

Butler & Company, Inc.

FORESTRY AND REAL ESTATE SERVICES



Lands for Wildlife Initiative Accepting Applications



USDA's
Natural
Re-
sources
Conser-
vation
Service

(NRCS) announced a partnership opportunity for landowners to voluntarily restore and protect habitat for the gopher tortoise. The announcement kicks-off the sign-up for the Working Lands for Wildlife initiative. This program targets at-risk wildlife species across the country.

Funding for this initiative is provided through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) administered by NRCS. Applications will be accepted on a continuous basis but those seeking funding for 2012 must be received by the batching dates of April 30, 2012 and May 30, 2012.

Landowners can receive financial assistance for a number of habitat manage-

ment practices such as prescribed burning which improve habitat by controlling invasive species. Landowners with gopher tortoises on their property will rank highest for funding allocation.

The NRCS wants to work with landowners on a voluntary basis to help the gopher tortoise endure on private lands. Conservationists hope the program will help conserve the species now and avoid the future need to list it under the Endangered Species Act.

Individuals are not eligible for WHIP until they have completed the Farm Bill eligibility requirements. Interested producers should visit their nearest NRCS or Farm Service Agency Office to determine eligibility and begin this process. NRCS field offices are listed in the telephone directory under U.S. Department of Agriculture or on-line at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov>.

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The Gopher Tortoise: Landlord to the Animal Kingdom

The gopher tortoise is native to the southeastern United States. Gopher tortoises are known as a keystone species. Their burrows provide refuge for as many as 350 to 400 species including gopher frogs, several species of snake, such as the eastern indigo snake, small invertebrates, and burrowing owls. The gopher tortoise is threatened by predation and habitat destruction.

The gopher tortoise is a fairly large terrestrial turtle which possesses forefeet and scaly front legs well adapted for burrowing, and elephantine hind feet. They are dark brown to gray-black in overall color, with a yellow plastron (bottom shell). A gular projection is evident on the plastron where the head projects out from the shell. Carapace (back shell) length can range from 7.9 to 12 inches, with a height 5.9–15 inches. The average gopher tortoise weighs 8.8 pounds. They can live from 40 - 60 years in the wild and can live more than 100 years in captivity.

Gopher tortoises are solitary creatures known for their digging ability. Gopher tortoises spend most of their time in long burrows, up to 48 feet in length and 9.8 feet deep. In these burrows, the tortoises are protected from summer heat, winter cold, fire, and predators. The burrows are especially common in sandy longleaf pine stands. Within

their home range, an area of about 4 acres, they dig several burrows.

Gopher tortoises are herbivore scavengers. Their diets contain over 300 species of plants including broad-leaved grasses, wiregrass, terrestrial legumes, mushrooms, gopher apple, pawpaw, blackberries, saw palmetto berries. In addition, gopher tortoises eat flowers from nettles, Spanish moss and ball moss. Juvenile tortoises tend to eat more legumes, which are higher in protein, and fewer grasses and tough, fibrous plants than mature tortoises. Gopher tortoises have been known to scavenge carrion and eat excrement. As gopher tortoises usually get water from the food they eat, they usually only drink standing water in times of extreme drought.

Sexual reproduction involves courtship rituals between the male and the female tortoises. They may mate from February through September, with a peak throughout May and June. Females may lay clutches of 3-14 eggs, depending on body size, in a sandy mound very close to the entrance of their burrow. The incubation period can last from 80-110 days. Ninety percent of clutches may be destroyed by predators such as armadillos, raccoons, foxes, fire ants, skunks and alligators before the eggs hatch, and less than 6% of eggs are expected to

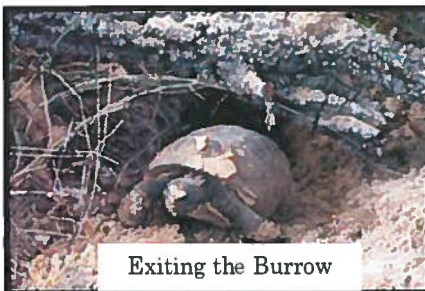
grow into tortoises that live one year or more after hatching. The young hatch will often spend the winter in their mother's burrow.

In addition to predation, conversion of gopher tortoise habitat to urban areas, croplands, and pasture, along with adverse forest management practices, has drastically reduced the historic range of the gopher tortoise. This loss is increasing as southern states continue to experience human population growth and highway road construction. The taking of gopher tortoises for sale or use as food or pets has also had a serious effect on some populations. The seriousness of the loss of adult tortoises is magnified by the length of time required for tortoises to reach maturity and their low reproductive rate.

One of the most suitable habitats for Gopher tortoise is the longleaf pine ecosystem, which provides suitable well-drained and sandy soils for tortoises to inhabit. Longleaf pine forests include abundant low herbaceous plant growth and open canopy/space for tortoise's eggs to incubate. Conserving these forests would provide the natural habitats Gopher tortoises need. Landowners interested in helping this keystone species survive should contact their local NRCS or Gary Butler to discuss the possibility of planting longleaf pine on their property.

