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30 April 2020

As a retired research forester, for 40 years with the Northern Forest Experiment Station, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (as a "Research Forest Products Technologist"), it was wonderful to be back in such a beautiful natural forest, at the West Klosterman Preserve.

I thank you for the invitation from the West Klosterman Preservation Group for the opportunity to join Dr. Craig Huegel on 27 April 2020.

As planned our visit was highly informative, seeing firsthand the natural forest communities that exist on the 13.85-acre tract known as the West Klosterman Preserve. The major part of the visit was on the sandhills which are similar to the natural community sandhills found adjacent and connected to the Mariner's Point Management Area. Because of the relative position of both areas the tree species were close to the same. Upon entering from the north of the 13.85 acre tract, in the first 50 yards I was struck by the condition of the trees that had obviously been affected by the surrounding residential urbanization. The frontal trees were in poor form and many were dying. However, continuing on to the sandhills north, I was amazed at the diverse number of tree species, plants, and wildlife that accompany this natural community. The sandhills community was dominated by Longleaf Pine, Sand Pine, and small areas of Wiregrass, Blackjacket Oat as well as older Live Oaks.

At one location where an old homestead was, stood one single Eucalyptus tree planted many years past. There is a lot of history to this area.

As a forester I was primarily interested in the genus and species of the sandhill trees. One of the species was Longleaf Pine (*PinusPalustris*) that occurred scattered but is common to the sandhill sites. Longleaf Pine was at one time an abundant tree species found on these uplands and is among the more ecologically important species in Florida. Because development has taken over the area surrounding the 13.85 acres, the Longleaf Pine has been disturbed and is now a protected tree species in many Florida counties (Lee County) and should be protected in Pinellas County as well.

As a forty-plus year veteran forester, it is just amazing to me that just such a unique area as the West Klosterman Preserve should be targeted for residential development when it could be used in so many sustainable natural ways. What comes to my mind are the many educational benefits that could be incorporated into this beautiful sandhills sanctuary.

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I ask, where in Pinellas County could you ever find another beautiful natural preserve as this one. It is up to all of us to save the West Klosterman preserve, not only for today but forever.

Dave Sonderman, Retired Research Forester

“A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people.”
—Franklin D. Roosevelt