

News Release

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Fish and Wildlife Service Announces \$37.2 Million in Grants to Boost State Endangered Species Conservation Efforts *AL, AR, FL, NC, TN Receive Funding in Southeast*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced \$37.2 million in grants to 20 states to support conservation planning and acquisition of vital habitat for threatened and endangered species across the nation. The grants, awarded through the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, will benefit numerous species, ranging from the Cahaba shiner to the red-cockaded woodpecker.

Five southeastern states received a combined total of \$4,112,981 in grants - - Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Project descriptions are listed below. For a nationwide list of the 2015 grant awards under these programs, click here: www.fws.gov/endangered/grants/index.html.

“Private landowners and natural resource managers play a vital role in conserving our nation’s most imperiled wildlife,” said Service Director Dan Ashe. “By cultivating partnerships between federal, state and local governments, private organizations and individuals, we can establish creative and effective solutions to some of the greatest conservation challenges of our time. These grants are one of many tools available under the Endangered Species Act, and we look forward to providing continued guidance and support for these programs.”

Authorized by Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act, these competitive grants enable states to work with private landowners, conservation groups and other government agencies to initiate conservation planning efforts and acquire and protect habitat to support the conservation of threatened and endangered species.

“This is one of the Endangered Species Act’s many tools we use to work with state fish and wildlife agencies in the Southeast to deliver conservation on the ground,” said Cindy Dohner, the Service’s Southeast Regional Director. “The beauty of these tools is that they provide flexibility and help us conserve the places threatened and endangered species depend upon. Our work in this area with active, committed partners has made it possible to recover species like the Louisiana black bear.”

The grant funding is provided through programs that advance creative partnerships for the recovery of imperiled species. This year, the fund will allocate approximately \$4.7 million in grants through the Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Grants Program, nearly \$20.3 million through the Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Grants Program, and \$12.2 million through the Recovery Land Acquisition Grants Program.

"These grants enable the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to tap into the considerable capacity of the state fish and wildlife agencies and their partners to advance the stewardship of our nation's fish and wildlife resources," said Larry Voyles, President of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and Director of the Arizona Game and Fish Department. "The states' proactive, science-based conservation programs and partnerships to restore vital habitats are more effective and less costly to American taxpayers than an emergency room approach to save species in peril."

Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) are agreements between a landowner and the Service that allow the landowner to undertake otherwise lawful activities on their property that may impact Endangered Species Act listed species. In return, the landowner agrees to conservation measures designed to avoid, minimize and mitigate the impact of those actions. HCPs also may be developed by a county or state to cover certain activities of all landowners within their jurisdiction and may address multiple species.

Under the HCP Land Acquisition Grants Program, the Service provides grants to states or territories to acquire land that complements the conservation objectives of approved HCPs. For example, red-cockaded woodpeckers will benefit from a \$275,076 grant to the State of North Carolina for up to 526 acres of longleaf pine habitat in the Sandhills region.

The HCP Planning Assistance Grants Program provides grants to states and territories to support the development of HCPs through funding of baseline surveys and inventories, document preparation, outreach and similar planning activities. For example, the State of Florida will use a \$750,000 grant to complete the Statewide Habitat Conservation Plan for Florida Beaches.

The Recovery Land Acquisition Grants Program provides funds to states and territories to acquire habitat for endangered and threatened species with approved recovery plans. Habitat acquisition to secure long-term protection often is an essential element of a comprehensive recovery effort for a listed species. For example, federally-listed species, such as the gray bat, northern long-eared bat, the Cahaba shiner and several mussels and snails will benefit from a \$795,900 grant to the State of Alabama for about 583 acres, including four miles of frontage on the Six Mile Creek.

The Endangered Species Act and its flexibility to support creative conservation solutions is a safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Service's work in this area, visit www.fws.gov/endangered/, and to learn more about the Southeast Region's At-Risk work with partners, visit www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation/.

Southeast Region's Grants By State:

Alabama

Six Mile Creek Recovery Land Acquisition to Benefit the Recovery of Federally-Listed, Fish, Mussels, Snails and Bats (Bibb County) \$795,900

This grant will enable acquisition of approximately 583 acres with four miles of frontage on the Six Mile Creek for the recovery of endangered and threatened species like the round rocksnail, orange nacre mucket (mussel), fine-lined pocketbook (mussel) and the Cahaba shiner.

