

PROMPT FOREST RECOVERY IS CRITICAL TO RESTORING COMMUNITIES AND WAY OF LIFE AFTER HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA



The damage to forestland, watersheds, and wildlife habitat that resulted from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita is extensive and will be felt for years to come.

This pine stand in Washington Parish, Louisiana, sustained heavy damage from Hurricane Katrina. Photo by Craig Gautreaux, Louisiana State University Agriculture Center

Most of the damage to forestland that resulted from Hurricane Katrina and Rita occurred on land owned by private industry

or by individuals and their families. It is critical that these landowners are given incentives to restore their forestlands so they may retain them over the long-term. However, due to the extent of losses, many family forest landowners will find it difficult to cover the expenses of restoring their storm-damaged lands.

Lack of recovery and reforestation could have significant consequences to the amount of clean water, wildlife habitat, and wood products that we have come to expect from these forests. Unless forestland owners receive land management assistance, Hurricane Katrina and Rita's effects will be felt for years to come in communities that depend on local, privately-owned forests for their economic and ecological well-being.

The Society of American Foresters (SAF)—a professional society of more than 15,000 forest managers, researchers, and educators—urges Congress to provide ways to help these landowners regain their economic footing with technical and financial assistance programs that will address both their short- and long-term needs. Additionally, tax incentives and other forms of support are needed to help cover the costs of reforestation, the loss of merchantable timber and equipment as well as help the forest products industry quickly process the major influx of timber that will soon be on the market and will help enable the 500,000 damaged or destroyed homes to be rebuilt.



Impact on Forestland in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Texas

State	Total Acreage of Forestland Damaged or Affected	Anticipated Losses (losses vary depending on amount of salvageable material)
Mississippi	3,372,050	\$3,683,000,000
Louisiana	1,095,968	\$1,073,000,000
Alabama	559,402	\$395,000,000
Texas	771,000	\$833,000,000
Totals	5,798,420	\$5,984,000,000

An estimated 1/3 of timber losses are expected to be recovered through salvage efforts. This depends, however, on the ability of logging crews to gain quick access to the downed trees before the wood deteriorates; workforce capacity; mill capacity; timber storage facilities, market prices; insect, disease, and wildfire threats; and other variables.

Impact on Forest-Related Values and Resources

In addition to direct damage to trees and the associated loss of valuable timber, other related resources have been severely affected.

Watersheds - Tons of debris and fallen trees are impeding the flows of streams and small rivers, and thus degrading aquatic habitats. Further, the storm may have dumped chemicals, bacteria, and other pollutants into waterways.

Wildlife Habitat - With over 5 million acres of forestland damaged, many nesting sites and habitats relied on by wildlife species have been destroyed and their food sources diminished. This will have a dramatic effect on hunting and fishing and the economies that rely on this revenue.



Glen Johnson, US Fish and Wildlife Service

In addition to game animals, many of the region’s endangered and threatened species, such as the gopher tortoise, the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, the Gopher Frog, and the Bald Eagle, have experienced reductions in or complete losses of vital habitat.

