

HARDWOOD CORNER

Recent Events

By James P. Jeter

BMP Forester/Hardwood Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission

To try and keep you up-to-date with ongoing activities as they relate to hardwood management, this article will briefly cover two meetings I attended in April, as well as a practice being offered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service under the Conservation Stewardship Program.

Alabama Invasive Plant Council (ALIPC)

The first meeting I attended was the *Ninth Annual Alabama Invasive Plant Council Conference* in Auburn. This conference just keeps getting better and I encourage any landowner to attend one in the future. Not only are some of the presentations technical in nature but there is also an abundance of common sense, something you do not see much of any more. Some of the presentations included:

- The biofuels boom and invasive plants: what the future holds for the U.S. – *Dr. Pat Minogue, University of Florida*
- North Florida Invasives: incoming threats to Alabama – *Ken Langeland, University of Florida*
- NPDES Permitting and Pesticides: The changes you need to know about! – *Dale Mapp, Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM)*
- New herbicides for invasive plant control – *Dr. Stephen Enloe, Auburn University*
- Alabama Tropical Soda Apple Eradication Program Update – *Lee Tuten, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and Travis Taylor, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries (AGI)*

The afternoon included the following field stops covering topics led by experts such as Fred Nation, Nancy Loewenstein, Kim Pope, Stephen Enloe, Jimmy Cobb, Jim Miller, and Erwin Chambliss:

- Native plant identification and cogongrass “look-alikes”
- Invasive plant identification
- Herbicides and eye protection
- Box store herbicide update
- Kudzu control

Many invasive plants and/or their seeds travel and relocate through the abundant streams that run through the coves, stream bottoms, and river bottoms where our best hardwood species grow and thrive. Therefore, you must learn to manage plants such as privet (and others) if you want to grow quality hardwoods. This is one of the meetings where you can learn to do exactly that.

Google or Bing “Alabama Invasive Plant Council” . . . they have a great website full of information (www.se-eppc.org/alabama/).

Southern Forestry Hardwood Group

The next meeting I want to share with you is the *Southern Forestry Hardwood Group*. The purpose of the group, according to its constitution, is to “provide a medium for exchange of ideas on the management and utilization of hardwood timber for all those actively engaged in this pursuit within the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, as well as for other individuals who express a genuine interest in hardwood timber management and utilization.” This purpose has expanded through the years to include wildlife habitat management and other ecological values. The group usually meets twice per year, once in the spring and again in the fall.

The spring meeting was held on the William B. Bankhead National Forest. Hosting the meeting was Dr. Callie Schweitzer with the U.S. Forest Service, Southern Research Station. Stops included a series of mixed upland hardwood stands on the Cumberland Plateau that are being managed towards a dominant hardwood desired future condition, using a combination of thinning and prescribed burning. Stands observed included those that have been thinned only, burned only, thinned and burned once, and burned twice. The analysis includes parallel studies involving the “Response of Ground Layer Vegetation to Thin and Burn” and “Response of Breeding Bird Communities to Forest Prescribed Thinning and Burning Treatments.”

Basically these practices involve converting (over time) mixed pine hardwood stands and mixed hardwood pine stands to mixed hardwood-only stands with an oak component. Let me

remind you that this area and the practices involved are being utilized to meet a wildlife habitat objective.

This is an excellent Alabama study that has been needed for years and that will give good factual data related to burning in upland stands to promote oak regeneration. Thanks should be given to the staff at Bankhead for working so diligently with Dr. Schweitzer and her associates. This study may change my opinion about burning in hardwood stands, but not at this time. As the old saying goes, 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating.' I will leave it at that.

April Tornado Devastation

In between starting this article and finishing it, Alabama suffered what may very well be the largest catastrophic natural disaster in the state's history — the April 2011 Tornadoes. The first series of tornadoes hit us on April 15. We (in the areas that were hit) were starting to get our arms around the extent of damage caused by these storms when April 27 rolled in, making history. First the storms that morning, then watching in shock that afternoon as the day culminated with over 31 tornadoes touching down or forming across the state.

The timber damage is excessive, with some partial loss of stands, and many stands and complete ownerships being completely destroyed. The hardwood stands that have been affected may need a silvicultural clear-cut harvest while some stands may only need partial harvest. Please get someone to help you evaluate your stand.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers an enhancement practice under the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) that may help you re-establish some of your hardwood stands: ***Plant Enhancement Activity – PLT12 – Patch Harvesting to Improve Degraded Hardwood Stands.***

As with any practice, certain criteria must be met before the practice is allowed. This practice is an "Enhancement Activity" under the current Conservation Stewardship Program so I really do not know if it can or will be applied to storm-degraded stands. Some of the criteria follow:

1. Offered forested acres must be harvested during contract period.
2. Offered acres must have an "acceptable growing stock" level below 50 square feet per acre.
3. Site condition must be of medium or higher quality.
4. Forested acres targeted for patch harvesting must contain species for regeneration from the NRCS state list. Species on this list were selected based on their abilities to

regenerate from seed, sprouts, or other natural regeneration sources.

5. For the oaks, advance regeneration must be present or developed prior to the harvest-cut in order to be competitive with other faster growing species.
6. Size of patches to be treated can vary from one to ten acres, be distributed throughout the forest, and cannot total more than 50 percent of offered acres.
7. Trees removed during patch clear-cut can be sold if of marketable quality.
8. Slash and cull trees must be managed to allow for natural regeneration to occur. This can be accomplished by windrowing, wildlife piles, chipping, or cutting for firewood.
9. Burning of slash is prohibited.
10. Patch harvesting shall not be done in or directly adjoining areas with established populations of invasive species unless specific control strategies will be implemented.



Additional Criteria for Patch Harvesting: The species likely to be present following the regeneration harvest will vary for each stand, and will depend upon many factors including advance regeneration, seed, and sprout sources. Desirable species such as red oaks and white oaks should be favored. Recognizing the regeneration sources, site productivity, and the growth habit of each species and how they all interact in their associated competitive environments will assist in your placement of these patches for successful regeneration of the favored species.

While most hardwoods regenerate quickly and readily following a disturbance of the stand, oaks present special regeneration problems. For the oaks, advance regeneration must be present or developed prior to the harvest-cut in order to be competitive with other faster growing species.

Oaks have to be present in the existing stand if you desire oaks to be naturally regenerated.

Patches should be one to ten acres in size with attention being paid to distribution throughout the stand as desired. **The patches must total at least 20 percent of the offered stand, but must not be more than 50 percent.** Many smaller landowners may only need patches to be one to five acres in size based on their ownership. Attention needs to be given to the density of the deer population on the tract. If you have a one-acre patch in a mature stand with a high deer population, there is a high probability the patch will be browsed down every year, damaging your regeneration efforts. It is suggested for high deer density counties that patch harvests be no less than three to five acres in size.

For additional details, call your local NRCS office. ☞