

**NRCS  
FLORIDA**



**ANNUAL  
REPORT  
FY 2023**



**FLORIDA CONSERVATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS**  
Helping People Help the Land



# NRCS FLORIDA



## MISSION:

*We deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.*

## VISION:

*A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes, and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation.*



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*Florida has experienced great challenges the past few years with hard-hitting hurricanes. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has seen historic increases in funding levels and demand for our conservation services. We have increased hiring efforts to meet these needs, and we continue to strive for excellence in customer service to our farmers and ranchers. It is humbling to see the resilience of our producers, employees and partners who have such dedication to our mission and vision.*

*It makes me proud to see the work we do in the field and the strong implementation of conservation measures. We are grateful for partners and contract employees that help our producers apply conservation practices that improve their economic bottom line.*

*Thank you to each and every one of our Florida staff and partners who has gone above and beyond to connect with our farmers and ranchers, helping their operations be more successful through conservation solutions. This annual report showcases our work across all programs and state initiatives. We are thankful for the opportunity to continue to serve and work with each of you.*



**Juan C. Hernandez**  
State Conservationist

**“ Out of the long list of nature’s gifts to man, none is perhaps so utterly essential to human life as soil.”**

**Hugh Hammond Bennett**  
Soil Conservation (1939).  
New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc.



Much of the work completed through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service on private lands is done with financial assistance through the Farm Bill. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), the various initiatives, plus the easement programs are all funded through the Farm Bill. Additional funds received for EQIP in FY 2023 were through Emergency Recovery Funds and through Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds.

Florida had an overall increase in conservation program contracts signed, acres enrolled and dollars obligated in FY 2023 as compared to FY2022 in the tables below.

Florida NRCS, serves diverse agricultural needs through four area offices, 34 field offices, and a Plant Materials Center. We provide voluntary, cost-effective program and technical assistance to landowners to conserve, protect and improve soil, water, air, plants and animals. In doing so, we enable farmers and landowners to better steward and manage their property and remain economically viable.

FY 2022 PROGRAMS	CSP Classic	CSP-GCI	EQIP Classic	RCPP
CONTRACTS SIGNED	134	4	571	21
ACRES ENROLLED	130,348	70	172,939	4740
\$ OBLIGATED	\$8,257,394	\$6,358	\$27,697,079	\$550,327



## FARM BILL PROGRAMS



FY 2023 PROGRAMS	CSP Classic	CSP-GCI	CSP IRA	EQIP Classic	EQIP EMERGENCY (HURRICANE IAN)	RCPP	EQIP IRA
<b>CONTRACTS SIGNED</b>	181	3	63	617	199	30	105
<b>ACRES ENROLLED</b>	84,202	258	33,824	188,870	111,582	8,416	14,973
<b>\$ OBLIGATED</b>	\$8,668,090	\$23,263	\$2,943,768	\$28,879,402	\$11,098,416	\$907,185	\$3,102,466



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NRCS conservation easements protect **288,131 acres** in Florida. Natural Resources Conservation Service easements provide habitat for wetland dependent species, including threatened and endangered species, and improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals. They also reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and recreational activities.







## EASEMENTS

### Florida NRCS manages 175 easements.

In FY 2023, total restoration, repair, and stewardship of Florida easements completed was **28,899 acres**. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) closed on six new Florida easements in FY 2023 adding nearly 1,690 acres. The table to the right reflects the number of Florida easement acres by NRCS program.

Total conservation easement acres include Other Stewardship Lands enrolled in easements as a result of additional factors that are not listed here. View more online at: <https://www.farmers.gov/data/easements-overview>

#### EASEMENTS & ACRES CLOSED

PROGRAM	NUMBER	ACRES
ACEP-ALE	24	19,853
ACEP-WRE	36	22,806
RCPP-ALE	4	4,734
RCPP-HFRP	3	18,270
RCPP-WRE	1	1,482
WRP	107	220,986
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>288,131</b>



# NRCS FLORIDA



## REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

FARM BILL	PROJECTS	NRCS AWARD
2014	12	\$44,713,000
2018	6	\$71,702,343



# REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

## FLORIDA RCPP PROJECTS

Through Partnerships, Florida NRCS coordinates the delivery of assistance where it can have the most impact. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds solutions to natural resource challenges on agricultural land. RCPP demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in delivering results for agriculture and conservation.

In Florida, two new RCPP projects were awarded in FY 2023: Lake to Lagoon, located in East Central Florida, and Corridor to Coast, which covers nine Florida counties extending to the East Coast.

### Lead Partner: North Florida Land Trust

- **Corridor to Coast:** Covering portions of nine counties in central to Florida and extending to the East Coast, the project focuses on improving wildlife habitat and water quality on forestland, pastureland, and adjacent natural areas through the acquisition of conservation easements and implementation of conservation practices.
- **Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor:** Seeks to link conservation and protect working timberlands, high quality river and streams, and promote a style of forestry that is better for wildlife and increases regional water supplies.

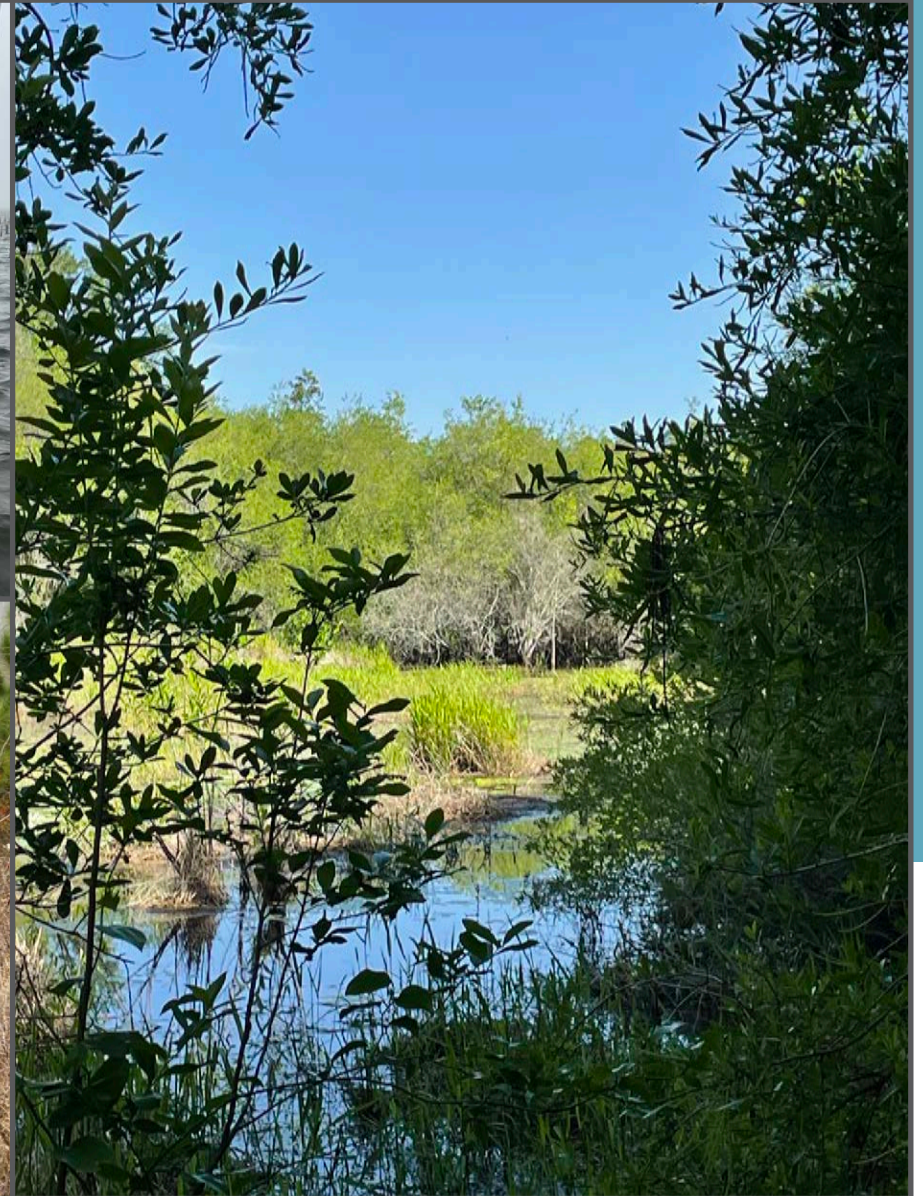
### Lead Partner: Alachua Conservation Trust

