Longleaf Pine Initiatives


In 2014 the Smithfield Town Council voted to reintroduce Longleaf Pine to this area in keeping with its commitment to preserve and protect our town's heritage and history for present and future generations.
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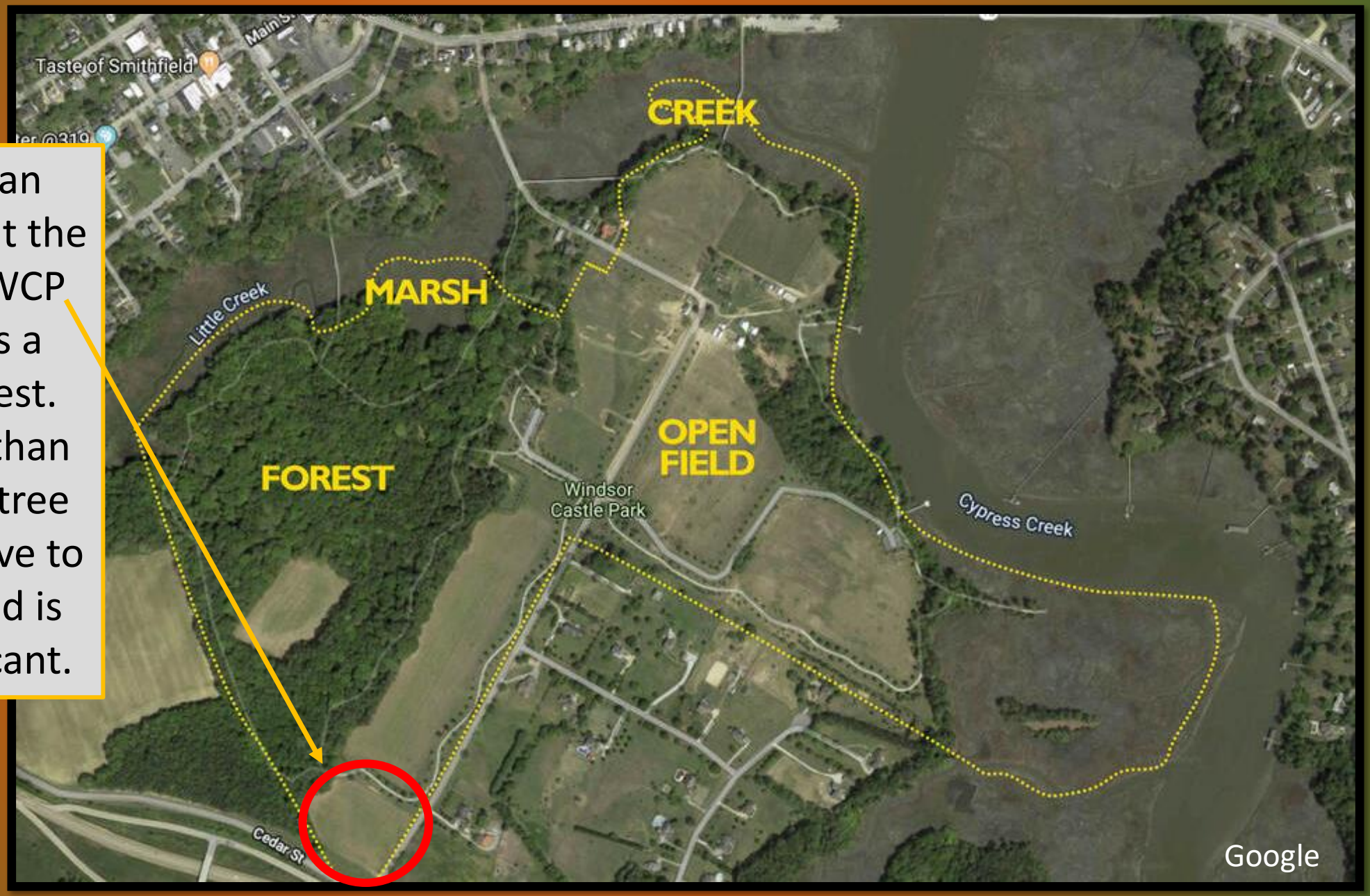
At their request an initial three acres at the southern end of WCP were set aside as a Longleaf Pine forest. What better way than to plant an iconic tree species that may live to over 300 years and is historically significant.



