

A photograph showing two women in a forest setting. They are standing in a field of tall, dry grasses, surrounded by numerous thin tree trunks. One woman is pointing towards the ground, and the other is looking down at something in her hands. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Alabama's Forest Health Cooperative

By Dr. Lori Eckhardt, Director

Organized in 2008 with the common goal of maintaining forest health, productivity, and sustainability, the Forest Health Cooperative has brought together interested parties from Auburn University, forest industry, consulting companies, timber management companies, as well as state and federal forest agencies. Created by Drs. Lori Eckhardt and Scott Enebak, faculty members at Auburn's School of Forestry and Wildlife Science, the Cooperative's mission is to address important, current and relevant forest health issues that include disease, insect, and invasive species, in a way that addresses real world management problems in the southern United States. In its second year of existence, the Forest Health Cooperative has 17 members: 12 from forest industry, 3 federal and state, and 2 private entities.

Several members of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences faculty work with the Cooperative in the establishment of research projects, technology transfer, and publications. They bring their expertise in pathology, entomology, silviculture, genetics, plant physiology, and invasive plants, with the amount of time each allocates to Cooperative activities related to their own discipline and interest in forest health work.

The Forest Health Cooperative already has an active research program that involves eight research projects falling into several general areas: disease development, pathogen ecology, insect ecology, insect and disease management, and invasive species management. Examples of current research topics include vector population dynamics related to silvicultural activities, pathogen resistance and host susceptibility, and delineation of pine decline.

Membership in the Cooperative is open region-wide to landowners, consultants, industry, federal and state forestry associa-

tions, as well as non-governmental organizations interested in maintaining forest health, productivity, and sustainability. To ensure that members are kept up-to-date on any new research or developments on forest health that may affect them, the Cooperative has an active technology transfer program and offers short courses on forest health as well as insect and disease identification. A newsletter is sent to members every spring and fall that includes research updates, articles, and technical reports. An advisory meeting is held each November at which time accomplishments, research reports, and new research project proposals are presented.

Membership is offered at three levels: full, associate, and sustaining. Sustaining members receive access to the Forest Health Cooperative webpage, newsletter, research and technical reports, email and telephone consulting, and participation in members-only workshops. Associate members receive the benefits of the sustaining members plus field consulting and laboratory diagnostics, and may participate at the annual advisory meeting, but cannot serve on the advisory council. Full members receive all the benefits of associate and sustaining members, serve on the advisory council, and have voting powers with respect to research direction and budgetary decisions. Membership dues go toward the salaries of one full-time research associate, an office administrative assistant, and an M.S. and Ph.D. student, as well as travel funds, installation, and analysis of Cooperative-sponsored research.

To learn more about the Forest Health Cooperative, visit our website at: <https://fp.auburn.edu/ForestHealthCooperative/default.htm> or contact Dr. Lori Eckhardt at 334.844.2720 or eckhalg@auburn.edu