



It's All About Ecosystem Balance



SOUTHERN PINE BEETLE



Laura is studying to be an entomologist (a scientist who studies insects) at the University of Georgia. Today, she learns that pine forests in the southeastern United States are threatened by growing numbers of southern pine beetle.

The southern pine beetle is native to the area and serves a purpose: When the ecosystem is balanced, the beetles attack old, weak or dying trees and make room for young, stronger ones.



But when healthy trees become stressed because of drought, or because they were planted too close together and compete for water and other resources, the southern pine beetles suddenly have lots of weak trees to feed on and their numbers grow out of control.

With so many beetles around, even healthy trees are at risk of attack!

Laura's professor shares that, unfortunately, all the affected trees must be removed when the attack is confirmed. Foresters need to act quickly to prevent the beetle from spreading to new areas.



More resistant pine species should be planted, and they need extra care to keep them healthy, so they are not vulnerable to beetle attacks.



But what happens to the cleared area?

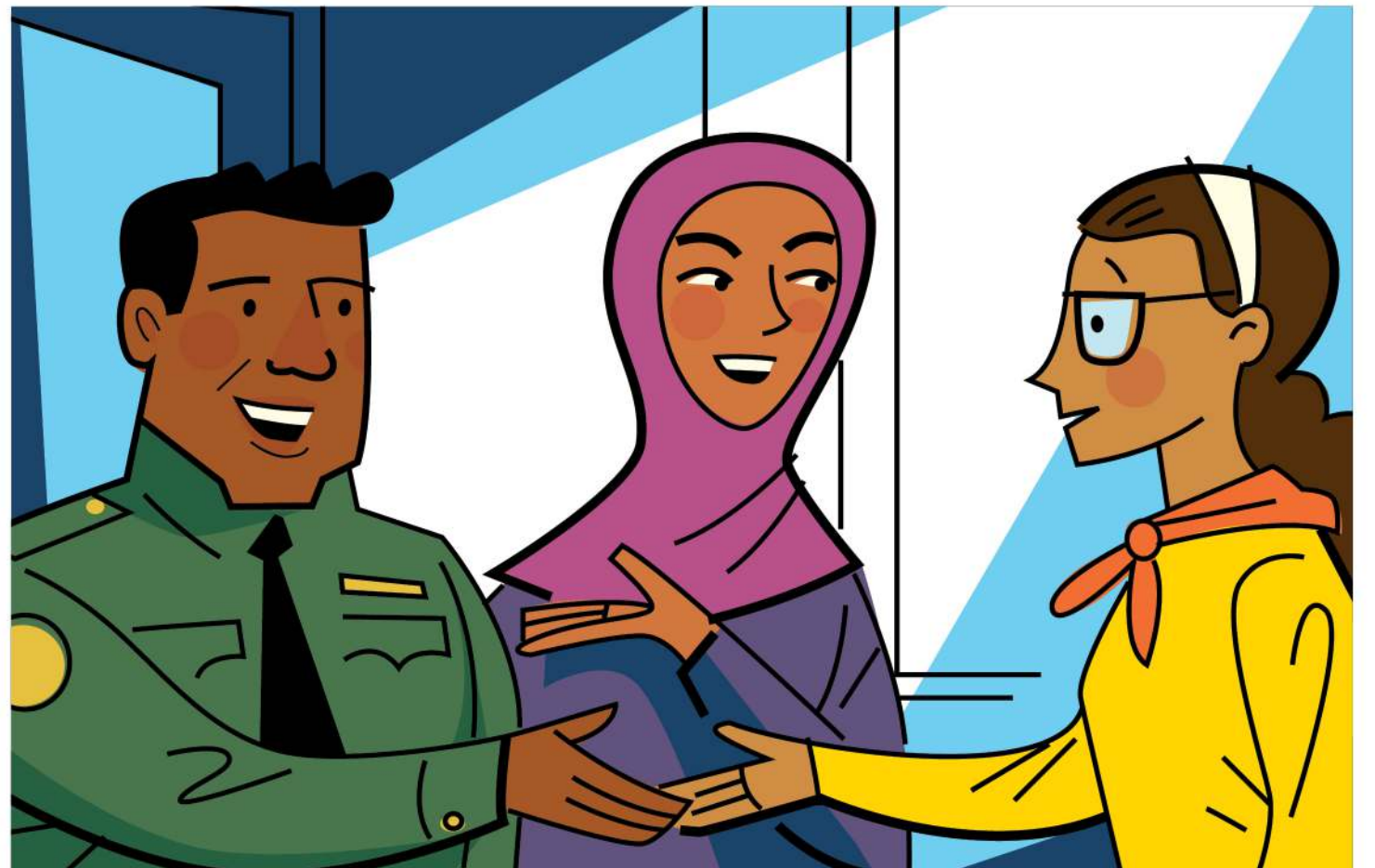
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PLANT HEROES

A natural area nearby was recently cleared and they are looking for volunteers to help replant longleaf and slash pine.

Laura invites her friends and they decide to have their annual spring break camping trip at Oconee National Forest!



The professor connects Laura with the Forest Service specialist at Oconee National Forest.

During spring break ...



Planting starts the next day, so they spend the afternoon setting up camp and exploring the area.



Laura shares what she learned in class: what the beetles look like and which trees they attack.

Laura and the rest of the heroes spend the next day replanting longleaf pines under the guidance of the Forest Service. Their efforts will help restore the balance and regenerate this forest!



The heroes learn that every insect has its place. Southern pine beetles are an important part of the ecosystem, but they turn into a problem when that delicate balance is lost.



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