This was a start to introduce a new ecological environment into WCP as well as sequester many tons of carbon thus helping to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Photos ©John Bunch

The first major planting for this tree species in WCP was a collaboration between the Virginia Master Naturalist Historic Southside Chapter and the WCP Foundation supported by many community-minded individuals.

In spite of a cold windy December 2019 day this happy group planted 104 one-year Longleaf Pines provided at no cost to the town by the VA Department of Forestry at the request of The Nature Conservancy.


An additional 600 LL pine seedlings were added to this area and were planted in scarfed, contoured rows.
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In the initial phase of its establishment this area is intentionally left to take its natural course of growth.
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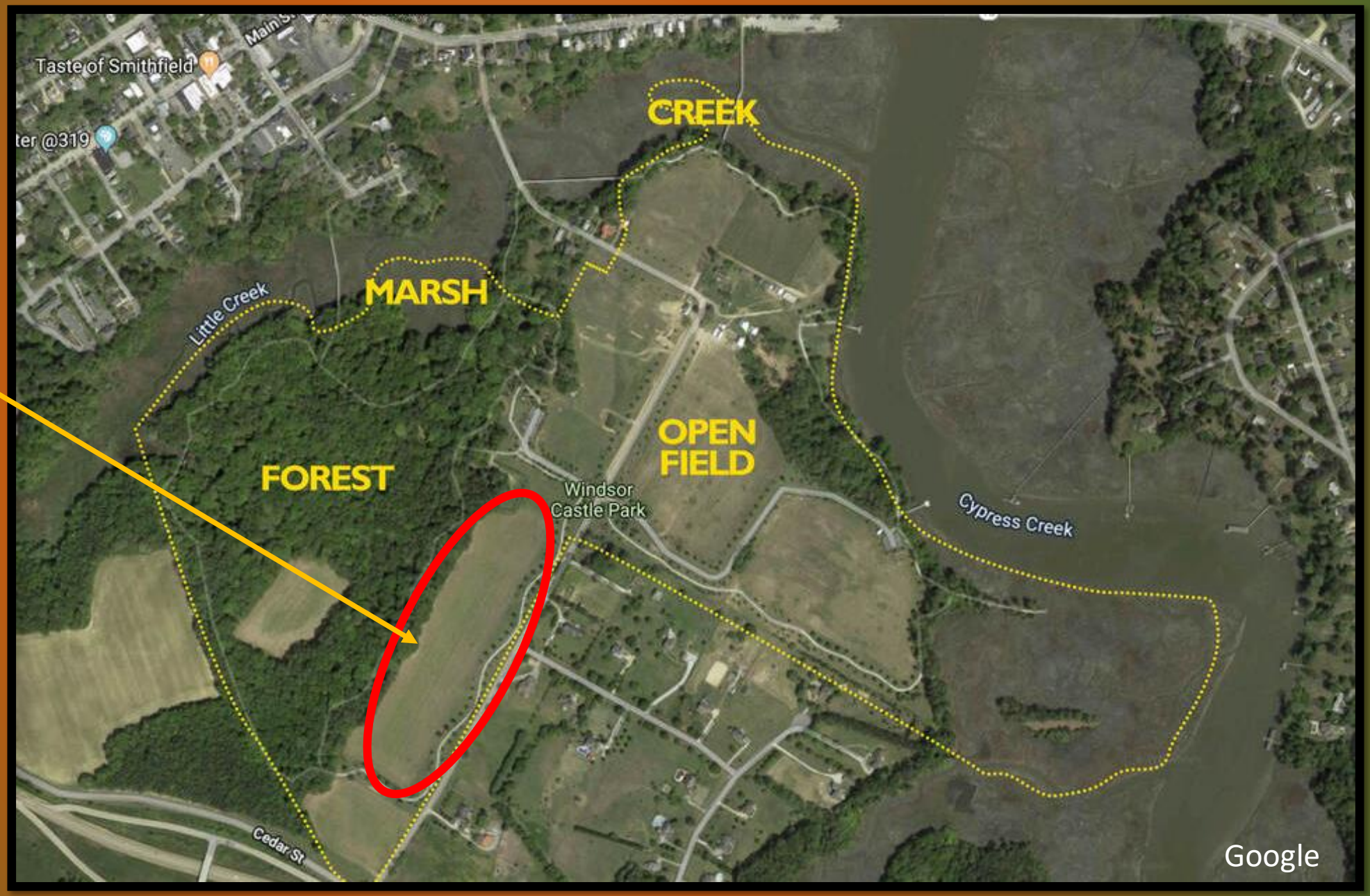
Three years later eight acres adjacent to the original plot was earmarked for additional LL pine planting.




