

GEORGIA PRESCRIBED FIRE COUNCIL

Lane Green

Chair, Executive Director, Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy

MR. MARK MELVIN: Georgia is kind of lucky in its proximity to Florida because we share that same resource that Steve [Miller] talked about, and that's Lane Green at Tall Timbers. Lane is active in both the North Florida council and also has been instrumental in the Georgia council. Actually he was part of the stakeholder group that got it all kicked off, and we're fortunate to have him as the chair for 2009. Lane.

MR. GREEN: Thanks, Mark. And Tall Timbers is one of those groups that kind of goes both ways, either side of the line. We operate as if that line doesn't exist. Mark, I was disappointed when you introduced Steve, since you didn't use the only name that he is known by in Florida, "Torch." Steve, The Torch, Miller. And he earned it not only from constantly setting fires everywhere all the time, but he's a ball of fire, so it's a very appropriate name.

First of all, as a member of the scoping group, I can say that there's a lot of energy, enthusiasm, and excitement and effort that went into trying to figure out how to birth this thing called the coalition. And congratulations! We're proud of the product of all this work. We look forward to seeing the growth and evolution under the leadership of Mark and the board of directors. This is something that a lot of us here are very proud of. Also, five of the members of the scoping group are on the Georgia Prescribed Fire Council, so we did have some influence. We'll see how that turns out.

About the Georgia council, I want to start with thanking Neal Edmondson. He's the Prescribed Fire Manager in Georgia with GFC [Georgia Forestry Commission], and he is kind of the anchor to this thing and was kind of the reason we got it going. The council was established in 2001 as the Southwest Georgia Prescribed Fire Council, after a series of fits and starts of trying to get a whole state council going and trying to get participation. Neal and I were participating in a training session, and we talked about it that day. We said, what if we take the most enthusiastic set of burners we have in Southwest Georgia and see if we can get some momentum going and then spread it across the state. And that's exactly what happened as we expanded to encompass a whole state in 2006. And it's doing well. We have a 30-member steering committee. One of the things about fire councils is they're inclusive, not exclusive. You need every single person, group, and organization represented who will put some energy into it. We have no formal organization. We share the leadership. We rotate chairmen. And the way you get elected as chairman is missing the steering committee meeting when they're planning for the next year. We have an annual meeting in the fall. Our Web site is maintained by Neal and GFC, and so we get a lot of support from them.

I'll just spend a little bit of time on accomplishments. You see the picture of this rogues' gallery, with Georgia's governor, Sonny Perdue, signing the first proclamation. We declared a week for prescribed burning. We can't deal with a month. South Carolina and Alabama, more power to you.

We're worn out after five days, but that's great. And when I went into Governor Perdue's office, as he's coming in and shaking everybody's hand, and we're introducing ourselves, I said, "I'm Lane Green from Tall Timbers. We're very proud of your support for prescribed fire." And he said, "Well, doesn't prescribed fire mean more quail to hunt?" And I said, "Thatta boy, Governor." So we got him hooked right away. So during that week, we have exhibits at the Capitol. We have media events statewide. We're trying to encourage more and more activities, and there are more groups participating across the state. We send out press releases to everybody in the council and the steering committee so that all they have to do is take it and walk it into their local radio station, TV station, or newspaper and say, "This is big doings. Here's a press release. Write something. Talk to me. I'm an expert." So we're always trying to get the word out, and especially on that week. And I say this of the North Florida council and the Georgia council, I don't think we're doing near as much as we could be doing during that week. So we have to continue to hammer on that.

We have been an effective voice and advocate for prescribed fire at the state level on all kinds of topics. We even got "gross negligence" added to the state law as the requirement for prescribed burners to be culpable, if they have a burn plan, adding the term "gross" to the "negligence" that was already there. We followed Florida's lead on that. That means that it has to be proven that you intentionally set that fire in order to harm somebody, so we have good liability protection in our state law. We were a partner in the Tri-state Message Campaign. Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina came together in 2007. You heard me talk about that. And I'm glad to see that Alabama is helping us test market that message. We're glad you have it on your Web site, and we would encourage everybody to use it.

We've been a partner in development and implementation of Georgia's strategic plan for fire. You've heard about the Fire Summit we had in Florida and Georgia. And one of the neat things about it is the objectives that we have in that plan. Some of the assignments for implementation go to the fire council. So we have a role in implementing that plan. And this year, in 2009, we'll be looking at what the priorities are. And I think, in talking with Neal, one of the biggest priorities right now is that we want to establish a code of ethics, or standards of conduct, for prescribed burners. In my looking around the country, I haven't found anybody that has anything like that. If you have something, I sure would like to see it, because none of us are reinventing the wheel. We're sharing information. So we in the fire councils want to take the lead in adopting a standard of conduct for burners.

We're influencing air quality regulators. You heard about Georgia EPD [Environmental Protection Division] and EPA participating in live fire demonstrations at the Jones Center. Before we were never able to get EPA's attention. Now they and EPD come and present at our meetings. So we