

Sustainable Forests

A resource for Georgia landowners, sponsored by the SFI Implementation Committee.

The Reforestation Issue

Tree planting has long been a visible symbol, and even a measure of success, of forestry. As a forestry community, we publish photos of tree planting, and annually celebrate acres and seedlings planted.

Southern forest owners, across all ownerships, are still planting a lot of trees; but the overall numbers for annual tree planting are moderating, from the highs of several years ago.

In this issue of *Sustainable Forests*, sponsored by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee, we:

- Look at some of the factors that have influenced the ups and downs of tree planting over the past couple of decades;



- Talk about what this means for Southern forests, and for you;
- Learn about the Longleaf Restoration Initiative and how you can get involved; and
- Get a few reforestation tips from the Georgia Forestry Commission.



Tree Planting Declines, But Southern Forests are Healthy, Productive and Growing

For the fifth straight year, tree planting across the 11 Southern states remains relatively level, though significantly below consistently high levels observed in the early to late 1990s. And Southern tree planting is declining across all ownerships—family forests, industry and other institutional ownerships.

What's driving these trends and what does it say about the sustainability and long-term health of the South's forests? What are implications for wood markets and other societal values derived from these forests?

First, there's no need to panic. There's a logical explanation for the tree-planting trends. Southern forests are healthy, productive and growing, and we're not going to run out of forests. And, there are still markets for wood and fiber from your forest.

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Many Factors Influence Tree Planting

There are many interrelated factors that have influenced recent tree planting activity:

- First, you have to go back a couple of decades to when cost-share programs were in full force and there was rapid conversion of low quality agricultural lands to forest.
- Then, you have to factor in recent trends related to harvesting shifts that favor thinning over clearcutting, and interest in row crop agriculture to support ethanol production.

At the height of the Conservation Reserve Program and other cost-share programs, tree planting by family forest owners peaked at almost 1.4 million acres in 1988. Today, the number of non-industrial acres planted with federal or state cost-share assistance across the 11 states has dropped from 844,700 in 1989 to just 160,684 acres in 2006 according to a Georgia Forestry Commission report.*

That big push to quickly replant forests once they were harvested and to convert marginal cropland into forests in the 1980s and 1990s was so successful that most of the marginal cropland has already been converted to forests. There are simply fewer opportunities across the South today to utilize cost-share programs, even if they were available, because we have essentially “caught up” with the conversion of available croplands.

Rising prices for agricultural commodities like corn in response to potential biofuel markets may halt, if not reverse, the trend of conversion of cropland to forestland in future years.

Forest Productivity Up; Growing More than Harvesting

While tree-planting statistics are important indicators of the long-term health and sustainability of Southern forests, you also have to consider forest productivity and the growth-harvest relationship of Southern forests.

There continues to be a net increase of growth over harvest across the South—or we’re still growing more wood than is being harvested—based on data independently collected through the U.S. Forest Service. The increases in growth may be attributed to:

- Improved forest productivity related to the increased use of intensive silvicultural practices, including planting genetically improved seedlings, and the use of herbicides and fertilizer; and
- The site fertility and lack of tree competition on former croplands where new forests have been established.

As we move into the early-2000s and beyond, timber harvest trends will be changing. Price margins between pulpwood and small sawtimber prices have become much greater lately as demand for solid wood products has grown.

Thinnings, or intermediate harvests, are now prescribed on a larger number of acres across the South in an effort to groom forests for this higher value market.

When you couple that with the increased productivity of both industrial and non-industrial forestlands, wood volumes from intermediate harvests represent a much larger portion of the total harvest than they did in the 1980s.

An additional incentive for some landowners who manage forests to older ages is enhancing recreational value of their forests. Certain wildlife species such as deer, turkey and quail thrive in older and more open timber stands that have more groundcover.

Across Georgia and the South

In Georgia, you can expect continuing shifts in the availability of different wood and fiber products, and diameter classes of logs. Foresters are projecting a cycle consisting of an abundance of small diameter pine in the short term, followed by a

tightening of pine pulpwood supplies and an increasing abundance of small diameter sawtimber in 10 to 15 years. This should provide a valuable opportunity for your reforestation efforts today.

Going forward, the South will likely continue to grow more wood on fewer acres. Manufacturers will undoubtedly adjust pricing trends to meet supply and demand imbalances and may improvise new products from available products. As in the past, both landowners and manufacturers will continue to respond—with different forest management approaches and manufacturing capabilities—to the fluctuations in the wood and fiber availability and price.



*Tree planting data is based on estimates compiled by the Georgia Forestry Commission from state forestry agencies and the U.S. Forest Service.

