

**Southern Regional Extension Forestry Report**  
**William G. Hubbard, Regional Forester**  
**Southern PLN Meeting**  
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**Background:** The Southern Regional Extension Forestry Office was created in 1979 to serve the thirteen 1862 Land Grant Universities (LGU's) and the USDA Forest Service – Southern Region/State & Private Forestry Unit (USDA-FS, SPF). The position of Regional Forester with the SREF office is the result of a federal MOU on forestry education and technology transfer signed by several agencies in 1978. The MOU, the result of federal legislation entitled the Cooperative Forestry Act of 1978 was signed by the USDA Forest Service, Extension Service, Soil Conservation Service and National Associate of State Foresters. The Southern Regional Extension Forestry Office is the only regional Extension Forestry office in the country at this time.

**Mission:** The mission of the office has expanded over the years to be more comprehensive and state-serving. The current mission states: “ The mission of the Southern Regional Extension Forestry office is to serve the southern Land Grant University System and USDA Forest Service through the collaborative development of forestry technologies, tools, products and programs that improve the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and impact of supporting institutions.

**Administration:** The Association of Southern Regional Extension Directors (ASRED) currently administers the project jointly through an official MOU with the Deputy Regional Forester of the USDA Forest Service – State & Private Forestry Unit in Atlanta, Georgia. The Extension Director, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service at UGA serves as the point of immediate supervision and works with the ASRED Forestry Committee to provide oversight and guidance to the Regional Forester program. The Regional Forester in turn supervises a half-time Business Manager and a half-time Communications and Marketing Director who are funded by contributions from ASRED membership institutions and the USDA Forest Service. In addition, the Regional Forester hires staff to coordinate and lead projects that are undertaken to support the Southern Land Grant Extension Services, the Forest Service, and other key stakeholders. These projects range from large, regionally coordinated competitive grant, to service oriented projects such as the development of websites and mobile applications. Staff include 7 full time specialists in urban forestry, wildland fire education, forest restoration, climate change, bioenergy, forest health, forest economics, Internet technologies, mobile application development, Geographic Information Systems, (GIS) and a variety of other topical areas and issues. Staff are assisted by several undergraduate students who provide data input, graphic design and other services.

**Major Programs and Projects:** The SREF budget for the three year calendar year period of 2014-2016 includes over \$1,000,000 in grants and contracts. Several major initiatives and programs are listed below. Several others will be listed in the annual report.

*Climate Learning Network* – SREF is providing leadership in the creation of an eXtension Learning Network on Climate Change, which will connect Cooperative Extension professionals

and facilitate peer-to-peer learning. This project is co-funded by the Office of the Chief Economist, USDA and the eXtension Foundation. The Learning Network, which is currently in development, includes input from the USDA Climate Hub leadership as well as experts working on climate change within the LGUS. SREF has agreed to a number of deliverables for the first phase of development, including a survey of climate hub leaders, the development of a database of agriculture and forestry professionals in the East, and the creation of six online Moodle® learning modules for the eXtension site. Phase 2 expansion has been funded to include the Pacific Northwest Climate Hub in the Network and the development of additional, targeted Moodle® modules. Discussions are underway to expand the Learning Network to all Climate Hubs in the country, in a manner that ensures the development of a powerful tool adaptive to users' needs at various scales.

*SERCH Tools (Service Foresters Toolkit)* – SREF is also working directly with the Southeastern Regional Climate Hub (SERCH) Director and staff to incorporate climate change information, data, and tools into version 2.0 of the Service Forester's Toolkit Mobile Application that was developed in 2014 and available on Google Play® and the App Store®. The Service Forester's Toolkit App will include numerous other facts, tables and figures that will continue to be helpful to state and county Extension professionals.

*PINEMAP* - SREF staff have worked on the Extension component of a NIFA AFRI CAP program, funded at 20 million dollars for 5 years that includes ~80 researchers from 12 southern LGU's and the federal government. There are over 30 million acres of pine plantation in the Southern United States and changes in climate will affect these forests. The PINEMAP project's goals include development of tools and technologies for professionals to use in climate adaptation and mitigation scenarios surrounding pine plantation management. Over the past four years, the SREF office has provided leadership in the development of Extension materials and tools for professional foresters, landowners, policymakers and youth. Several of the products can be accessed online at <http://www.pinemap.org>. Additionally, SREF has leveraged resources from this project towards development of the Southern Region Extension Climate Academy. PINEMAP has entered its 5<sup>th</sup> and final year with a possible one-year extension on the horizon.

