

## **The American Forest Foundation and USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife South Carolina Habitat Improvement Initiative**

Goal: Collaborate with regional and local partners and private landowners to improve habitat in South Carolina to support federal listing decisions for the following focal species: gopher tortoise, southern hognose snake, pine snake, gopher frog, Bachman's sparrow, tiger salamander, eastern diamondback rattlesnake, pine barrens tree frog, and frosted elfin.

### Objectives:

- Enhance occupied and potential habitat for identified focal species (see below);
- Obtain further information on location data and potential habitat for future populations of the identified focal species on private lands.

### Criteria for participation:

- Focus areas include the following counties in South Carolina which correspond to the three established Longleaf Implementation Teams: Edgefield, Aiken, Barnwell, Bamberg, Hampton, Allendale, Colleton, Hampton, Jasper, Beaufort (SoLo Ace Longleaf Partnership); Berkeley, Georgetown, Williamsburg (Sewee Longleaf Conservation Cooperative); and Chesterfield (Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership).
- Landowners should have:
  - at least one focal species on their property; or
  - be directly adjacent to a property where one focal species is present (the subject property should have similar habitat type);
  - or has an occurrence record on the subject property; or
  - has suitable habitat for one of the defined focal species, as identified in a habitat suitability model.
- Landowners should be actively managing their property or adjacent to an actively managed property (note: questionable properties will need to be independently evaluated by the partners to determine if they are a right "fit" for participation; new landowners have the ability to sign a new agreement);
- Landowners should allow the Service and collaborators access to their property to conduct surveys and subsequent monitoring.
- Landowners are required to provide a minimum 25% non-federal match (can be cash or in-kind).
- Projects will target a preferred minimum of 100 acres of contiguous ownership (this is not a strict requirement); no maximum acreage has been identified at this time.
- Funds can support one prescribed burn; however, landowners must be willing and able to actively manage and maintain the subject property with a minimum of three prescribed burns (fuel-load permitting) within a ten-year period.
- Activities covered in this initiative can include hardwood/mid-story control, invasive species control, prescribed burning, and site prep, native warm season grass or pine (longleaf only) establishment and other habitat improvement practices, as needed.

Additional information:

- Partners for this initiative include: American Forest Foundation (AFF), Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), The Longleaf Alliance and the South Carolina Forestry Commission.
- This initiative is part of a larger effort focused on working with private landowners in the southeast. Complimentary collaborations/work currently underway.
- Currently there is no maximum amount of funding per landowner.
- There is no Annual Gross Income (AGI) limitations.
- Anyone is eligible to participate in this initiative if they meet the American Tree Farm Standard Eligibility requirements for Certification (up to 20,000 ac); therefore, no publicly traded Timber Investment Management Organizations.
- Longleaf on the property is not required to receive funding; however, it will be the only species of pine eligible for funding through this initiative.
- One of the project partners may conduct focal species monitoring on the participants property, once a landowner agreement is signed. The Service will conduct habitat quality surveys/monitoring and develop a Biological Opinion/Conference Opinion
- Focal species surveys shall be completed on a participant's property, as agreed upon by both parties. Surveys will only be *required* on those funded properties.
- This funding should not support habitat improvement activities funded by other programs.
- Predictability will be given to each landowner (when completed) who participates in this initiative that relieves them of any take liability while under a landowner agreement.
- Initial landowner participation, including information of the property and a location map will be circulated to the project partners for review and concurrence. Final funding decisions need approval from both AFF and the Service, as signatory agencies of the Cooperative Agreement funding the habitat improvement on private lands. Note: future landowner selections may require a ranking system with written criteria to justify properties selected for participation.

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