

## NCNPS Fall Field Trip to the Sandhills

### Descriptions of the sites we will tour.

Participants will need to select two of the three sites to tour as part of the field trip registration. The sites illustrate different aspects of conservation and management of Longleaf Pine ecosystems. All will include a diversity of fall-blooming wildflowers and plants and wildlife characteristic of Longleaf Pine ecosystems.

Fall is the best time to see the highest number of blooming plants in the sandhills. Particularly noteworthy are the striking Pine-barren Gentian (*Gentiana autumnalis*), several distinctive milkweeds including Sandhill Milkweed (*Asclepias humistrata*), blazing stars, and gayfeathers, goldenrods, numerous asters, and Threadleaf Gerardia (*Agalinis setacea*).

### Eastwood Preserve

Tour leaders: Jeff Marcus & Lesley Starke

The Eastwood Preserve, located north of Pinehurst and east of West End, is part of the NC Plant Conservation Program, Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, and managed by the Plant Conservation Program. Three Rivers Land Trust recently added 15 acres to the Eastwood Preserve, bringing the total size to almost 400 acres. An additional tract will be added in the near future. Due to limited staff and the sensitive nature of the species found on site, the site is only open to the public through workdays and guided tours.

This site is a significant natural heritage area as identified by the NC Natural Heritage Program, known primarily for its occurrence of the state-endangered Sandhills Lily (*Lilium pyrophilum*), which blooms for two weeks in early August. The lily is a relatively newly described species by botanist Bruce Sorrie, author of *A Field Guide to the Wildflowers of the Sandhills Region: North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia*. This showy species is endemic to the 16 counties in the sandhills of southern Virginia, North Carolina and northern South Carolina. An estimated 250 populations are currently documented.

In the preserve the lilies occur mainly in an actively managed powerline right-of-way. The lily grows in wet, boggy places and is among a large suite of species that require open-canopy wetlands maintained mainly by fire or other disturbance such as mowing. Yellow Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera ciliaris*), Purple Pitcherplant (*Sarracenia purpurea*), and Pink Sundew (*Drosera capillaris*) are other fascinating plants in the wetland habitat surrounded by fire maintained sandhill Longleaf forests. The Carolina Lily (*Lilium michauxii*) was recently found in the drier portion of the preserve.

The focus of this tour will focus on the endemic flora of the sandhills and issues related to their conservation. While the lilies will no longer be blooming at the time of our visit, there will be plenty of fall bloomers to discover.

## LighterWood Farm

Tour leader: Jesse Wimberley

LighterWood Farm, a property that has been in the same family for generations, well demonstrates what sandhill land owners can do to enhance their Longleaf forests and generate income in several ways while conserving natural habitats and ecosystems. The property, which is enrolled in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Safe Harbor Program for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, is located west of Pinehurst, south of Carthage, and just east of West End.

The property includes Longleaf Pine forest areas protected by a conservation easement, and Longleaf tracts managed for income, as well as a pond and wetlands. The Margaret Reid Chapter of the NC Native Plant Society visited LighterWood Farm in January 2022 and a [YouTube video](#) is available for you to preview.

This tour will focus on innovative and sustainable ways a private landowner can both conserve habitat and natural resources and sustain themselves. There will also be opportunities to botanize and discover the variety of fall-blooming plants that grow among Longleafs.

## Nick's Creek Longleaf Reserve

Tour leaders: Melvin Ezzell & Julie Moore

There is a unique, new preserve in the western NC sandhills located northwest of Pinehurst and east of West End; just to the west and upstream from the state's Eastwood Preserve.

The 1,800-acre Nick's Creek Longleaf Reserve was acquired in late 2019 by Southern Conservation, a Georgia-based nonprofit that protects working farms, forests and historic landscapes through conservation easements and fee simple property donations.

Nick's Creek Longleaf Reserve, once destined to become a resort-like community of homes, hotel and spa, and two 18-hole golf courses, will instead be a demonstration forest.

The large acreage of rolling uplands, mainly Longleaf forest, including the headwaters of Nick's Creek that runs from West End to Whispering Pines, will illustrate techniques to manage and restore Longleaf Pine forests. Based on the diversity of existing conditions, it is divided into units where different techniques of forest management and restoration will be utilized to show landowners, with or interested in Longleaf Pine management, different approaches, costs, and the potential income.

Melvin Ezzell, a registered forester, who manages the reserve, said "Forestry doesn't happen overnight; it is a process. It is a marathon, not a sprint. The ultimate goal at Nick's Creek is to restore 1,200 acres to Longleaf savannah and serve as an outdoor classroom for landowners to see how they can see returns in forestry."

This tour will focus on the Nick's Creek restoration and education projects. We will look at examples of the property's diverse habitats and discuss management strategies for sustaining

and restoring Longleaf ecosystems, including the wide variety of plants they support. There will be ample opportunities to discover the variety of fall-blooming plants that grow in these habitats.

## Bios

**Melvin Ezzell**, tour leader, is a registered forester and site manager for Nick's Creek Longleaf Reserve.

**Amy Mackintosh**, the field trip coordinator, is a co-chair of the Margaret Reid chapter of the NCNPS (Triangle region), a retired landscape architect, and owner/steward of the Margaret Reid Wild Flower Garden in Raleigh.

**Jeffrey Marcus**, tour leader, is the NC Longleaf Restoration Director with the Nature Conservancy, representative of the North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership, and also the resident site manager at Eastwood Preserve for the Plant Conservation Program.

**Julie Moore**, field trip organizer, tour leader and lunchtime speaker, is an active member of the Margaret Reid chapter of the NCNPS (Triangle region.) A botanist and ecologist, Julie has a long history of professional and personal involvement in native plant conservation organizations and land trusts in North Carolina and nationally, with a particular interest in Longleaf Pine ecosystems.

**Lesley Starke**, tour leader and ecologist, manages over 12000 acres in 26 preserves throughout the state for the NC Plant Conservation Program in the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services.

**Jesse Wimberley**, tour leader and owner of LighterWood Farm, has deep roots in the sandhills. His family has been in Moore County for generations and was recognized in September 2021 by the NC Longleaf Honor Roll for their long-term interest and outstanding management of their Longleaf Pine stands of several age classes. Jesse is also the coordinator of the NC Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association, which works with private landowners in the NC sandhills to teach them about the benefits of prescribed burning and the techniques to do their own burning.