



Newsletter



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Carvers Creek State Park

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The Longleaf Pine Trail, Part 2

By William Johnson, Park Naturalist

Today we'll begin the second part of our exploration of the Longleaf Pine Trail. Beginning at the two mile marker, we'll follow the trail to where it ends at the beginning of the Turkey Oak Loop trail.

If you are walking the trail when we publish the newsletter in July, you will immediately notice that the area you are walking in has recently burned. The ground has a layer of black from the fire, with spots of green already pushing skyward as the area goes through the fire cycle. This is a result of what we call a "prescribed fire". Fire professionals, such as wildland firefighters, state resource managers, burn bosses and even members of your local state park staff who have completed required training, use fire to maintain healthy conditions in parks and other wild areas. For example, here at Carvers Creek State Park we've burned about 1300 acres so far this year, which helps limit the amount of available fuel on the ground, recycles nutrients back to the soil, and promotes the growth of native trees, wildflowers and other plants.



Prescribed fire is much like a prescription a doctor might give you to help stay healthy. Prescribed fires are planned and controlled by experienced and qualified fire fighters and natural resource managers. Prescribed fire is medicine for the longleaf pine ecosystem. Without fire, the longleaf pine areas would sicken and die. The longleaf itself would not grow and the area would quickly be taken over by dense, heavy underbrush that would drive out the animals and plants that rely on the longleaf for life.

When European settlers first came to this country, they found longleaf pine growing from Virginia to Florida and west to Texas. It covered around ninety million acres. Overtime, longleaf pine was reduced to about 3% of that area. That's due to a combination of the longleaf pine being tapped for turpentine production and timber, population growth and the conversion of longleaf habitat to other uses, like farming. Why is that important? Well, imagine finding out that you could only use 3% of your house! That would probably have a pretty big effect on your life.

As you walk the trail, you'll soon see the other side of the Fox Squirrel Loop and another bench, and then, not far beyond, you'll cross Carvers Creek itself, which flows across the trail about a half mile from where we started today, or roughly 2.5 miles from the parking lot.

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Keep following the trail as it winds through the swamp bottomland and slowly begins to climb to the top of the Sandhills ridges that wind throughout the park. Do you notice a change in the temperature and humidity and you move from the lowlands to the ridges? Continue past the 3 mile marker and soon you'll see the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Loop on the right. For now, let's continue to the left on the Longleaf Pine Trail. You are now walking through mature, open longleaf pine forest. Look for the wide white bands painted on some of the trees - those are markers for Red-Cockaded woodpecker nesting trees.

Did you know that some animals rely on fire? In the western U.S. there are owls that hunt by perching on the edge of burned areas. Since the fire has burned down the small plants and young trees that would normally hide movement, the owls can easily see prey moving in the burned areas. Here in the Southeast, there are many animals that rely on fire to provide a healthy habitat. Not only the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, but the gopher tortoise, white-tailed deer, pocket gopher, bobwhite quail, fox squirrel, wild turkeys, white-footed mice, and countless different types of insects.

Before too long you will reach the far side of the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker trail to your right, while the Longleaf Pine trail continues to your left. The section on the left side of the trail was burned about a year ago. You can see how quickly new bluestem and wiregrass take hold. Think about the difference between how these areas look versus the low lying areas that haven't burned. Do you see a difference in the types of plants and trees that are growing? Do you see any difference in how thick the underbrush is?

Take a moment and imagine that you are a bobwhite quail, about 6 inches tall. If you get down on the ground and rest your chin on the ground, your eyes will be just about the right height. Go ahead and try it, nobody's watching! Now imagine you are surrounded by dense, thick underbrush, roots and stems sticking up everywhere. Leaves and interwoven branches cover your head. But you aren't small and agile like a sparrow, it's much harder for you to push your way through the brush to find food or a place to nest.



