



Cumberland Plateau Strategic Planning

Chase Coakley, Area Resource Biologist

USDA-NRCS

Cookeville, TN

What is it?

- Overview of opportunities and initiatives with common goals that...

Strengthen collaboration between partners while identifying opportunities to leverage resources that strategically deliver conservation.





Cumberland Plateau PFW Focal Area Coordination Meeting

Aug. 9, 2023



Mission Alignment



PFW - Working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats

TWRA - Preserve, conserve, manage, protect, and enhance the fish and wildlife of the state and their habitats

TACD – Conserve and Enhance the Natural Resources of TN

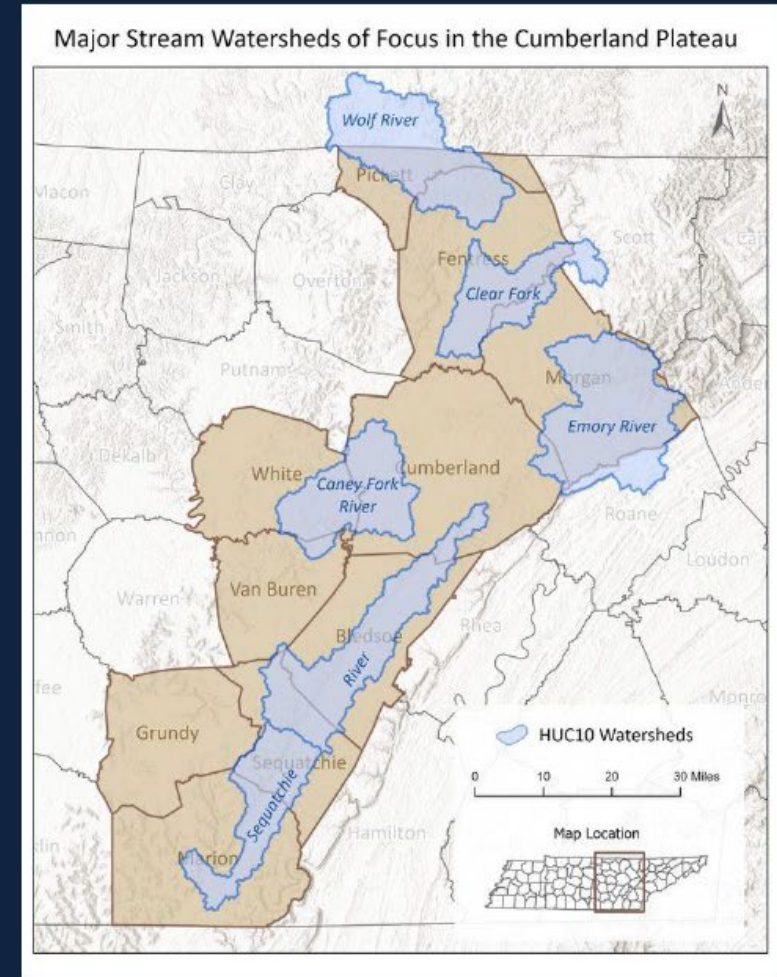
NRCS – Delivery of Conservation Solutions so that agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world

TDA - Serve, support, and promote agricultural

TNAQI – To inspire wonder, appreciation, and protection of water and all life that it sustains

PFW Strategic Planning

- **2022-2026 National, Regional, and State Priorities**
 - Species Conservation
 - Habitat Connectivity
 - Resilient Ecosystems