So, in December 2022 over 3000 more longleaf pine plants were planted in the park.
©Karen Barlow

The plants were donated by the VA Department of Forestry and VA Department of Conservation and Recreation.
Over 60 volunteers from the community put them in the ground.


The compact clay soil and damp, cold conditions were challenges.
©Karen Barlow


The tap roots had to be freed and directed downwards.
©John Bunch

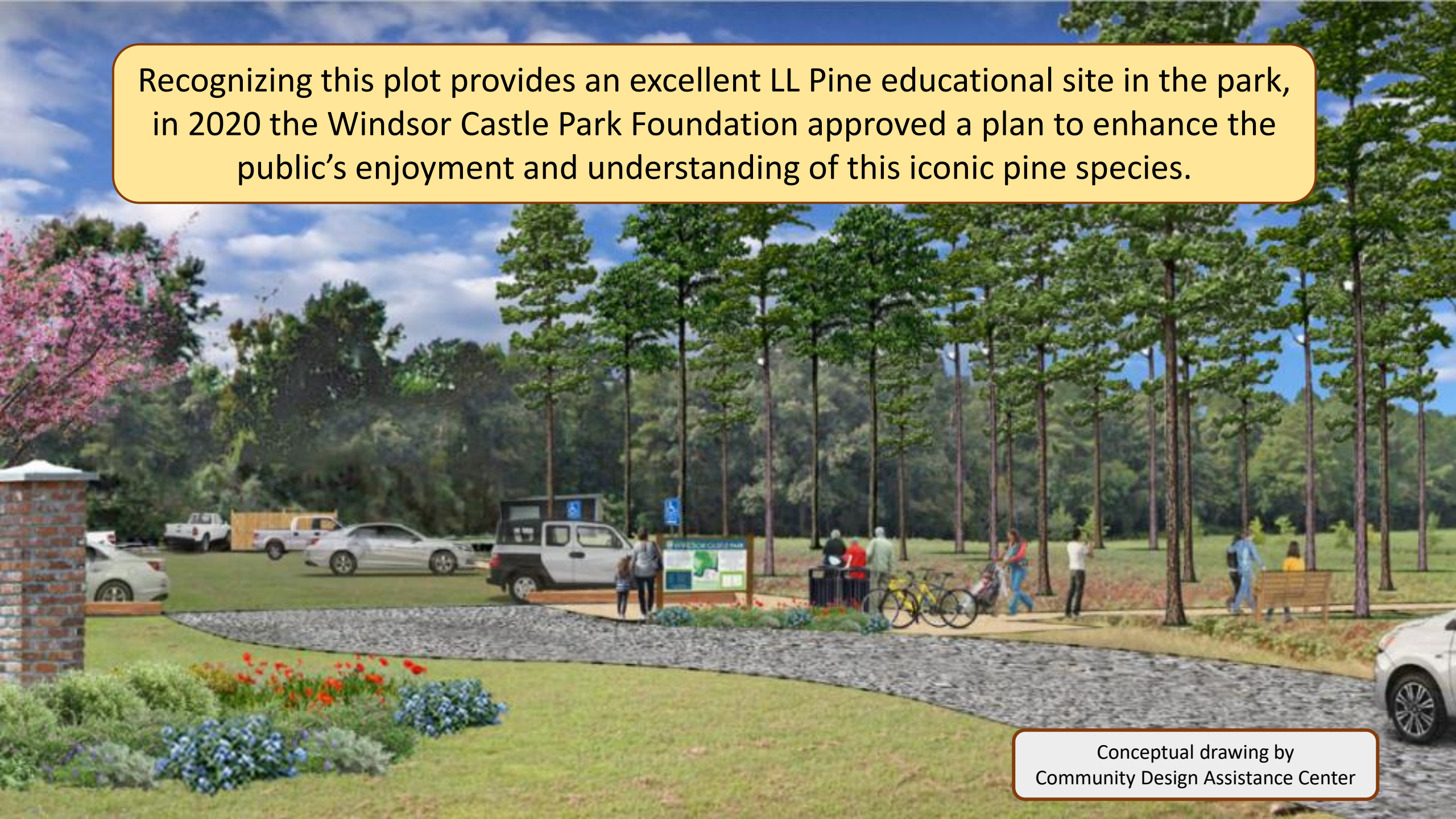

But the dedicated volunteers persevered.
©Karen Barlow

They were happy to contribute to the worthwhile project.