- **Forest to Gulf:** Addresses degraded plant conditions, terrestrial and aquatic habitat, weather resilient landscapes, and protection of water resources, including groundwater that supplies the majority of Florida's fresh water.
- **Lake to Lagoon:** Addresses resource concerns related to climate resiliency, long-term protection, degraded plant condition, terrestrial habitat, and fire management. Located in a nearly 1.2 million-acre, low-lying region of East Central Florida.
- **Surface To Springs:** Covers approximately 25% of Florida's springs and targets a critical geography threatened by high producer land conversion. Two major impacts for Florida's springs and ground water: 1) catalyze existing partner groundwork to set a regional precedent for protecting rural producer lands in this sensitive area with entity held conservation easements; and 2) reduce nutrient inputs and water use through management activities on producer lands.

### Lead Partner: Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy

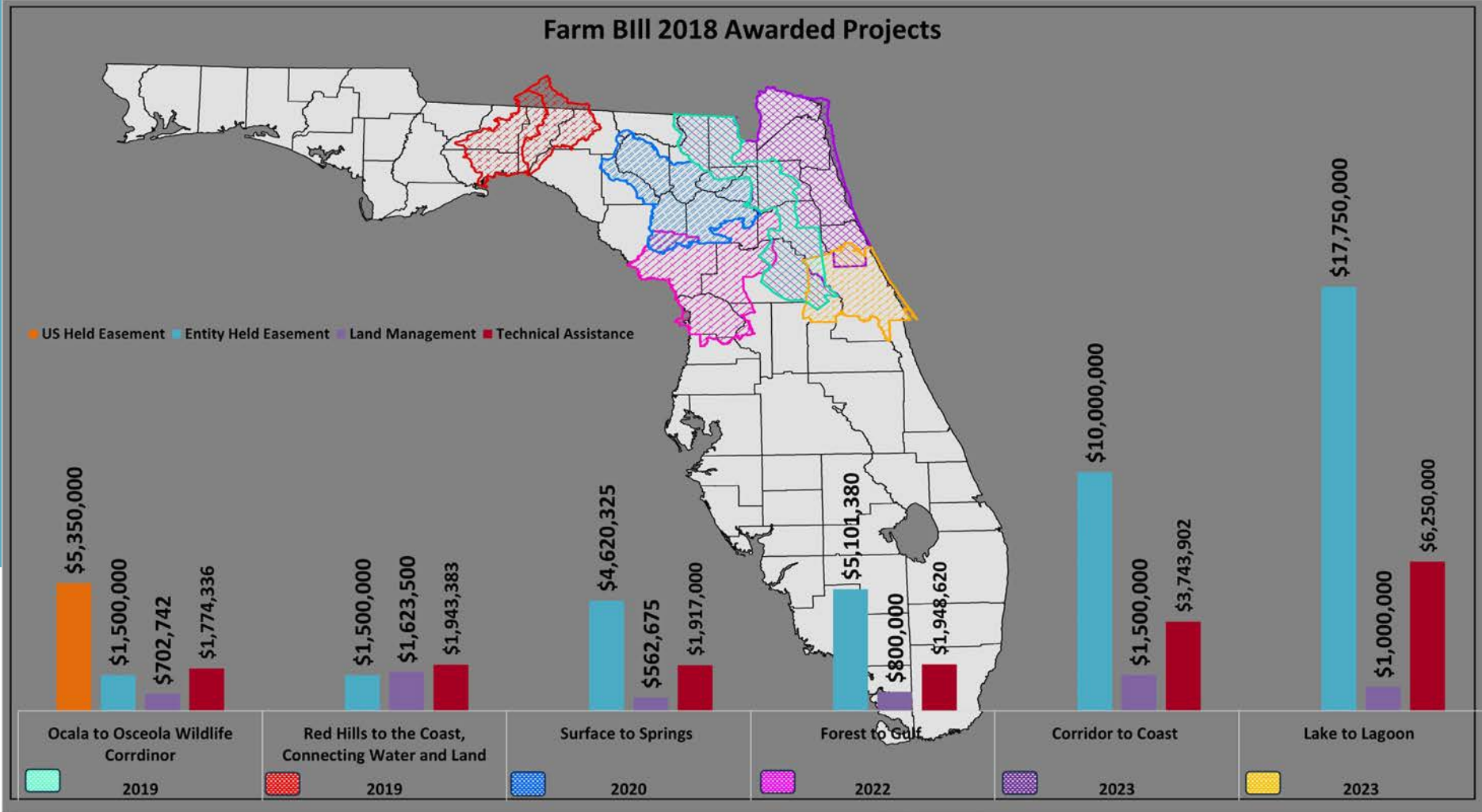
- **Red Hills to the Coast, Connecting Land and Water:** The vision for St. Marks River and Aucilla River watersheds is a pair of adjoining watersheds that will contain conserved, well-managed natural habitats that allow for an increase in listed species populations, improved water quality for residents, and economic benefits to surrounding communities.

