

The Terrain

Summerville sits on a sand plateau about 90 feet above sea level. At one time we were underwater as the coastline was near Columbia, SC. Today you can still find sharks' teeth and other fossils in the low areas around town. The sandy terrain and the quick drainage of water by natural cut ravines allowed for the growth of longleaf pine trees. The Longleaf Pine was once one of the most abundant trees in the United States. Its realm—vast savannas shaped by thousands of years of frequent fires set by lightning and Native Americans—stretched across some 90 million acres of the American South, from Virginia to Texas through the Carolinas. The Longleaf Pine, even as a small immature plant, is fire-resistant, so it remains as other elements of the forest burn away. Today 97% of the longleaf forest is gone.

The Longleaf Pine is also an essential part of the American Southeast's biodiversity. In fact, it's one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. It is home to many unique species that are endemic to the forest. Examples of these include the Gopher Tortoise and Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. The Gopher Tortoise is an interesting little creature that likes to burrow into the ground like a gopher- hence the name. The Red-Cockaded Woodpecker [note carving on wall], on the other hand, is the only woodpecker in the world that chooses to take the time to carve its home into the living bark of longleaf pines. Today the species is listed as "Near Threatened." There are also hundreds of rare plant species that live within the longleaf pine ecosystem. Researchers have identified roughly 600 types of plants in the ecosystem with 389 of the species being considered "rare."