

Longleaf Pine Initiative

2023 Progress Report

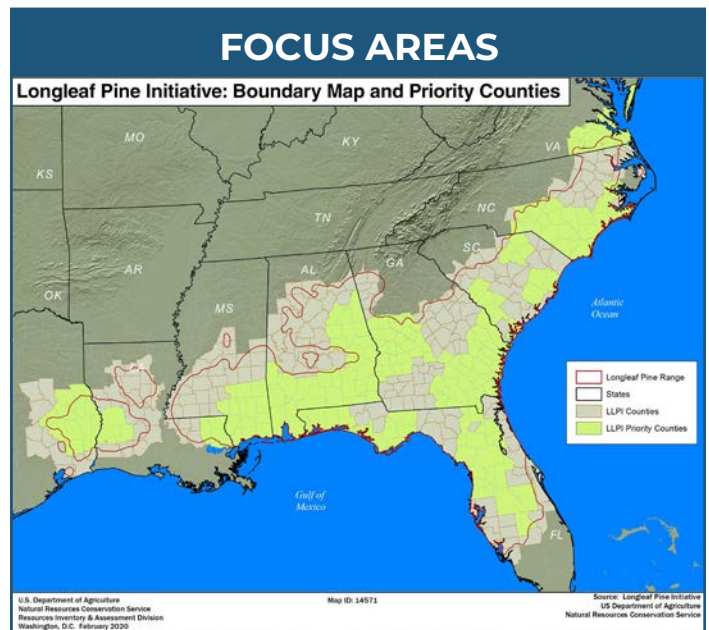
Longleaf pine forests once encompassed more than 90 million acres across the Southeast, stretching from eastern Texas through central Florida to southern Virginia. These forests represent some of the world's most biologically diverse ecosystems and are home to nearly 600 plant and animal species, including 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 nearly 1 million acres on private lands. Together with other conservation efforts, the amount of longleaf pine forests has grown from approximately 3.4 million acres to nearly 5.2 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.



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.

Prescribed burn ahead sign and ATV in longleaf pine forests, in Wilmington, NC.



Fiscal Year 2023 Longleaf Pine Initiative: NRCS EQIP Contracts, Acres Enrolled, and Financial Assistance (FA) Obligations for Active and Completed Contracts

State	Contracts	Acres	Obligations
Alabama	208	35,105	\$5,947,314
Florida	78	10,186	\$2,668,455
Georgia	252	20,905	\$8,967,001
Louisiana	18	1,826	\$1,072,873
Mississippi	105	13,218	\$1,940,109
North Carolina	50	5,217	\$1,191,278
South Carolina	71	5,824	\$1,850,356
Texas	3	480	\$249,611
Virginia	5	947	\$242,956
Total	790	93,708	\$24,129,953

Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, March 2024

Tracking Progress

NRCS' LLPI is an active partner on the Longleaf Partnership Council of America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI). ALRI is a public-private collaboration that coordinates range-wide efforts to restore, improve, and maintain longleaf pine ecosystems. ALRI's new 2025-2040 Range-Wide Conservation Plan has a goal to restore an additional 2.8 million acres of longleaf pine ecosystems by 2040. NRCS is working closely with the ALRI partners at the local and regional levels to achieve those cross-boundary goals together.

Overall LLPI Summary

Total NRCS Investment EQIP & WHIP \$222,281,307



Number of Contracts 11,411



Total Acres Contracted..... 1,080,392



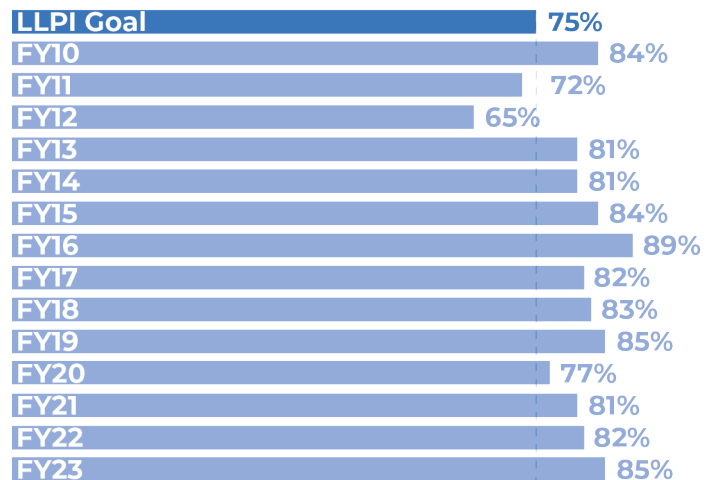
Note: The WHIP program ended in 2014.

Uneven-aged stand of longleaf pine, with flowering understory, in Wilmington, NC.



Milestones

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



Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, March 2024