



Background/Purpose

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has established the Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) to assist forest landowners to more effectively conserve the longleaf pine forest landscape. The initiative is part of USDA's coordinated response to address the priority resource concern

and is an outgrowth of the agreement between the Departments of Defense and Interior. The LLPI is active in nine states, which include Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia.

At the beginning of the 17th century, there were an estimated 90 million acres of longleaf pine forests with nearly 900 different plant species in the southeastern United States. Today, less than 4 percent, or 3.4 million acres, remain. Longleaf forests are home to about 100 bird species, 36 mammal species, and 170 species of reptiles and amphibians. In addition, 29 species associated with longleaf pine forests, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker, are listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened or endangered.

Goals/Objectives Achieved

NRCS is focusing its efforts to help forest landowners more effectively address longleaf pine forest conservation issues through the LLPI. Through this approach, the LLPI is restoring and enhancing longleaf pine forests to improve critical wildlife habitat, as well as the health, sustainability and profitability of privately owned forests.

In fiscal year (FY) 2011 (October 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011), with the help of LLPI funding, landowners agreed to establish more than 32,400 acres of new longleaf pine forests over the next several years.

Conservation Funding/ Practices Applied

NRCS has identified longleaf pine ecosystem priority areas in nine states and continues to refine the priority areas with help from local partners. A variety of programs provide technical and financial assistance to landowners to plan and implement conservation practices that improve longleaf pine forest health and/or establish new longleaf pine forest plantings. Since 2010, more than \$17 million in funding from the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) has been targeted to assist landowners working to restore or enhance longleaf pine forests. Landowners are also taking advantage of other programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help meet the objectives of the LLPI.

NRCS works directly with non-industrial, private forest landowners to implement a variety of conservation systems to restore, improve, or maintain understory and overstory longleaf pine ecosystems. The conservation systems used include forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, restoration and management of rare or declining habitats, and tree/shrub establishment.

Participation/Partnership Successes

The historic range of the longleaf pine is now under the care of private landowners. NRCS and its partners work directly with these private landowners to protect, improve, and restore longleaf pine forests. During fiscal year 2011, more than 12 state and local natural resource agencies, wildlife organizations, forest landowner organizations, as well as many individuals partnered with the NRCS to leverage federal funding for this initiative – making the LLPI conservation investment reach even more landowners and more forests.