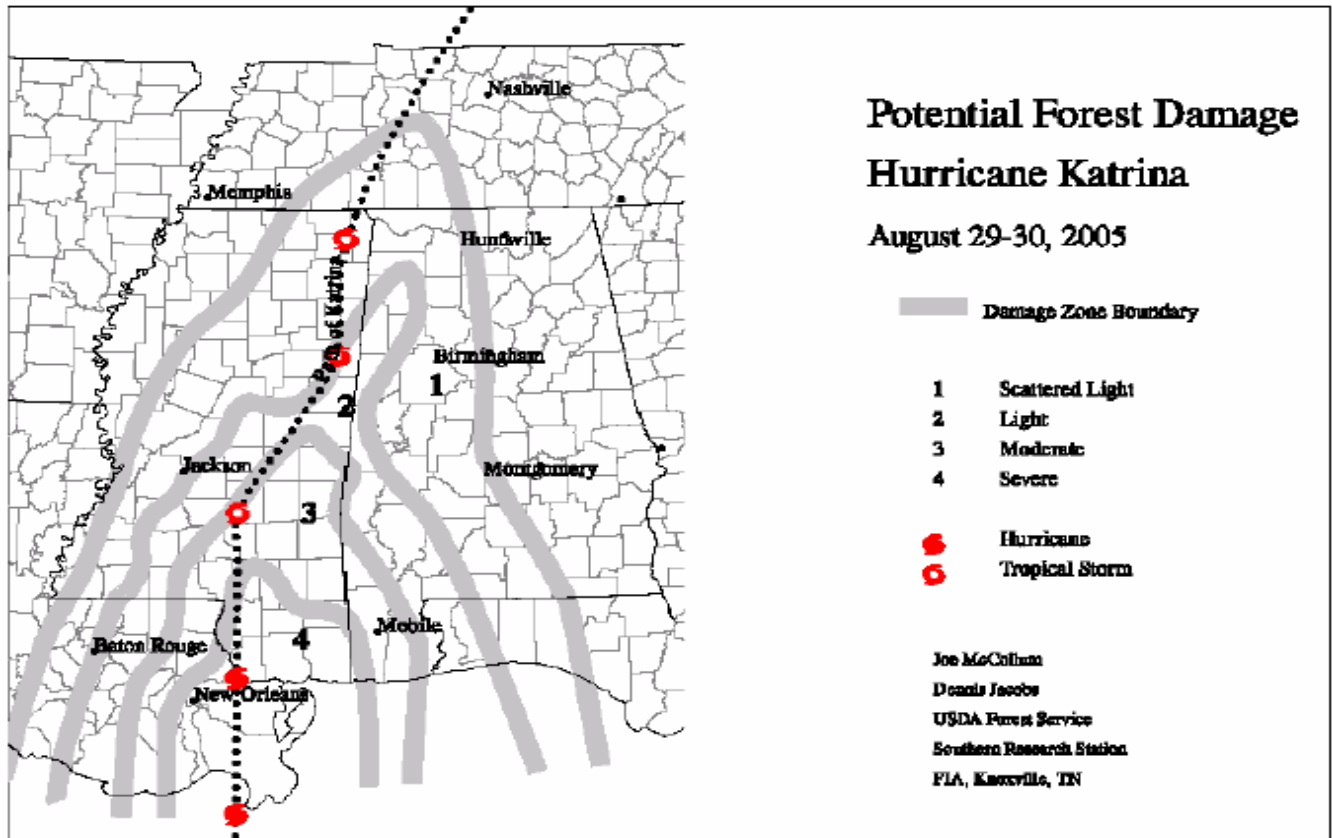
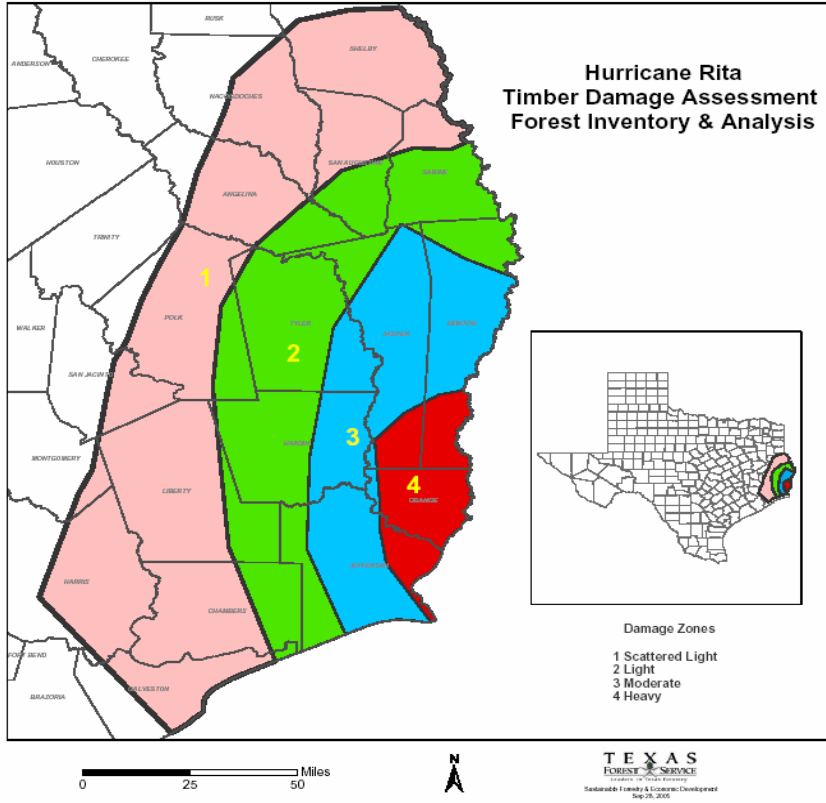
Insects, Disease, Wildfire, and Invasive Species - As time lapses, the dead trees will dry out and create extreme amounts of wildfire fuel, enough food to support outbreaks of tree-consuming insects, and suitable conditions for the spread of tree diseases. It is critical that fuels be reduced quickly to mitigate the risk of wildfire risk and control the proliferation of insects and disease.

Damaged forests are highly susceptible to invasive species, including Cogongrass (shown at left in a pine plantation), that can create extremely hazardous wildfire conditions. Also, invasive plant species whose seeds may be spread by wind, such Chinese tallow and Japanese climbing fern, often rapidly colonize disturbed forest sites.



Charles T. Bryson, USDA ARS

For additional information and updates on forest damage visit <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/>



Maps Produced by USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station and the Texas Forest Service.