Did You Know?

- There are an estimated 1,674,000 gopher tortoises in the wild.
- Male gopher tortoises having concave plastrons, while those of females are flat. In addition, the gular projection on male plastrons is generally longer than in females.
- Gopher tortoise egg's are round and about the size of a ping pong ball. Hatchlings are 1 - 2 inches long and grow about 3/4 inch a year. They reach maturity at about 10–15 years of age, when their shells are around 9 inches long.
- The sex of the eggs is determined by the temperature where they are incubated in a nest laid below sand. If the sand is over 30 degrees Celsius, it's a female and if below 30 degrees Celsius, the egg is a male.
- In Alabama, the gopher tortoise is a protected non-game species; populations west of the Tombigbee and Mobile Rivers are federally listed as a Threatened species.
- Since European settlement, longleaf pine decreased in area by an estimated of 96%, which has contributed to an 80% decrease in population densities of gopher tortoise. This means that there is only 4% of longleaf pine remaining.
- In Mississippi, along State Route 63, chain link fences were built to prevent gopher tortoise mortality from traffic. These fences, made from heavy gauge wire for durability, are three feet high and are buried one foot below the surface. The fences have "turnarounds" at either end, which are angled fences that redirect tortoises back into the area



Cogongrass Alert!

We are currently inspecting properties for cogongrass and other invasive species. Cogongrass, one of the world's top 10 invasive species,

is easily recognizable by its silvery white bloom that can be seen from March to June. If you find cogongrass on your property, you have a serious

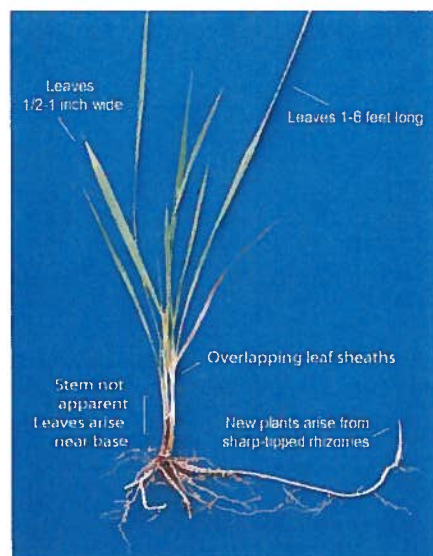
problem that should be addressed immediately. Please call us if you need assistance with cogongrass treatments or any other invasive species.

Cogongrass: A Physical Description

- Cogongrass leaves can grow up to one inch in width and up to six feet in length.
- They grow directly out of the ground and have rough edges.
- The leaves are yellowish-green, except in the winter when they turn tan after the first freeze, and have a whitish midrib that is noticeably off-center in mature leaves. The midrib may not be as noticeable in new

growths of cogongrass, and the leaves may be lime green.

- The flowers are cylindrical in shape and range from two to eight inches long and half an inch to one inch wide. They are first light-purple or tan in color, but then becomes bright silvery-white and fluffy.
- Cogongrass plants grow in dense and often circular patches.



Source: Field Guide to Identification of Cogongrass



What is Silviculture?

Silviculture is the art of producing and tending forest stands, or the application of the knowledge of silvics; bringing together biological and economic concepts to prescribe and apply treatments needed to reach land management objectives. Silvics deals with the growth and developments of single trees as well as forest ecosystems. It provides the scientific basis for the cultured treatments of forest stands.

Silvicultural practices are used to control the establishments of the forest and the composition of the forest as well as its growth and density. Forest composition is controlled by restructuring species of trees to those that are biologically and economically suited to a particular site. Composition is controlled through timber harvesting including the scheduling and placement of harvests, the regulation of the intensity of the harvesting and seeding or planting. Composition is further restricted by tree selection which should result in trees of the best form and quality, faster growing and most valuable species left to compose the residual stand. Growth can be controlled by regulating the density of the stand. In other words, by regulating the number of trees per acre or basal area per acre. Our goal is usually to achieve maximum growth and return by seeking optimum stocking and site

utilization. You will often hear us refer to or recommend a sanitation-improvement harvest. This is usually an intermediate timber cutting designed to harvest or remove the less desirable trees in a stand while leaving the more desirable trees to make up the residual stand.

In forestry, there are 2 levels of forests. These are the individual stand level which we will discuss in more detail here and the forest level or the forest as a whole. Silviculture plays a large role or deals more with the treatment or management of individual stands. There are 2 groups of stands defined as follows:

Even-aged— these stands usually have a single age class or a small difference in age class. Even-age management is the easiest to plan and execute.

Uneven-aged—these stands are stocked with trees that have considerable difference in ages. Uneven-age management is

We want to hear from you!

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but-*

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much more difficult due to the mixing of different age classes, varying species, difficulty in regeneration of desirable species and the control of stocking, etc. It is usually less expensive.

