



# NFWF

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE**

**Tuesday, Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>**

## **Nearly \$3 Million in Funding for the Southeast's Vanishing Longleaf Pine Forests Announced**

*NFWF, Federal Agencies and Southern Company Join with States  
and Nonprofit Groups to Restore Ecosystem*

Milton, Fla. – September 4—The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) today announced \$2.88 million in grants to restore vanishing longleaf pine forests in the Florida Panhandle and six other southeastern states, including North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The Florida Forest Service and other recipients will use the funds to re-plant and enhance thousands of acres of longleaf pine, which provides habitat for many endangered species.

The grants are part of the NFWF Longleaf Stewardship Fund, a landmark public-private partnership that includes the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Forest Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Southern Company. With the combined financial and technical resources of this group, the Fund will support accelerated restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem and implementation of the Range-Wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine, as part of the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative.

The longleaf pine ecosystem once covered more than 90 million acres across nine states, from Virginia to Texas. Today, only three percent of the original acreage remains, with 29 threatened and endangered species depending on the shrinking habitat, including the red-cockaded woodpecker, the gopher tortoise and the indigo (pine) snake.

The NFWF announcement, made at the Blackwater River State Forest, highlighted a grant to the Florida Forest Service to establish 900 new acres of native longleaf pine and enhance more than 59,000 acres of the longleaf pine ecosystem at that site. In addition, the Florida Forest Service will provide technical assistance to private landowners and plant 500,000 longleaf seedlings on private lands around the Osceola National Forest.

“This is just one project in a program that is providing close to \$3 million in grant awards and technical support to restore the longleaf ecosystem,” said David O’Neill, director of the Eastern Partnership Office at NFWF. “In Florida and across the southeastern U.S., this suite of actions will have a huge impact.”

The 16 projects selected to receive support will expand and enhance the longleaf ecosystem on public and private lands across its historic range. They include nine Significant Geographic Areas, or Sites, identified for their great potential to restore large, connected landscapes of longleaf pine forest. These targeted areas are anchored by Department of Defense military bases, National Forests, Fish and Wildlife Service Refuges and state protected lands.

*NFWF, Federal Agencies and Southern Company Join with States and Nonprofit Groups to Restore Ecosystem - 2*

It is anticipated that through these projects, more than 11,000 acres of longleaf pine habitat will be restored and an additional 122,000 acres will be enhanced, benefitting an incredible diversity of species native to the longleaf ecosystem.

"During a decade of working with NFWF and others to conserve longleaf pine forests, we have learned very clearly that strong, diverse partnerships are the key to achieving meaningful results," said Chris Hobson, Southern Company chief environmental officer. "These new projects, and the increased resources of our new partners, will expand and accelerate critical habitat restoration and engage the public in our growing region."

"Every acre of longleaf pine we conserve near these military installations provides important buffer for our training areas and alternative habitat for some of the endangered species that live on post. In other words, these conservation projects contribute to our military readiness," said John Conger, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations & Environment. "In addition, by leveraging this partnership to fund conservation efforts, we are getting - quite literally - more bang for our buck."

"The Forest Service is very enthusiastic about the Longleaf Stewardship Fund," said Liz Agpaoa, Regional Forester for the Forest Service's Southern Region, comprised of 13 Southeastern states and Puerto Rico. "It enables us to honor our agency's longstanding commitment to longleaf restoration. It gives us and our partners the flexibility to deliver the dollars and technical support to all the right places - whether that's on a state or national forest, a military installation, or on private lands. And, working together, we can duplicate cooperative projects like those announced today anywhere in the historic range of longleaf."

"When visiting a longleaf pine forest, it doesn't take long to realize you are in a special place," NRCS Chief Dave White said. "NRCS, partners and private landowners are joining together to restore and protect longleaf forests, and the Longleaf Stewardship Fund is a good example of this effort. Healthy longleaf pine forests come with many benefits, including improving water quality, enhancing wildlife habitat and providing good economic return for landowners because longleaf pine is more resistant to fire, insects, diseases and wind than other pines."

"Longleaf and open pine forests are an invaluable part of the conservation landscape in the Southeast, and critical to ensuring abundant fish, wildlife and plants for future generations," said Cindy Dohner, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast Regional Director. "These forest types provide habitat for more than half the nearly 300 species of amphibians and reptiles found in the Southeast, many of which are threatened, endangered or at-risk. We are excited about this partnership and the work to continue the legacy of longleaf."

Since 2004, through a partnership between NFWF and Southern Company, over \$8.7 million has been invested into projects to restore more than 82,000 acres of longleaf pine forest and the native species that rely on it. The new Longleaf Stewardship Fund builds on the success of this public/private partnership, expanding restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem through collaborative and result-oriented actions that contribute to the restoration goals in the Range-Wide Conservation Plan.

**About the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**

*Established by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) sustains, restores and enhances the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal, corporate and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 4,000 organizations and committed more than \$2 billion to conservation projects. Learn more at [www.nfwf.org](http://www.nfwf.org).*

Media contact:

Mike Smith, Public Affairs for NFWF

[mike@msbdinc.com](mailto:mike@msbdinc.com)

703-623-3834