Acquisition will protect important habitat for federally-listed bats such as the endangered gray bat. This parcel contains numerous cave systems, and protecting it has importance to the whole recharge area. Also, this acquisition will allow for protection of the northern long-eared bat, federally-listed as threatened, and the recently petitioned Cahaba pebblesnail.

Arkansas

Land Acquisition along the Saline River for the Recovery of Winged Mapleleaf (mussel); Pink Mucket (mussel); Red-cockaded Woodpecker; and Rabbitsfoot (mussel) (Ashley County) \$901,791

This grant will enable the acquisition of 1,073 acres of important riparian and upland habitat adjacent to the Saline River to directly benefit the recovery of two federally-listed freshwater mussel species, and the red-cockaded woodpecker. This tract contains the largest population of winged mapleleaf range-wide and one of the largest populations of pink mucket, both endangered. This acquisition will help further woodpecker recovery by reconnecting populations at Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge and Warren Prairie State Natural Area. Securing this site also will grow the Longview Saline State Natural Area that is adjacent to it along the Saline River and allow for protection of at risk species including three petitioned mussels

Florida

Statewide Habitat Conservation Plan for Florida Beaches (35 Coastal Counties - Statewide) \$750,000

This grant will assist in the ninth and concluding year of this HCP planning effort. Stakeholders plan to assimilate acquired data into a final draft of the HCP. Activities in the coastal area and their threats to listed species will be analyzed. The goal of the HCP is to allow ongoing beach structure protection measures while limiting and mitigating the adverse effects to nesting loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, leatherback, green and hawksbill sea turtles, five beach mouse subspecies and shorebirds, including wintering piping plover. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is leading this effort in conjunction with builders groups, municipalities and other partners.

North Carolina

Red-cockaded Woodpecker Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Protection and Corridors (Richmond and Scotland counties) \$275,076

This grant will enable the acquisition of up to 526 acres of longleaf pine habitat used by red-cockaded woodpeckers in the Sandhills region of North Carolina. Acquisition of this property will promote connectivity among woodpecker groups to expand managed areas in and around the Fort Bragg and Camp Mackall woodpecker populations and throughout the North Carolina Sandhills.

Land Acquisition to Benefit Plant Recovery at Bat Fork Bog for the Endangered Bunched Arrowhead and Threatened Swamp Pink (Henderson County) \$41,746

This grant will enable the acquisition of 7.6 acres of mountain bog habitat for the recovery of two federally-listed plants. This important site will also secure critical bog habitat that will allow for reintroduction efforts of the federally-listed endangered mountain sweet pitcher plant and the white fringeless orchid, a candidate species. North Carolina along with Botanical Garden partners will initiate proactive restoration of this site as soon as it is acquired.

Protection of North Carolina's Only Canby's Dropwort Site- McIntosh Bays (Scotland County) \$37,479

This grant will enable the acquisition of 211 acres of Carolina bay habitat for the recovery of Canby's dropwort, an endangered plant species. This important site also will secure significant Carolina bay habitat that will allow for possible reintroduction efforts, restoration, and management activities. This grant will also permanently protect nine state-listed species.

Tennessee

Development of Habitat Conservation Plans for the Cumberlands Region, Tennessee (Cumberland County) \$511,890

This grant will assist in the ongoing development of the Cumberlands region-wide HCPs to protect aquatic and forest resources. Several mammals, mussels, reptiles, amphibians, fish and aquatic invertebrates would benefit from this pre-emptive attempt to develop protective measures in an ecologically diverse region that is beginning to experience increased development and resource extraction issues. The HCP will provide management prescriptions and regulatory guidelines to minimize and mitigate development effects on the target species and habitats. With the plan in operation, regulatory processes for the covered municipalities will be streamlined. Listed species include the Indiana bat, gray bat, spotfin chub (a fish species), purple bean (a freshwater mussel), and Cumberland rosemary and Virginia spiraea (plants).

Sherwood Forest Land Acquisition (Franklin County) \$800,000

This grant will enable the acquisition of 1,056 acres of Sherwood Forest in Franklin County to benefit the federally-listed Morefield's leather flower and painted snake coiled forest snail. This entire area will be designated as a Tennessee State Natural Area. Permanent protection of this tract will provide a huge leap forward in recovery for the snail because nearly half of its habitat

would be protected in conservation in perpetuity and will provide critical bat foraging and roosting areas for the northern long-eared bat, recently proposed for listing.

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