



Reforestation—a Louisiana Priority for Decades

Replanting with pine and a mix of hardwoods can provide multiple benefits for recreation, wildlife habitat diversity, and economic return

Introduction

Louisiana Wildlife Federation (LWF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that advocates for conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat in our state. We are advocates for forested lands for their economic, ecological, and recreational roles in Louisiana and have supported active reforestation as fundamental to the health of forest ecosystems.

A Bit of History

Beginning in the late nineteenth century Louisiana's forests were cut over massively with little thought for the future of the land, wildlife, water quality, or ecosystems. Foresters and political leaders took note of the damage that was being done across the U.S., resulting in the founding of a national conservation movement with early leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, and Gifford Pinchot, first head of the U.S. Forest Service. In Louisiana during the early decades of the twentieth century, some prescient individuals such as Henry Hardtner and Caroline Dormon encouraged the recognition and application of forestry management principles. However, the exploitative approach in Louisiana continued into the 1940s when some of the largest and most remote virgin bottomland forests in the state finally fell to the ax. Most of the lands stripped of trees were left to regenerate slowly on their own or were converted to some kind of agricultural use which often did not prosper due to low soil fertility. Soil erosion became a big problem in some of the areas that had been denuded of trees. The reforestation and "wise use" movement became a public policy objective, which eventually led to a program to assist landowners who were interested in jump-starting the regeneration that would otherwise take place much more slowly by natural seeding. For several decades, Louisiana has had positive trends in forested acreage. These trends have increased the supply of wood available for various purposes, ranging from sawtimber to build houses to pine pulp material for paper and packaging products and wood pellets for European power plants seeking renewable energy sources. Forests throughout the state have continued to provide a primary setting for outdoor recreation and they have provided the necessary backdrop for the recovery of threatened and endangered forest wildlife species such as black bear, panther, red-cockaded woodpecker, and a flourishing deer population.

Recent Changes Affecting Landowners' Potential Economic Returns and Program Options

As the supply of wood has increased throughout Louisiana and the southeast U.S. with the recovery of our forests, technology and economic changes have simultaneously reduced demand for some forms of wood, leading to a steady increase in timber inventories and flat or declining prices that landowners can obtain for their pulp and sawtimber.

This situation challenges landowners to reforest in smart ways that will produce a variety of tree species and a natural mix that harbors the best wildlife potential for recreational and aesthetic purposes.

Because such an approach does not overcommit a landowner to one species, it also provides economic diversification benefit as the demand for various species continues to wax and wane and in recent years has favored hardwoods.

Reforestation that promotes both economic and ecological diversification:

- planting a mix of hardwoods of several species in addition to pine
- favoring longleaf pine in the areas where longleafs were the original dominant forest type
- providing openings for natural regeneration of undergrowth for the wildlife to browse
- limiting use of herbicides
- providing 100% hardwood replantings in ravines, creek bottoms, and sloped areas
- planting species that were common in the original forests of an area, depending on such factors as slope, soil type, geology, and locations of intermittent streams

LWF urges your consideration of the following factors as input to the reforestation decision:

Review the recent decades' trends in sawtimber and pulp prices for pine and hardwoods.

Ask yourself what kind of trees will give the best possibility of higher prices in the future.

Ask questions about trends in inventory of pine pulp and sawtimber as well as locations of mills near your land, which will affect your ability to find an interested logger.

Review the thinning requirements (including timing and cost thereof) of any pine monoculture management. Loblolly must be thinned periodically to be average wildlife habitat, and low pine pulp prices limit landowners' ability to get the requisite thinning done.

Consider your family's values and interest in enjoying your land for hiking, hunting, and other outdoor activities. What type of woods do you want to see on the property? What recreational uses might you make of it?

Consider the greater ecological stability of a well-mixed hardwood and pine reforestation that mimics the natural forests that preceded the original cutting of the forests a hundred years ago.

Consider the role of forests in storing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (maintenance of forests worldwide will be a factor in limiting the severity of climate change in the future.)

LWF can suggest people who have shown an interest in helping landowners as they contemplate advantages of diversified reforestation:

- Dr. Richard Williams, forester, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, (318-473-7804)
- Robbie Hutchins, forester, LSU Ag Center, (318-308-2995)
- C. C. Richmond, private lands biologist, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, (337-764-4822)
- Mike Adcock, owner of Cypress Brake Tree Farm, Rayville (318-282-8454)—hardwood seedlings for sale
- Don Anderson, owner of Delta Wildlife, Crowville (318-282-0418)—hardwood seedlings for sale
- Charles Williams, LWF Chairman of Forest and Upland Wildlife Committee, (225-250-8623)

