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# News Release

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## **USDA Announces \$50 Million to Help Alabama Ag Producers Restore Wildlife Habitat**

*Gopher Tortoise Part of Innovative Private Land Conservation to Benefit Agriculture and  
Wildlife*

**AUBURN, Dec. 14, 2015** – USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service is making available about \$50 million this year in financial assistance to partner with agricultural producers who want to restore and protect habitat for seven focus species, including the [gopher tortoise](#). Conservation efforts for the gopher tortoise are part of Working Lands for Wildlife, an innovative partnership that supports struggling landscapes and strengthens agricultural operations.

“The decisions of agricultural producers can have significant impacts on wildlife,” said Ben Malone, NRCS State Conservationist in Alabama. “By managing land with the gopher tortoise and other wildlife in mind, producers can benefit entire populations while also strengthening their agricultural operations

This year, NRCS will invest about \$3.7 million on habitat restoration for the gopher tortoise, the keystone species of longleaf pine forests in the Southeast. The tortoise, known for its deep burrows, is listed as threatened in the western part of its range under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Since 2012, NRCS has worked with land managers to make conservation improvements to more than 278,000 acres of pine forests, benefiting the gopher tortoise and many other species.

“Working Lands for Wildlife helps land managers integrate wildlife-friendly measures into their working lands and also ensures they can keep those lands working,” Malone said.

The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Alabama has targeted portions of the Gulf Coast to focus on protecting and improving gopher tortoise habitat. One area, in particular, is demonstrating strong support for gopher tortoise protection.

**-More-**

Forest landowners [Bob and Carol Pittman](#) have made it their mission and the focus of their conservation plan to enhance gopher tortoise habitat on 85 acres of their property. They use conservation practices like prescribed burning, installation of fire breaks and weed control to encourage the growth of longleaf pine trees and the native understory that make up the longleaf ecosystem.

Since 2012, NRCS Alabama has invested \$1.8 million in financial assistance to improve more than 50,000 acres of gopher tortoise habitat in Mobile County. To learn more about technical and financial assistance is available through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), visit your [local USDA service center](#).

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