

Alabama-Coushatta Forestry Initiatives

Tyler County Forest Landowner Association

Spring General Meeting - March 16, 2024

Delvin Johnson, Alabama-Coushatta Historical Preservation Office, spoke about the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe's current forestry initiatives, historical stewardship (e.g. burning), and some of the traditional uses of native resources.

In the 1780s, the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes crossed the Sabine River into the Spanish controlled territory of modern-day Texas. The Alabama tribe's first settlement in Tyler County was at Fort Tehran where they established a trading community. Their second settlement was at Peach Tree Village, near the current town of Chester. The Coushatta settled east of the Trinity River. Today the two tribes are united on over 4500 acres in Polk and Tyler Counties.

Historically, the Alabama and Coushatta tribes practiced burning to provide habitat for animals and to promote the growth of medicinal plants. Since longleaf pines are dependent on fire to seed and grow, fire was necessary for the health of the forests which were prevalent in Tyler and surrounding counties.

By 1900, 95% of longleaf pines had been removed by logging. The Alabama-Coushatta Tribe is actively working with the Nature Conservancy to restore longleaf pine forests. They currently manage over 200 acres they planted in 2012 and an additional 200 acres of older growth trees. The tribe's new Wildland Director has reintroduced burning recently and medicinal plants were observed emerging after the fire.

Longleaf pines were important to the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe, who used the logs to build cabins and the needles to weave baskets. Delvin now possesses the last pine needle basket his grandmother wove. He treasures it as a memory of his heritage.