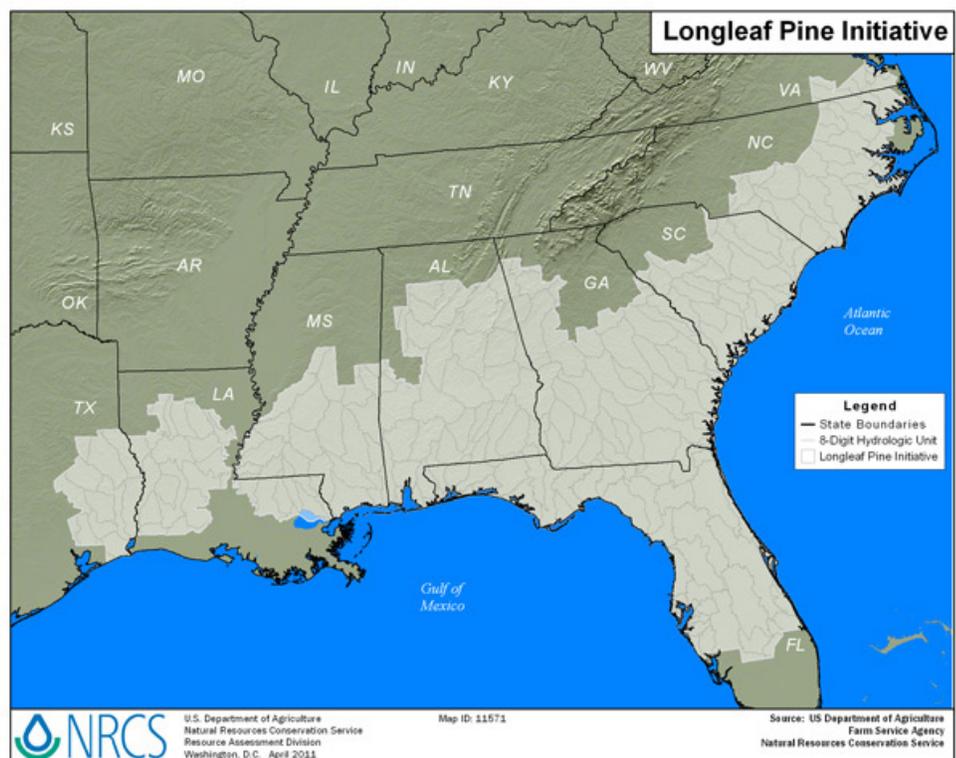
At-a-Glance Benefits

Through the LLPI, landowners are qualifying for up to 75 percent payment rates to restore or enhance longleaf pine forests. For many, these payments help re-establish longleaf pine plantings and defray the cost of seedlings, plantings and site preparation. More than 1,000 landowners participated in the LLPI in Fiscal Year 2011. Over the next several years, landowners plan to establish more than 32,400 acres of new longleaf pine trees. Landowners also plan to improve more than 5,700 acres of existing longleaf pine stands over the next several years.

Not only do healthy longleaf pine forests yield improved water quality, wildlife habitat and are more resistant to insect and disease infestation, wildfires and storm damage than other pine species, but properly

managed longleaf pine forests yield good economic returns for landowners through high-end longleaf pine timber production.

Implementing conservation plans on longleaf pine forests will help improve wildlife habitat and will contribute to the long-term sustainability of non-industrial, private forests, which will provide environmental, economic and wildlife benefits for generations to come. In addition, healthy longleaf pine ecosystems provide wildlife habitat for game species and non-game species alike and support – within a single square meter of forest – dozens of species of wildflowers, shrubs, grasses and ferns. It's no wonder landowners are planning to restore and manage wildlife habitats on about 13,700 acres of longleaf forests over the next several years.



Alabama

Retired Veterinarian Embraces Longleaf Pine Establishment

Longleaf pine once dominated millions of acres in Alabama, but has declined more than any other forest type. Pine forests currently comprise 41 percent of the state's total forest cover, but only 3 percent is classified as Longleaf pine. Retired veterinarian Dr. Lomax "Max" Walker Jr. is doing his part to restore longleaf pine to Crenshaw County, Alabama.



Dr. Lomax Walker will attempt to re-establish native grasses and eradicate invasive plant species in his longleaf pine stand.

Florida

Ranchers Diversify with Longleaf Pine

Leo (Bud) and Karen Turner are ranchers and wildlife land managers who own 200 acres of pasture and forest land north Okaloosa County, Florida. Recently, through the LLPI, they planted 40 acres of longleaf pines and various species of native hardwood. They participated in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and developed a plan to plant 40 acres of longleaf pines and various species of native hardwoods. The plan has been implemented and the longleaf pines are thriving. The Turners have noticed an increase in bobwhite quail on their farm along with an increase in other species of birds.

Prescribed burning is the conservation practice that gives longleaf pine the advantage over other plant species in competing for water and nutrients from the soil. Longleaf pine thrives with the periodic application of prescribed fire as do many native grasses. Once the tree crowns have grown enough to protect the longleaf tree's growing tip from excessive heat, the potential for damage from a prescribed fire is remote.

Longleaf pine forests also face threats from exotic and invasive species such as climbing fern, cogongrass and tropical soda apple. The Turners have worked hard to control invasive species and other pests, and their efforts are providing a wildlife friendly longleaf pine landscape.



The Turners' longleaf pines after a controlled burn. The tree crowns have grown enough to protect the trees from damage.



Bennett Whitfield inspects a 15-month-old seedling. Behind him are some of the 8 million longleaf pine seedlings that are growing in the Whitfield Nursery in Swainsboro, Georgia.

Georgia

Small Farm Sprouts Future Forests

Long before the Longleaf Pine Initiative, Bennett Whitfield was growing longleaf pine seedlings on his 6-acre plot of land. Having enough longleaf pine seedlings to support the LLPI can be a challenge, so building a longleaf pine network is key to the initiative's success.

During an average growing season, Whitfield's nursery in Emanuel County, Georgia, is home to 8 million seedlings – enough to cover 16,000 acres of land. "It's taken 14 years to get here," Whitfield says. Now, many of the seedlings grown in Whitfield's nursery are sold to landowners who participate in the LLPI's reforestation efforts throughout the southeastern U.S. With the help of NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Whitfield has been growing longleaf pine seedlings on his family's land since 1996.

