

For Immediate Release

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*Applications must be received by January 7, 2011*

## **USDA-NRCS CONDUCTING STATEWIDE SIGN-UP FOR THE LONGLEAF PINE INITIATIVE UNDER THE WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM**

ATHENS, GA, December 7, 2010—James E. Tillman, Sr., State Conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Georgia today announced that the NRCS has \$5 million available in financial assistance funds to help private landowners manage and restore longleaf pine. Applications for the longleaf pine initiative are due January 7, 2011.

Longleaf pine forests once covered millions of acres throughout the Southeastern United States. Today, only a few thousand acres of this vital habitat remains. “The longleaf pine is one of our key native species; providing a home to hundreds of plant and animal species as well as being a tremendous economic resource,” NRCS Chief Dave White said. “Restoring and expanding this species is only made possible through voluntary partnerships with conservation-minded landowners who share our goal of healthy forests.”

Longleaf pine habitat can contain as many as 300 different species of groundcover plants per acre and approximately 60 percent of the amphibian and reptile species found in the Southeast. Additionally, this forested habitat is home to at least 122 endangered or threatened plant and animal species including the fox squirrel, northern bobwhite quail, red-cockaded woodpecker and gopher tortoise.

“We’ve taken great steps toward conserving longleaf pine forests in Georgia,” said Tillman. “Through this initiative, and the great works of our landowners, we will be able to enhance and protect more of this essential habitat,” he added.

The longleaf pine initiative will incorporate both technical and financial assistance to help landowners improve habitat on agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest and Tribal land.

Nine states are included in the longleaf pine initiative: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia.

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Helping People Help the Land

Eligible counties include the following 116 counties: Appling, Atkinson, Bacon, Baker, Baldwin, Bartow, Ben Hill, Berrien, Bibb, Bleckley, Brantley, Brooks, Bryan, Bulloch, Burke, Calhoun, Camden, Candler, Carroll, Charlton, Chatham, Chattahoochee, Chattooga, Clay, Clayton, Clinch, Cobb, Coffee, Colquitt, Columbia, Cook, Coweta, Crawford, Crisp, Decatur, Dodge, Dooly, Dougherty, Douglas, Early, Echols, Effingham, Emanuel, Evans, Fayette, Floyd, Fulton, Glascock, Glynn, Grady, Hancock, Haralson, Harris, Heard, Houston, Irwin, Jeff Davis, Jefferson, Jenkins, Johnson, Jones, Lamar, Lanier, Laurens, Lee, Liberty, Lincoln, Long, Lowndes, Macon, Marion, McDuffie, McIntosh, Meriwether, Miller, Mitchell, Monroe, Montgomery, Muscogee, Paulding, Peach, Pierce, Pike, Polk, Pulaski, Putnam, Quitman, Randolph, Richmond, Schley, Screven, Seminole, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Tattall, Taylor, Telfair, Terrell, Thomas, Tift, Toombs, Treutlen, Troup, Turner, Twiggs, Upson, Ware, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wheeler, Wilcox, Wilkinson and Worth. These counties are eligible due to the fact that they are in the historical range of the longleaf pine.

The following 43 counties are not eligible as they are not part of the historical range of longleaf pine: Banks, Barrow, Butts, Catoosa, Cherokee, Clarke, Dade, Dawson, DeKalb, Elbert, Fannin, Forsyth, Franklin, Gilmer, Gordon, Greene, Gwinnett, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Henry, Jackson, Jasper, Lumpkin, Madison, Morgan, Murray, Newton, Pickens, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Rabun, Rockdale, Spalding, Stephens, Taliaferro, Towns, Union, Walker, Walton, White, Whitfield and Wilkes.

Approved participants will receive financial assistance for implementing conservation practices including planting longleaf pine, installing firebreaks, conducting prescribed burning and controlling invasive plants.

Additional information on the Longleaf Pine Initiative, NRCS and our programs is available on our Website at [www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov) or at your local USDA NRCS office.

NRCS is USDA's lead conservation agency and has worked hand-in-hand with farmers and landowners for 75 years to conserve natural resources on private lands. Georgia landowners can learn more about conserving natural resources by contacting NRCS Georgia through USDA Service Centers or by visiting the NRCS Georgia homepage at [www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov).