

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY & AFRICAN AMERICAN LAND RETENTION

Newsletter



Welcome!

INAUGURAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Sustainable Forestry & African American Land Retention (SFLR) newsletter! In the coming months, the newsletter will highlight our work and that of our partners in creating a sustainable support system for African American forest owners and their families throughout the Southern United States.

What's inside our latest issue:

- WELCOME
- FEATURE STORY
- MCINTOSH SEED - SITE SPOTLIGHT
- LR LEAN - SITE SPOTLIGHT





Empowering, Protecting, and Preserving African American Landowner Rights through Boundary Surveys



Tyrah Ward, Outreach Manager for McIntosh Sustainable Environment and Economic Development (McIntosh SEED)

When we ask the question, “How much land do you think you own,” many African American landowners are uncertain, especially with land that has been passed down through generations without a clear title. And often, these landowners lack access to the services of a trusted surveyor who can verify their property boundaries. Recognizing this need, McIntosh SEED emphasizes and works hand-in-hand with these landowners, connecting them to the resources they need to protect their assets and prevent the potential loss of the land that is rightfully theirs.

“McIntosh SEED provided the services of a surveyor, who verified that I rightfully possessed an additional five acres. This was more than double the land I thought I owned!”

Such was the case with landowner Herman Baker. “McIntosh SEED provided the services of a surveyor, who verified that I rightfully possessed an additional five acres. This was more than double the land I thought I owned! This demonstrates the importance of having the correct information as it relates to your property. However, it also emphasizes how relationships with organizations like McIntosh SEED can benefit landowners and their families tremendously,” he says.

Mr. Baker’s story is not unique; through professional surveys, many African American landowners have discovered that the boundaries of their property extend beyond what they thought or were told.



Left: Recently, Tattnall County, GA landowner Mr. Lonnie Johnson and Mr. Mark McClellan, Georgia Forestry Commission's Stewardship Coordinator, joined by McIntosh SEED's staff, cruised over 160 acres during an on-site visit.

Connecting Landowners to the Right Resources

In addition to not knowing where their property lines begin and end, some African American landowners believe that their boundary lines are of little importance. For example, McIntosh SEED collaborated with a landowner who was hesitant to have the boundaries of her 30 acres surveyed, as the property sat in the midst of a corporate site. With assistance and gentle persuasion, she conceded to have property formally surveyed. Although the survey has not yet been completed, she has allowed us to consistently share the importance of how the boundary survey will benefit her in the years to come.

In our work for landowners, McIntosh SEED has established strong relationships with our local organization, including the Farm Service Agency and the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices in Georgia. Yet, there remain challenges in connecting landowners throughout Georgia—even in neighboring counties—with the local NRCS and other resources they need.

We have found that some of the greatest hurdles we have to overcome are inconsistencies in documentation and processes, leaving some landowners confused about—and even intimidated by—what information they must provide to ensure that their properties are properly surveyed. In our quest to help landowners, we have had to take a “trial and error” approach, persisting in figuring out what questions to ask these agencies, who is willing to provide us with the correct information, and how we can obtain the cooperation necessary to assist our clients. And it is essential that we continue to press these agencies because we know our work is vital in advocating for African American landowners.

Soon, McIntosh SEED will host a workshop in which boundary surveys will be the topic of discussion. Yet, even as we recognize the need to continue to reach out to African American landowners about their property rights, we also know that education is only effective if it begins with listening.

Through listening, we can respectfully understand each landowner's experience, perspective, expectations, and concerns. By embracing this knowledge, we can establish the trust necessary to effect positive outcomes in firmly establishing and preserving these families' rights.



Above: Landowner Annie McIver's hosted a recent on-site visit with McIntosh SEED's staff in Worth County, Georgia, where more than 70 acres were assessed. Since the visit, Ms. McIver has applied for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) through NRCS and has signed a timber sale contract to begin the harvesting of her 20+ year-old trees.

Site Spotlight



McIntosh SEED Helps Stem the Loss of African American-Owned Forest Lands



Benjamin Sterling, Jr., Program Director, McIntosh SEED

In the last 100 years, more than 90% of African American-owned land in the Southern United States has been lost. However, initiatives such as the SFLR and its partners, are addressing this loss by encouraging and enabling landowners to retain and maintain these legacy lands.

As an anchor organization with SFLR, McIntosh SEED helps restore and secure ownership of African American-owned forest land and improve the value and productivity of such land through sound forestry practices. McIntosh SEED assists landowners in Georgia to gain access to their property deeds and other pertinent records, facilitates cost-sharing opportunities with governmental entities, and shares knowledge about conservation practices that help them keep their land sustainable and profitable.

With a focus on transforming communities by transforming individual lives, McIntosh SEED began serving citizens in three counties in the Southeast corner of Georgia in 2016. Realizing the need to expand this outreach, McIntosh SEED now serves participants in 24 counties throughout the state.

Partnering with organizations such as the Georgia Forestry Commission, the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), Farm Service Agencies, and local private partners, DS Smith (Bill Guthrie), has also allowed McIntosh SEED to further empower African American landowners by connecting them with local foresters. With these relationships, McIntosh SEED helps to build back the trust of landowners and positions them to gain wealth through their land ownership.

Landowner Testimonial

As a recent result of this connection to foresters across the state, McIntosh SEED has helped six Georgia landowners receive funding in 2022 through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) of the NRCS. Through this funding, these landowners can adopt conservation practices to keep their land sustainable and managed correctly according to their desires, as well as help them to retain their legacy lands.

“*My family and I are so pleased with Tyrah and her organization’s communication skills, knowledge of heirs’ property, educational programs, and professionalism, and their commitment to assist African American property owners.*”

"For over three decades, my family and I struggled to find an organization that could assist us with organizing our heirs' property. We had many issues, including obtaining a reputable harvesting company, finding financial assistance, accessing our land-locked land, and finding reputable legal counsel.

On searching the internet for someone to help our family, I discovered McIntosh SEED. I immediately contacted them, and Ms. Tyrah Ward responded immediately. My family and I are so pleased with Tyrah and her organization's communication skills, knowledge of heirs' property, educational programs, and professionalism, and their commitment to assist African American property owners. McIntosh SEED has addressed and resolved many of the issues we struggled with. Tyrah has been a godsend."

Saul J. Blair
BHG Consulting, LLC

Resources

The McIntosh SEED Landowner Handbook is a tool to strengthen and empower landowners by providing information and resources. The handbook provides a glossary of forestry and sustainability terminology that educates the landowner while they are learning about their land. The workbook also is designed to help landowners organize their affairs related to family land holdings and navigate them as they look at their land for their families now and for generations to come!

This powerful tool can be also used by organizations and individuals seeking information and guidance on their land management goals and conservation practices.

[McIntosh SEED Landowner Handbook](#)

Site Spotlight

LRLEAN

Ensuring a Legacy Grounded in Stewardship and Sustainability of the Land



Jerry Lacey, Executive Director, Limited Resource Landowner Education and Assistance Network (LRLEAN)

LRLEAN, in strong partnership with SFLR, Alabama's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Alabama Forestry Commission, has been dedicated to assisting and supporting African American landowners in the Black Belt region of Alabama in conserving, managing, and sustaining their legacy lands.

LRLEAN began its work in 2008, with an \$850,000 grant from the NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The funding was earmarked for encouraging African American landowner participation in EQIP's financial and technical assistance programs. Several other groups and agencies were attempting to service these landowners, but without much success. With LRLEAN's involvement as facilitators and advocates, the program gained the local support necessary for building trusting relationships with property owners and connecting them with EQIP. Through perseverance, LRLEAN was able to recruit and serve more than 100 landowners over the five-year grant period.

Even with LRLEAN's successful landowner recruitment efforts, there remained much to be done when the grant expired in 2013. Many property owners applied and were funded through EQIP. Yet, even with this well-intentioned program, landowners with little experience working with the forest industry had a hard time getting their funded practices on the ground—or completed at all. After years of trying, many gave up because of their inability to hire vendors to perform needed services on their smaller acreages.

In 2018, LRLEAN introduced Clustering in Greene County, Alabama. Clustering is a concept LRLEAN uses to group NRCS-funded landowners in a reasonably close geographical area, making it more economically feasible for vendors to provide the services required to complete the funded practices. The completed practice must be certified by an authorized representative of NRCS before payment is made to the landowner or vendor. Utilizing only proven vendors completes cluster participants' practices in one season or within 365 days!



Clustering in Greene County, Alabama

Applying “real world” lessons prompted LRLEAN to begin offering funding for constructing firebreaks on property boundary lines as an incentive to funded landowners. Upon cluster participation, LRLEAN provides the services of a professional surveyor to establish the firebreaks and flag boundary line, and place concrete corner monuments where/if needed.

Traditionally, LRLEAN worked with one cluster per season, comprising 8 to 12 landowners. However, due to the COVID19 pandemic very little was accomplished in 2020. To make up for lost time, LRLEAN formed two separate clusters in 2021. In that one season, LRLEAN successfully served 20 landowners, with 50 completed practices on the ground!

American Tree Farm System (ATFS) Certification

Since its inception, LRLEAN has worked, with some success, to accommodate candidates with management plans and certified practices on the ground to obtain ATFS Certification. Beginning in 2022, two LRLEAN staff members, both with more than 20-years’ experience working with the Alabama Forest Commission, will become certified ATFS Inspectors. This will make great strides in helping the more than 30 landowners seeking certification in this prestigious and nationally recognized program!

Even as the program continues to evolve, LRLEAN remains committed to its “boots on the ground” approach to growing communities through forestry to preserve and protect the precious legacy of African American land ownership.

Landowner Testimonials

Carzella S. Isaac and J.C. Smith were participants in the first cluster project in Greene County, Alabama.



“In this day and age, it’s hard to find people who will actually do what they say they’ll do. It’s good that there is assistance available like LRLEAN, trying to help small landowners protect and conserve their property.”

Carzella S. Isaac



“Working with LRLEAN was a smooth process. We were able to finally get the necessary work done on our property and it only took a year to get done.”

J.C. Smith

Upcoming Events

May 26, 2022

WCSHC Will Host Farmers from Louisiana
9:00 a.m.
2948 Highpoint-Weir Rd., Louisville, MS 39339

May 31, 2022

Ozell White’s Crop Management
9:00 a.m.
5641 Hwy 84, Prentiss, MS 39474

Frazier Acres Field Day (Frederick Frazier)
5:00 p.m.
379 Mount Williams Rd., Taylorsville, MS 39168