"I thought growing a tree would be a piece of cake," he says. Contrary to what Whitfield believed, growing a tree from the seed up is tough work. But those seedlings are a critical link in the nation's longleaf pine recovery effort. "Our programs wouldn't work as well without people like Mr. Whitfield who are out there farming these trees," says Sidney Lanier, NRCS district conservationist in Georgia.

Louisiana

Partnership Bridges Public, Private Efforts to Restore Longleaf Pine

A cohesive group is typically worth more than the sum of its parts. This synergy is evident in Louisiana's partnership effort to accelerate longleaf pine ecosystem restoration. In 2011, NRCS formed a unique partnership with the Department of Defense, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy and the Texas Louisiana Longleaf Task Force to leverage longleaf pine conservation efforts. This coalition of diverse agencies bridges public and private efforts to restore longleaf pine forests in Louisiana.

Louisiana's partnership approach will reduce duplication of effort, increase agency capacity, improve efficiency and accelerate ecosystem development. Working together, Louisiana's longleaf pine partnership will transform shared goals into exceptional results.

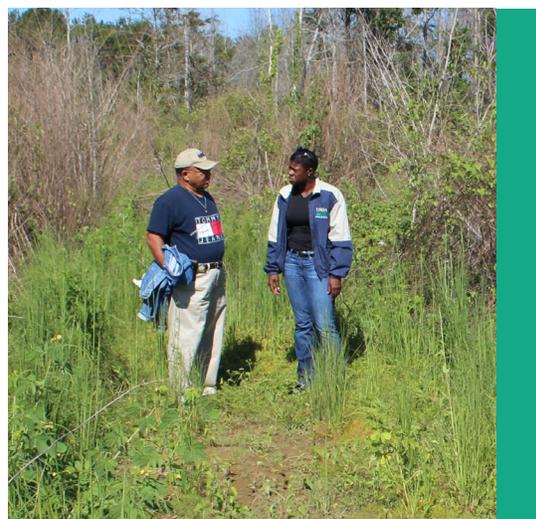


Coordinated efforts in Louisiana are accelerating longleaf pine restoration efforts on both public and private lands.

Mississippi

Moving into Longleaf Pine in Monticello

When Douglas Harris planted 10 acres of longleaf, he said he was planning for his grandchildren—not himself. The timber farmer from Monticello, Miss. has grown plenty of pine, but never longleaf. And he is excited to see how the NRCS and its Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) is transforming clear-cut land into a profitable venture. Harris planted this year, and he is preparing for his first prescribed burn this fall. “I’ve never grown longleaf before, but I look forward to what this land can do,” Harris said. Harris hopes this land will help his family prosper for many years to come. His local soil conservationist, Sarah Fleming Wilcher, coached him on the benefits of longleaf, and he plans to sell pine straw and timber and lease the land to hunters. She said she hopes more farmers become interested in using LLPI to restore longleaf forests, the ecosystem that once covered most of Lawrence County.



Timber farmer Douglas Harris and NRCS Soil Conservationist Sarah Fleming Wilcher monitor the growth of longleaf pine trees on 10 acres in Monticello, Miss. that Harris recently enrolled in LLPI. Harris is preparing for a prescribed burn this year to allow the young trees to outpace the other plants..

North Carolina

Longleaf Pine Reaches New Heights

The Walthour-Moss Foundation encompasses more than 4,000 acres of practically unblemished longleaf pine habitat in the southern pines of North Carolina. The foundation has received technical and financial assistance from NRCS in its efforts to enhance and restore longleaf pine habitat. Conservation practices implemented include prescribed burning, fire line installation and mid-story control. Because of the foundation’s aggressive management of the land under its care, adjacent landowners have adopted similar management styles and are seeking NRCS assistance to help buttress longleaf pine habitat.

An additional benefit resulting directly from the work of the foundation and NRCS has occurred. A recent study by Sand Hill Ecological Institute and through the Safe Harbor Program indicates that the almost extinct red-cockaded woodpecker is making a strong comeback on the foundation’s protected and conserved lands. Longleaf pine is North Carolina’s state tree and a prominent part of North Carolina’s history. NRCS, with the help of partners and landowners, has taken great steps toward protecting, enhancing and sustaining longleaf habitat – developing longleaf pine conservation plans on 10,795 acres.



