

# INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

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We're glad you're here. I wanted to talk briefly about the history of the Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conferences this morning. These conferences began in 1962 and were initially held to provide a forum for international discussion about the research needs and management needs for fire. There was at that time little to no organized research effort about fire. It was at that first conference in 1962 that the words *fire* and *ecology* were put together for the first time. We like to think that Tall Timbers was in essence the birthplace of Fire Ecology as a science.

Early on, these conferences provided synergy for people who were doing independent fire research around the world to get together and just talk about the ecology and management of fire. Often researchers who had cast fire in a positive light were ostracized in their respective professions. They were looked upon with suspicion. So, as Lane alluded to, over the years, the conference has focused on various topics that at the time provided new insights into fire as an ecosystem process, and the use of fire as a management tool. These conferences have contributed to paradigm shifts along the way in how we think of fire. One of our purposes for being here today is to look at the future of fire, so that we can be proactive about the future of fire, rather than reactive.

These conferences are typically designed to be small, so that there can be a deeper level of interaction among participants. For the most part they have been in the U.S., but they have certainly had a worldwide focus. There have been conferences focused on Africa, conferences in Canada, different regions of the country, and so on. Prior to the convening of these conferences, there were very few papers published about fire. You can look through the early literature and you will find that there were only a handful of papers that happened to get through the review process.

A lot of these, though not all, were negative about fire, saying fire was bad for forests or fire was bad for this or that. So, as an outlet for objective information about fire, the Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conferences were the only game in town. But the times have changed. These days, there are two to four, sometimes more, fire conferences each year somewhere in the world. They have proliferated. The fire literature has exploded in the last two decades. Yet, these early

proceedings and recent proceedings are cited countless times in the fire literature.

Those early proceedings and classic works by Ed Komarek, on lightning fire and on other topics, and writings by Herbert Stoddard, have made lasting impacts. Since then, the topics and concerns of the conferences have provided a documentation of the development of fire ecology as a science. In spite of the growing professionalism of fire practitioners and the growing media attention on the ever-increasing numbers of acres burned each year by wildland fire, the vast majority of the urban public still fails to see the essential role of fire in the environment. Our goal for this conference is to continue the effort to precipitate change in the public's attitude towards fire and acceptance of the need for fire for a healthy environment and for healthy ecosystems and as an acceptable way to minimize risk.

You are going to learn more about our current challenges and the proactive ways that we can better approach dealing with them. You are going to hear from the folks from Georgia and in Florida about their statewide fire plans for the near future. Tall Timbers hosted a milestone Fire Summit back in January of this last year, where plans were laid for developing the future of fire in both of those states. It is an effort that we feel must be promoted and we believe that other states should get on board with as well.

This current conference also represents a landmark in that it will include the first meeting of the Southeast Section of the Association for Fire Ecology. The Coalition of Fire Councils will also have its inaugural meeting. These are great developments that we're honored to have as part of our conference. These are exciting times in the world of fire. At this time I would like to introduce Dr. Kevin Robertson, our Fire Ecologist, who will be moderating our morning session.

*Citation:* Masters, R.E. 2010. Introductory comments. Page 4 in K.M. Robertson, K.E.M. Galley, and R.E. Masters (eds.). Proceedings of the 24th Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference: The Future of Prescribed Fire: Public Awareness, Health, and Safety. Tall Timbers Research Station, Tallahassee, Florida, USA.