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# REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM



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## Florida NRCS has 11 Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) projects totaling \$1,979,618.

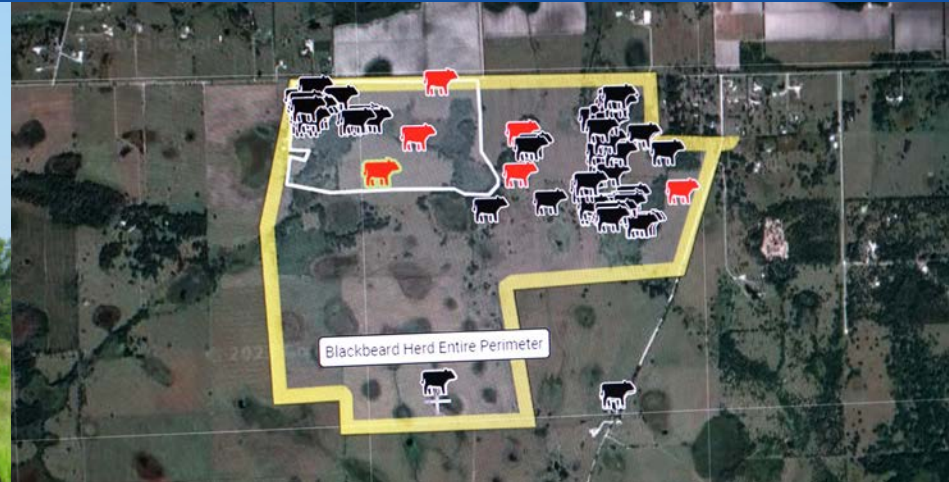
CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies into NRCS standards and practices. Florida NRCS offers CIG state program funding opportunities to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies in conjunction with agricultural production.



Archbold Expeditions, Inc.



## CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS



*Blackbeard Ranch, NRCS Florida.*

**In FY 2023, Florida awarded four new CIG projects totaling \$784,214.**

**Archbold Expeditions, Inc: \$241,036** – To develop innovative unmanned aerial vehicle technology (commonly known as drone) to better identify and quantify brush and improve data collection and management of Florida’s grazing lands.

**Florida State University: \$250,000** – Evaluate the efficiency of rain gardens as a selected conservation practice to mitigate microplastic pollution in urban farms, and provide guidance on proposing effective plans to prevent and lessen this pollution using green infrastructure.

**Blackbeard’s Ranch: \$43,000** – To show virtual fence is a helpful tool that works towards long-term, agro-ecosystem goals on grazing and ranchlands.

**IMG Citrus Inc: \$249,991** – An implementation and on-farm research and demonstration project that integrates rhizome perennial peanut cover crop in citrus groves as a soil best management practice.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing funding through Agreements for partnerships that improve outreach to underserved producers and communities to expand access to conservation assistance.

**In FY 2023, a total of \$6,669,938 was funded for new agreements and amendments to include:**

- Outreach Agreements - \$274,742.44
- Technical Assistance (TA) Agreements - \$6,395,196  
*TA includes both providing to NRCS and hiring technical assistance support positions to provide TA for NRCS.*
- There are eight National Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative agreements that include work in Florida.

