



Hardwood Corner

By James P. Jeter,

Statewide Hardwood Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission

Boy, what a difference a year and a little rain can make. During part of the summer of 2007, Alabama was under a “No Burn” order issued by State Forester Linda Casey. The big question was about fireworks and the potential for devastating fires on the state’s forestland. This scenario followed on the heels of a unique Easter freeze that defoliated a lot of trees with new growth. These situations presented several questions that only time would answer. Allow me now to address some of these questions.

Is Alabama out of “the drought?”

We had two hard years with most of Alabama’s counties under some sort of drought, listing from severe to extreme. As of May 2008, only the counties in the Northeast Region of the state were listed as severe drought. (See insets of Palmer Hydrological Drought Index, June 07 and June 08.) While there is improvement, we are actually not out of the woods, so to speak. Even though the rain we have received is truly appreciated, ground water has not built up. How this year ends will be determined by hurricane season rains.

Did the 2007 late spring freeze kill any trees and what did it do to the acorn crop? A few trees did bite the dust as a result of the freeze, although it took them a complete year to die and they were isolated here and there. A hawthorn died that I had planted in my yard several years ago, as well as a Japanese maple at our office. The maple did not die outright, but had enough dead limbs to be unsightly and make recovery very difficult.

Oaks flower in early spring between March and April – turkey season. If the crop is a success, white oak acorns mature later in the summer and begin falling September to October of the same year. Red oaks take two years to complete the process. From what I personally observed and was told by enthusiastic deer hunters, the Southern three-quarters of the state had an excellent white oak acorn crop with acorns lasting into the winter. However, there seemed to be a line from north Marion County across to Cherokee County where the white oak acorn crop suffered from the freeze. That same scenario can also be expected this fall for the red oak acorn crop.



Photo by Kevin J. Daniels

- 1) Just because hardwood species are present, is the site really a good hardwood site that will meet your objectives?
- 2) What are my options for regenerating this stand back to hardwood if I so desire?
 - a) Will I need to site prep and plant?
 - b) Will a shelterwood cut help establish advanced regeneration?
 - c) What species will come back in the natural regeneration?
 - d) Did I look at the existing ground vegetation? Do privet sprouts exist?

As a follow-up, if you have privet and it is small enough to reach with a foliar application, the “application window” is from August to March according to Dr. Jim Miller, USDA Forest Service. This means you can make applications in the cooler months. Also, if you choose to use glyphosate as your application, smaller hardwood seedlings may not be harmed as much due to the lack of leaves being present on non-target stems.

What about hardwood trees dying from the lasting effects of the drought and associated stress? I am seeing a lot more mortality from Hypoxylon Canker, which was discussed in the spring issue of this magazine. Urban tree decline is also on the rise due to the stress of drought, with oak decline being one of the disorders or syndromes associated with this stress.

Newly established hardwood regeneration – Planted seedlings and natural regeneration seem to have had enough rain at this point where survival will be favorable. This fall will tell the tale.

Privet – There was a great article by Tim Albritton (also in the spring issue of this publication) dealing with this plant. Before you harvest a hardwood site, please evaluate the site for the following:

As a late note of interest: In

Tuscaloosa along a certain portion of the Black Warrior River, there was an unusual outbreak of the sweetgum defoliator, Large Paectes (*Paectes abrotaloides*). This pest is always present but in small numbers, although something this year raised the number of caterpillars to the point of concern by those who observed the complete defoliation of the abundant sweetgum. Regretfully, no harm done. According to Jim Hyland, AFC Forest Health Specialist retired, the last recognized outbreak of this defoliator was in 1977. I would like to thank Wayne Ford and Dr. Charles Ray for helping identify this caterpillar. I understand there were several occurrences across the state. 🙏