Natural Resources Conservation Service

TENNESSEE



For Immediate Release

August 12, 2022

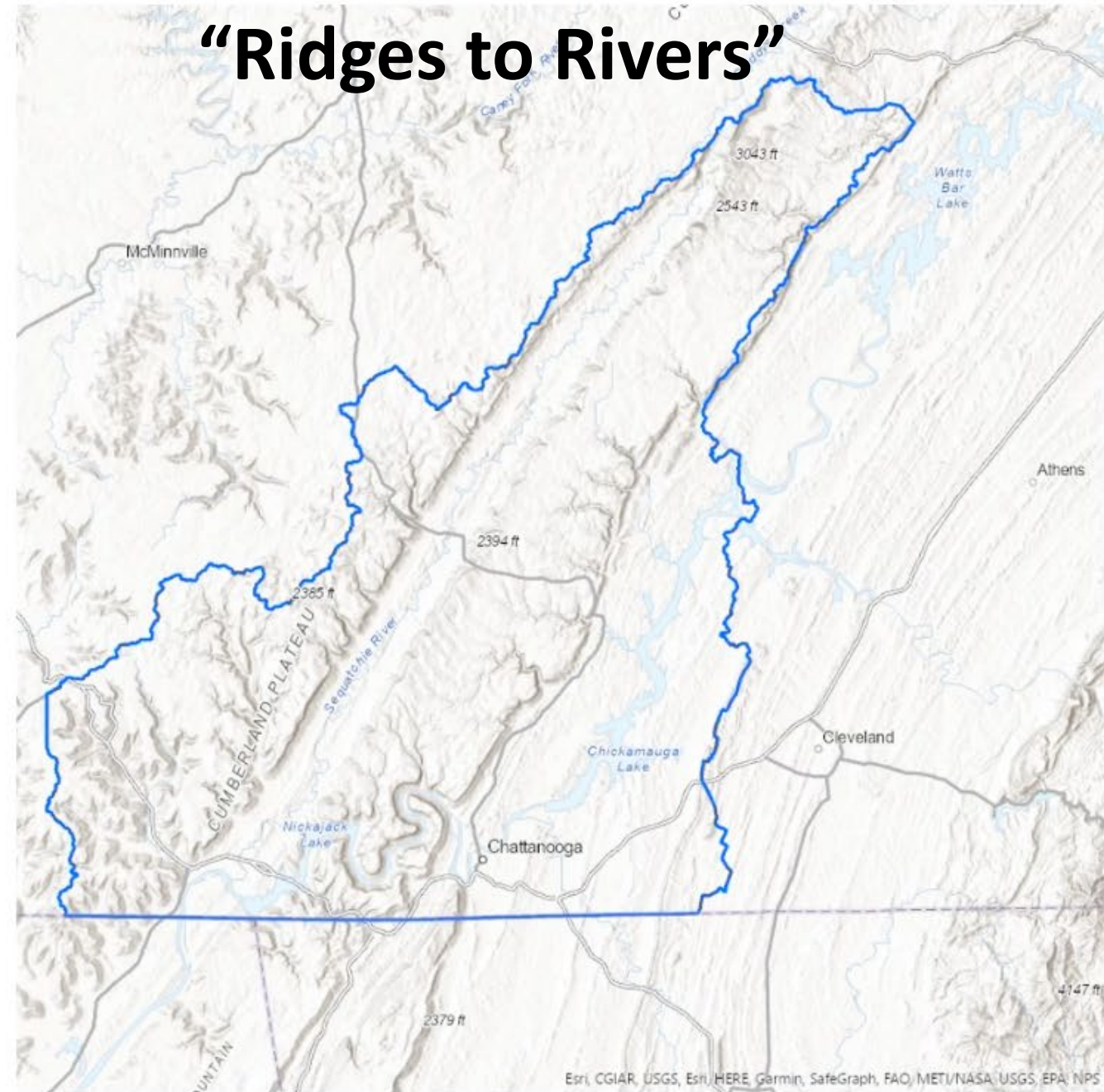
Tennessee conservation project receives \$10 million of \$197 million USDA RCPP investments

NASHVILLE, Aug. 12, 2022 – The Ridges to Rivers conservation project in Tennessee will receive \$10 million as part of USDA's announcement today to award \$197 million for 41 local-led conservation projects through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which is a partner-driven program that leverages partner resources to advance innovative projects that address climate change, enhance water quality, and address other critical challenges on agricultural land.

The Ridges to Rivers partnership, with more than 15 contributing partners, plans to work with producers and landowners in a seven-county area in the Tennessee River Basin to improve water quality and aid the recovery of imperiled aquatic species. The project area is home to five threatened or endangered species, including the Laurel Dace, known only from headwater streams in the project area. A mix of land management practices and conservation easements will be used to restore degraded habitats and protect parcels critical to stream health. Partner contributions will lead to extensive producer and landowner outreach and the development and use of sophisticated geospatial tools to help target project activities.

