

SPOTLIGHT ON A COHESIVE FIRE STRATEGY SUCCESS STORY

Boy Scouts Introduced to Benefits of Prescribed Fire

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National Cohesive Fire Strategy Goals: Maintain and Promote Resilient Landscapes

SE Cohesive Strategy Regional Values: Ecological Services

Partners: Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance, F4 Tech, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Forest Service, Florida State Parks, Florida State University Emergency Management Program, Southern Fire Exchange, Southern Forestry Consultants, Tall Timbers Research Station, The Nature Conservancy, University of Florida, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the US Forest Service

The Longleaf Challenge, a Boy Scout camporee style event, was held at the Wallwood Boy Scout Reservation, in Gadsden County, Florida. The event was designed to get Scouts, Scouters, and their adult volunteers excited about longleaf pine ecosystems through fun activities that introduced them to longleaf management and the value of its restoration. Approximately 120 participants attended the event, including 90 North Florida and South Georgia Boy Scouts.

At activity stations scattered across the 500 acre camp, Scouts gained knowledge from natural resource professionals on various aspects of longleaf management. Activities included planting 500 longleaf pine seedlings, measuring tree height and diameter, observing active gopher tortoise burrows through a scope camera, operating wildland fire hoses, aging deer bones, identifying animal tracks, removing invasive loblolly seedlings, learning about red-cockaded woodpeckers and artificial nest cavities, counting tree-rings, watching an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) live-video feed, learning Firewise concepts and sowing wiregrass seeds. Longleaf Challenge participants even got front-row seats to observe a narrated prescribed fire led by The Nature Conservancy North Florida Prescribed Burn Team.

Some stations introduced Scouts to future job opportunities in natural resources, while others provided a fun way to get some on equipment experience. At the wildland fire management activity station, Scouts learned not only the importance of prescribed fire and the differences between wildland and structural fire engines, but they also learned about career opportunities in prescribed fire and wildland firefighting. The fire equipment station provided an exciting opportunity to operate some of the firefighting equipment through a fire hose relay. This may have been one of the highlights of the Longleaf Challenge, where Scout teams challenged each other to push hanging milk jugs along a rope with the high pressure hoses.

By working through each of the activity stations, Scouts went home having fulfilled all of the requirements to earn the Forestry merit badge.

The Longleaf Challenge was conceived two years ago as a creative way to provide an education and outreach component to an existing longleaf restoration project at Wallwood Boy Scout Reservation, which is owned by the Suwannee River Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. This project, in collaboration with the Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance and The Nature Conservancy, has already planted over 16,000 longleaf trees on the property. The Wallwood longleaf project is supported through America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative, which is funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Southern Company.



Boy Scouts observing a prescribed burn at the Wallwood Boy Scout Reservation in Gadsden County, Florida. Credit: David Godwin



Scouts enjoying the fire equipment station at the Longleaf Challenge. Credit: David Godwin