



PRESS RELEASE

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Federal Agencies Join NFWF and Southern Company to Save Vanishing Southeastern Forests

December 14, 2011 -- Building on nearly a decade of investment to restore vanishing longleaf pine forests in the southeastern United States, NFWF (the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation) has established the *Longleaf Stewardship Fund*, a landmark public-private partnership that includes the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation 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.

The longleaf pine ecosystem once encompassed more than 90 million acres of North America. Today, only three percent of the original acreage remains, and threatened and endangered species that depend on the habitat – for example, the red-cockaded woodpecker, the gopher tortoise and the indigo snake – are struggling to survive. Since 2004, a partnership between NFWF and Southern Company, the Longleaf Legacy Program, has invested over \$8.7 million into projects that will restore more than 82,000 acres of longleaf pine forest and the native species that rely on it. The Longleaf Stewardship Fund will build on the success of the Southern Company partnership and expand the restoration effort across the nine states within longleaf pine's historic range.

A significant amount of the old-growth longleaf pine forest that still exists in the Southeast is on land owned by the U.S. military, and many opportunities for large-scale restoration and protection are concentrated around public lands. The Fund will invest in targeted areas that are anchored by Department of Defense military bases, National Forests, Fish & Wildlife Service Refuges and state protected lands to expand existing longleaf habitat and establish large-scale healthy ecosystems. In addition, the Fund will support range-wide restoration projects, technical assistance to private landowners, and locally based partnerships dedicated to restoring longleaf pine. Investments will be made to achieve specific conservation outcomes, and success will be tracked to evaluate gains in healthy longleaf forest and the recovery of native wildlife.

“The involvement of our federal partners in the longleaf pine restoration effort is a tremendous addition that will make our program even stronger, broader and more effective,” said Jeff Trandahl, executive director and CEO of NFWF. “With the continued leadership and support of Southern Company, we’re poised to embark on a new chapter in the recovery of this once-majestic forest.”

“This expansion of our longleaf partnership is a natural progression and an exciting development that gives us the opportunity to build on the successes we’ve had so far in restoring this vital ecosystem,” said Chris Hobson, Southern Company chief environmental officer. “We are ready to go to work with our newest partners, combining the best that public and private entities have to offer into a model of effective environmental stewardship.”

“The Department of Defense is a natural partner in longleaf restoration,” said John Conger, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations & Environment. “Enhancing the forested lands on and around our military bases protects our mission while also playing an important part in the overall restoration of longleaf pine. We look forward to participating in this important effort.”

“I am continually amazed by the diversity of organizations that come together to restore the unique and rich longleaf pine forests,” said Liz Agpaoa, Regional Forester for the Forest Service's Southern Region, comprised of 13 Southeastern states and Puerto Rico. “By pooling public and private sector resources, the Longleaf Stewardship Fund will advance this important restoration work even during challenging times.”

“NRCS is committed to helping private forest landowners protect and restore longleaf pine ecosystems,” said Chief Dave White. “Healthy longleaf pine forests will yield improved water quality, enhanced wildlife habitat, and good economic return for landowners because longleaf pine is extremely resistant to insects, diseases and wind.”

“This is an important collaborative effort that restores millions of acres of longleaf pine bringing back a culturally iconic and historically valuable habitat for this region,” said Cindy Dohner, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast Regional Director. "This work focuses on restoration that will benefit many listed and candidate species such as the Red-cockaded woodpecker and the gopher tortoise among others. This ambitious work would not be possible but for the diverse partners engaged in it.”

In its first year, the Fund will award approximately \$3 million through a competitive grants process. Grants applications will be accepted through February 15, 2012, with awards announced in Summer 2012. For more information, visit www.nfwf.org/longleaf.

Images of longleaf pine and the gopher tortoise are available on request from Seraphina Lin, 847-224-3266 or seraphina@mikesmithpa.com