Southeast Mixed Forest and Outer Coastal Plain

Physical description

The terrain is rolling hills to mostly flat. Marshes, lakes, and swamps are numerous along the Coastal Plain. The average annual precipitation ranges from 40 to 60 inches. Precipitation is received throughout the year. Summers are hot and winters are mild.

Dominant vegetation

The final stage of succession usually consists of deciduous trees, such as oaks, hickories, American beech, blackgum, red maple, Southern magnolia, laurel oak, American holly, and winged elm. However, on many upland sites, especially where prescribed fire is used, loblolly or shortleaf pine are often the principal overstory species. Fire suppression has decimated the shortleaf pine ecosystem to a fraction of its former range throughout the ecoregion. Planted loblolly pine is widespread over much of the ecoregion, but without fire and judicious thinning, the value of loblolly plantings for wildlife is relatively low. Gum and cypress are dominant on moist areas along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and along major river drainages. Mid-story trees throughout much of the ecoregion include dogwoods, American hornbeam, redbud, sweetbay, titi, and shadbush (also called serviceberry). Native forbs and grasses commonly found include lespedezas, partridge pea, ragweed, pokeweed, bluestems, paspalums, wiregrass, povertygrass, and many others. Vines, such as Virginia creeper, trumpet creeper, grapes, yellow jessamine, and greenbriar, are common. Shrubs include sumacs, viburnums, elderberry, wild plum, blueberry, blackberry, hawthorns, and wax myrtle.

Typical nonnative invasive plants in the Southeast Mixed Forest include bermudagrass, bahiagrass, cogongrass, kudzu, Japanese honeysuckle, privets, Japanese climbing fern, chinaberry, tree-of-heaven, mimosa, and popcorntree.

Farming and ranching

Many wetlands along major rivers have been drained and forests cleared to grow crops such as cotton, rice, soybeans, corn, and other grain crops.

Large areas of forests have also been cleared and planted to nonnative grasses, especially bermudagrass and bahiagrass, for livestock. Unfortunately, most of these are not beneficial for wildlife.
Figure 12. Planted pines, especially loblolly, are common across the Southeast. Early successional vegetation is provided for a few years until the canopy of the pines closes.

Figure 13. Mature pine stands, especially longleaf, are best managed by thinning to a predetermined basal area, which allows better tree growth and a diverse understory. Prescribed fire is used to manage the composition and structure of the understory.

Plant succession

Figure 14. Annual forbs and grasses represent the initial successional stage. Here, a strip was disked in a field dominated by perennial native warm-season grasses to enhance brooding cover for northern bobwhite. Note the common ragweed and bare ground in the disked strip (center) as compared to the relatively dense native grass on the right.
Figure 15. Perennial forbs and grasses represent the **second successional stage**.

Figure 16. The second successional stage slowly gives way to the third. Here, broomsedge bluestem, blackberry, and various forbs are succeeding to sweetgum, red maple, and eastern redcedar. This transition provides excellent habitat for northern bobwhite, loggerhead shrike, and eastern cottontail.

Various shrubs (such as wild plum) and trees (such as eastern redcedar, sweetgum, and winged elm) represent the **third successional stage** (no photo available). Planted loblolly pine stands often represent a third successional stage.

Figures 17 and 18. These pictures show the same loblolly pine stand 4 years after planting and 8 years after planting. Although it is the same loblolly pine stand, the wildlife species found in this stand 4 years apart are quite different because the structure of the stand has changed dramatically.
Figure 19. Mixed hardwood forest dominated by various oaks, hickories, maples, and sweetgum represent the **fourth successional stage**. Loblolly and shortleaf pine are often a component in these forests. Unmanaged forests often lack a developed understory, such as seen in this picture.

**Wildlife associated with Southeast Mixed Forest and Outer Coastal Plain**

- barred owl
- bluegill
- channel catfish
- coyote
- eastern cottontail
- eastern fox squirrel
- largemouth bass
- loggerhead shrike
- mourning dove
- northern bobwhite
- prothonotary warbler
- raccoon
- red-cockaded woodpecker
- red-eyed vireo
- white-tailed deer
- wild pig
- wild turkey
- wood duck