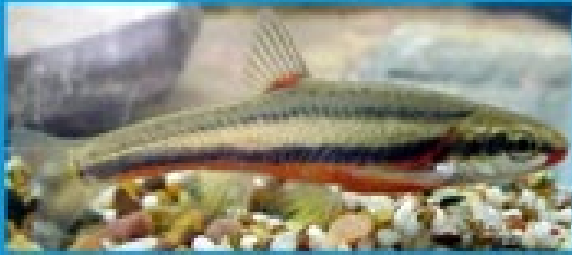
GEOGRAPHIC AREA

- Cumberland Plateau
- Sequatchie River Valley
 - Cumberland County
 - Bledsoe County
 - Sequatchie County
 - Marion County
 - Rhea County
 - Hamilton County



CRITICAL HABITAT – THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

- Laurel Dace – Cumberland Plateau

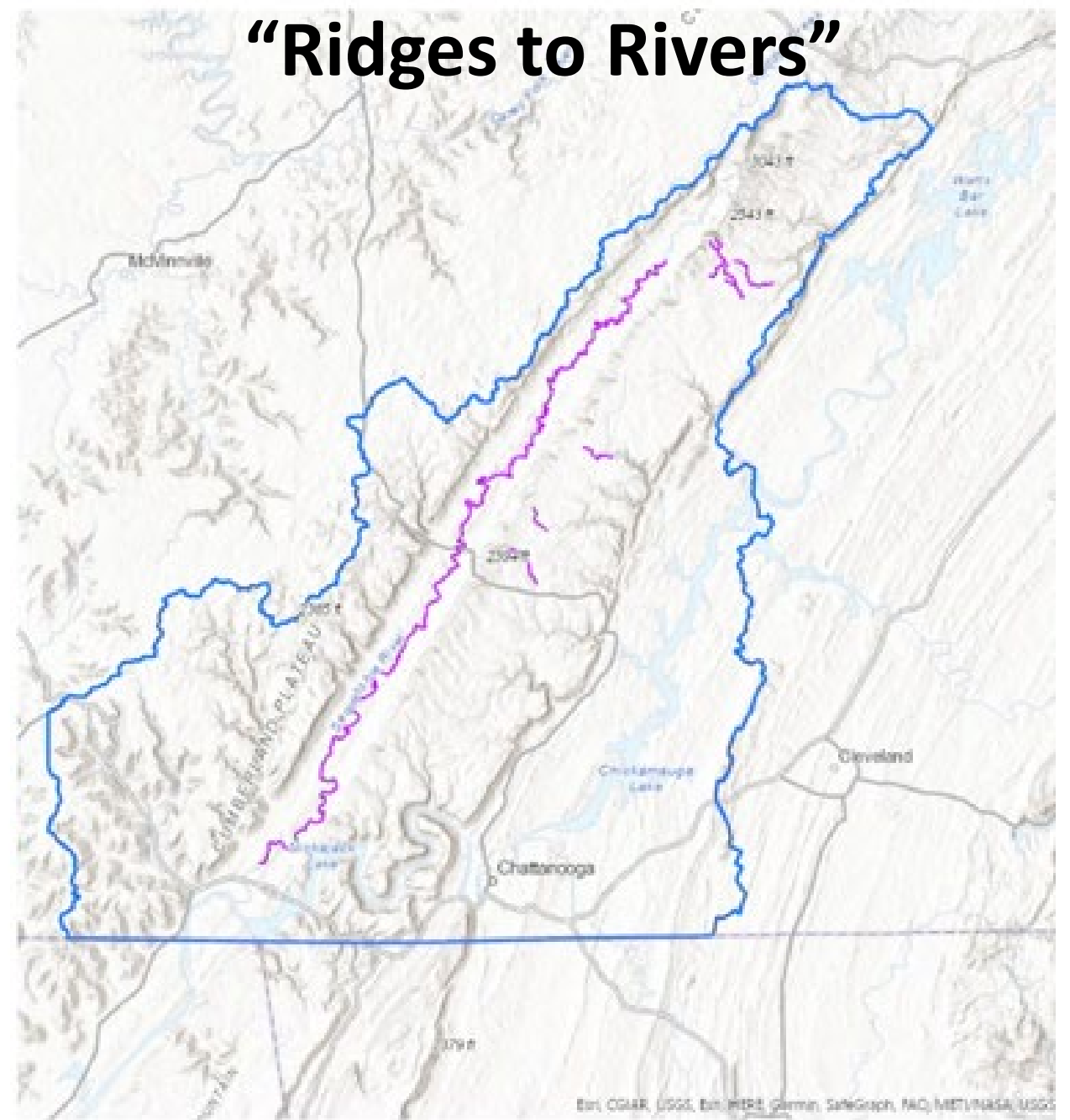


- Slabside Pearly Mussel – Sequatchie River



Slabside Pearlymussel

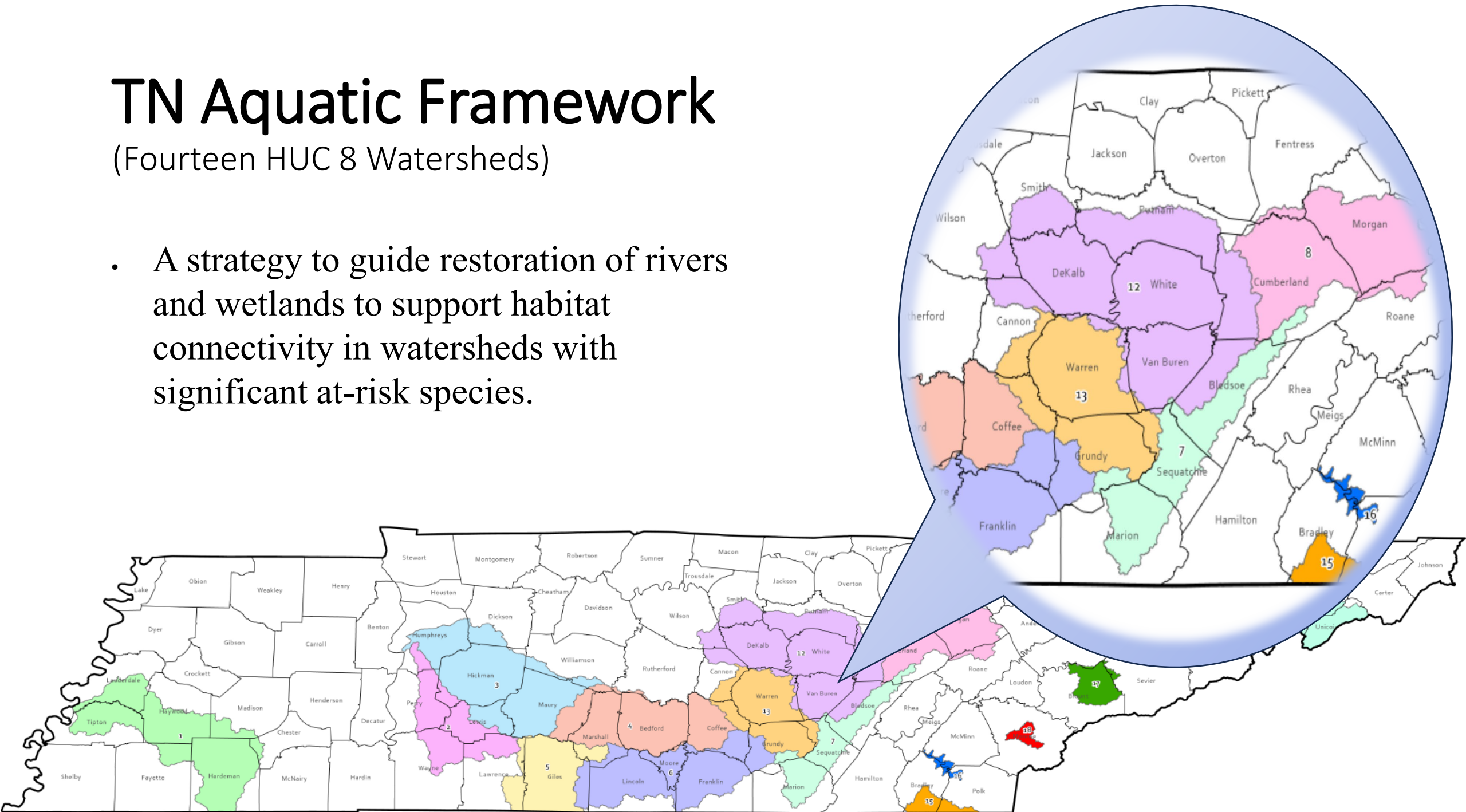
“Ridges to Rivers”



TN Aquatic Framework

(Fourteen HUC 8 Watersheds)

- A strategy to guide restoration of rivers and wetlands to support habitat connectivity in watersheds with significant at-risk species.

