



Longleaf Pine Restoration Grant Available to Landowners

The Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is accepting applications through its Landowner Incentive Program to continue longleaf pine restoration efforts in Alabama. The grant was awarded through a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and will be made available to qualifying landowners for longleaf pine restoration on private lands.

Landowners are encouraged to submit applications to receive assistance with the site preparation, seedlings, planting, native grass restoration and/or exotic control costs. For landowners to be considered eligible to receive funding, the property must

be within the historic range of longleaf pine in Alabama, or contain suitable soils to support longleaf pine. Program details include: cost share at 50 percent, no minimum acreage is required, and cutover and agricultural sites are eligible.

The LIP funds are administered to complement habitat restoration goals of the longleaf pine ecosystem. This program provides financial and/or technical assistance to private landowners to conserve, manage or enhance the habitats of species in greatest conservation need associated with Alabama's longleaf pine ecosystem. The deadline for applications is March 1, 2012. For application information contact Traci Wood at 334-353-0503.

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Lynch vs. Alabama Property Tax Case Ruling Appealed

Alabama landowner's and the forest products industry breathed a sigh of relief on October 21 when U.S. District Judge Lynwood Smith issued a ruling against plaintiffs of the *Lynch vs. Alabama* racial discrimination property tax case which could have raised property taxes on timberland 1000%. However, that sigh of relief might have been breathed too soon. The parents of the ten minor black students in Sumter and Lawrence counties filed notice on December 20 that they are appealing Judge Smith's ruling rejecting their claims. Attorney General Luther Strange's office is also appealing, despite winning the case, as a precautionary measure.

The class-action lawsuit, filed on March 13, 2011 in Federal District Court in Huntsville, alleges that tax policies, such as the "current use" provision, limit the ability of state and local governments to raise taxes to adequately fund K-12 public schools in rural, mainly black districts of the state and to provide an education comparable to that provided in other parts of



the state. The plaintiffs also alleged that "*these constitutionally enshrined tax policies were adopted for segregative purposes and with discriminatory intent.*" They claim that the tax policies were created in the wake of the Civil War by both the 1901 Constitution and in later amendments and were designed to limit education funding for black students.

In the lawsuit, the plaintiffs ask the federal court to eliminate all of Alabama's existing limitations on property tax rates, do away with differential assessment, remove all of the maximum tax or "lid" provisions that limit the total amount of property taxes that may be collected, and eliminate a number of constitutionally provided-for tax exemptions, such as

those that exempt property held for religious or charitable purposes.

After deliberating for six months after a trial that included more than 700 exhibits, 1,000 pages of documents, and testimony from historians on Reconstruction, cotton farming, poll taxes, George Wallace, the Civil Rights Movement, desegregation, and busing, U.S. District Judge Lynwood Smith, a Clinton appointee, delivered his 854-page opinion which attacked Alabama's property tax system as a hindrance to the education of all rural students, black and white, and ultimately rejected the plaintiffs who'd alleged the system is unconstitutionally racist.

State Attorney General Luther Strange said Smith's ruling, "confirms the State's consistent position that Alabama's property tax structure does not violate the United States Constitution. It is the prerogative of the citizens of Alabama, through their elected representatives, to structure a tax system in a manner that best serves

their interests. The Office of Attorney General remains committed to defending and vindicating this important right whenever necessary."

However, Jim Blacksher, an attorney representing the students says, "Judge Smith issued this exhaustive ruling, and then at the eleventh hour changed his mind. He had

We want to hear from you!

*Email your thoughts and requests to
but-*

*lerandcoinc@bellsouth.net,
fax them to (334)289-1972
or mail them to
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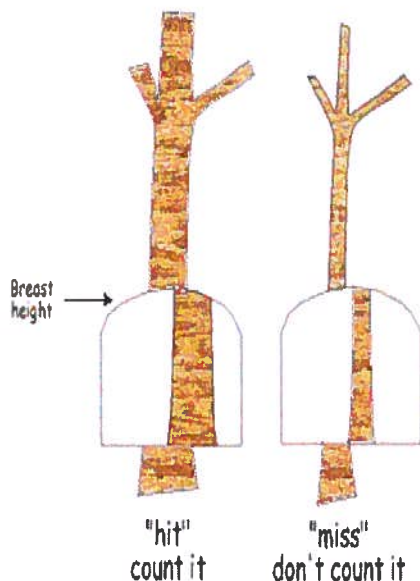
all these findings of fact that, when correct legal principles are applied, should find for the plaintiffs ... That will be our argument." He says he expects the appellate court to set a hearing schedule in January and that it could take a year to have the appeal decided. We will keep you up to date on this important topic.

What is Basal Area?

Basal area is the term used in forest management that defines the cross-sectional area of a tree measured at 4.5 feet above ground level. Basal area is used to estimate the density of trees in order to describe habitat and to develop timber management recommendations. It is usually

expressed in square feet per acre and is easily determined by the use of a wedge prism to determine "in" and "out" trees. Multiplication of the number of "in" trees or trees on a variable radius plot or sampling point by your basal area factor will give you the basal area. "In trees" are those trees that

when viewed through your prism appear to be in line with the standing tree on the outside of the prism. Basal area factors for prisms are usually 10 or 20. If there were 12 trees on your sampling point and you were using a 10-factor prism, your basal area would be 120.



Must always be held directly above the "plot center."

Thinning Pine Plantations

Pine plantations require thinning to optimize growth, increase financial returns and minimize the risk from southern pine beetle attacks. Plantation thinnings are intermediate harvests made in immature stands to improve the growth of remaining trees as well as the health, yield and profitability of the stand.

A forest site can only support so many trees. Trees compete for nutrients, sunlight, water and other resources. Periodic thinning concentrates the growth potential of the stand to the trees with better quality and higher potential for production of more valuable products.

Trees in stands that are too dense grow more slowly and are more susceptible to southern pine and other bark beetles. Stand density is usually measured by determining the basal area of the stand. Basal areas of 100 to 120 or above usually indicate that a stand is in need of thinning. It is normally recommended that those trees considered to be of poorer form or qual-

ity, weakened or suppressed intermediates, disease or insect infested, crooked, cankered, rotten or decaying, high risks or less desirable species be removed in a thinning operation. Trees remaining to compose the residual stand should include those felt to be of better form and quality, healthier, faster growing and more desirable species. The remaining stand should have a basal area to equal to or slightly below the site index of the site on which it is growing.

Thinning is also advantageous economically. It provides the landowner with some returns on his investment and promotes the growth of crop trees from pulpwood which is lower in value to higher valued products such as pine sawtimber, pine poles, etc. Federal cost share assistance is available for some thinning.

An often asked question is "When should I thin my pine plantation?" First time thinnings are usually carried out from age 15 years to 18 years. However, some stands can be thinned

earlier, especially in the case of plantations planted on pastures or agricultural fields and treated for herbaceous weed control. As mentioned above basal area is most often used to determine if a thinning is needed. Average line crown ratio is the ratio of the tree bole or trunk with green branches to the total tree height. A live crown ratio of less than 35% normally indicates a need for thinning. Radial growth of the dominant trees in the stand is also a good indicator. Radial growth can be determined through the use of an increment borer. If radial growth begins to slow considerably, a thinning should be carried out.

The first thinning in a plantation is, many times, the most crucial step in the management of the stand over its entire rotation. It sets the tone for the remainder of the life of the stand and effects its growth, future quality and finally the landowner's rate of return from his investment. Preparations for the thinning can include a forester marking "leave trees" or trees to be left after the

thinning or cut trees which are the trees to be harvested in the thinning. Most thinnings today are done on an operator select basis with the operator of the machine cutting the trees, selecting the trees to be harvested in the thinning. This requires an experienced operator but greatly reduces the cost of the operation for the landowner.

