

## Western Arkansas Woodland Restoration

### The Partners

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Arkansas Conservation partners expected to provide guidance and promote this initiative include: Ouachita National Forest, Ozark-St. Francis National Forests, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Arkansas Forestry Commission, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, National Wild Turkey Federation, The Nature Conservancy, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, consulting foresters and biologists, Central Hardwood Joint Venture, Central Arkansas Water, and the 27 partners in the Ouachita Mountains Shortleaf-Bluestem Alliance for the Ouachita Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (CFLR) and the Ozark Highlands CFLR.



### The Project

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The forests and woodlands in the area provide significant ecosystem service benefits for society. However, the effects of land-use conversion and fragmentation, development pressures, changes in species emphasis and stand structure, invasive species, as well as exclusion of the historical fire regime, are reducing those services significantly. The vast majority of forestlands in the region are privately owned. As most private forest landowners (<10%) in the area do not have a Forest Management Plan and do not actively manage their forest land, additional incentives are needed to convince these private landowners to undertake forest management practices to restore their forest land to a more healthy and vigorous woodland condition.



Benefits will include reduced risk of catastrophic wild fire, improved water quality (especially in watersheds with drinking water supply), improved water quantity, and recovery of at risk wildlife and plant species with an estimated 700 new conservation practices implemented on approximately 22,000 acres. Complementary habitat and watershed restoration efforts are also proposed on the Federal

lands within the project area. The Ouachita National Forest will implement a series of activities that will improve water quality for the federally listed species, including the Arkansas fat mucket (T), rabbitsfoot (T) and spectaclecase (E) mussels by reducing sedimentation. This work will also help restore shortleaf pine – bluestem grass forest communities and reduce wildfire threats in the process. Activities will include improvement, obliteration, closure, or relocation of roads and off-highway vehicle trails. Restoration activities also include non-native invasive species control, prescribed burns, native warm season grass seeding, native cane planting, and woody species control. The Ozark-St. Francis National Forest will continue and accelerate efforts to restore habitat for the endangered Indiana Bat. Through this partnership, 10,000 acres of glades and woodlands will be restored through non-native invasive species control, prescribed burns, native warm season grass seeding, native cane planting, and woody species control.

### **The Benefits of Additional Resources**

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Additional resources will lead directly to additional conservation on private lands and public lands. NRCS anticipates doubling the conservation activity on private lands in the project area over the next three years. Woodland restoration in the Sylamore Ranger District of the Ozark and St. Francis National Forests will improve 10,000 acres of habitat used by the Indiana bat and other wildlife species. Watershed restoration activities on the Ouachita National Forest, including improvement, obliteration, closure, or relocation of roads and off-highway vehicle trails, will reduce sedimentation and improve water quality for three federally listed species of mussels. Improvements to water quality and increases to water quantity will help protect the 464 active public water sources in the project area. Finally, economic development opportunities for 14 of the chronically impoverished counties under the NRCS StrikeForce Initiative will be enhanced.



### **The Measure of Success**

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The measures of success for this project will be woodland ecosystems restoration, reduction of fuel load and risk of catastrophic wild fire, enhanced wildlife habitat and help for endangered species, and employment opportunities created in chronically impoverished counties. This project will also serve to strengthen collaboration with local conservation partners and demonstrate the effectiveness of an All Lands approach to improving forest health and resilience as supported by sister USDA agencies.