As this Longleaf Pine forest establishes itself, it will be a good example of what a Longleaf Pine forest looks like and will demonstrate what is needed to maintain it.

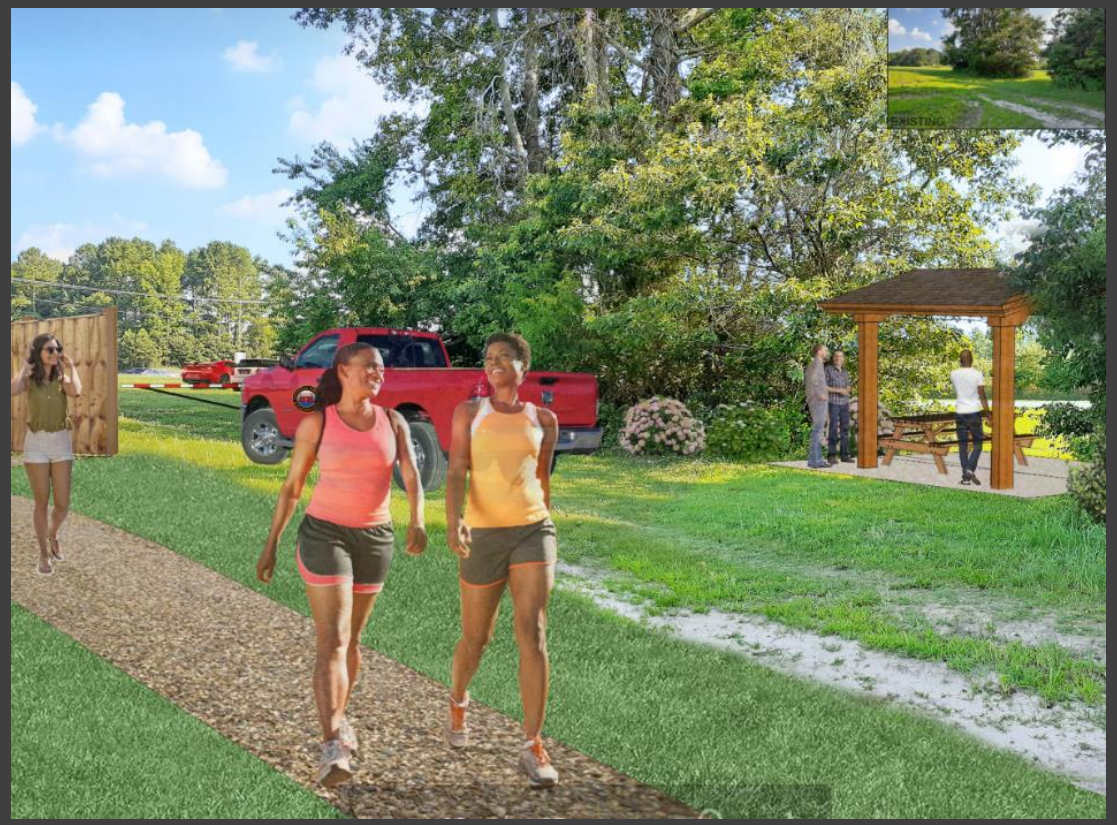
In doing so landowners who plant pine forests will be better informed as they select the type of pine for their lands.

Recognizing this plot provides an excellent LL Pine educational site in the park, in 2020 the Windsor Castle Park Foundation approved a plan to enhance the public's enjoyment and understanding of this iconic pine species.



Conceptual drawing by
Community Design Assistance Center

When developed, visitors will not only learn of the importance of LL pine but also be reminded of how to incorporate best management practices into development of public areas. Permeable crushed stone walking trails and combined trash and recycling receptacles will be used for their environmentally friendly approach.



