

# PLENARY SESSION—THE FUTURE OF PRESCRIBED FIRE

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## WELCOME

Lane Green

Executive Director, Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy

Good morning, and welcome to Tall Timbers' 24th Fire Ecology Conference, and welcome to sunny and warm Florida. Winter has just arrived, and by the time you leave here it will be in the 20s. But one thing about Florida is it's temporary. We have been waiting on winter to get here.

I'm Lane Green, Executive Director of Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy. I'm pleased to have you with us today. Our fire ecology conferences started around 1961. This is the 24th. They happen every two to three or four years throughout our history, and I had a couple of folks ask me last night was this an annual event. No, it takes too long to plan, wrap up, and print the proceedings to do it annually. So we do it periodically, and we do it on topics of interest at the time.

One of the things that the founders of Tall Timbers believed in 1958 was that the role Tall Timbers could play and needed to play was to bring together scientists, managers, and other prescribed fire users periodically to share information on the latest happenings with prescribed fire and to focus on timely topics. How many of you have been to Tall Timbers fire ecology conferences before? Good, about a third of you, maybe half. So the topics range anywhere from fire in longleaf pine ecosystems, fire and grasslands, the conference we had in Canada on fire in boreal systems, and even fire in wetlands. I think my first fire conference was here in Tallahassee when I came to Tall Timbers in 1990, and it was about fire in wetlands. I said, "That sounds like an oxymoron!"

Anyway, the topic for this year is one that is on everybody's mind. And you'll hear a lot today about the future of fire, how people are planning for the future of fire, and focusing on public awareness, health, and safety.

Just a couple of things for you to know about Tall Timbers. We celebrated our 50th anniversary last year, 2008, and throughout the year we tried to recognize and remember special people and events in our history. It was quite an exciting year. A couple of the highlights of what Tall Timbers has done over the years include that we are the home of the study of modern Fire Ecology. I think those two words were first put together at the 1st Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference. We are also home to the longest running game bird management research program in the country. And we're the home of one of the premier land conservancy trusts in the country. So our name, Tall Timbers Research Inc., is our corporate name, but we do business as Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy.

The Land Conservancy component was added in 1990. Without going into a lot of history, the concern was, if we can't do something about protecting land north of

Tallahassee, there wouldn't be any reason to study fire or wildlife or anything else. We would end up a Central Park between Tallahassee and Thomasville. One accolade for our Land Conservancy Program is from a recent survey done by the Land Trust Alliance that says we hold more acres in conservation easements than any other local or regional land trust in the Southeast, and right now that number stands at about 120,000 acres protected in perpetuity. You'll get to see some of that territory on field trips. By the way, you'd better wear your woolies on the field trip. It's going to be cold that morning!

So the 24th Conference actually kicks off our next 50 years. The topic is emphasizing an organizational priority for Tall Timbers, and that is, we need to spend significant effort and resources not only researching fire and fire effects, but protecting the right to use fire. You will hear a lot about that today.

I would like to thank our sponsors who make all this possible. There are 15 of them. You see them on the screen up there, but I'm going to read over them right quick so you don't miss them. These are important folks: U.S. Fish and Wildlife, National Park Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Georgia Forestry Commission, Interactive Training Media, Association for Fire Ecology, the Joseph Jones Ecological Research Center, the Prescribed Fire Training Center, Rigdon and Associates, and I'm going to stop right there just to make a comment. Last week I got a call from a landowner in Georgia who had called, I think, Neal [Edmondson] at the Georgia Forestry Commission, and said, "I can't get insurance. My burners can't get insurance. What do I do?" And that's a common question. Now you can talk to Chris [Rigdon] and he can tell you how we're going to solve that issue. So we're glad to have you here, Chris. The Joint Fire Science Program, United States Forest Service, Florida Division of Forestry, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, and the Southeast Fire Ecology Partnership. So we appreciate all of those sponsors. Let's give them a round of applause and thank them.

I'd also like to recognize some folks who have been instrumental in putting this conference together. The first one you'll hear from shortly is Dr. Kevin Robertson, who is our Fire Ecologist and Conference Coordinator, and this is the first of the conferences that he has coordinated. He has done an excellent job and I think you are going to enjoy what he has put together along with his working team: Rose Rodriguez, our Information Resources Manager—y'all just waggle your hand, please—Kaye Gainey, our Senior Research Administrative Assistant; Lisa Baggett, Research

Administration Assistant; and Josh Picotte, our GIS Fire Analyst, who is handling all of the electronic wizardry for this conference.

Something I learned in taking a course in college is that anything that can go wrong will with electronics, so please bear with us. I would also like to thank Carol Armstrong, our Librarian, who has helped us immensely with this conference, and our student presentation judges, Caroline Noble and Dave Brownlie, and the organizer for the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils meeting, Mark Melvin, who has been working on the historical occasion for Wednesday afternoon. There is Jim Cox on our staff, who is our Vertebrate Ecologist; Jason Isbell, who is our Fire Ecology Specialist; Tracy Hmielowski, Fire Ecology graduate student; Eric Staller, Land Manager; Jennifer Hinckley with

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Chuck Hess with U.S. Forest Service. It takes a lot of people to put this on.

At this time I want to introduce our Research Director, Dr. Ron Masters, and thank him for his leadership on this team and his leadership in the Research Program here at Tall Timbers. In the time he has been here we have made tremendous progress in furthering our research effort. So I hope you enjoy your stay. If we can do anything for you, please let us know while you're here. Ron, it's all yours.

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