

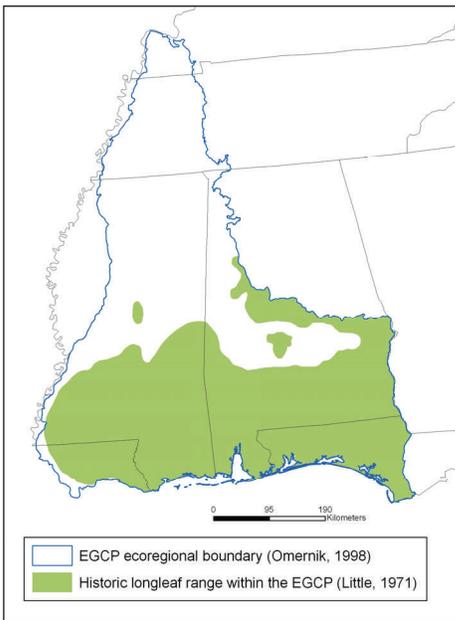
A DECISION SUPPORT TOOL TO GUIDE THE RESTORATION OF OPEN PINE HABITATS IN THE EAST GULF COASTAL PLAIN

ROLE OF THE DECISION SUPPORT TOOL IN CONSERVATION DECISION-MAKING

The East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture (EGCP JV) is developing a series of tools that enable the strategic conservation of open pine habitats. We intend for this tool to guide decisions about where, when, how, and why to undertake conservation actions based on a comprehensive landscape analysis and the application of key conservation biology principles to maximize conservation benefits for birds and other wildlife.

The core elements of the decision support tool pursue the following questions:

1. Where do stands of high-quality, open pine habitat currently occur on the EGCP landscape?
2. Where does recently restored longleaf pine occur on the EGCP landscape?
3. Where could longleaf pine be appropriately restored on the landscape?
4. What are the EGCP JV's numeric and spatial habitat objectives for sustaining priority birds in open pine habitats?
5. Where on the EGCP landscape should conservation strategies be directed in order to achieve the most ecologically-meaningful conservation benefits?



GEOGRAPHIC TARGET

The geographic scope of this decision support tool will include the intersection of the EGCP JV planning boundary with the historic range of the longleaf pine forest ecosystem. However, our intention is that the fundamental elements of this tool will be applicable across the entirety of the historic range of longleaf pine, specifically the West Gulf and Atlantic Coastal Plains.

IDENTIFYING HIGH PRIORITY AREAS FOR RESTORATION

Attributes used in the decision support tool to weight a landscape unit according to its relative potential to optimize bird response and maximize overall conservation include:

- Likelihood of being managed with fire at regular intervals
- Proximity to land managed for long term conservation
- Proximity to land in public ownership
- Proximity to patches of habitat that meet assumed requirements for supporting a sustainable subpopulation of priority birds
- Proximity to areas that are not currently open pine habitat but are classified as a land cover type with the potential for restoration of longleaf pine

ON-THE-GROUND CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

Target audiences for the open pine decision support tool are programs of agencies and non-governmental organizations that either directly fund or deliver on-the-ground restoration programs in pine forests of the EGCP.

Target conservation strategies include:

- Reforestation of agricultural lands
- Improvement of the habitat value, through appropriate management, of existing, closed canopy pine stands
- Conversion existing off-site loblolly and slash pine stands to well-managed longleaf pine stands
- Acquisition, preservation, and appropriate management of existing high-quality, open pine stands