The Walthour Moss Foundation uses prescribed burn practices to stimulate germination of forest plant species and to help reduce fuel buildup.



The partners of the South Carolina Longleaf Pine Initiative are working together to assist private landowners in the unique South Carolina Sandhills to establish and improve longleaf pine habitat.

South Carolina

Unique Conservation Alliance Protecting Longleaf in Carolina Sandhills

Nearly two-thirds of the remaining longleaf pine forests in South Carolina are located on family forest lands. Another critical area for longleaf pine restoration and protection in the state is the Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge, which lies along the fall line separating the Piedmont Plateau from the Atlantic Coastal Plain. The refuge covers 47,850 acres in Chesterfield County. The NRCS Longleaf Pine Initiative focuses on areas within Chesterfield County that have suitable soils for growing longleaf forests, as well as a small portion of Darlington County.

Rolling beds of deep, sandy soils in these counties were once host to an extensive longleaf pine ecosystem. Because the soils in the initiative focus area are too sandy to farm economically, longleaf pine is an excellent choice and can maximize both economic and wildlife habitat benefits. Longleaf Pine Initiative partners are assisting private landowners in this unique area to establish and improve longleaf pine habitat. The partnership includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, South Carolina Forestry Commission, Pee Dee Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Farm Service Agency and NRCS.

Texas

Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Begins Longleaf Pine Restoration Efforts

In years to come, members of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas won't have to travel far to gather the treasured Longleaf pine needles used to make their traditional handmade baskets. Through the LLPI, the tribe has enrolled upwards of 400 new acres of longleaf pine production land into NRCS' Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP).

Carlos Bullock, tribal council chairman of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, says that longleaf pines are deeply entrenched in the tribe's history and their culture of making handmade baskets from the needles, since the 1700s. Reforestation efforts will include six sites. The smallest pine plantation will be an estimated six acres, the largest about 139 acres.

NRCS will provide technical assistance and guidance throughout the life of the contract. Conservation practices will include firebreak establishment, forest site preparation, forest stand improvement, prescribed burning and tree establishment. An added benefit will be the restoration of native grasses, plants and wildlife habitat in the reforested areas.



An Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Tribal elder makes a traditional handmade basket from longleaf pine needles. Longleaf pines are deeply entrenched in the Tribe's history and their culture of making handmade baskets.

Virginia

Partners Pool Resources to Restore Native Species, Ecosystem



Bill Owen is bringing longleaf pine back to life in Virginia with the help of six different agencies and has completed several controlled burns through a burn contract with NRCS. (Photo courtesy of Bobby Clontz, The Nature Conservancy).

A musician by profession, Bill Owen is a dedicated conservationist who still lives in the family’s Yale, Virginia, home. Working through a diverse Longleaf Pine Initiative partnership, he hopes to realize his dream of planting 1,000 contiguous acres of longleaf pine forest on his Sussex County property.

Owen began his legacy project with a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant and began working with NRCS in 2002. Other partner agencies involved in the effort include the Virginia departments of Forestry, Conservation and Recreation, and Game and Inland Fisheries. Owen has already planted just over 300 acres in Sussex County and 100 acres in Surry County. In addition, he’s donated a 1,400-acre easement on his property to The Nature Conservancy to further his longleaf pine legacy. This easement forms the core of The Nature Conservancy’s Raccoon Creek Pinelands Conservation Area, which is one of the premier sites in Virginia for longleaf pine restoration.

“I think longleaf pines are magnificent trees,” says Owen. “They’re like the sequoias of the East Coast – living up to 400 years or more and are at the very center of a complex ecosystem which we are trying to reestablish.”

FISCAL YEAR 2011 – LONG LEAF PINE INITIATIVE (LLPI)				
NRCS – Financial Assistance (FA)				
LLPI	Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)		State Totals for Initiative	
STATE	Number of Contracts	FA Contract Obligations	Number of Contracts	FA Contract Obligations
Alabama	301	3,333,307	301	3,333,307
Florida	40	362,390	40	362,390
Georgia	362	5,996,205	362	5,996,205
Louisiana	39	1,087,536	39	1,087,536
Mississippi	116	1,053,019	116	1,053,019
North Carolina	71	1,028,080	71	1,028,080
South Carolina	123	1,495,706	123	1,495,706
Texas	29	425,853	29	425,853
Virginia	2	139,425	2	139,425

Source: NRCS Protracts 10/01/2011