

## Longleaf Pine Reforestation on Robins AFB

Ninety million acres of longleaf pine forest covered the southeastern United States when European settlers arrived, but due to fire suppression and logging (and the subsequent replanting of these sites to faster growing loblolly and slash pine), that number is now down to three million.

Environmental Management has been working with forestry consultants since 1997 to restore 23 acres of relic longleaf forest. The area has been cleared of competing tree species and planted with 15,000 longleaf pine seedlings. A nature trail with interpretive signs extends from the NW corner to the SE corner of the site with an outdoor classroom at the SE corner.

The name longleaf refers to the long needles that occur in bundles of three and grow to 18 inches. The pine itself can grow to a height of 150 feet with a diameter of nearly 4 feet. It's ecosystem (a local biological community) is among the most bio-diverse of all forest ecosystems, supporting hundreds of plant and animal species including threatened and endangered species such as the indigo snake, red-cockaded woodpecker, gopher



*Longleaf Pine Seedling*



*Entrance to Wiregrass Nature Trail on the NW Corner of the reforestation site*

tortoise and chaffseed. Longleaf is resistant to many diseases, insects, fire and other damaging agents common to other southern pines. The open, park-like appearance of a longleaf pine forest is conducive to the establishment of a diversity of ground cover plants, providing food and shelter to many insects, birds and other wildlife.

One reason for the longleaf pine ecosystem's decline was the increased effort, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, toward fire prevention and suppression. Prior to this, for several thousand years, landscape-scale fires caused by lightning occurred in the longleaf ecosystem every 3-5 years. This would rid the sites of less fire tolerant hardwood species and open the forest floor up to fire dependent plant communities such as longleaf pine. Burning also eliminated competition from other plants, thereby improving the longleaf seedlings' survival.

Another more obvious reason for the decline was the over harvest of this once abundant resource. Of all the southern pine species, longleaf pine yields the largest proportion of high value, solid wood products including poles, pilings and pulpwood and was once important in the production of pitch, tar, rosin and turpentine. By the 1920's, however, most of the longleaf pine forests were depleted. Timber companies simply moved on without giving much thought to replanting any of the major sites. Instead, focus was given to faster growing pine species thus leading to more frequent harvests. For example, loblolly pine can be harvested for pulp (paper) at about 18-20 years.

All base personnel and their families are invited to visit Robins' longleaf restoration site and learn more about this increasingly rare forest community. To visit the site, go south on Macon St. past Marchbanks Dr. until it turns into a dirt road. The DLA storage facility will be on the left. Turn on the first dirt road on the left and continue straight into what appears to be a field. The beginning of the "Wiregrass Trail" will be on the right. For more information, contact Becky Crader at 926-1197 ext. 113 or [rebecca.crader@robins.af.mil](mailto:rebecca.crader@robins.af.mil). For more information about the longleaf pine, visit the following websites: <http://consci.org/Eglin/>, <http://www.forestry.auburn.edu/la/>.