

# Bringing Longleaf Pine Forests Back to Alabama through Longleaf Initiative

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**L**ongleaf pine forests once covered millions of acres throughout the Southeastern United States. Today, only a few thousand acres of this vital habitat remains. To help sustain, enhance, and restore longleaf pine forests, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Dave White announced the availability of more than \$12 million to help private landowners in nine states restore and manage longleaf pine.

“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,” 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, red-cockaded woodpecker, and gopher tortoise.

“We’ve taken great steps toward conserving longleaf pine forests in Alabama,” said Dr. William Puckett, NRCS State Conservationist. “Through this initiative, and the great work of our landowners, we will be able to enhance and protect more of this essential habitat.”

The Longleaf Pine Initiative will incorporate both technical and financial assistance providing \$2.5 million to help landowners in Alabama improve habitat on agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest, and tribal lands. This is a substantial increase from Fiscal Year 2010 when \$1.1 million in financial assistance was provided through this program to restore longleaf on 6,000 acres.

Approved participants will receive financial assistance for implementing conservation practices including planting longleaf pine, installing firebreaks, conducting prescribed burning, and controlling invasive plants. The NRCS will advertise the appropriate sign-up dates for the 2012 program year which usually occurs in the fall. 🌲

