

## Shortleaf Pine: An Opportunity for Landowners in Virginia

Mike Black, Shortleaf Pine Initiative



### Overview

Shortleaf pine forests and associated habitats once covered a vast area of the continent from the piney woods of eastern Texas and Oklahoma to the eastern seaboard from New Jersey to Florida. Shortleaf pine dominated significant portions of its historic range due to its adaptation to frequent fire return intervals that were common for thousands of years until the loss of open range and subsequent fire suppression efforts. Shortleaf pine not only provided outstanding forest products for dimension lumber, poles and paper, but also excellent wildlife habitat, particularly in stands with adequate sunlight to the ground and frequent fire return intervals. The loss of these open forest habitats has led to significant declines in both plant and wildlife populations and range that are dependent on these early successional forests.

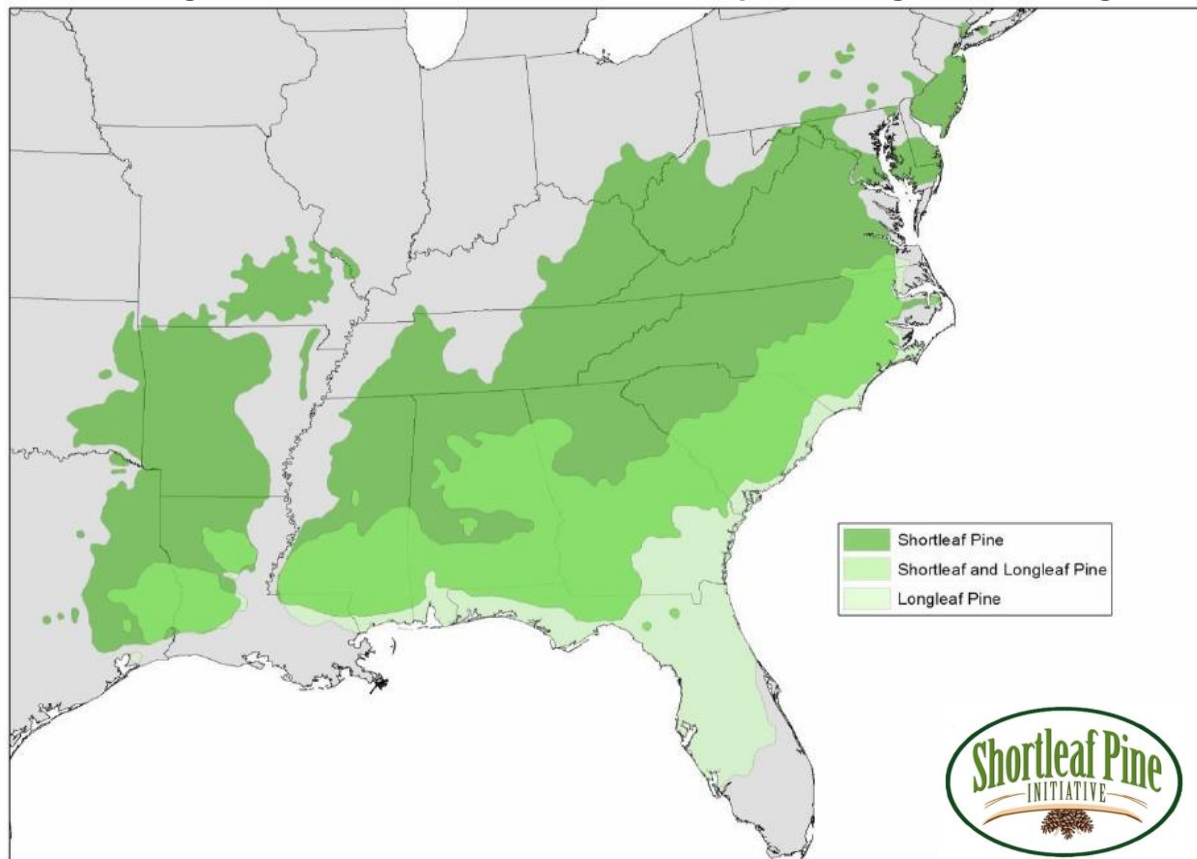


*A stand of Shortleaf pine managed for both forest products and wildlife habitat. Thinning, along with a frequent application of prescribed fire, promotes an understory*

