



Historical Indicators of Former Piedmont Longleaf Pine Distribution

Some Preliminary Findings in Randolph County NC

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INTRODUCTION

The presettlement range of longleaf pine is of interest to conservationists and the timber industry for a variety of reasons. An understanding of where these trees grew well in the past can guide restoration efforts and indicate soils and conditions where this high quality timber tree can be grown to advantage.

Present day observations of existing remnant longleaf pines and old lighter wood stumps, often with turpentine scars, combined with information from historic deeds and land grants, can shed light on the presettlement range of longleaf pine.

Old land grant descriptions include direct references to longleaf pine and indirect references like place names and "shrubs" or "grubs" used as corner markers, possibly because no mature hardwood trees were present due to frequent fire. Other deeds, especially after 1900, reference pine knot corner markers and provide further data points.



OBJECTIVE

To use current and historic data to reconstruct the range of longleaf pine in Randolph County and nearby areas.

DATA SOURCES

- Remnant longleaf pines, both in natural stands and cultivated areas
- Longleaf pine stumps well enough preserved to retain a characteristic turpentine scent when shaved with a knife
- Personal observations and recollections by foresters, surveyors and other with an interest in the natural landscape
- Historic deeds, mostly 1920s to 1980s, showing pine knot corner markers. Pine knots are the resin-soaked branch bases that remain after a longleaf trunk has rotted, lasting 100+ years.



Generally accepted range of longleaf pine in North Carolina

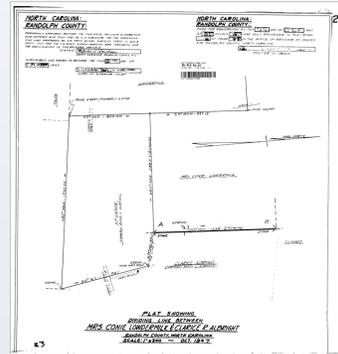


A split pine knot shows a longleaf twig inside



Old flat top, a source of "pine knots"

Examples of Data Sources



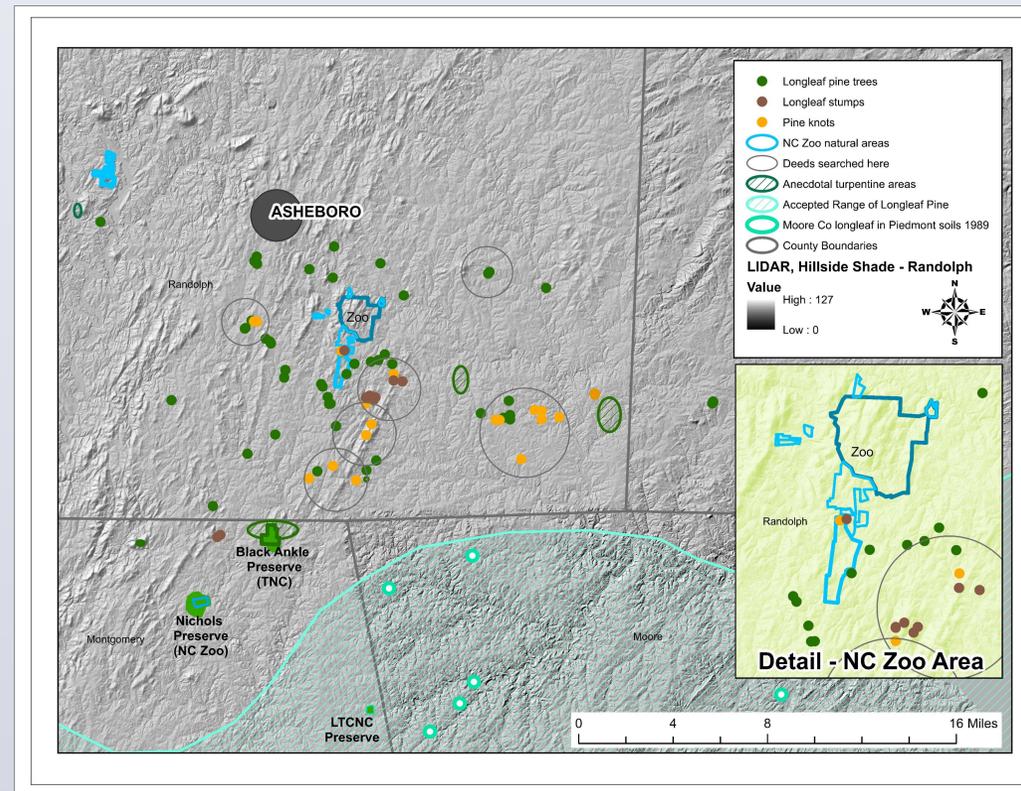
1947 deed, pine knot and pine stump corners



Lighterwood stump



Remnant longleaf above hardwoods



Indicators of Former Longleaf Pine Stands In and Near Randolph County, NC

FINDINGS

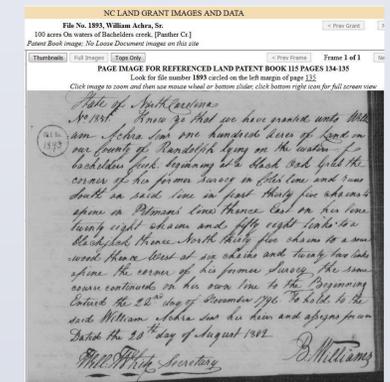
In many areas, pine knots corners on old deeds and surveys agree with remnant trees, stumps and local recollections to indicate that longleaf pine was once much more extensive in the southeastern part of Randolph county than it is today. Several areas with existing pine trees remain to be studied.

CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary investigations in Randolph County NC suggest that longleaf was common at least 10 miles north and west of the generally accepted range, which ends more or less at the Moore County line. This information can assist with fine-tuning appropriate restoration goals and techniques on NC Zoo lands and elsewhere. In particular, it applies to the Zoo's 400 acres of dedicated natural areas located directly south of the Zoo itself (see map inset).

FURTHER STUDY

Early land grants from the 1700s include place names and corner trees, and can help to further delineate the extent of longleaf pine savanna and other plant communities in Randolph County and nearby areas. Exact location of the tracts is uncertain so more research into chain of title is needed for these old records.



An example from southeastern Randolph County: corner trees in this land grant are "black oak grub, pine, blackjack, sourwood, pine."

REFERENCES

- Carter, J.H. III and Harry LeGrand. Inventory of the Natural Areas of Moore County North Carolina. NC Natural Heritage Program. 1989.
- Little, Elbert L. Jr. (1971). Atlas of United States Trees: Conifers and Important Hardwoods. U.S. Department of Agriculture: Forest Service, Misc. Pub. No. 1146. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office.
- And the following web pages, accessed many times over the past year:
- North Carolina Land Grant Images and Data, <http://nclandgrants.com/>
- Randolph County Maps Online <http://gis.randolphcountync.gov/randolphjis/>
- Randolph County Register of Deeds, Plans and Maps <http://www.randrod.com/platsandmaps.html>
- State Archives of North Carolina, <http://archives.ncdcr.gov/>

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