

SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES
Forestland Resources Committee

Briefing Report Regarding “The Wetland Forest Initiative”

The Wetland Forest Initiative steering committee recently met on Dec 13-14 in Charleston, SC. As mentioned previously in the Forestland Resources Committee Report, this initiative was spearheaded by the Dogwood Alliance to protect bottomland forests throughout the southeast.

A steering committee consists of several environmental and conservation groups which includes representatives from American Forest Foundation, Black Family Land Trust, Carolina Wetlands Assoc., Clemson University, Defenders of Wildlife, Dogwood Alliance, Forest Stewards’ Guild, Gulf Restoration Network, Key-Log Economics, Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resource Defense Council, One Hundred Miles, Open Space Institute, Southern Group of State Foresters, University of Georgia, USFWS, Wild South, Wild Virginia, and Wildlands Network. The representative from the Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries, Donald Locascio is a member of the SEAFWA Forestland Resources Committee. Two additional FRC members present for this meeting, but not serving on the steering committee were Martin Blaney, Arkansas Game and Fish and Gary Burger, SC DNR. The initial direction of this initiative seemed to be towards designating areas to be protected through preservation and not necessarily conservation; however with input from conservation-minded participants on the steering committee and present for this meeting, the direction of this initiative appears to have been altered to protection through responsible management.

The group adopted a vision, “Abundant and healthy wetland forests for human and natural communities” and a mission, “Conserving, restoring, and improving Southern wetland forests to strengthen our communities through science-based actions, diverse partnerships, and citizen and landowner engagement.” The group also discussed the importance of clear definitions in regard to forest and wildlife management and subsequently adopted several definitions which included conservation, forest management, forest stewardship, land (resource) protection, preservation, restoration, wetland forest, and wildlife.

Elections were held and it was determined that Rick Savage (Carolina Wetlands Assoc.) and Maria Whitehead (Open Space Institute) would serve as Co-Chairs, with Sam Davis (Dogwood Alliance) as a “Backbone Chair”. It was also determined the need for an expanded Executive Council and through election Tim Foley (Southern Group of State Foresters), Duck Locascio (LDWF), Ben Prater (Defenders of Wildlife), and Jan Goldman-Carter (Wildlife Federation) were added to the Executive Committee to support the Co-Chairs.

The most pressing action items discussed during the meeting consisted of “management guidelines” and mapping. The group plans to query management guidelines relative to wetland forest throughout the southeast and make those, which can be endorsed by the group, available on a future Wetland Forest Initiative website. The mapping discussions involved the development of map layers to identify

wetland forest types across the southeast and to identify priority areas.

As this initiative evolves so will the importance of the direction taken concerning the designation and management recommendations of priority areas. The SEAFWA Forestland Resources Committee will remain engaged through the participation of several FRC members and continue to brief the Directors on all matters concerning the Wetland Forest Initiative.