**Top Partners with contribution agreements:**

- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- The Trust for Tomorrow



**Florida NRCS has 24 Active Agreements totaling \$35,161,846.**



## PARTNERSHIPS







NRCS offers numerous practices for landowners to solve conservation related problems and to adopt new conservation activities on their operations. Through various conservation programs, NRCS provides agricultural producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement improvements, or what NRCS calls conservation practices. Using these practices leads to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and better wildlife habitat, all while improving agricultural operations.



**Florida's Top 5  
conservation practices  
for EQIP in FY 2023, by  
order of most used:**

**Ecological Sciences**

1. Fencing
2. Herbaceous Weed Treatment
3. Prescribed Burning
4. Firebreak
5. Brush Management



## Top Engineering Accomplishments

- **Completion of the \$2 million Brock Gully Stabilization (RESTORE) project through a federal construction contract, which included working with the design consultant to verify work was completed according to the plans and specifications. NRCS also coordinated with the Grants and Agreements Division and Santa Rosa County to develop a reimbursable agreement with the county to provide funding assistance on the construction of this project.**
- **Coordinated with national headquarters on a variance and developed guidance to allow for above ground/shallow burial of dead animal carcasses under conservation practice standard Emergency Animal Mortality Management, Code 368, to address the large number of dairy cows lost as a result of Hurricane Ian. This was needed because the site conditions did not allow for traditional burial methods at these locations due to a high water table. NRCS also investigated other methods of disposal for this large number of dead cows.**

**Florida's Top 5**  
conservation practices  
for EQIP in FY 2023, by  
order of most used:

### Engineering

1. Watering Facility
2. Livestock Pipeline
3. Heavy Use Area Protection
4. Pumping Plant
5. Water Well

**NRCS engineers assist conservation planners, working side-by-side with landowners, to plan, design and implement conservation practices and systems.**





**The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program responds to emergencies created by natural disasters. This NRCS emergency recovery program is designed to help people and conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.**

**All EWP projects undertaken, with the exception of the purchase of floodplain easements, must be sponsored by a legal subdivision of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, conservation district, or any Native American tribe or tribal organization as defined in Section 4 of the Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act.**

**EWP work can include: removing debris from stream channels, road culverts, and bridges; reshaping and protecting eroded banks; correcting damaged drainage facilities; repairing levees and structures; reseeding damaged areas; and purchasing floodplain easements to restore or enhance the functions of wetlands and riparian areas; conserve natural values including fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flood water retention, ground water recharge, and open space; and safeguard lives and property from floods, drought, and the products of erosion.**