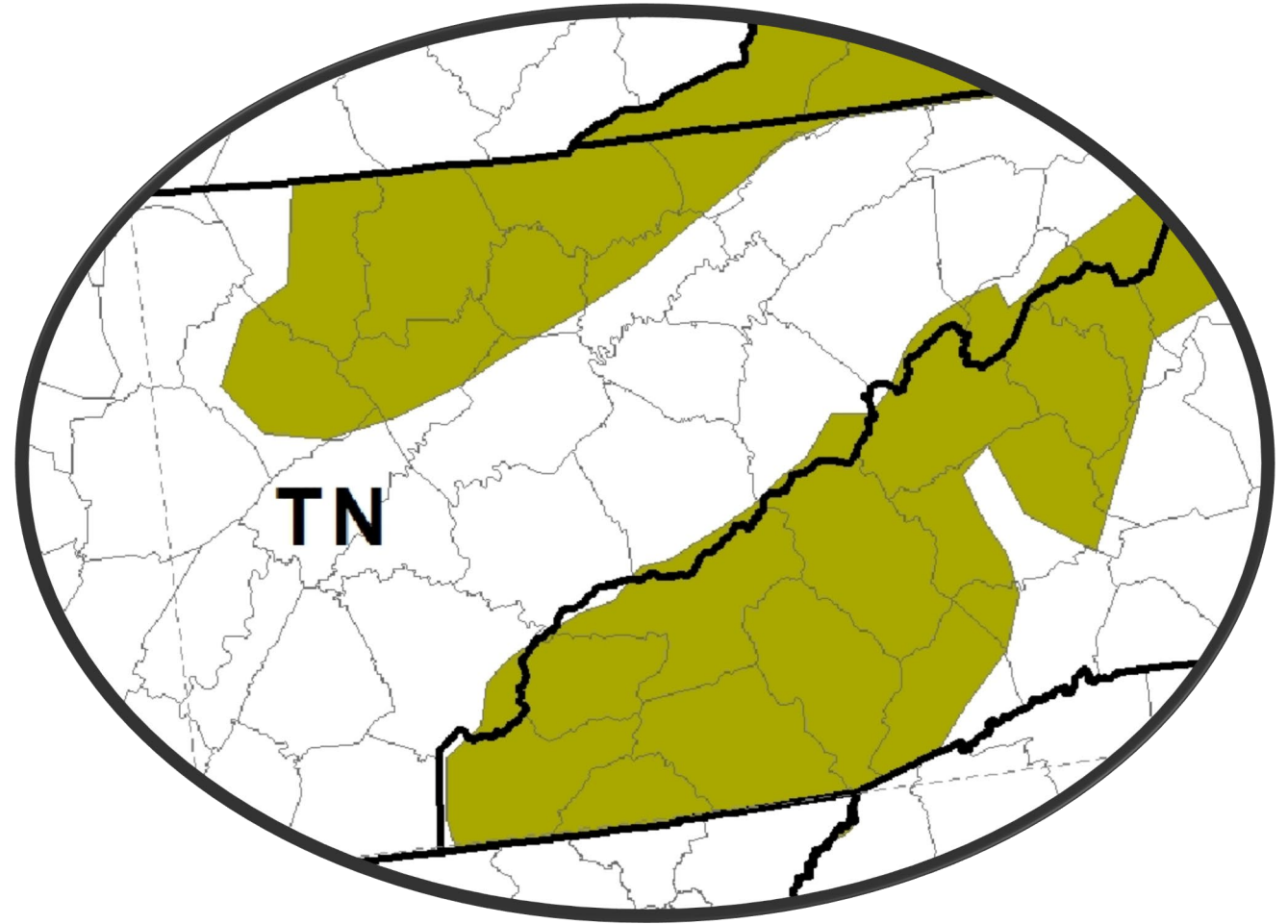


Aquatic focused WLFW species will be reorganized into an Aquatic Framework and expanded into other priority watersheds.

