



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**

3381 Skyway Drive
Auburn, Alabama 36830
Voice: 334-887-4581
Email: Amelia.hines@ga.usda.gov
Web: <http://www.al.nrcs.usda.gov>

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Contact:
Amelia.Hines, (334) 887-4581
Amelia.Hines@ga.usda.gov

USDA selects Coastal Headwaters project for new, innovative program

Auburn, AL, Jan. 22, 2015 – USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist, Dr. William Puckett, today announced that a regional high-impact longleaf pine conservation project is one of 115 nationwide projects awarded NRCS funding as part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The RCPP awards totaled \$370 million for projects in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, leveraged with an estimated \$400 million more in partner contributions. RCPP’s historic focus on public-private partnership enables private companies, local communities and other non-government partners a way to invest in efforts to keep our land resilient and water clean, and promote tremendous economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism and outdoor recreation, and other industries.

This year’s projects in Alabama will accomplish a wide diversity of agricultural and natural resource goals from helping to protect important water supplies in targeted watersheds statewide to providing essential habitat for many at-risk species along the Gulf Coast. Alabama will be involved in three projects totaling nearly \$11 million.

“RCPP puts our partners in the driver’s seat,” said Dr. William E. Puckett, USDA’S Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist in Alabama. “Projects are led locally, and demonstrate the value of strong public-private partnerships that deliver solutions to tough natural resource challenges. The Coastal Headwaters project is a phenomenal example of this partnership approach for conservation that will leave an impact on the entire Gulf ecosystem.”

The Conservation Fund and its partner Resource Management Services, LLC will lead the \$5 million Coastal Headwaters project that launched a historic partnership to create a 205,000-acre sustainable working forest comprised of native longleaf pine in the lower Alabama and Florida panhandle region. As part of [America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative](#)—a collaborative, public-private effort to restore the threatened longleaf ecosystems across 8 million acres by 2020 —partners plan to establish the first large landscape-level model for reestablishing and conserving longleaf habitat on privately-owned land, which will have the dual benefit of providing environmental and economic benefits.

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“The Coastal Headwaters Forest is truly a flagship endeavor not only for us but also for the entire longleaf coalition that is diligently working to reverse the trend of longleaf pine loss across the Coastal Plain region,” said Andrew Schock, Alabama & Georgia State Director for The Conservation Fund.

More than [600 pre-proposals](#) were submitted for RCPP nationwide in 2014. Of those, more than 200 were invited to submit full proposals. “With so many strong project proposals, the project selection process was extremely competitive. RCPP is a 5-year \$1.2 billion USDA commitment; projects not selected in this first year may be eligible in subsequent years,” Puckett said.

For more information on RCPP, visit www.al.nrcs.usda.gov or [click here](#). The next announcement of program funding for fiscal year 2016 is expected to be announced later this year.

To learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or local USDA service center.

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