



For a Louisiana Treesilience project, Wilkinson Tree Farm from Iowa, La., uses heavy equipment to plant large trees in a City of DeRidder park. © TNC

Louisiana Treesilience

Celebrating one year of building storm-ready communities, one tree at a time

This summer, new oak trees provide shade and improve air quality for residents using the walking trails and picnic areas in a popular DeRidder park. On a busy street in Alexandria, new magnolia trees brighten the landscape while reducing air temperatures in the city's downtown. Thanks to The Nature Conservancy's Louisiana Treesilience program, these trees and many others will help communities be more storm-ready at the beginning of hurricane season.

Over the past 12 months, Louisiana Treesilience completed four major projects, with five other active tree plantings in progress, in communities devastated by storms in 2020 and 2021. Funded by a three-year grant from the USDA Forest Service, the program has planted nearly 600 large trees and removed 19 dead or dying trees that were potentially hazardous.

These projects, which serve more than 60,000 Louisiana residents, mitigate the effects of recent hurricanes by both removing hazardous trees and strategically planting native species to

reduce urban temperatures. "The trees also provide a buffer from storms, manage flooding and improve quality of life," says Amanda Takacs, TNC's Louisiana community forest conservation coordinator.

"Treesilience allows us to employ conservation practices where people live, work and recreate," says Seth Blitch, TNC's Louisiana director of conservation. "Also, not everyone has the opportunity to spend the day in nature, so bringing it to municipal areas can strengthen a community's bond with the natural world."

In DeRidder, the city already is seeing the benefits. "The park is full of people every morning, with the walking trail and the pickleball court," says Tommy Landry, DeRidder's director of public works. "To bring children out to play, if there are no shade trees, they won't stay long."



Volunteers of every age help at Louisiana Treesilience's first planting event. © TNC



Clockwise: Young Longleaf Pine Trees © TNC; Coneflowers © Matt Pardue; Propeller Flower © TNC

Long Live Louisiana Longleafs

Once a symbol of the south, this ecosystem fuels a healthy and resilient landscape.

From roots working deep underground, up through the woody trunk and into the canopy of needles or leaves, a tree is busier than a factory—providing vital habitats, filtering air and water, and improving the soil. And that's only a single tree. Multiply that by a factor of thousands to underscore the important functions of forests.

Take longleaf pines (*Pinus palustris*), for example. The tree itself is a dominant feature of longleaf pine woodlands, a collective ecosystem composed of these trees interspersed with open savanna and a variety of shrubs, grasses and forbs. Once covering more than 90 million acres across the southeastern United States, the system was considered an inexhaustible resource for heating fuel and products including flooring, railroad ties and telephone poles. Resin from within these trees served as a key ingredient for turpentine and for waterproofing naval ships. Unfortunately, by the 1920s, most longleaf pines were gone. Today, longleaf pine woodlands represent one of the most threatened habitats in North America.

To bring these biologically diverse forests back, The Nature Conservancy is restoring native longleaf pine woodlands at six of its Louisiana nature preserves, which collectively account for more than 6,600 acres. In addition to improving air and water quality, and storing and sequestering carbon, the ecosystem is more resilient than others to wind, drought, wildfires and pests. It provides habitat for diverse wildlife, including declining and rare species, such as northern bobwhite quail and the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. Longleaf pine woodlands also use less water than more dense forests, allowing more of it to flow into nearby streams and rivers.

In addition to restoring these forests at TNC's nature preserves, we are working throughout the region to bring these forests back to the American South. In fact, longleaf pines represent a recommended species for TNC's Louisiana Treesilience Program, which is focused in 22 parishes that suffered severe hurricane damage in 2020 and 2021.

NATURE LOUISIANA

The Louisiana Treesilience program has been working with the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana to replace trees lost in Hurricane Laura at the tribe's ranch in Sulphur. The \$30,000 project includes planting 30 new trees, including some longleaf pines. Longleaf pines are important to the culture and history of the Coushatta Tribe, which has a long tradition of weaving baskets out of the needles.



Ta Wier, Coushatta Ranch Director © TNC

"Those who have been taught the tradition, before they pick the pine needles for the baskets, they say a prayer and give thanks to our creator for providing us with things to use for our culture and our heritage."

— Ta Wier,
Coushatta Ranch Director

Support This Work!

Visit [nature.org/lagiving](https://www.nature.org/lagiving) to support The Nature Conservancy's efforts to conserve forests around the state, from within TNC's system of nature preserves to hurricane-affected areas of the state. Thank you, Louisiana!