

Beyond Longleaf...

Longleaf pine forests are more than one species of tree. A fully functioning forest supports a variety of plants and wildlife.

WHY NATIVE UNDERSTORY SPECIES?

Plant Diversity: Much of the diversity in longleaf ecosystems comes from the abundant plant life that is found on the forest floor. Many of these plant species are rare and/or found nowhere else.

Wildlife Habitat: Native understory cover, maintained by periodic fire, supports diverse wildlife populations, including:

- Non-game animal species
- Game animal species
- Native pollinators
- Rare & endangered species

Fire: Native understory plants provide fine fuels that are necessary to carry fire across the forest floor. Fire in turn helps maintain open conditions needed by many native plants.

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Restoring Understory

Re-introducing prescribed fire to longleaf forests promotes and benefits existing native plants.

On sites where native species are absent, such as former agricultural fields, planting is necessary to restore the understory.

Select plant species based on specific site conditions and management goals. Species should naturally occur in the area and grow in similar habitats.

Control Competition: Use a combination of prescribed fire, herbicides, and mechanical treatments to reduce woody vegetation and remove weedy species prior to planting.

Directly sow seeds or outplant nursery grown seedlings, preferably using local seed sources. Time the planting to take advantage of seasonal rains.

Develop a Plan

Prepare the Site

Plant Understory

Prescribed Fire

Prepare Seed Bed (if seeding): For optimal germination, expose the soil in forests or cutovers using prescribed fire. If disking former ag fields, compact loose soil prior to seeding.

Regular fire is essential for long-term understory restoration, but newly established plants need 1-2 growing seasons before burning.