

# Prescribed Burns at Mobile Botanical Gardens

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It's time again to burn the 35 acre longleaf conservation area at Mobile Botanical Gardens. Visiting this area is like entering a portal to the past. Longleaf pine forests once covered an estimated 90 million acres from Virginia to Texas. Now only about 4 percent remain making the longleaf pine ecosystem one of the most threatened in North America. The longleaf ecosystem is one of the most species diverse in North America, hosting a vast array of plants and animals.

The longleaf conservation area at Mobile Botanical Gardens is one of the last longleaf stands in the city of Mobile. The area was preserved due to the nearby lake in Langan park being used as the water supply for the city until the 1950's. However, this did not prevent the forest from being logged in the early 1900's making the Longleaf conservation area a second growth forest. Longleaf pine, *Pinus palustris*, has the longest lifespan of the southern pines living up to 250 years and some of the oldest being over 400.



Old trees are susceptible to a fungus called red heart rot, so the forest is always transitioning through different stages of development. Even in forests considered old growth around 2/3 of the trees are less than 50 years old. Fire is an important feature of the longleaf pine lifecycle. Historically lightning strikes would start fires clearing the underbrush of fire tender hard woods. Longleaf pine seedlings need exposed mineral soil to become established. The understory plants have also adapted to the frequent burns and benefit from the clearing.

For many years fire had been suppressed in the conservation area promoting the growth of laurel and water oaks which choked out the understory preventing the regeneration of pines. The hardwoods were removed and in 2005 a burn program was established. The results have been the reemergence of many herbaceous plants such as the Lupines and Milkweed. The latter being an important host plant for the monarch butterfly caterpillar. After this burn, we can expect to see many of these beautiful plants emerge in an impressive show of spring wildflowers.



*Spring Lupine, photo Jenni Krchak*



*Asclepias tuberosa, photo Seth Allen*

**When:** August 1<sup>st</sup> (burn window could be July 31 – August 2<sup>nd</sup> depending on weather conditions).

**Where:** Mobile Botanical Gardens  
5151 Museum Drive  
Mobile, AL 36608

**In Partnership with:** The Nature Conservancy of Alabama, the Longleaf Alliance, Alabama Forestry Commission, and the City of Mobile

**Contact Us at:** (251)342-0555 or [mbq2@bellsouth.net](mailto:mbq2@bellsouth.net) if you would like to be notified about the burn.