

Forest Health Cooperative FY2026 Advisory Meeting Minutes

Location: The Devall Room, 540 Devall Dr., Auburn, AL 36849

Date: November 4 – 5, 2025

Attendance:

Dr. Lori Eckhardt, Auburn University
Brett Goulding, Campbell Global
Greg Bentley, Campbell Global
David Wilkinson, Manulife
Clarissa Balbalian, Mississippi State University
Ernie Spiller, PRT Growing Services
Rusty Booker, PRT Growing Services
Nash Dierks, Scotch Land Management
Pete Stanovich, Scotch Land Management
Jace McCauley, Westervelt
James Owens, Westervelt

Presentations:

- Current brown spot needle blight on loblolly in Arkansas- **Dr. Laura Sims**
- Current brown spot needle blight on loblolly in Alabama- **Mr. Drew Metzler**
- Current brown spot needle blight on loblolly in Mississippi- **Mr. Garron Hicks**
- Current brown spot needle blight on loblolly in Louisiana- **Mr. Tyler Cloud**
- Loblolly pine potential genetic and nutritional BSNB resistance patterns-
Dr. David Wikinson
- Mitigating needle blight: A growing economic threat to pine forests – project overview-
Dr. Lori Eckhardt
- Component 1 Update (Part 1): Isolation and Identification of *L. acicola* and other foliar pathogens associated with needle blight on *Pinus taeda*- **Andrew Howard**
- Component 1 Update (Part 2): Susceptibility of *Pinus taeda* families to *L. acicola*-
Emmanuel Nyarko

- Component 2 Update (Part 1): Physiological responses to brown spot needle blight and anatomical variation among families of loblolly pine- **Jaden King**
- Component 2 Update (Part 2): Evaluating a portable NIR-based model to detect susceptibility in loblolly pine trees affected by BSNB- **Laura Nieto**
- Component 3 Update: Remote sensing-based detection of BSNB: A comprehensive review and UAV-based, spatially explicit assessment- **Swati Sing**
- Component 4 Update (Part 1): *Lecanosticta acicola*'s genome features and its significance in BSNB- **Temitope Folorunso**
- Component 4 Update (Part 2): Integrative bioinformatic and molecular approaches to elucidate the genomics of *Lecanosticta acicola* and its impacts on BSNB- **Gabriel Silva**
- Survival of spores in pine straw litter- **Jaden King**
- Detecting Biological Invasions with Sentinel Plantings in Alabama- **William Heaster, Jacob Podemski**
- Forest Health Dynamics Laboratory Update (Coop Only)- **Pat Gordon**

Posters:

- Using Spore Traps to Measure *Lecanosticta acicola* Dispersal- **Joseph Anglin**
- Using Dendrochronology to Assess the Effects of Brown Spot Needle Blight on Loblolly Pine Growth- **Gracey Goldsby**

Business Meeting:

Commencement

Meeting was called to order November 5, 2025, by Dr. Eckhardt at 8:00 a.m.

Anti-trust compliance reminder.

Chair for FY – 2026 is Dr. David Wilkinson, Manulife.

Motion to approve meeting minutes for FY – 2025 passed unanimously.

Accomplishments

- Year 2 of Sentinel Garden grant funded
- Year 1 of CRISPR-based *L. acicola* strain detection funded
- Year 3 of the BSNB grant funded
- SOD grant re-funded
- Wood and chemical resistance grant re-funded

- Collaboration between SFWS and FABI continued
- Data collection underway for:
 - Mitigating Needle Blight: A growing economic threat
 - *Lecanosticta acicola* Spore Dispersal in Burned and Unburned Areas
 - *Lecanosticta acicola* Spore Viability on Pine Straw

Work Plan

- Continue data collection on ongoing projects
- Increase coop visibility
- Transfer research results to cooperative as they develop
- Initiate and continue current research projects
- Continue to update websites
- Prepare manuscripts

Motion to approve work plan for FY – 2026 passed unanimously.

Budget Review

- Dues were not raised

Motion to approve budget FY – 2026 passed unanimously.

Business Meeting Notes:

- Newsletter update to cooperative members in January
- FY – 2027 meeting dates July 14-15, 2026
- Coop members would like to receive email updates whenever a publication or report is added to the Forest Health Cooperative website
- Coop would like to see an increase of contact throughout the year
- Suggestion made to host a strategy meeting to discuss coop matters regarding federal funding concerns and how the coop moves forward. It was well received.
- Strategy meeting to be added to the FY – 2027 Forest Health Cooperative meeting

Meeting on November 5, 2026, was adjourned at 10:02 a.m.