*Southern Region Extension Climate Academy (SRECA)*- The SREF office with funding through PINEMAP, in combination with leadership from PLN, and other co-organizers, developed and planned the Southern Region Extension Climate Academy. SRECA was held in Athens, GA in September, 2014 and included 120 Extension agents and specialists from across the South, who were trained in climate science, climate communication, and sector specific information in livestock, forestry, coastal and crop production. The goal of SRECA was to provide opportunities for Extension employees to learn more about how climate change may affect their resources, how to talk about it with their clients, and tools and resources towards adaptation and mitigation.

*Southeastern Integrated Biomass Supply Systems (IBSS)* – This was another large NIFA AFRI CAP program in the biomass/bioenergy arena. SREF has assisted with regional leadership in

the development of Extension materials for professionals interested in learning more about both agriculture (switchgrass) and woody biomass (short rotation woody crops and pine) opportunities. This project, now in its 5<sup>th</sup> year, has involved research, Extension and teaching on all aspects of the biomass to bioenergy production system. This included research and Extension on growth, management, harvest, storage and transportation of crops, feedstock conversion, and bioenergy marketing and policy aspects. This project was funded at 15 million dollars for 5 years and involved 4 land grant universities and the private sector, and may continue for a 6<sup>th</sup> year. A majority of the Extension materials and tools can be found online at <http://www.se-ibss.org>.

*Urban Forestry & Energy Conservation eXtension site (UFEC)* – This project is entering its second phase which involves the development of 4 high definition videos highlighting how urban forestry management practices can enhance energy conservation. Videos will be featured on the current eXtension site and will be available on You Tube. SREF is partnering with Virginia Tech and providing monetary resources to their professionals to assist with the development of the videos and enhance the site. The original site, funded in 2012 is located at [http://www.extension.org/trees\\_for\\_energy\\_conservation](http://www.extension.org/trees_for_energy_conservation) and contains articles, FAQ's and other resources for the professional and homeowner interested in urban trees for energy conservation.

*National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy: Southern Region, Communication & Extension Activities* - SREF works closely with several federal agencies to improve upon the implementation of the National Cohesive Strategy (CFS) in the Southern Region. SREF developed several marketing and educational products and activities in support of CFS, including: a social network analysis of the southern fire community, development of the [www.southernwildfire.net](http://www.southernwildfire.net) website, creation of 30+ fact sheets highlighting Southeastern wildfire success stories, co-development of CFS southern region value cards, and several other outreach products. SREF staff attended regional meetings in 2015 to improve communications and programming in support of CFS, including: the Tucson, Arizona Extension Fire Workshop (Preparing for Wildfires: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity); the Tuscaloosa, Alabama fire conference (5<sup>th</sup> Fire in Eastern Oak Forests Conference); and Tallahassee, Florida Prescribed Fire Communication Summit (Best Practices for Communication & Delivery of Prescribed Fire Messaging).

*Shortleaf Pine Restoration Initiative (SPI)* – SREF coordinates with numerous federal, state, and private partners, including state Extension, to promote the new Shortleaf Pine Initiative (SPI), through marketing, educational products, and other support. Many of the products and other support can be found at the Shortleaf Pine Initiative website SREF created: [www.shortleafpine.net](http://www.shortleafpine.net). For the website, SREF developed 17 shortleaf fact sheets; gathered nursery, cost-share, and regional expert contact lists; created an online site suitability mapping tool; set up a regional events listing and calendar; wrote the Initiative overview and history; and researched and compiled other relevant sites and links. SREF is also currently developing an extensive, shortleaf literature library; a network of featured demonstration sites; archived video presentations; and additional fact sheets for the website. SREF staff have assisted in editing and adding relevant information to the Regional Shortleaf Restoration Plan; are assisting in planning the 3<sup>rd</sup> Biennial Shortleaf Pine Conference; have developed a social media plan for

the Initiative on Facebook and Twitter; and have attended numerous regional shortleaf pine-focused workshops to present information on the SPI and network with relevant contacts, showcase SREF products related to the SPI, and to record relevant lectures for the creation of educational video presentations to be housed on the SPI website and YouTube.

*Economic Importance of Forestry in the South Initiative* – The SREF office is leading an effort to develop tools, methods and products for use by state forest economic and marketing specialists. The SREF staff worked with Mississippi State University Extension Forester James Henderson to develop regional fact sheets on the economic importance of forestry in the South. The SREF office also organized a summit in the spring of 2015 that brought together more than 30 experts in forest economics and IMPLAN modeling from across the southern region, to develop a “standard” methodology for states to be able to develop comparable state-level fact sheets with IMPLAN data. A survey of southern forest economists which will provide specific details on method analysis will be launched in September, 2015. A website is being developed to share this information for the region, and finally, a “Governor’s Summit,” which will include other stakeholders, policymakers and agricultural economists, is being planned.