- **Landscape Scale** – Provides an effective and efficient mechanism to target conservation actions across large geographies while supporting locally led conservation.
- **Enhanced Partnerships** - Elevates the importance of conservation planning and prioritizes added technical capacity through streamlined partnership opportunities at national/state/local levels.
- **ESA Predictability** - Credits voluntary conservation actions in Endangered Species Act regulatory decisions and provides increased regulatory predictability for producers across USDA conservation programs that supports economic stability.
- **Program Alignment** - Allows for better local and national alignment of USDA conservation program participation opportunities locally to maximize opportunities to address multiple resource concerns.



- **Potentially a New Framework**
- **“Eastern Deciduous Forest”**: A strategy to achieve forest health and habitat restoration that benefits declining wildlife dependent on young forests.



WLFW Golden
Winged Warbler

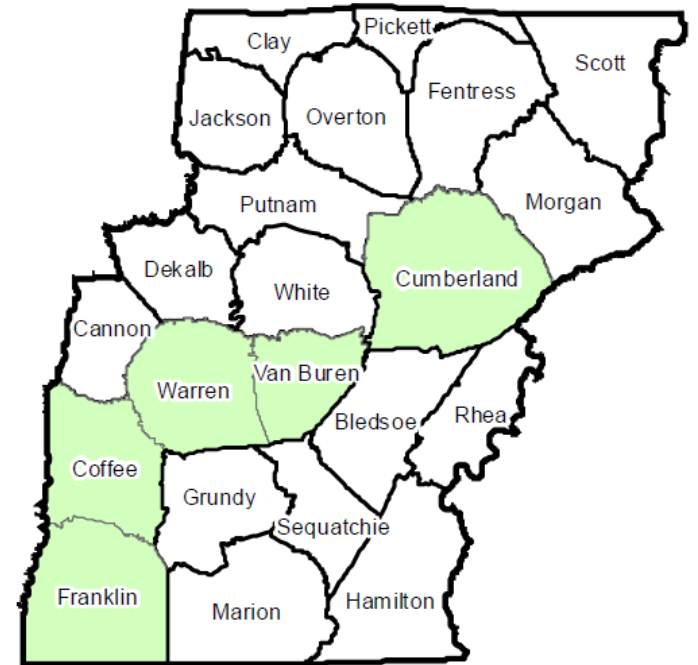
NORTHERN BOBWHITE, GRASSLANDS, AND SAVANNAS

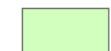


Major threats include:

- 1) **Habitat loss and fragmentation**
- 2) **Climate change**
- 3) **Alterations to natural land disturbance regimes**
- 4) **Invasive species**

Cumberland Plateau



 WLFW Target Counties



NFWF

Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund

NFWF CONTACTS

Jonathan Scott
Program Director
Southern Forests
jonathan.scott@nfwf.org
202-595-2609

Zachary Bernstein
Program Manager
Southern Region
zachary.bernstein@nfwf.org
202-595-2433

PARTNERS

- USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- International Paper
- Altria Group



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Restore and enhance shortleaf pine and oak savanna forests on public and private lands
- Restore and enhance riparian forests and freshwater habitat
- Increase populations of forest and grassland birds, as well as fish, amphibians and other aquatic species
- Engage private landowners through outreach, training and technical assistance activities that contribute to the restoration and enhancement of habitats and wildlife, and supports working forests by demonstrating their environmental and socioeconomic benefits

Grant Slate

(by year)

Increasing Forest and Grassland Habitat Management with a Habitat Specialist Crew (TN)

Grantee: Pheasants Forever

Grant Amount: \$591,400

Matching Funds: \$352,700

Total Project Amount: \$944,100

Increase landowner technical assistance in the Cumberland Plateau region of Tennessee to restore and enhance more than 1,600 acres of shortleaf pine woodland and savanna habitat. Project will deploy a habitat specialist crew to implement prescribed burns and timber stand improvement treatments, remove invasive species, and plant shortleaf pine and oak seedlings, benefiting northern bobwhite, prairie warbler and other woodland and savanna-dependent species.