*of plants beneficial to both game and non-game wildlife species. Photo courtesy of Mike Black, SPI.*

Shortleaf pine can be found in 22 states from east Texas to Florida and up the eastern seaboard to New Jersey. According to Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) data from 2012, there are only approximately 6.1 million acres of shortleaf and shortleaf-oak habitats across the range. The same FIA data from the 1980s showed that there were approximately 12.6 million acres of shortleaf pine and shortleaf-oak habitat. This represents a 52 percent habitat decrease across the range. Most of the remaining shortleaf pine is found west of the Mississippi.

#### **Historic Range of Shortleaf Pine and Area of Overlap with Longleaf Pine Range**



***Both shortleaf and longleaf pine are often favorites of private landowners (on proper soils) for both high quality timber production and excellent wildlife habitat. Both species respond well to management utilizing thinning and prescribed fire. Map courtesy of Southern Regional Extension Forestry (SREF)***

#### **The Loss of Shortleaf Forests in Virginia**

While shortleaf pine has decreased in all areas in its range, the greatest loss in Virginia occurred decades before losses in other states, as fence laws were enacted there far earlier

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in history. Fence laws and the end of open range drastically reduced the frequency of landscape-scale fires that favored shortleaf pine. Intensive settlement across Virginia also occurred earlier than in other states. Another factor that has led to the recent decline of shortleaf in Virginia is that shortleaf often occurs in mixed stands of shortleaf and other hardwoods. When these stands are cut (with the shortleaf removed), there is often insufficient sunlight to allow for regeneration, and the shortleaf disappears. Like other southern yellow pines, shortleaf requires bare soil and nearly full sunlight for effective regeneration.

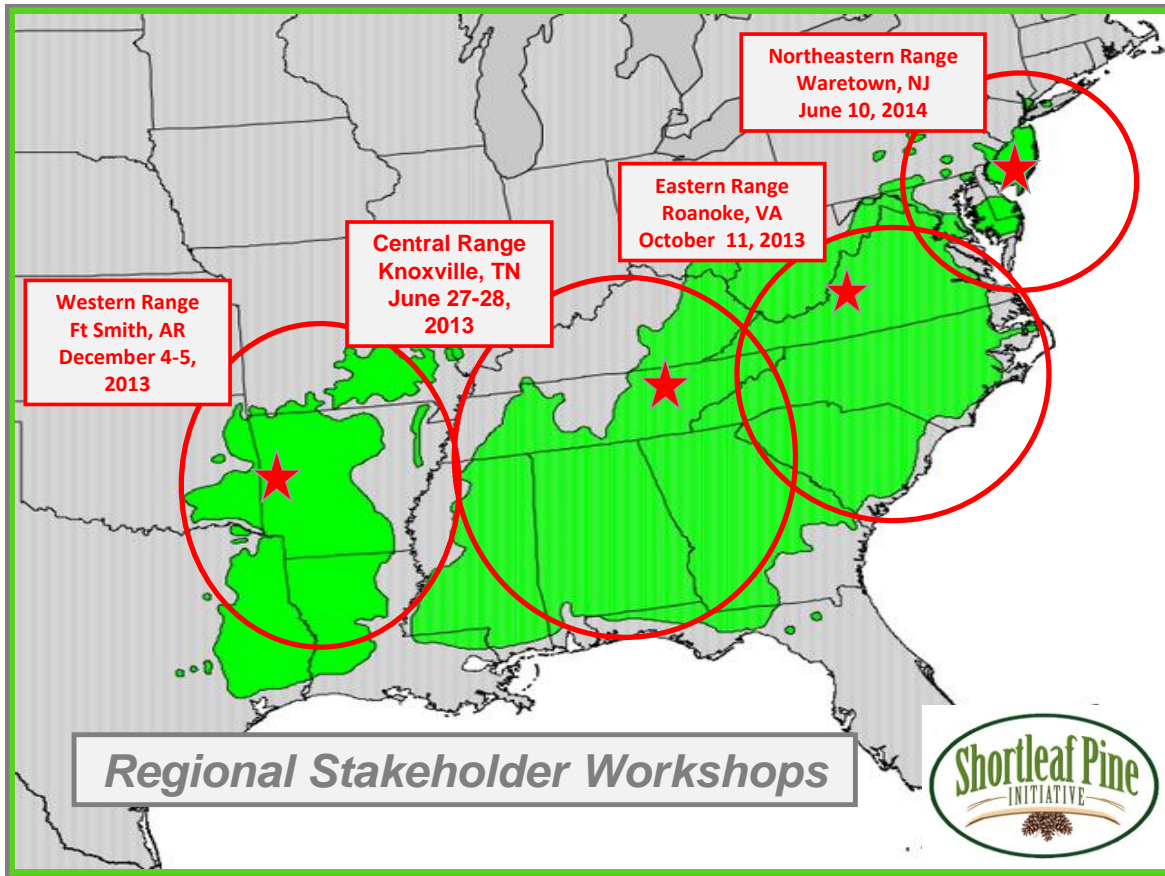
Throughout much of the southeast, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the planting of loblolly pine for fiber production and a faster rate of growth. Another favored species – longleaf pine – is also attracting interest and attention for planting and restoration for both sawtimber and pole forest products. Most management focus has been towards loblolly and longleaf the last few decades without much emphasis on shortleaf.

