**Southern Regional Extension Forestry Report**

**Southern PLN Meeting**

**Fort Worth, Texas**

**August, 2017**

**Background:** The Southern Regional Extension Forestry (SREF) office was created in 1979 by \an MOU between the 13 1862 Landgrant Universities and the USDA Forest Service, State & Private Region 8 Office, Atlanta, Georgia. The University of Georgia serves as the host institution, with the Extension Director, UGA providing oversight to the Regional Forester. The 14 members of this consortium provide funding and support for a regional forester and support staff (business management, communications, marketing). The rest of the SREF office is supported through grant, contract and other funds.

**Mission:** “The mission of the Southern Regional Extension Forestry office is to serve the southern Land Grant University System and USDA Forest Service through the collaborative development of forestry technologies, tools, products and programs that improve the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and impact of supporting institutions.”

2017 – Updates

**Staffing** - Has remained stable since 2016. 2 staff are funded by ASRED (regional forester and a business manager), 9 are funded by grants and contracts (4 Extension Associates, 3 IT Associates, 1 communications manager, and a marketing/graphics design manager along with student workers and contractors.

**Needs Assessments Results** – Conducted at the request of ASRED Forestry Committee. 52 responses: (Separate handout with results): Highlights include:

* *How well is SREF meeting the objectives?* – 4 on a scale of 5
  + “yes, I would like to see more in-service for agent, more online training- your material development is great”
  + “SREF has provided education and training for extension forestry professionals and helped plan continuing education. I do not see those goals in the above list.”
  + “I think the MOU and the associated goals and objectives remain appropriate and I see no obvious redundancies. They are designed to complement and enhance state efforts and that has been nicely accomplished through many efforts.”
* *Important areas to be working in?*
  + Forest economics and timber markets
  + Forest health and management
  + Wildlife management
  + Wildland fire
  + Bioenergy
  + Forest restoration
  + Urban forestry
  + Climate change
* *Top Ten Services provided to states from SREF (ranked highest to lowest)*
  1. Electronic newsletter (delivered via email)
  2. Website materials
  3. Liaison to external agencies and partners (NIFA, USFS, NRCS, state forestry, FLA, etc)
  4. Awards program (regional professional recognition program)
  5. Regional promotion of state activities and products
  6. "Forestry webinar series" (forestrywebinars.net, conservationwebinars.net, bioenergywebinars.net, etc)
  7. Representation on regional and national committees
  8. SREF.INFO website
  9. Listserv communication
  10. Regional professional development programs
* *Suggestions for improvements:*
  + Engage a much wider cross-section of the faculty at member institutions.
  + Estate and Conservation Planning; Taxation are important topics to collaborate on
* *Demographics:*
  + Over 30 different forestry, wood products and wildlife type sub disciplines chosen
  + Majority of the respondents were state specialists
  + Solid response from each state
  + Average tenure was 17 years

**Service to State Extension and State Forestry**

* **Funding** - SREF Staff and partner ASRED institutions were involved in a combined 30+ grants including:
  + Biomass – Carinata – UF lead, MSU, NCSU, UGA, FVSU and USF partnering ($15,000,000) – successful (SREF will provide leadership and coordinate the Extension effort)
  + Wildland Fire – UGA lead, UF and others partnering ($90,000) - successful
  + Biomass – Loblolly Pine – NCSU lead, UGA partnering ($997,520) - submitted
  + Extension Recruiting – UK Lead, UGA, VT, Clemson, ($300,000) - submitted
  + Landholding Resiliency - UT Lead, UGA partnering ($750,000) - submitted
* **Training** 
  + Extension Forestry & Natural Resources Mentoring Initiative
  + Agent and county forester training sessions in forest health were held in collaboration with ASRED partners in Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina, Texas, Louisiana, Virginia (Dr. David Coyle). Plans to work in several more states in 2017-2018.
  + Webinars – (Separate handout on the impacts)
    - 91 webinars completed in 2016 and 65 webinars completed in 2017 (to date)
    - Average rating 4.0 out of 5.0
    - Total webinar views:
      * 22,379 (live)
      * 25,761 (on-demand)
  + Climate Learning Network Certificate Program (eXtension and USDA – Office of the Chief Economist)
    - 8 Modules listed at climatelearningnetwork.net
    - e-Learning modules based on live, professionally taped webinars
* **Publications & Websites** – Our IT Staff has continued to work with staff and partners to create web-based solutions to many of our natural resource issues. In addition to many of our ‘legacy’ sites, we have launched several additional sites in late 2016 and 2017.
  + **Askforwood.com** – This site has been specifically designed to provide local educational resources for county agents and county foresters (Clemson University lead)
  + **Proforesthealth.com** – The University of Florida is promoting pro-active forest health protection and management. SREF is a regional partner and provided website services for them.
  + **Eszf.sref.info** – Eastern Seed Zone Forum to host support discussions and professional development in the area of reforestation and seed deployment.
* **Other resources**
  + Two-page fact sheet on importance and impact of the RREA program
  + Reports and impact research conducted by SREF to quantify the impact of the NUCFAC annual grant program.

2017-2018 – Plans

SREF plans for the remainder of 2017 and 2018 include providing leadership in several areas including:

* **Southern Region Extension Forestry & Natural Resources Retreat** – Delta, Alabama, October 11-12, 2017
* **Initiate Forestry & Natural Resources Forest Mentoring Program** – Via e-Learning, webinars and other venues (assistance in identifying participants is greatly appreciated)
* **Staff of SREF will work closely with state partners on several topical areas including**:
  + Wildand fire
  + Shortleaf restoration
  + Urban forestry
  + Forest health and management
  + Bioenergy
  + Climate change and forest resilience
  + Estate planning, taxation and conservation easements
  + New technologies and websites
  + General professional development