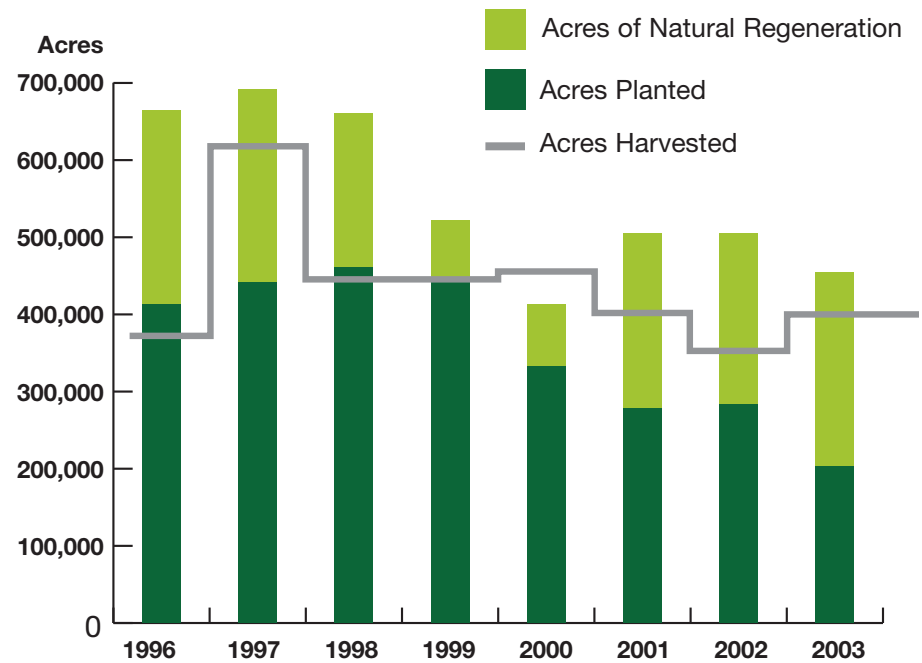
Tips for Successful Reforestation



Plan Now for 2008-2009. Steve Chapman with the Georgia Forestry Commission offers a few tips for future reforestation activities:

- **Develop a plan with the help of a professional forester.**
- **Order seedlings early.**
- **Obtain the highest quality seedlings with the best genetics for your area.**
- **Allow for adequate site preparation that considers your site and the amount of competition from other plants.**
- **When seedlings are picked up, ensure they are high quality before transporting them to the field for planting.**
- **If there is access to refrigeration, keep seedlings refrigerated until they are ready to be planted.**
- **Proper seedling care after shipment and delivery is critical. Make sure that just enough seedlings that can be planted in one day are transported to the field.**
- **Plant early in the planting season.**
- **Select your tree-planting vendor carefully. Get references and talk to them.**
- **You or your forester should supervise planting to ensure that you get the highest quality job.**
- **Post-planting treatments, such as herbaceous weed spraying, are often recommended to ensure survival and growth.**
- **Conduct a survival check the fall following planting.**

Georgia Harvest vs. Regeneration



Reforestation and Harvest in Relative Proportion

A quick look at Georgia trends appears to confirm that reforestation of stands that have received a final harvest continues to be in relative proportion. Also note the recent downward trend in acres planted. These data are plotted from the GFC reforestation and harvest data using a two-year lag from harvest to regeneration.



Restoring the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem

Longleaf pine forests and savannas once occupied 92 million acres across the Southeast. Only 3 percent of that acreage remains and we are still losing 100,000 acres every year. In Georgia alone, 20 high priority animals and 56 high priority plants that depend on the longleaf pine ecosystem have suffered significant declines. Landowners like you can help restore this system's critically important habitat types while sustainably managing for longleaf pine forest products.

Best management practices for longleaf forests include: conserving existing longleaf pine stands, planting 400-600 seedlings per acre, minimum row widths of 12 feet, and a consistent prescribed burning rotation. With the establishment of a new longleaf forest, you may need to re-establish native understory plants.

In Georgia, longleaf pine restoration is being supported through the Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan (www.gadnr.org/cwcs) and Georgia Bobwhite Technical Team (www.bobwhiteconservation.org). For more information, contact a forester with the Georgia Forestry Commission or Natural Resource Conservation Service office; or log on to one of the websites noted above.



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U.S. Forests Stable and Healthy Over Time

The real proof of the success of forest management in the United States is in four centuries of forest history. Consider these facts:

- When European settlers arrived in the 1600s, there were an estimated 1 billion acres of forestland.
- Despite tremendous population growth and settlement, and the clearing of 200 million acres for agricultural from 1850 to 1900, there are still 750 million acres of forestland in the U.S.
- For the last 100 years, total forest area in the U.S. has been relatively stable, and in recent years, from 2000 to 2005, the forest area grew by 2 million acres.
- Today, 59 percent of U.S. forestland is considered "working forests," which are managed for some level of timber production. Another 41 percent is considered "restricted forests" and includes national and state forests, national parks and reserves, and Bureau of Land Management lands.

Data Sources: USDA National Report on Sustainable Forests 2003-FS 76; Forest and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; 2002 RPA

About SFI in Georgia



The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Implementation Committee in Georgia has been making a positive difference in Georgia forests since 1995. SFI works behind the scenes supporting responsible forestry, wood procurement and harvesting in Georgia. Collectively, SFI has trained thousands of loggers and foresters and

provided forestry information and support to private landowners. Additionally, SFI program participants manage their forest or wood procurement practices to comply with the SFI Standard.

For More Information about SFI, call 706-542-7691 or log on to www.sfi-georgia.org or www.aboutsfb.org.

Photos: Courtesy of Jay Brittain/Temple-Inland.

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