### **The Shortleaf Pine Initiative**

A concerned group of foresters and biologists met in September 2010 at a shortleaf meeting hosted by Southern Regional Extension Forestry (SREF). Those in attendance all shared an interest in the value of shortleaf pine for both forest and wildlife management objectives. Many stayed after the meeting and formed what became the Shortleaf Working Group. These professionals continued to meet and promote shortleaf and alert others to the decline of the resource across the range. A national conference was held in October 2011 in Huntsville, Alabama with over 100 in attendance. During this conference, the enormity of the loss of acreage was realized due to a presentation using FIA data.

Following the Huntsville conference, the need for range-wide shortleaf restoration was accepted and a planning team was formed. Sufficient funding was obtained to conduct a series of four stakeholder workshops across the range to gather input for the planning process. The first draft of the Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan was completed in September 2014 and subsequent drafts have been written in the last year. The Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan is in its final draft and should be officially released and available in January 2016.

A great deal of renewed interest and management has occurred in the last four years, and local initiatives have developed in portions of Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Texas, and New Jersey. The Shortleaf Pine Initiative (SPI) was formalized in 2013. An SPI Advisory Committee was formed, composed of numerous forestry and wildlife agencies and organizations, and a full-time director was hired in November 2014. The Initiative operates out of the University of Tennessee's Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, and operates in close collaboration with the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative and the Center for Native Grassland Management.



***Four stakeholder workshops were held to provide input for the Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan – available in January, 2016. One of these workshops was held in Roanoke, Virginia in October 2013.***

### **Why Shortleaf?**

Professional foresters and wildlife biologists have understood the value of shortleaf forests in the management of public lands. It is a good fit with the principles of ecosystem management; when shortleaf is managed with thinning and prescribed fire, it not only provides excellent wildlife habitat, but also yields forest products from thinning and final harvest.

Private landowners manage and retain land for a variety of reasons. Income from the sale of timber is important, but landowners are increasingly interested in the objectives of wildlife, legacy of ownership and recreation, and shortleaf fits these objectives well. Lower-quality, well-drained sites, not used for high-quality hardwood management, can be planted or managed for shortleaf and mixed stands. When managed properly with thinning and application of prescribed fire, shortleaf can provide an additional source of timber income and excellent game and non-game wildlife habitat.

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Interested? Contact your local forester and wildlife biologist. Additional information can be found at [www.shortleafpine.net](http://www.shortleafpine.net). Since not all sites and lands are suitable for shortleaf, it is always recommended that the services and expertise of a professional forester and wildlife biologist be utilized in the planning process.