Quail's Eye view

But now the scenery changes. You are still a bobwhite quail, but now you're moving through the wiregrass and bluestem clumps, with tall longleaf pine trees covering the sky. It's much easier to move and quickly hide from a predator, or to find a tasty seed to eat. It only gets thick down near the streams and seeps, and you can avoid those if you need to. Without the open areas provided by the longleaf pine you might not be able to survive long.

Continuing your walk (as a human now!), just ahead you see a powerline opening that runs past a small pond on the left. This is the end of the Longleaf Pine trail and the beginning of the Turkey Oak Loop trail. If you walk toward the pond on the powerline, you'll find a park picnic area with some tables. A perfect spot to take a rest before you begin your 4 mile journey back to the parking lot!

July Book Recommendations for anyone who would like to learn more about nature and the outdoors:

Longleaf, Far As the Eye Can See by Bill Finch, Beth Maynor Young, Rhett Johnson, John Hall. Well-written with plenty of quality pictures of longleaf pine habitat in all its aspects.

A Field Guide to the Wildflowers of the Sandhills Region by Bruce A. Sorrie. Our go-to book to help identify the many wildflowers that grow throughout the park. Highly recommended.

PBS recently aired a special about local efforts to help the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. Go to [PBS.org](https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/woodpecker-wars-wild-hope/29044/) and look for the series **Wild Hope, Episode 103: Woodpecker Wars** or click on this link: <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/woodpecker-wars-wild-hope/29044/>

If you would like to attend one of our upcoming programs please call 910-436-4681 to reserve your spots.

FIRST DAY HIKE

Saturday, July 1st @ 9:00 am

First Day (of the Month!) Hike: In honor of North Carolina celebrating the Year of the Trail, we will host a First Day of the Month hike every month this year. In July, we will hike part of the Longleaf Pine Trail and learn about the nature and history of the Longleaf Pine trail. We'll meet at 9:00 am in the Small Parking lot at the Sandhills Access. Please call (910) 436-4681 to sign up.

CANOE HIKE

Sunday, July 2nd @ 6:00 pm

Saturday, July 8th @ 6:30 pm

Friday, July 14th @ 6:30 pm

Saturday, July 22nd @ 6:00 pm

We will be learning the basics of canoeing and then trying out our new skills by maneuvering through the Cypress swamp. This is a slow and calm canoeing experience and great for beginners or if you want to get a closer look at the Cypress trees. **YOU MUST SIGN UP.** You can call the park office to sign up. **Limit is 10 visitors. Please allow approximately 15 minutes to walk from the parking lot to the Rain Shelter. Age limit is 8 years old and older.**

HISTORY HIKE

Saturday, July 15th @ 6:30 pm

Join us as we will be walking and exploring the millpond, silos, pavilion, and other historical farm buildings not yet open to the public. Please call or stop by the park office to sign up. Bring a bottle of water, a camera (if you like taking pictures), and your walking shoes! Please meet in front of the park office for this event.

NATURE HIKE

Friday, July 28th @ 7:00 pm

Come out for a Ranger-led nature hike. We will be exploring our fire-dependent longleaf pine ecosystem. We will observe numerous native species to the Sandhills. Bring a bottle of water, a camera (if you like taking pictures), and your walking shoes! We will meet in the small parking lot at the Sandhills Access.

VOLUNTEER DAY

Saturday, July 29th from 9:00 am– 12:00 pm

Carvers Creek State Park offers a wide variety of opportunities when you come to our Volunteer Days. Our prized volunteers help us with everything from our old farm fences to culverts, to invasive species of plants, to leaf cleanup, trail creation, and many others. Please be prepared for the weather and bring bottled water and gloves with you. We will be meeting at our Long Valley Farm Access, Welcome Center.

CARNIVOROUS PLANTS HIKE

Saturday, July 29th @ 6:30 pm

Join us on a hike near the Rockefeller Loop trail to learn about and see up close, the awesome carnivorous plants here at Carver's creek state park. We will be seeing a variety of pitcher plants, sundews, and bladderworts! Bring your walking shoes and a bottle of water.