

# Recovering from Drought Preparing for the Next

By **TILDA MIMS**

Forest Education Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission

**W**HEN FALL RAINS began in 1999, firefighters in the Forestry Commission, forest industry and volunteer fire departments across Alabama breathed a sigh of relief. After many weeks of wildfires fanned by dry winds and low moisture, rainfall signaled the official end of the Drought Emergency declared by Governor Seigelman.

While wildfire risk was relieved by adequate precipitation, the most damaging effects of drought take longer to appear. Drought-stressed seedlings may die outright, or be weakened and attacked by insects or diseases. Stressed seedlings grow slowly and are often less effective than surrounding vegetation at competing for limited moisture. Established pine trees stressed by drought are more susceptible to attack by Southern pine beetle, as well as many other insects and diseases.

## Drought Recovery

There are few immediate solutions for drought damage to newly planted stands. You may, however, receive help in reforestation costs. If you planted trees under a cost-share program and the seedlings died due to drought, you may apply for additional cost-share assistance for reforestation. Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service for information on Forest Incentive Program (FIP) funds and contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District for cost-share through the Alabama Agricultural and Conservation Development Commission Program (formerly ARCP).

You may recover some of your planting expenses by reporting the loss on your income tax. The "Forest Owner's Guide to the Federal Income Tax" states that drought-induced losses of planted

tree seedlings may qualify for a business loss deduction. The loss is deductible in the year the seedlings died.

## Drought Strategies and Planning

Drought often prompts a crisis management, rather than risk management, approach. Today, however, many forest managers are taking a proactive approach by incorporating strategies to minimize drought damage when developing management plans. By anticipating the inevitable—that drought will come and go—forest landowners may minimize its damaging effects.

Healthy stands are your best defense against drought. Forest landowners that seek professional forestry assistance and follow a sound forest management program realize more net profit and incur less loss.

**Stand Establishment**—While an extreme drought may kill young seedlings, total failure usually results from a combination of factors including poor site preparation, poor seedling quality, poor seedling handling practices, lack of competition controls, improper planting, or planting the wrong species on a given site.

For best results a forest management plan should include:

- Improving soil moisture conditions by eliminating competing vegetation.
- Selecting species well adapted to the geographic area and soil type.
- Obtaining high quality seedlings from a reputable source. Seeded stands are more susceptible to drought and early competitions than stands planted with seedlings.
- Protecting unplanted seedlings from direct sun, high temperatures and

freezing when transporting and in the field during planting.

- Planting at the correct time of year. Research has proven that late fall and dormant season planting gives superior results. If you must plant in late spring or early summer, containerized seedlings result in better survival than bare-root.
- Avoiding reforestation immediately following a clearcut to avoid risk of pales weevil.
- Planting during optimum conditions of temperatures between 35 and 60 degrees Fahrenheit, relative humidity above 40 percent, and wind speed less than 10 mph.

## Established Stand Management

Research has found that drought is often the final stress factor that weakens overstocked or overmature stands so severely that trees cannot fend off insect or disease attack. Regular prescribed burning and timely thinning will reduce competition and facilitate vigorous growth in pine stands. Healthy trees can often resist or rapidly recover from such attacks.

Forest landowners should inspect their forests frequently and move quickly to salvage or renovate stands where excessive mortality has occurred. Timber killed or weakened by insects, diseases, drought or all three may be sold in a salvage sale. While forest landowners need to salvage quickly because insects and fungi cause rapid deterioration of wood quality, a hasty decision can also be a costly one. Consult a professional forester before marketing timber under any circumstances.

## Planning for Change

The *Old Farmers Almanac 2000* predicts drought in parts of the Deep South for April and May, above normal rainfall

in September and a return to drier than normal conditions for October. The Climate Prediction Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration also reports that drought is expected to continue through mid-2000.

A forest's best bet for surviving too little rain, too much rain, ice storms, tornadoes, wildfires, insects and diseases is

to stay healthy enough to resist damaging effects of change. The forest landowner's best insurance policy is to seek professional forestry assistance, develop a sound management plan and follow that plan "come rain or come shine."

### Sources of Information

University of Georgia College of

Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Georgia Cooperative Extension Systems

### Forest Owner's Guide to the Federal Income Tax 1995

North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service publication numbers AG-519-9, AG-519-3, AG-519 and AG-518-2  
**Old Farmer's Almanac 2000** ☞

## Educational Grant Proposals Being Accepted

Forestry tag sales continue to be successful, which results in monies available to fund forestry educational projects. The Forest Stewardship Education Committee is now accepting grant proposals through May 25, 2000. **Grant proposals must be post-marked no later than May 25, 2000.**

Since the forestry tag went on sale January 1, 1997, the Committee has approved more than \$480,000 in grants for various forestry projects throughout the state. If you know of groups or organizations that need financial assistance in implementing forestry programs, you can request a grant proposal form by sending your name and address to Anita W. Benton, Forestry Tag Coordinator, P.O. Box 302550, Montgomery, AL 36130, or you can e-mail her at BentonA@forestry.state.al.us.



## Show Your Care Purchase an Alabama Forests License Plate

- Cost: \$50 above fee required by law for regular license plates.
- No additional cost for personalization.
- The additional \$50 is a charitable contribution and is tax deductible.
- Proceeds will be used for educational projects that promote healthy and productive forests, clean water, and abundant wildlife.

## NEWS BRIEFS

### USDA-NRCS

Robert N. Jones has been selected State Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Alabama. In the position, Jones will be responsible for the agency's natural resource conservation activities in partnership with Alabama's 67 soil and water conservation districts. Jones replaces Ronnie Murphy, who retired from the agency in October 1999.

### Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

The Game and Fish Division has officially changed its name to the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

The name change was made to more accurately reflect the work performed by the division. For many years the division was involved primarily with enforcement, game management and restocking programs. Today, they are involved in nongame protection and proliferation, conservation education and outreach programs, hunter safety education and many other projects. Since the division is not involved in saltwater fisheries management, the distinction needed to be made between fresh and saltwater fisheries.

In another announcement, M.N. "Corky" Pugh has been named as head of the Division of Wildlife and

Freshwater Fisheries. Pugh, who had served as assistant director since 1993, replaces long-time director Charles Kelly, who retired last year.

### USDA-Forest Service

Jim Gooder, a 22-year veteran of the Forest Service, has been named as the new forest supervisor for the National Forests in Alabama. The National Forests in Alabama includes the Bankhead, Conecuh, Talladega and Tuskegee National Forests. Gooder replaces John Yancy, who accepted a position with the U.S. Park Service last year. ☞