



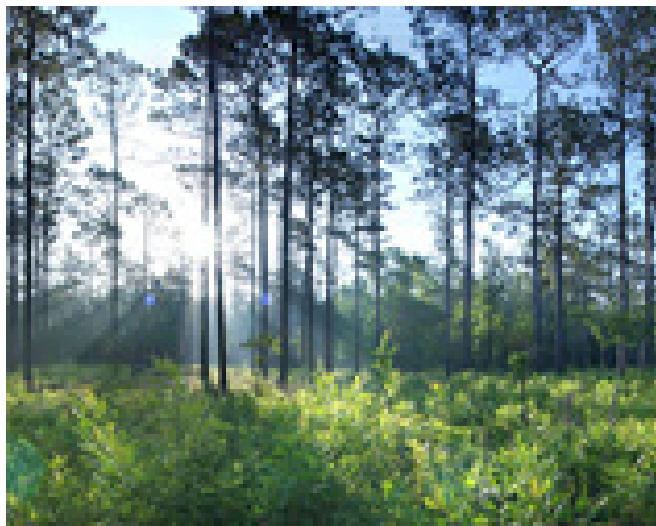
# Southeastern Conifer Forests

Nearly Gone...



# Characteristics

This ecoregion is known for the long-leaf pine trees that once dominated the area. Imagine walking through a forest where beautiful trees reach 60 to 70 feet into the sky. On the ground, among the fallen pine needles, grow clumps of wiregrass. As you walk, you notice the softness created by the thick cushion of needles. You reach down and pick up some of the needles and are amazed by their length. At nearly 18 inches, they are the longest pine needles of any Eastern pine. When intact, this area was the largest forest of conifers east of the Mississippi. Long-leaf pines are fire-resistant and actually depend on fire for their survival. Without frequent fires, deciduous trees will take over the pine's area, which is what has happened throughout most of this ecoregion.



# Plants

This area is home to many plants including 27 naturally occurring species of trees. Pine species include long leaf, loblolly, and others. These light, open forests have some of the richest spring wildflower communities anywhere. Poison ivy and honeysuckle are frequently found in these woodlands, as are dogwood and yaupon. Blackberries and crabapples provide food for the many herbivorous - or omnivorous - animal species.



Clockwise: Long leaf pine,  
crabapple, and Japanese  
honeysuckle

# Animals

The red-cockaded woodpecker and the gopher tortoise are both endangered species that make these conifer forests their homes. Gopher tortoises are important to other animals in the ecoregion because nearly 400 other species use their burrows, including the largest rattle snake anywhere - the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake. Other reptiles found here include the fence lizard and the rat snake. The coastal areas of this region are important habitat for migratory birds. The fox squirrels and black bears that live here are sometimes hunted illegally.



Clockwise from left:  
Red cockaded  
woodpecker, eastern  
fence lizard, fox  
squirrel, gopher  
tortoise, and the  
Eastern diamondback  
rattlesnake



# Threats

Virtually all of the long-leaf pine forests are gone, either replaced by mixed hardwood forests as a result of fire suppression or converted to farms to grow food or trees for lumber or paper pulp. The expansion of housing developments and construction of roads has also cut into this ecoregion. Only two percent of the original habitat remains, and much of this is in small pieces. The reduction in frequent fires, which kept the forests open and prevented catastrophic burns, is a major problem.



Traditionally, this was the area of Louisiana that was covered by the Southeastern Conifer Forests.

