USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Longleaf Pine Initiative

Conservation Beyond Boundaries

LLPI

Overview
Longleaf pine forests represent some of the world's most unique biologically diverse ecosystems. At the beginning of European settlement, longleaf pine forests covered more than 90 million acres. But their range has been reduced by 96 percent.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) established the Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) in fiscal year 2010 to support America's Longleaf Pine Restoration Initiative (ALRI) goals of restoring and maintaining this unique ecosystem.

Priorities
The ALRI's goals are to protect, restore or enhance an additional 4.6 million acres of longleaf pine ecosystems in the natural longleaf pine range by 2025.

NRCS has identified a longleaf range for the nine participating States to target restoration efforts on private lands with assistance from local, state, and federal partners.

Funding
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Results
NRCS invested $11.8 million in fiscal year 2014 to fund nearly 900 contracts covering nearly 64,000 acres in the nine states home to longleaf forests. During the past five years, NRCS has invested $48 million to help plant and restore 260,000 acres of forests.

The initiative has also supported efforts to increase prescribed fire in the longleaf range through an agreement with North Carolina State University to help develop the Comprehensive Strategy for Prescribed Fire Project. NRCS contributed $33,000 to the project that provides training opportunities for forest landowners and forest consultants to encourage and increase prescribe burning in the region. The Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Department of Defense also committed funds to the project.

To support ALRI, NRCS set a goal that 50 percent of restoration activities take place in priority areas. The states met the goal with 49,000 acres of the year's 64,000 acres taking place in priority counties.

In partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, NRCS contributed to the Longleaf Stewardship Fund, awarding 15 grants totaling $3.8 million for projects in the longleaf pine range that will restore 11,800 acres and improve more than 116,000 acres of longleaf pine habitat.

NRCS worked with private landowners to restore and enhance 64,000 acres of longlaf forests in fiscal year 2014.

2014 Progress Report

Helping People Help the Land

NRCS and Partners Exceed Goals in Priority Areas for Fiscal Year 2014

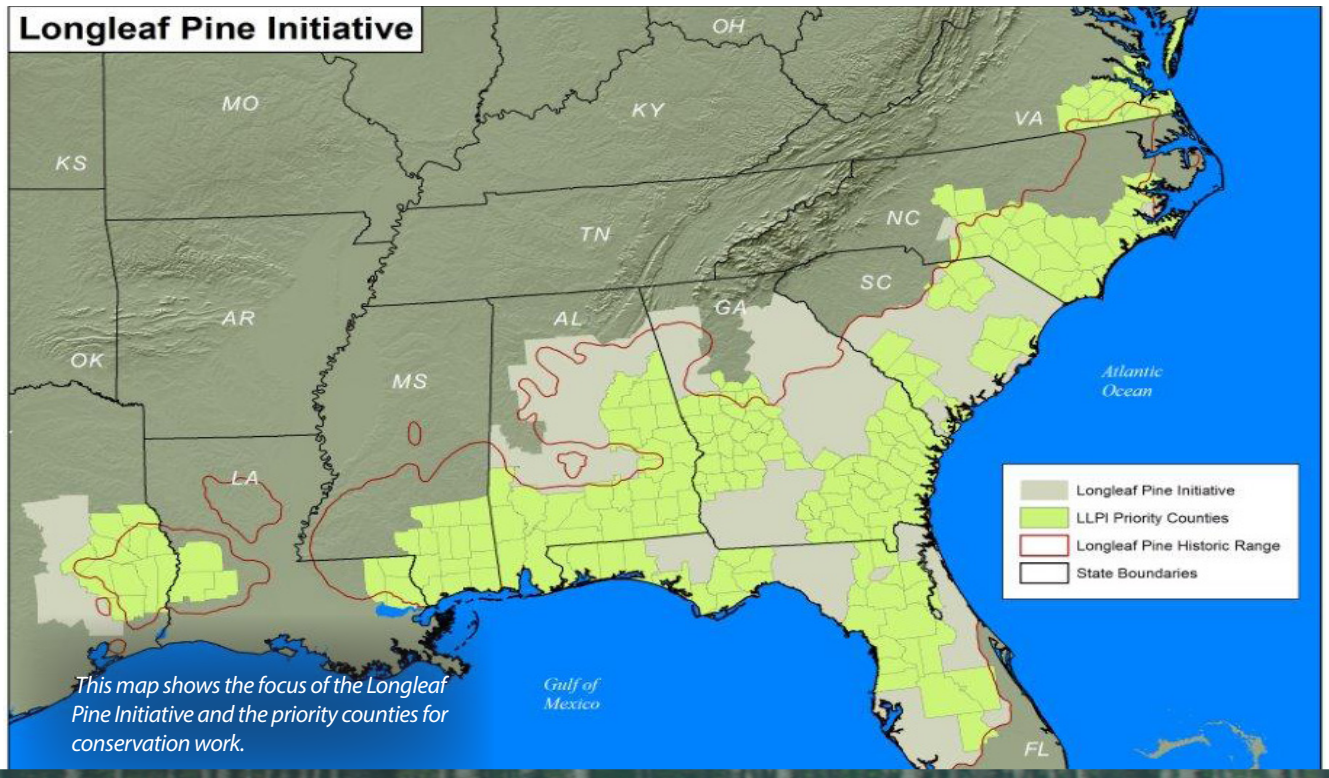
NRCS worked with landowners in fiscal year 2014 to target conservation activities in priority areas in the Southeast, meeting a goal the agency established the previous year. NRCS set a goal for half of the agency's restoration efforts to take place in priority counties.