Thinnings "from below" are recommended in most selections and are designed to favor co-dominant and dominant trees as the final crop trees in the stand. Row thinnings are em-

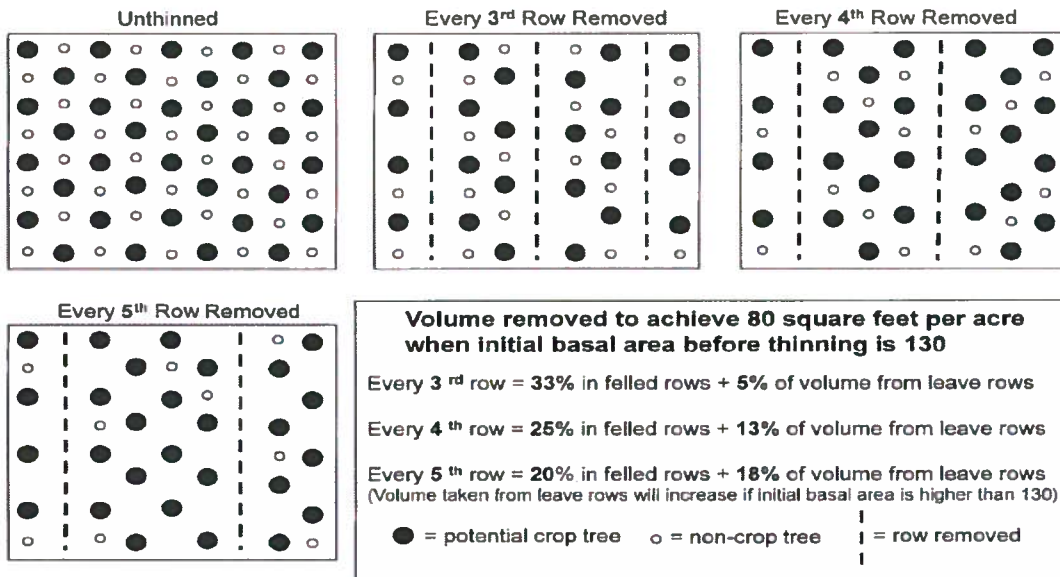
ployed where every 3rd or 5th row is removed to allow access to the stand and the rows in between are thinned. The logger is given a target residual basal area depending upon the objectives of the thinning. This is usually 70 to 90 square feet per acre. Most foresters prefer 5th row thinning. This method has the advantages of removing fewer crop trees and harvesting more undesirable trees. It does increase the possibility of damage to more trees and the cost of the logger and landowner may be greater. However, it is felt that the ad-

vantages of 5th row thinning far outweighs the disadvantages.

Inspect your plantations often for pine beetle activity, storm damage or any other problems that may arise. Please contact Gary if you have any questions or concerns relating to your pine plantations and their management.

Source: Billings, Ronald F. "Thinning Pine Plantations: Why, When and How?" Texas Forest Service

Options to reduce basal area from 130 to 80 square feet per acre using different row thinning intensities plus operator-select method to remove undesirable trees from leave rows.



How is Real Estate Doing?

Every time I am out, I get approached with this question. It seems like it is on everyone's mind. (Which is understandable since, for most people, our homes are one of, if not our most valuable assets.) My answer is "REAL ESTATE IS GREAT RIGHT NOW!!"

And it is true! Real estate in our area is great. There are a lot of lookers and buyers. And interest rates are AMAZING!!!!

I am also asked how much per square foot does real estate sell for in our area. The answer is that it depends. Even in a small town you can go literally a couple of blocks and the values change. Factors like where it is located, what is the condition of the house, etc will all make an impact on the price of the house. The old saying "Location, Location, Location" still holds true. But I believe everything will sell no matter where it is located if it is priced correctly for where it is and what it is.

Are prices the same

that they were one or two years ago? Overall ... No. In our area some house prices have remained more "firm" in price than others. The newer homes seem to be holding their value more than do the older ones that show some datedness. But can these "softer priced homes" raise their value? Most certainly!!

How do you raise the value of your house in the mind of the buyer? By making your home as updated as possible!!! It doesn't always have to be a costly remodel. It can be as simple as a fresh coat of paint.