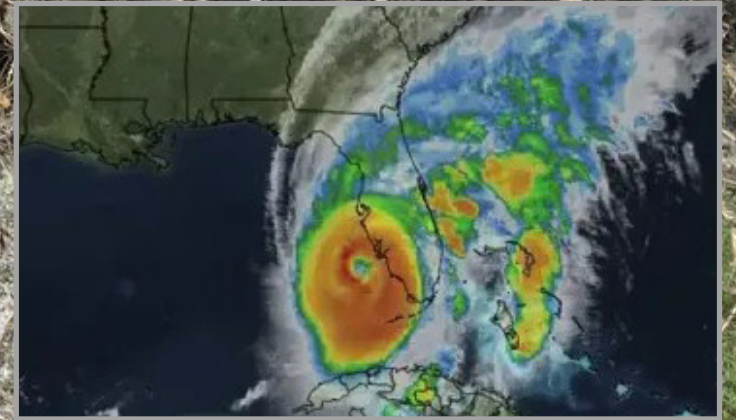
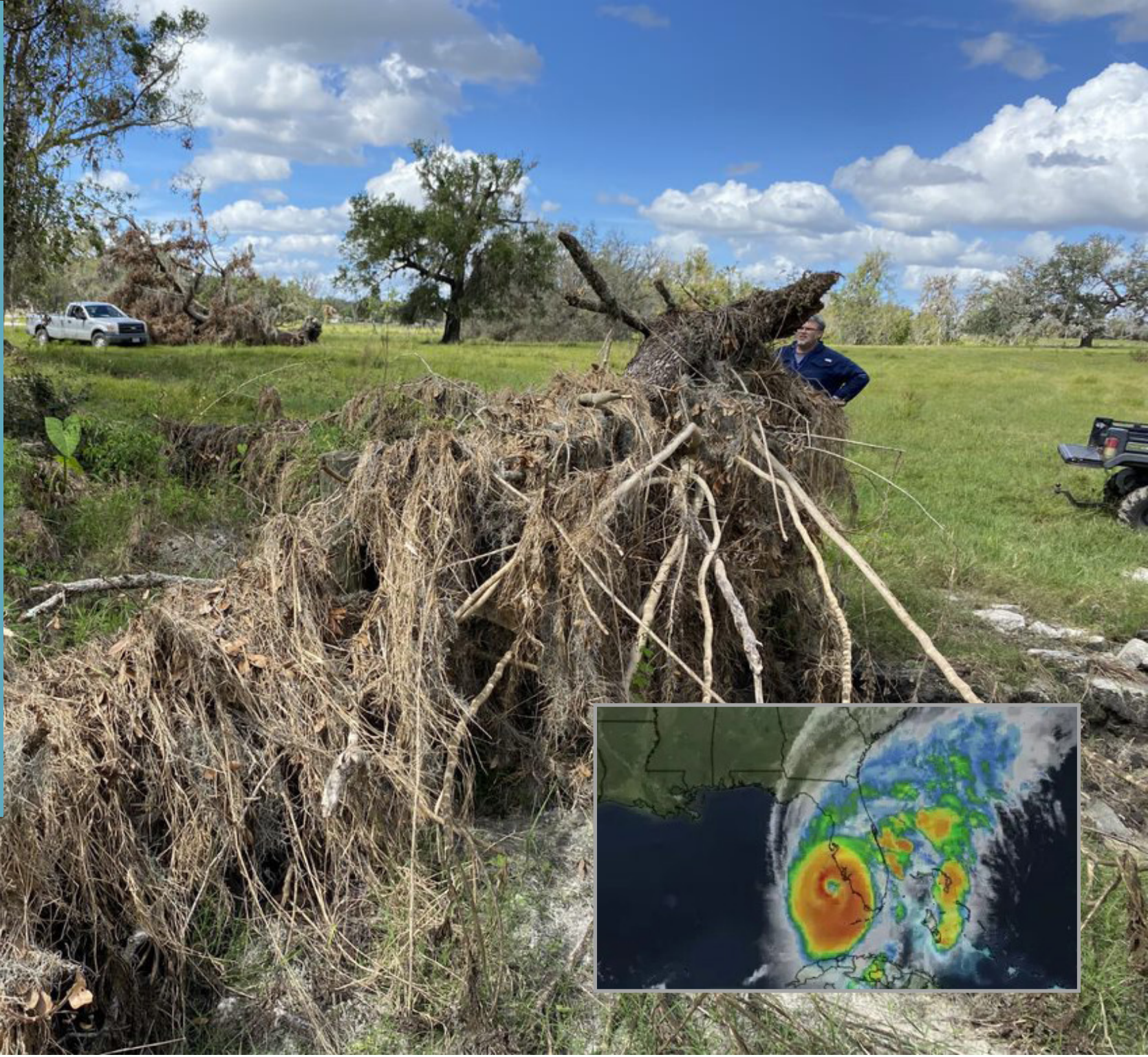


## Emergency Watershed Protection

NRCS funded **19 EWP projects** during FY 2023 in Florida, with 18 sponsors, totaling **\$87,949,740** for debris removal and channel bank stabilization in **12 counties** as a result of Hurricane Ian.



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**H**urricane Ian made landfall early Wednesday afternoon on September 28, 2022, near the Charlotte Harbor area in southwest Florida as a Category 4 storm – nearly a Category 5, with winds of 155 mph. Most of the southwest coast of Florida experienced life-threatening risk from catastrophic storm surges, wind and flooding. The storm moved slowly over the peninsula and lingered over central Florida into the early morning hours of Thursday, September 29, 2022, dumping heavy rains with wind gusts up to 50mph. Hurricane winds extended out 45 miles from the center as it made landfall. The northeast area of the state, near St. John’s River, was also impacted heavily as the storm continued its northeast trajectory across the state.

