

Longleaf Pine Initiative

2021 Progress Report

Longleaf pine forests once encompassed more than 90 million acres across the Southeast, stretching from eastern Texas through central Florida to southern Virginia. These forests represent some of the world's most biologically diverse ecosystems and are home to nearly 600 plant and animal species, including 29 threatened and endangered species. But over the past two centuries, development, logging, and fire suppression have reduced the forested area by almost 97 percent.

NRCS and Longleaf Pine Forests

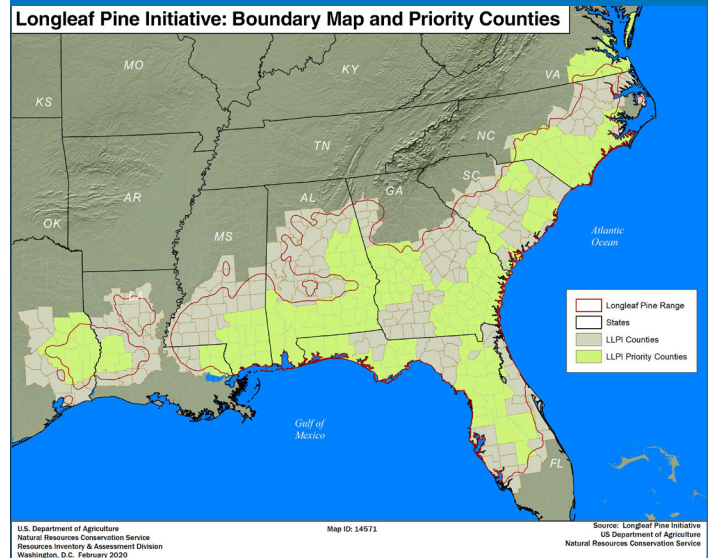
NRCS engages with forest landowners, agricultural producers, and conservation partners to restore longleaf pine forests through the Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI). Since 2010, NRCS has helped producers implement conservation practices on more than 870,000 acres on private lands. Together with other conservation efforts, the amount of longleaf pine forests has grown from approximately 3 million acres to nearly 5 million acres during this time, reversing a century-long decline across the region.

Through LLPI, NRCS works with producers on private lands in nine states to improve the health and sustainability of longleaf pine forests. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to producers, helping them identify and implement a variety of conservation practices. These practices enable landowners to improve these unique forests by establishing new trees and maintaining the ecosystem using prescribed burning or other stand improvement techniques.

The LLPI focuses efforts in priority counties because of the favorable growing conditions and presence of longleaf pine forest. By restoring longleaf pine adjacent to, or between, existing forests, corridors can be created. These corridors facilitate the movement of plants and wildlife across the range. These targeted areas are usually located in the vicinity of a military installation, national or state forest, national wildlife refuge, or heritage reserve.

FOCUS AREAS

Longleaf Pine Initiative: Boundary Map and Priority Counties



Outcomes and Impacts

LLPI enables producers to make conservation improvements on their forestlands with NRCS providing technical and financial assistance. Sound forest management practices support healthy longleaf pine forests which are more resilient to wildfires, disease, and high wind events. One management practice that especially benefits longleaf pine ecosystems is restoring the natural fire regimes of the Southeast through prescribed burning. Historically, low intensity fires burned through longleaf pine forests every few years, maintaining an open canopy and diverse herbaceous understory.

The benefits of forest management practices range from producing high quality forest products, such as pole logs, to improved wildlife habitat. Many at-risk wildlife species such as the gopher tortoise, Louisiana pine snake, and red-cockaded woodpecker depend on longleaf pine forests for habitat. Healthier forests also offer other natural resource benefits, such as diverse recreation opportunities, better upstream forest water use efficiency, carbon storage, and healthier soil.

A fuel treatment area in the Accelerating Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Restoration Project in the Osceola National Forest, Florida. (Forest Service photo by Scott Ray)



Fiscal Year 2021 Longleaf Pine Initiative: NRCS EQIP Contracts, Acres Enrolled, and Financial Assistance (FA) Obligations for Active and Completed Contracts

State	Contracts	Acres	Obligations
Alabama	237	36,890	\$5,428,759
Florida	95	13,444	\$2,911,547
Georgia	276	20,454	\$7,477,284
Louisiana	15	1,405	\$511,203
Mississippi	111	13,218	\$2,357,492
North Carolina	49	4,217	\$1,337,637
South Carolina	115	8,587	\$2,601,852
Texas	11	3,203	\$304,823
Virginia	5	1,335	\$430,325
Total	914	102,754	\$23,360,920

Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, May 2022

Tracking Progress

NRCS' LLPI is an active partner on the Longleaf Partnership Council of America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI). ALRI is a collaborative public-private effort that coordinates range-wide efforts to restore, improve, and maintain longleaf pine ecosystems. ALRI's Range-Wide Conservation Plan has a goal to restore an additional 4.6 million acres of longleaf pine ecosystems in the natural longleaf pine range by 2025. NRCS is working closely with the ALRI partners at the local and regional levels to achieve those cross-boundary goals together.

Longleaf pine seedlings in raised beds, irrigated by a pivot irrigation system, at Lewis Taylor Farms in Fort Valley, Georgia.



Overall LLPI Summary

Total NRCS Investment EQIP & WHIP\$176,729,897



Number of Contracts9,790



Total Acres Contracted874,988

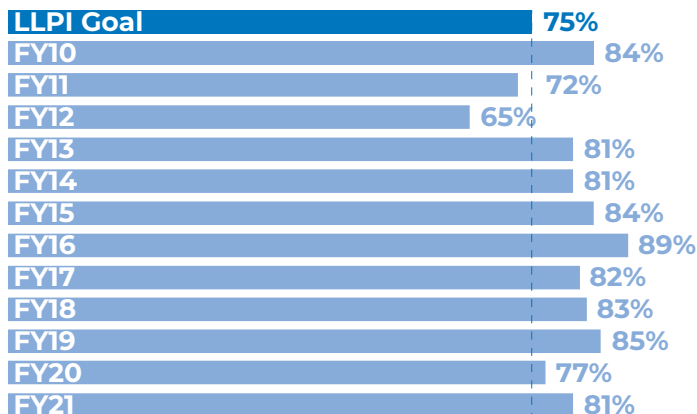


Note: The WHIP program ended in 2014.

Milestones

■ LLPI Goal ■ Achieved

NRCS aims to invest 75% of longleaf conservation activities in priority counties.



Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, May 2022