If your home looked great in the 70's or 80's and you have not updated it since, you are more than likely due a new update! Are the paint colors on the walls stylish or neutral? Is that old leak spot that happened before you had the roof replaced painted? How about all those brass fixtures that were so popular 20 years ago but now scream "dated" to a potential buyer?

Also, how does the exterior look? Does the outside of your home tell potential buyers (Even years from now ... Because everyone that drives by your house could be your potential buyer in the future!) that your outside looks maintained so the inside must look great too?

I have always heard you can tell how well someone takes care of the inside of their house by how their outside looks. And, after twenty years as a realtor I would say there is a lot of truth to that!!

So.... in conclusion.... Real estate is GREAT, and if you are in the market, you CAN have an influence on the worth of your property by just doing simple updates!! If you aren't sure whether your new project will be one that will add value to your home, feel free to call me at 216-1225 or your local realtor. We can guide you and let you know if we feel you will be over improving your home for the neighborhood.
By: Barbara Myers

Featured Listings in West Central Alabama



67 acres +/- in Lowndes County: Timber/Recreational/Pasture land located 3 to 4 miles north of White Hall with frontage on the Alabama River. Would make an excellent small farm and recreational tract or an excellent timber and recreational property. Asking \$3,000.00/acre. Call Gary Butler for more information at 334-289-0051.



3469 County Road 19, Greensboro: Three bedroom/two bath ranch-style home on 200 acres just north of Greensboro in Hale County. Truck shed, horse stable, three barns, four small shooting houses, one large shooting house, a water well and two five-acre lakes with a pier each are all featured on this great property listed at \$600,000.00! Owner is willing to sell the house and 2-5 acres separately. See www.butlerandcompanyinc.com for more pictures of this great property and call Gary at 334-217-0595 for more information.



281 Phillips Street, Gallion: Don't miss out on this one! House features three bedrooms/two and one-half baths. Beautiful family room with vaulted ceilings! Amazing master bedroom suite! Study, formal dining room and a custom kitchen that features a great view of the lake. Relax in the great pool on hot summer days. Nice utility room. Room above garage is perfect for a teen or a potential mother-in-law's room. Located on 5.21 acres +/- . Offered at \$332,000.00! Call Barbara at 334-216-1225 today to view!!!



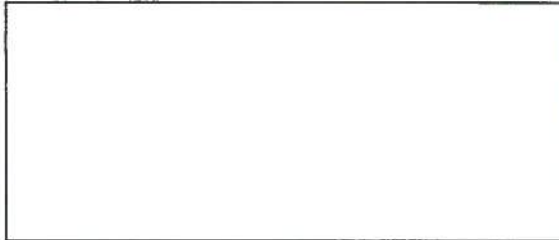
1627 Cypress Cove, Forkland: Great river house! Two/three bedrooms and one bathroom on 6.7 acres. Deck facing the river. Per owner, 153' of river frontage. Offered at \$189,700.00! Call Barbara at 334-216-1225 to view!

For more great listings, visit our new and improved website at www.butlerandcompanyinc.com!



Forest Management & Consultation • Real Estate Sales & Appraisals

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Housing Statistics

Existing home sales increased 4% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.42 million in November from 4.25 million in October. This is 12.2% higher than November 2010 sales.

Single-family home sales rose 4.5% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 3.95 million in November from 3.78 million in October, and are 12.9% above the 3.50 million-unit level in November 2010.

Existing condominium and co-op sales were unchanged at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 470,000 in November and are 6.8% higher than the 440,000-unit pace one year ago.

Total housing inventory at the end of November fell 5.8% to 2.58 million existing homes available for sale, which represents a 7.0-month supply at the current sales pace, down

from a 7.7-month supply in October.

Building permits rose 1.6% from 428,000 in October to an seasonally adjusted annual rate of 435,000. Builders broke ground on 447,000 homes, a 2.3% increase over October's totals.

Source: Department of Commerce and National Association of Realtors Press Releases

We hope that you have enjoyed this newsletter, but if you haven't and wish to opt out of future issues, please send an email to dawnatbutlerandcoi@bellsouth.net with your name or organization.