Removing Fish Passage Barriers and Improving Water Quality on the Cumberland Plateau (TN)

Grantee: Tennessee Aquarium

Grant Amount: \$265,700

Matching Funds: \$137,000

Total Project Amount: \$402,700

Improve water quality and in-stream habitat connectivity on private lands in Bledsoe, Rhea, and Sequatchie counties, Tennessee. Project will engage 150 landowners to implement conservation practices on 200 acres of cropland to reduce erosion and improve water quality, replace a failing culvert to improve habitat connectivity within 12 miles of stream and monitor the response of the endangered Laurel dace and other at-risk fish species to stream habitat and water quality improvements.

MULTIPLE STATES

Restore Shortleaf Pine Forest and Grassland Ecosystems on Private Lands (AL, TN)

Grantee: Pheasants Forever

Grant Amount: \$275,600

Matching Funds: \$275,600

Total Project Amount: \$551,200

Increase landowner outreach and technical assistance, including engagement of historically under served landowners, in the Cumberland Plateau region to accelerate the adoption of Farm Bill programs and practices to restore shortleaf pine and other woodland and savanna ecosystems. Project will restore 1,100 acres of habitat through prescribed fire, forest thinning and invasive species removal, benefiting northern bobwhite, Bachman's sparrow, and other forest and grassland dependent species.

Restoring Abandoned and Legacy Mine Lands in the Cumberland River Basin (KY, TN)

Grantee: Cumberland River Compact

Grant Amount: \$194,300

Matching Funds: \$273,700

Total Project Amount: \$468,000

Engage private landowners to restore forest habitat on former coal mine sites within the Cumberland River Basin in Kentucky and Tennessee. Project will implement restoration practices

developed by the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, resulting in at least 100 acres of restored riparian forest buffers, improved stream habitat, and the establishment of bird and pollinator habitats.

Southern Cumberlands Shortleaf Pine Seed and Seedling Initiative (AL, GA, TN)

Grantee: Paint Rock Forest Research Center

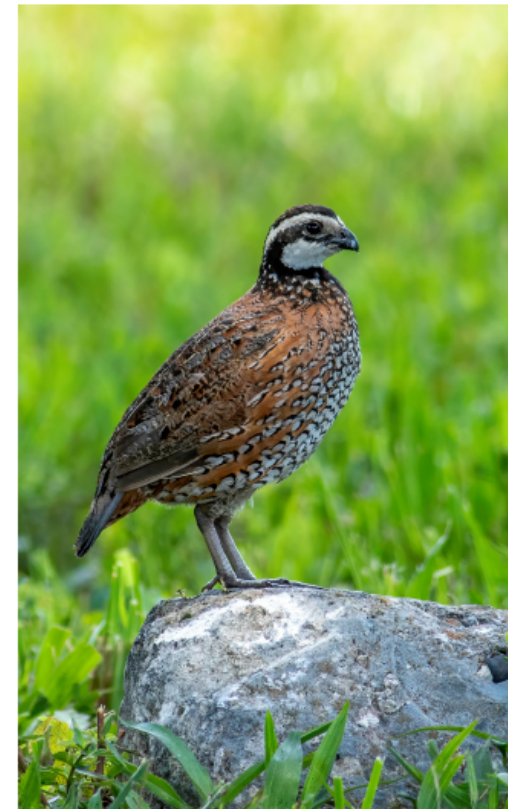
Grant Amount: \$266,900

Matching Funds: \$103,000

Total Project Amount: \$369,900

Address the lack of genetically appropriate shortleaf pine seed and seedling resources for reforestation efforts in the Southern Cumberland Plateau region of Alabama and Tennessee.

Project will identify appropriate seed sources; collect seeds to support three years of propagation; process seeds and select appropriate nurseries for propagation; produce over 75,000 seedlings ready for distribution to planting projects in the second year of the grant; and develop plans for a permanent seed orchard.



Northern bobwhite

Questions ?

Chase Coakley, Area Resource
Biologist

chase.coakley@usda.gov

615-295-6114