*Regional Forest Health Initiative* – SREF is partnering with the USDA Forest Service – Forest Health unit in Atlanta and has hired a regional Extension forest health specialist to construct a regional training and education program aimed at Extension and state forestry agency professionals at the county, state, and regional levels. This effort aims to ameliorate misinformation and lack of information on several important forest health issues (including invasive species) in the Southeast. The Extension forest health specialist will be developing a webinar series and investigating other online, print, and face-to-face opportunities to improve the fundamental and working knowledge of on-the-ground educators and technology transfer specialists.

*The Professional Development Webinar Series:* The SREF office has provided a webinar portal service for several years servicing the Southern region and beyond with the forestrywebinars.net series. SREF has also hosted the NRCS’s online training library at conservationwebinars.net and is now working with the Forest Service to host webinars at sustainableforestswebinars.net. Three other portals include bioenergywebinars.net, climatewebinars.net and urbanforestrywebinars.net to handle related stakeholder groups. These webinar sites are robust, content management style portals with access to live and archived events, certification, marketing tools, green savings and impact calculators, and now social media and ranking/rating tools.

**State Impacts & Success Stories:** The SREF office strives to work collaboratively with all 13 states in the Southern United States. With an enhanced staff in recent years, the quality and quantity of work with each state has increased exponentially. Today, SREF staff works closely with Extension and state forestry agency in every state in the Southern U.S. A few highlights are listed here with apologies in advance for missing anything in particular:

**Alabama** – SREF staff work with Auburn state, district and county staff on a variety of projects including the IBSS project referenced above, and the UFEC project, as well as webinar

training options for regional forestry and natural resource agents. SREF collaborated with private foresters on southern success stories for the Cohesive Fire Strategy and Auburn Extension and University on management information (fact sheets) for the Shortleaf Pine Initiative. SREF staff have attended several meetings in Alabama as well and gathered input on state level needs including shortleaf pine restoration education.

**Arkansas** – The Regional Forester worked with the USDA Climate Hub in Raleigh, NC to obtain funding in the amount of \$30,000 to include climate change messaging for Dr. Walkingstick’s *Women in the Woods* project. The SREF staff hosted a meeting in Little Rock in March of 2015 and invited forest economists and state Extension Foresters to participate in a working IMPLAN summit. SREF staff travelled to Arkansas to seek advice and guidance from Arkansas Extension, USFS-AR office, and The Nature Conservancy-AR on best ways to market shortleaf pine and develop the Shortleaf Pine Initiative website. These groups provided an educational tour of key shortleaf management sites that helped shaped website development.

**Florida** – SREF staff have worked closely with the University of Florida to develop climate materials for the PINEMAP project, and have edited biomass fact sheets for a regional Woody Biomass Ambassadors Guidebook. Additionally, SREF staff worked with the Florida ANR leader to provide leadership and planning for the Southern Region Extension Climate Academy. SREF staff participated in the regional Prescribed Fire Communication Summit (July 28-29<sup>th</sup>, 2015) at Tall Timbers Research Station in Tallahassee, which provided information for advancing communications and marketing for the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy and the Shortleaf Pine Initiative.

**Georgia** – The SREF office works closely with the University of Georgia on a variety of projects including providing web support for the National Timber Tax Website and the Georgia Feral Hog website. SREF also works with UGA faculty and staff to develop and deliver materials through the PINEMAP project and a workshop was held in Tifton that brought together professionals in four states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia and South Carolina) to review the results of the PINEMAP project and other climate and weather information and tools. The Regional Forester serves on UGA’s Southern Forestry GIS conference planning committee (SoForGIS) and assists with the marketing activities for that conference. SREF worked on several grants with UGA professors including a regional DOE bioenergy grant and an heir’s property grant to USDA. The Regional Forester also speaks at the Southern Outlook Conference at the request of the UGA Extension agriculture economist. SREF staff has presented an overview of the Shortleaf Pine Initiative at local professional foresters meetings and presented SREF materials available to County Extension agents at several trainings set up in the state.

**Kentucky** – The SREF staff assisted UK Extension forestry faculty with setting up a field tour for high school students at a Georgia Tree Farm. The Regional Forester provided support letters for the development of a mobile application for Kentucky and Southern forestry logging professionals. SREF presented shortleaf pine as a reclamation species to regional foresters, mine reclamationists, UK scientists, and biologists at the joint American Society of Mine Reclamation and Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative meetings in Lexington, KY this June 2015. SREF staff also met with a UK urban forestry professional to discuss regional urban forestry needs and issues.

**Louisiana** - The Regional Forester regularly presents at the annual Ark-La-Tex Forestry Forum and works closely with the regional agents and state staff on programs and projects of



mutual interest. The Regional Forester recommended that a National Extension Foresters meeting be held in Southern Louisiana in the fall of 2015. This event last occurred over 10 years ago and will be held at the LUMCON facility in southern Louisiana in November, 2015. The Regional Forester is also involving the State Extension Forester in a key leadership role in the Southern Forest Economic IMPLAN Impact work. SREF worked with the LSU AgCenter to develop educational materials for the Shortleaf Pine Initiative.

