

Dr. Matthew J. Aresco graduated from Florida State University in May 2005 with a PhD in Biological Science and has an M.S. in Zoology from Auburn University (1998). He has an undergraduate degree in English from Fairfield University in Connecticut (1985). After graduating from Fairfield University, he worked for four years at the Connecticut National Mortgage Company and three years at the Connecticut National Bank in the Trust and Estate Department. At Auburn University, Aresco studied the effect of slash pine plantations on the movements and growth rates of gopher tortoises in the Conecuh National Forest. At Florida State University, Dr. Aresco studied lake ecology and lake food webs and the role of freshwater turtles in the food web. Since 2006, Dr. Aresco has been the Director of Nokuse Plantation, a 51,000 acre privately-owned wildlife preserve in Walton County, Florida owned by Mr. M.C. Davis. Dr. Aresco is an expert in restoration ecology and directs the ecological restoration of this property, converting pine plantations and agricultural areas back to the native longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem, conducting prescribed burns, and re-establishing and augmenting populations of rare species. A highlight of his work at Nokuse Plantation is a gopher tortoise restoration project which has provided safe refuge on the preserve for over 4,000 gopher tortoises relocated from sites throughout Florida slated for development. The research project associated with these relocations has helped guide the State's new permitting requirements for gopher tortoise relocation. Dr. Aresco is an expert in the population biology and conservation of Florida turtles and has conducted long-term research on the Florida softshell turtle, Florida snapping turtle, Florida cooter, and gopher tortoise in northwest Florida. He is a member of the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group. Dr. Aresco is the founder of the Lake Jackson Ecopassage Alliance which worked with the Florida Department of Transportation and local government to ensure the construction of wildlife crossings on U.S. Highway 27 at Lake Jackson in Tallahassee, the first wildlife crossings built in northwest Florida. Dr. Aresco is the primary author on 15 peer-reviewed scientific publications and four book chapters.