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***Editor's note:** Interested landowners can find their local state forester at [www.dof.virginia.gov](http://www.dof.virginia.gov). In certain counties, cost-share assistance is available to help landowners cover the cost of planting shortleaf pine. Learn more here: [http://dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/forestry-topics/FT0016-Forestry-Quail-Habitat-Recovery-Cost-Share-Prog-2014-06\\_pub.pdf](http://dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/forestry-topics/FT0016-Forestry-Quail-Habitat-Recovery-Cost-Share-Prog-2014-06_pub.pdf)*

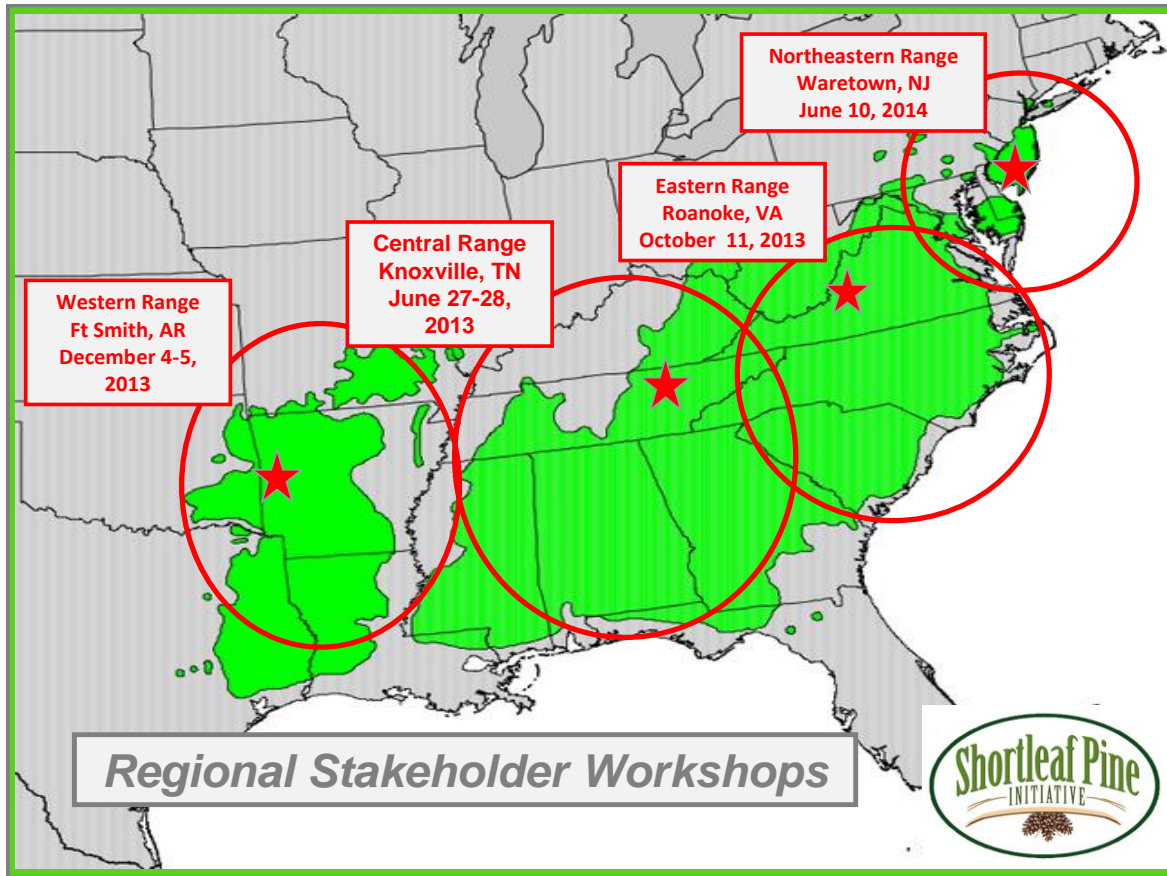
*Learn more about shortleaf pine:*

*Draft Shortleaf Pine Restoration Plan: <http://shortleafpine.net/tools-and-resources/additional-resources/publications/shortleaf-pine-restoration-plan>*

*Shortleaf Pine: An Option for Virginia Landowners: [https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/420/420-165/420-165\\_pdf.pdf](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/420/420-165/420-165_pdf.pdf)*

*Successful Establishment of Shortleaf Pine: <http://ncforestservice.gov/publications/Forestry%20Leaflets/FM14.pdf>*

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