**Mississippi** - The Regional Forester obtained resources over the last two years to purchase IMPLAN data for Mississippi State Extension Forestry to run models for regional economic importance of forestry fact sheets (over \$30,000). The Regional Forester has provided letters of support for awards and recognition of state Extension staff. These support letters combined with other factors have been successful as state specialists have received several awards.

**North Carolina** – SREF staff work closely with NCSU faculty and staff to develop materials and tools on the PINEMAP project, the Climate, Forests, & Woodlands eXtension CoP, the Climate Learning Network, and the IBSS project. The collaboration between these two groups has resulted in several regional fact sheets and products that can be found online at <http://www.pinemap.org> and <http://se-ibss.org>. In addition, there are several other regional SREF related projects that are being led by NCSU staff including the Webinar Series Portal. In addition, SREF staff have been working with staff at NCSU and the NC Forest Service on the Shortleaf Pine Initiative and an SREF staff member delivered a presentation on the Shortleaf Pine Initiative's history and goals at a Service Forester and Consulting Forester Meeting in Morganton, NC. SREF also works with NC Extension Forester, Jennifer Evans, through the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPAS) prescribed fire work group, in support of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

**Oklahoma** – The state Extension Forester retired in 2014 but the SREF staff work closely with the Oklahoma forestry agency to include them in regional Extension programming. This includes working with them on regional climate change, bioenergy and forest economics work as well as including non-Extension staff on the Shortleaf Pine Initiative and the Cohesive Fire Strategy. Additionally, SREF is also developing a forestry economic importance factsheet for Oklahoma, by leveraging data obtained from IMPLAN analysis conducted for the regional economic project.

**South Carolina** – The SREF staff include Clemson Extension in as many ways as possible and have visited South Carolina to participate in workshops and meetings. South Carolina is also without a state Extension Forester at this time, but the SREF staff includes the state regional foresters with Clemson in all mailings and correspondence. Moreover, the Regional Forester worked with Clemson faculty and staff to develop a national RREA grant to engage wood products Extension Specialists on the regional level in a summit and online portal tool for county Extension use, SREF worked with South Carolina fire managers and foresters on the Cohesive Fire Strategy, and the SREF's marketing team is working closely with Clemson's communications group to streamline announcements and produce smoother and more cohesive marketing publications with the possibility of further collaboration in the future.

**Tennessee** – The Regional Forester and SREF staff work closely with UT specialists on the Shortleaf Pine Initiative (SPI) and the IBSS project. In particular, the Shortleaf Pine Initiative is based at the University of Tennessee. SREF developed the SPI website, coordinated the

production of 17 fact sheets, developed an online site suitability mapping tool, and numerous other educational and marketing materials for SPI. SREF is working closely with UT forestry Extension and others to plan the 3<sup>rd</sup> Biennial Shortleaf Pine Conference.

**Texas** – The Regional Forester and SREF staff are working with the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service on PINEMAP and the regional climate change initiative, the webinar series, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and several other regional initiatives. Additionally, SREF staff have utilized videos of presentations from Texas Extension service’s workshops and co-created webinars and factsheets for regional use.

**Virginia** – The Regional Forester and SREF staff work with Virginia Tech Extension Service and other land grant faculty and staff on the PINEMAP project, the UFEC urban trees and energy conservation project, a new Beginning Farmer and Rancher project on non-timber forest products and several other programs. The Regional Forester and staff work with the regional Extension foresters within the state on several regional and national initiatives as well including the National Forestry 4-H Invitational.

**Plans for 2015-2016:** In the coming year, the SREF office will continue to offer a variety of services to the Land Grant Universities in the South, the USDA Forest Service and the state forestry agencies in the Southern United States. The SREF office will continue its active engagement with Extension foresters and state agency professionals in every state in the Southern United States. This includes working closely with state Extension foresters, ANR Leaders, Extension Directors and others. As in other years, staff of SREF are more than willing to continue to assist state efforts by traveling to state and county meetings to describe the products, programs and tools that the office is developing in cooperation and collaboration with partners. These visits are also important to gather input and information regarding ways that SREF can better serve individual states and the region. The Regional Forester will investigate opportunities for regional promotion and further development of forestry Extension in the South. Specific plans on the horizon include seeking further opportunities to work to develop a Southern Family Forest Center. This proposed center would include practical and applied research, and the development of tools to meet the professionals’ needs and augment their ability to engage, educate and empower the millions of forest landowners in the Southern United States.

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