

Nursery Profile: North Carolina Department of Forest Resources F.H. Claridge Nursery

James West

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Who We Were

North Carolina Department of Forest Resources F.H. Claridge Nursery in Goldsboro, was founded as the Little River Nursery in 1954, and was one of five nurseries in the Forest Resources Division at the time. The early focus of the nursery was on southern yellow pine species, predominantly loblolly (*Pinus taeda*) and longleaf (*P. palustris*) pines.

In the early 1960s, the nursery was renamed in honor of F.H. Claridge, a former state forester who was a major proponent of forest nurseries.

Who We Are

Claridge Nursery has evolved into a diversified, full service nursery, offering bareroot and container pine and hardwood seedlings to a wide variety of customers. One of the nursery directives is to provide seedlings at cost to the citizens of North Carolina for a number of reasons, including reforestation, wildlife habitat, aesthetics, stream restoration, wetland mitigation.

One interesting diversification for the nursery has been the production and maintenance of the only pond pine (*P. serotina*) orchard in the world. Pond pine is a suitable species for wetland restoration and mitigation, and is very much in demand for restoration work in the Carolina bays.

Available Services

The nursery is a full service operation. “You call, we haul” anywhere, often on the same day. This service includes custom contracts and special orders, especially species for wetland and stream restoration. The nursery is a small operation, but customer care is important and keeps the nursery productive and profitable.

The nursery is self-contained, with in-house production from seeds to seedlings. Seed orchards are maintained for all softwood species grown at the nursery, as well as some hardwood species. In the Forest Resources Division, every county office is charged with its own seed collection. In addition, the nursery tailors the seed source to the deployment region. Seedlings are grown by physiographic region, for example, coastal, Piedmont, or mountain sources of poplar (*Populus* spp.).

Embracing New Technology

Loblolly Pine Performance Rating System—The nursery participates in the Loblolly Pine Performance Rating System, a simple rating system that allows customers to be informed about and compare different loblolly pine selections.

Computer System—After many years of working with an old mainframe computer system, the nursery has recently purchased a new Microsoft Windows®-based seedling order program. This new program allows the nursery staff to access customer records and order information quickly and help meet their needs.

Machinery Upgrades—Over the course of several years, the nursery has been, and is, in the process of upgrading machinery, from the field to the packing room. The field irrigation system, including pipe, risers, irrigation heads, and timers,

is being replaced. Several years ago, a new pump system was installed, but the existing solid set irrigation system remained. Beginning in 2007, and continuing through 2008, all new 7.5 cm (3 in) pipe with plastic impact sprinkler heads have been installed. This new system provides very efficient water use, very few blowouts, and plenty of water with great flow rates.

Personnel

The nursery maintains a small- to moderate-sized staff to provide efficient service to its customers. This staff includes four equipment operators, a nursery technician, three field assistants, a sales coordinator/financial officer, a nursery clerk, an orchard technician, a seed plant operator, a tree improvement supervisor, and a nursery supervisor.

Inventory

Approximately 19 million seedlings comprise the 2008 inventory at Claridge Nursery. This inventory includes 13

million loblolly pine, 3.5 million container and 1 million bareroot longleaf pine, and 2.5 million hardwoods of 50 different species.

Where We Are Going _____

The nursery continues to expand into a variety of services and technologies. A limited amount of third-cycle loblolly pine production has occurred in 2008. In addition, the first controlled mass-pollinated seeds for loblolly pine were obtained at the nursery.

In the orchard program, testing families for the second generation longleaf pine orchards is now taking place. The nursery is one of the few sources of improved longleaf pine in the southern United States, and hopes to be the first with second generation material available.

The nursery is also greatly expanding the number of available hardwood species and other products to meet the changing demands of the citizens of North Carolina.