine as the dominant tree, a conspicuous lack of mid-story trees and shrubs, and a well- developed, diverse ground layer (dominated by bunch grasses and other flowering plants). At a landscape scale, naturally occurring longleaf systems typically exist as an uneven-aged mosaic of even-aged patches, which vary in size, shape, structure, composition and density depending upon the local conditions. This variability helps to drive the high biodiversity associated with them, with most of that biodiversity in the ground layer. Fire is the most important driver in the system, maintaining both the structural characteristics and the species diversity, particularly in the ground layer. Longleaf Pine systems can be subcategorized into four basic groups: Montane, Sandhill, Rolling Hill, and Flatwoods & Savanna.

[1] Brown, E., N. Dudley, A. Lindhe, D.R. Muhtaman, C. Stewart, and T. Synnott (eds.). 2013 (October). Common guidance for the identification of High Conservation Values. HCV Resource Network.

These systems are associated with particularly high animal and plant diversity, including nearly 900 endemic plant species and rare wildlife such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Eastern Harvest Mouse, Gopher Tortoise, Wolf spider, Eastern Indigo Snake, and Flatwoods Salamander.

"Native" in this instance refers to existing longleaf pine that is on a site that has historically been maintained as longleaf pine. Longleaf pine stands that have been restored in areas that have not been historically maintained in longleaf pine do not apply under this definition. "Native" does not imply a particular regeneration method; these stands may be either planted or naturally regenerated.

IDENTIFIED THREATS TO NATIVE LONGLEAF PINE SYSTEMS

Threats include altered stand structure (due to lack of fire), **conversion to other forest types,** conversion to other land uses (development and agriculture), habitat disturbance (including **management techniques that inhibit native understory communities which may include herbicide application**), fragmentation, and **modification of hydrological features (including by both past and current silvicultural practices)**. Because native longleaf cannot compete with other species for short-term returns on investment, it is still being converted to other forest types. While these other forest types may provide an acceptable habitat for some species, their establishment is threatening existing longleaf pine areas. As the bulk of the biodiversity exists in the understory of a longleaf pine system, restoration or maintenance of species composition is an essential component of longleaf pine conservation. While herbicides can be an essential tool in restoration of longleaf pine, there is mixed evidence regarding the impact of herbicides on understory vegetation – different chemicals and application methods may have differing affects. The hydrology of a site is important for both establishment of longleaf pine systems, but also for the natural function of the wetlands (ephemeral and permanent) that typically occur within them.

Threats are different in different places, with lack of fire being the overall greatest concern, followed by conversion to other land uses (development) and incompatible forest management practices (predominantly conversion to other forest types). The interactions between these three threats compound the problems. It is possible to harvest in and sustainably manage longleaf pine systems and therefore timber management by itself is not considered a threat.

WHAT ARE MITIGATION ACTIONS AND WHAT WOULD WE LIKE TO ACHIEVE?

Companies that mix FSC-certified forest materials and non-certified materials to make products with an 'FSC Mix' claim/logo are required to address certain risks before using the non-certified forest materials. One of these is the risk that their forest materials come from areas where HCVs are threatened by forest management activities. FSC has completed a US National Risk Assessment to identify where this risk is greater than 'low' native longleaf pine systems are one of these places - specifically, the counties that are identified in Figure 1 of the Range-wide Longleaf Conservation Plan as having 10,000 or more acres of Longleaf Pine[2]. Companies that wish to use non-certified materials from the identified places are required to either avoid sourcing from specific sites where the threats are occurring, or to implement mitigation actions that reduce the risk of sourcing from those sites. For this rare ecosystem, any mitigation actions will need to address the threats identified above in **bold**.

[2] Effective protection is demonstrated by GAP Status 1 & 2 areas in the PAD-US dataset (https://gapanalysis.usgs.gov/padus/data/download/) and USFS Inventoried Roadless Areas (https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/roadless/2001roadlessrule/maps/?cid=stelprdb5382437).

The FSC US National Risk Assessment also introduces the concept of holding regional meetings to bring stakeholders together to collaboratively identify effective and practical mitigation actions. We are asking participants to consider landscape-scale mitigation actions, that will help to reduce risks across the landscape in which the companies source forest materials. An effective way to do this may be to build on existing programs and projects that are already tackling these issues. The companies implementing mitigation actions are required to select one or more from the options identified at the regional meetings.

Please help us to determine what these mitigation actions should be, by visiting engage.fsc.us.org and joining the virtual discussion, or attending a regional meeting.

SOME SOURCES THAT CAN HELP GENERATE MITIGATION OPTION IDEAS

- America's Longleaf Alliance
- The Nature Conservancy – Longleaf Pine overview & state-by-state features
- USFS Southern Research Station – History & Current Condition of Longleaf Pines in the Southern United States
- Natural Resources Conservation Service – Longleaf Pine Initiative