NRCS designates priority counties as particular focus areas for restoring longleaf pine ecosystems because of their value in connecting existing longleaf landscapes, providing better habitat and generating more environmental benefits, like cleaner air and water, because of the forests' larger footprints. These are usually located in the vicinity of a military installation, a national forest, national wildlife refuge, state forest or heritage reserve.

NRCS aided forest landowners in restoring 64,000 acres across the range, including 49,000 acres of restored forests in priority counties. Plus, of the $11.8 million invested in fiscal 2014, more than 73 percent of those funds supported conservation efforts in priority counties.

Simon Winston of Winston 8 Ranch of Nacogdoches, Texas, was one of the forest landowners who restored longleaf forests in a priority area. His county, Nacogdoches County, is designed a high priority county because of its proximity to the Angelina National Forest.

"We're just trying to make better conservation and do what's right," said Winston, who restored more than 150 acres of longleaf forests. "That's what we do every day. It's naturally what we do."



This map shows the focus of the Longleaf Pine Initiative and the priority counties for conservation work.

Feature Story

2014: A Year for Longleaf

2014 was a big year for restoration efforts of America's longleaf pine forests. America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI) marked its five-year anniversary, and partners, including NRCS, restored and enhanced 1.59 million acres of forests in fiscal year 2014 with much of the work occurring in priority areas.

Through ALRI, conservation groups including NRCS and its partners like the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Longleaf Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others have aided in the rebirth of the native forest.

After halting the decline of this ecosystem, the partners recognized their efforts were making a difference. In July 2014, the partnership marked its fifth anniversary with a major celebration in Washington, D.C.

"Conserving America's longleaf forests is a team effort," said Robert Bonnie, USDA's Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment. "We are proud of the many restoration efforts on public and private lands, and we encourage landowners and land managers to take advantage of USDA conservation programs that assist in planting and managing these forests."

Through ALRI, these groups help plant trees, carry out prescribed burning, control invasive species, establish native understory plants, and acquire land for easements.

More than 75 percent of restoration work in fiscal year 2014 occurred within the 18 designated significant geographic areas. Significant geographic areas are those optimal for focusing resources, expertise, partners and to conserve longleaf pine ecosystems. Similarly, NRCS targets priority areas for its conservation activities. Public lands accounted for 1.25 million acres of longleaf restoration work in 2014. National forests and military installations were major contributors to these totals.

2014 also saw the birth of a new Farm Bill program, which will help focus funds to longleaf restoration. The new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) dedicates 35 percent of its funding to eight critical conservation areas, including the longleaf pine range. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the designation in May 2014. With this designation, RCPP will provide additional funding opportunities for the partners to continue to work with private landowners to increase restoration activities throughout the longleaf pine range.

"Designating the longleaf pine range as a critical conservation area brings focus to the importance of the longleaf ecosystem," said Dr. William Puckett, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist for Alabama. "Restoration efforts will not only impact wildlife sustainability across the range, they will support the South's economy and the timber industry job market."

Fiscal Year 2014 Longleaf Pine Initiative
NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) and Active and Completed Contracts

	Contracts	Acres	Obligations
Alabama	277	23,166	$3,440,680
Florida	75	5,006	$884,041
Georgia	306	16,522	$3,694,400
Louisiana	11	1,582	$271,432
Mississippi	35	3,113	$868,597
North Carolina	66	7,436	$837,057
South Carolina	90	5,620	$1,593,272
Texas	4	688	$174,461
Virginia	8	403	$80,072
Total	**872**	**63,536**	**$11,844,012**

Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, January 2015.

For more information, visit: nrcs.usda.gov/initiatives

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