Conceptual design by
Community Design Assistance Center

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The contoured planting approach also will help visitors recognize the value of considering the lay of the land when planting in their home areas. Stopping the rapid loss of water from a plot can be achieved rather easily.

Conceptual design by
Community Design Assistance Center

Two other plots in the park demonstrate other aspects of the Longleaf Pine.

One plot is located along Jericho Road directly in front of the planted LL Pine forest. Forty-seven Longleaf Pines have been planted in three parallel rows to demonstrate how impressive they appear in this kind of formation.

This display is intended to encourage those planting trees alongside rural driveways or county roads to incorporate Longleaf Pines.


A third area near the dog park describes the history and importance of LL Pine in Virginia.
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The explanatory sign traces its foundational role in the early shipbuilding industry and in fostering a unique ecosystem in and under its canopy.
HISTORY OF LONGLEAF PINE IN VIRGINIA
© Bonnie Horne

HISTORY OF LONGLEAF PINE IN VIRGINIA

In the early 1600s, Captain John Smith and the Jamestown colonists noted long-needled pines along the south bank of the James River and recognized their potential as a valuable resource. Soon after, the first "tryalls of pitch and tar" (naval stores) was produced from these trees and exported to England. Thus began the exploitive use of longleaf pines in North America for naval stores and timber for shipbuilding and construction materials.

By 1850, perhaps 1.5 million acres of longleaf pine forests had disappeared from Virginia. In 1893, forester B. E. Fernow declared the longleaf pine in Virginia to be "... for all practical purposes extinct."

In 1938, Harvard University botanist Merritt L. Fernald spent time in Isle of Wight County conducting floristic surveys. At a location south of Zuni, he discovered and documented a remnant stand of longleaf pines growing along the Blackwater River. Some 60 years later, surveys by Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) staff have identified fewer than 200 individual mature longleaf believed to have originated prior to 1950 and existing in natural (not planted) stands. These few trees are all that remain of Virginia's original longleaf pine forest.

In the early 2000s, VDOF and partners including Old Dominion University, The Nature Conservancy and Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation began developing a plan to bring longleaf pine forests back from the brink. Each year, cones are picked from remaining mature "native" longleaf pines and seedlings are grown for use in reforestation projects. VDOF has established a longleaf pine seed orchard at the New Kent Forestry Center, which will ensure an expanded supply of longleaf seedlings. VDOF is now growing "native Virginia" longleaf pine seedlings at the Garland Gray Forestry Center for distribution and sale.

These achievements, as evidenced by the young longleaf pines in front of you, are a testament to the decades of effort by dedicated conservationists directed at returning this iconic species to the Virginia landscape.

The Town of Smithfield has dedicated this area to re-introducing the longleaf pine – part of our cultural and natural heritage – for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations.

- An estimated 90 million acres of longleaf pine forest, woodlands and savannas once existed in America, extending from southeast Virginia to north Florida and on to east Texas. Today, less than three million acres remain.
- The biodiversity of fire-maintained longleaf pine woodlands and savannas is extremely high, supporting far more species of plants and animals than does the unburned, mixed hardwood forest in Windsor Castle Park today. Lacking an understory, open longleaf pine canopies allow great amounts of sunlight to reach the ground, supporting growth of grasses, legumes, composites and many other plant types. Longleaf pine itself has numerous fire-adaptations including a grass stage, thick bark, buds protected from fire damage by thick tufts of insulating needles, and rapid growth that allows terminal buds to reach a fire-safe height quickly.

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VIRGINIA FORESTRY

Click here to read this information. LL Pine

Picture Reference

Follow the link below to understand how useful the Longleaf Pine was to Naval Stores resulting in the pillaging of these pines in colonial America and the (almost) extinction of this species in Virginia. LL Pine/naval history

Besides providing the materials for an early thriving industry, LL Pine forests support an unusually rich and plentiful array of plant and animal life.

Pic reference @Julio Mulero

The endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker prefers old growth pine forests like that of Longleaf Pines.

Picture Reference

Consider whether you can add Longleaf Pines to your property, whether it is one or two plants or more. For further information contact the Va. Department of Forestry at www.dof.virginia.gov or Garland Gray Forestry Center in Courtland, Va.

In doing so you will help to bring back one of the most important native plants on the east coast and beyond.