Even-aged silvicultural methods include the following: Clearcutting, seed tree and shelterwood. Clearcutting is the removal of the entire stand in one cutting or harvest. This method is most prevalent today in the management of southern pine species such as loblolly and longleaf. The seed tree method results in the removal of all merchantable timber except for a small number of trees left by themselves or in small groups. Seed tree harvests usually leave 4 to 6 seed trees per acre. There are a number of disadvantages to seed tree harvests and we usually do not recommend them especially in areas with high site indexes. The shelterwood approach involves a series of harvests which extend over a short portion of the rotation. The first or preparatory harvest is designed to leave as many as 10 to 20 trees per acre to regenerate the new stand. This method has several advantages over the seed tree method including leaving an operable volume for harvest following the establishment of the future stand. As was the case with the seed trees method, this method is difficult to successfully execute on areas with high site indexes. Both methods will require prescribed burning

on a regular basis to be successful.

Uneven-aged stands are most often managed through the selection-method which is the removal of mature and less desirable trees usually the oldest and largest either as scattered individuals or in small groups at periodic intervals. An uneven-aged stand usually contains at

least 3 age classes with differences in height, age and diameter. This particular method is most often the least expensive but requires a substantial amount of skill and knowledge on the part of the forester. This is particularly true in the management of bottomland hardwoods. Uneven-aged management may not result in the highest rate of return from an eco-

nomic standpoint but it is favored by many landowners, particularly those where recreation is high on their priority list. However, it should be noted that in almost all cases, this method can only be used for so long before some type of regeneration harvest will be needed to maintain an acceptable level of stocking and production.

Investing in Rental Property

If you're thinking about investing in a rental property, low home prices combined with low interest rates make this the best time in years to become a real estate investor. The following tips can help you take advantage this great opportunity.

First, have capital lined up. Speak to potential lenders or even a financial planner about whether you have enough assets to handle the ups and downs that could come with investing. Even if you plan to rent out the property, count on paying the mortgage whenever there's a vacancy.

Second, prepare yourself. Talk to other real estate investors about pitfalls they've experienced. You also might consider going to the general district court in your area and listen to some landlord/tenant cases so you can get a sense of what kind of challenges landlords face.

Third, partner with expe-

rience. Find a Realtor to help you locate promising properties. Working with one Realtor helps form a relationship with professionals who expect to do business with you again and therefore are going to be much more careful with what they recommend.

Fourth, choose your property carefully. Look for the right location. Homes in high-rent or highly populated areas are ideal. Look for homes with multiple bedrooms and bathrooms in neighborhoods that have a low crime rate. Think about potential selling points for your property. If it's near public transportation, shopping, or other amenities, it will attract renters, as well as potential buyers if you decide to sell later. The more you have to offer, the more likely you are to please potential renters.

Finally, build a supporting cast. Don't wait until a rental property needs repairs to find

someone to handle them. Line up maintenance individuals who can take care of the different challenges that occur so you can simply call the person when a particular issue comes up. Other sources you may want to have relationships with are an attorney to consult with on tenant issues, a property management firm to handle the day-to-day rental affairs and an accountant to help you understand the tax ramifications of investing. The more support you have, the better you will be able to handle the problems that come your way.

Whatever you do, understand that buying investment property is an entirely different experience than buying your primary residence. When you go to buy your own home, you usually have emotions in it. When you go to buy an investment property, you need to put all that aside and ask, 'What makes sense?'

Listings in West Central Alabama

270 acres +/- in Hale County: - Excellent timber/recreation tract 10 miles south of Moundville. Call Gary for more information at 334-289-0051.



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. 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 to view!!!



108 Cedar Cove, Gallion: On the lake with 7.36 acres this home has 2,800 +/- sq ft with 3 BR/2.5 BA, 2 fireplaces, and a large patio with a lakeview . Private hot tub room & dock. Priced at only \$230,000! Call Jim at 334-507-8379. Approved for Home Path Renovation Mortgage.

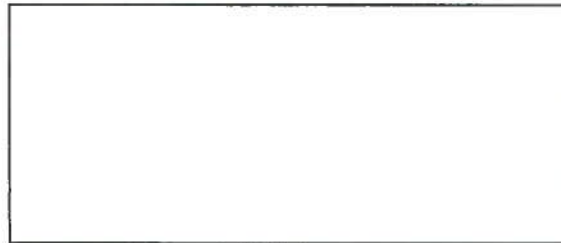
Thinking about selling your property? Why not list it with Butler and Company? Call Gary at 334-289-0051 to discuss your options.



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Housing Market Update

Existing home sales decreased 2.6% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.48 million in March from 4.60 million in February. This is 5.2 % higher than March 2011 sales.

Single-family home sales dropped 2.5 % to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 3.97 million in March from 4.07 million in February, but are 5.9%

above the 3.75 million-unit level in March 2011.

Total housing inventory at the end of March declined 1.3% to 2.37 million existing homes available for sale, which represents a 6.3 -month supply at the current sales pace, the same as in February.

Building permits in

March were at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 747,000, up 4.5 % from the revised February rate and up 30.1 % from March 2011. Housing starts in March 2012 were at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 654,000, down 5.8 % from February's revised estimated but up 10.3 percent from March 2011.

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.