**Requests for NRCS Assistance:** NRCS received 178 requests for disaster assistance through its state Disaster Hotline and email (through December 13, 2022). Florida NRCS utilized the ACT Now threshold funding process which allows NRCS to approve and obligate a ranked application when it meets or exceeds a threshold ranking score without waiting until a designated batching date. Contracts were obligated as soon as possible with a target date of March 30, 2023.

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

**Emergency Assistance:** NRCS received 424 applications and over 433 site visits were conducted for EQIP Hurricane Ian emergency assistance, with 199 contracts funded for over \$11 million.

**Emergency Watershed Protection:** NRCS funded 19 EWP projects in Florida, with 18 different sponsors, totaling \$87,949,740 for debris removal and channel bank stabilization in 12 counties as a result of Hurricane Ian.



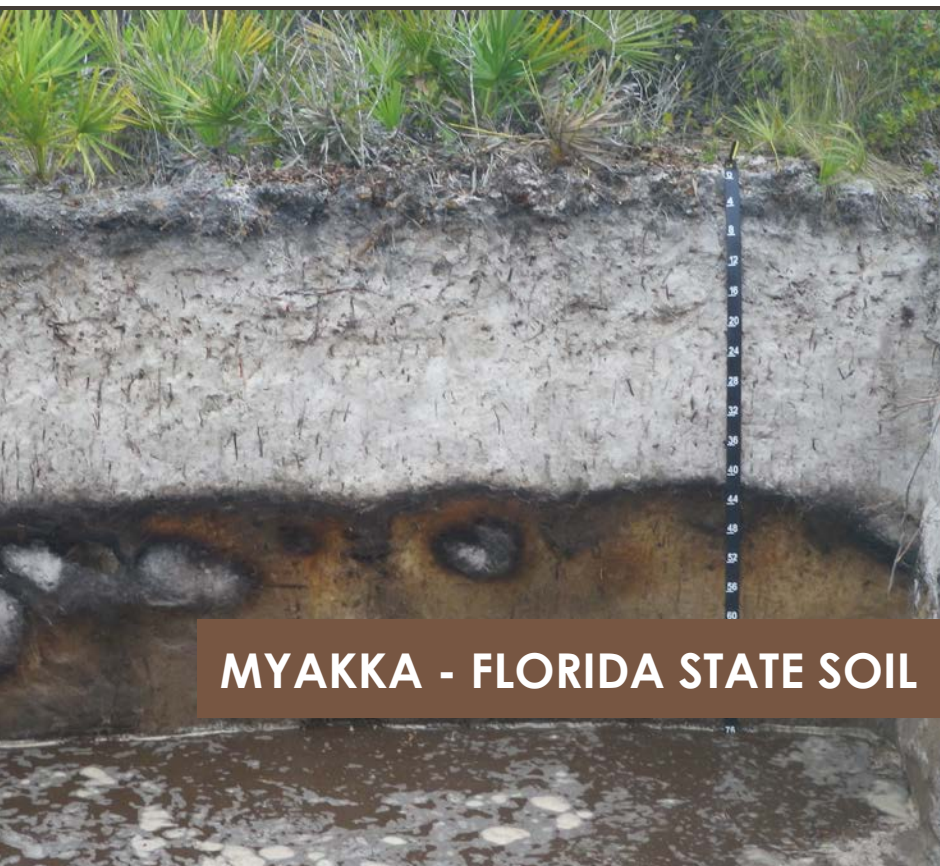




NRCS delivers science based soil information to help farmers, ranchers, foresters, and other land managers effectively manage, conserve and appraise their most valuable investment – the soil. **Florida field staff perform excellent work, collecting valuable data to assess soil change at several study sites, and demonstration plots across the state. This data helps us to better evaluate resource concerns while providing critical information to update our technical guidance and standards.**







**MYAKKA - FLORIDA STATE SOIL**

## Technical Soil Services and Wetland Compliance Natural Resource Inventory (NRI)

- In FY 2023, the Florida NRI program processed 520 segments for Local Data (cropping history) and 40 segments for the Grazing Lands Onsite Data Collection statistical studies.

## Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) Requests

- 123 sites evaluated

## National Food Security Act – Wetland Compliance

- Completed 66 wetland requests
- National template updates for the State Offsite Methods
- One Mitigation Plan agreement
- Three Good Faith Waivers

### Soil Survey

- Big Cypress National Preserve 708,597 acres completed and available on WSS
- 10 new soil series (available in WSS FY24)
- Gadsden County Update (in progress)
- Kandic Soils Study Projects (in progress)

### Ecological Sites Descriptions

- 126 ESDs are being edited in various stages of development for eventual publication

### Technical Soil Services / Collaborations

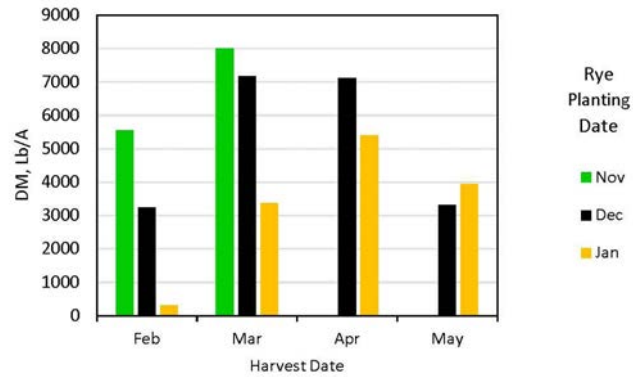
- Longleaf Pine project
- Florida Department of Transportation (FPPA pre-evaluations)
- University of Florida Dynamic Soil Property Projects (initial stage)
- Technical Soil Services: DOH mediations, Envirothons, Land Judgings, and Web Soil Survey Data public calls



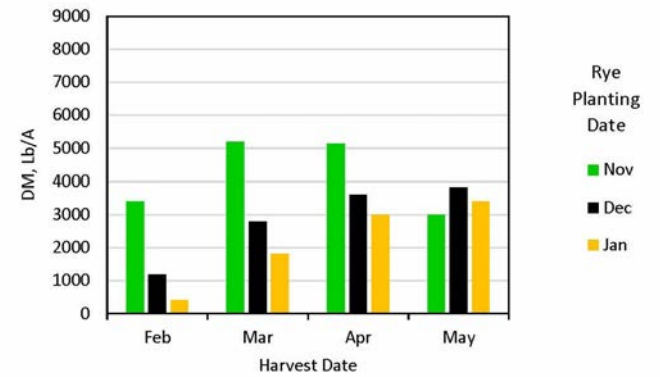


Rye Cover Crop

Date of Planting 3-Year Average FL 401-PMC  
FL401



Date of Planting 3-Year Average Wrens Abruzzi  
Wrens Abruzzi





## NEW COVER CROP STUDY

### *Planting Date Effect on Biomass Production of Cereal Rye Managed as a Cover Crop*

The current planting window for cereal rye, one of the best cover crop species available, runs from October through December, and is based on its use as either forage or grain. NRCS field office staff were concerned that many cotton and peanut producers in the panhandle could not participate in some Farm Bill programs because these commodity crops often are still being harvested in late-December.

To see if a later planting date could be used when grown specifically as a cover crop, early season FL 401 and mid-season Wrens Abruzzi cereal rye cultivars were evaluated in a three-year study at the NRCS Brooksville Plant Materials Center. Both were planted in November, December and January and harvested in February, March, April, and May of each year. Although the average biomass yield for both cultivars was higher with earlier planting dates (see graphs on previous page), on average, the January planted Wrens Abruzzi produced 3,000 lb/acre and FL 401 produced 5000 lb/acre of biomass by April. In the Florida panhandle, the planting season for cotton and peanuts begins in April. This means that either cultivar can be planted as late as mid-January and still meet the requirements of most Cover Crop (CPS 340) purposes.

Current Cover Crop (CPS 340) planting specifications for Florida NRCS are being updated to reflect this new information.





QUARTER	EVENTS	PARTICIPANTS
1 & 2	30	4,175
3	27	3,886
4	23	2,720
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>10,781</b>

Florida NRCS participated in approximately 80 outreach events across the state in FY 2023. About 10,781 participants were reached through active engagement during producer meetings, agricultural tradeshow events, field days, and other partner, local, state, and community outreach events designed to inform farmers, ranchers and the public about NRCS conservation programs, disaster assistance, and employment opportunities.



Scan the QR Code to visit NRCS Florida online:



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<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/florida>

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December 2023