

Conservation Matters

In the Palmetto State

Information for Employees and Friends of SC NRCS



From the Office of the State Conservationist

Ann English
South Carolina NRCS

Helping People Help the Land

Greetings NRCS employees and conservation partners,

As another year comes to a close, thanks to all of you for your contributions toward another successful year helping South Carolina farmers and forest landowners conserve their natural resources.

We have many contributions to be proud of this year. We obligated millions of dollars in Farm Bill program funds in Fiscal Year 2015 to help South Carolina farmers and ranchers install or apply conservation measures. We had a successful start this summer for our Indian Creek Project in Newberry and Union counties.

We could not have achieved this work without the help of our numerous partners and we thank them for their efforts. They are the glue that holds us together, allowing us to leverage our diverse resources to help our farmers and forest landowners get conservation on the ground.

Fiscal Year 2016 will offer NRCS in South Carolina new opportunities and changes for even greater gains in conservation. The additions to our State Leadership Team will enhance our abilities to be innovative and creative in how we deliver NRCS programs and services to farmers and forest landowners in the state.

Our new regional structure is designed to increase efficiency and effectiveness in supporting field offices and providing programs and services to our valued farmers and forest landowners. Our two new Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations—Reginald Hall and Beau Sorenson—are ready and able to lead us toward innovative approaches to program delivery in the future.

Our new State Public Affairs Specialist is eager to carry the NRCS messages to diverse audiences across the state. Jerry Bynum, a Public Affairs Specialist from Risk Management Agency in Washington, D.C., will officially move to Columbia in early January 2016.

With our permanent leadership structure in place, we are ready to face the opportunities and challenges this fiscal year will bring. Some of them include helping communities, farmers and forest landowners rebound from the 2015 flood that occurred in early October 2015 and increasing our outreach to underserved customers and partners.

Please enjoy this holiday season with your families, friends and colleagues.

ANN ENGLISH

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Strong Partnerships Enhance Restoration of Longleaf Pines in Chesterfield, SC

By: Sabrenna Bryant, Public Affairs Specialist, SC NRCS

The restoration of longleaf pine forests is a major priority of USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the southeastern United States, due to the decline of longleaf pine forests over the past several centuries. The steep decline from 90 million acres of longleaf pines in the 17th century to 3.4 million acres today, has not only drastically

changed the landscape, but has also affected the hundreds of plant and animals species that call these forests home.

In 2010, USDA-NRCS launched the Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) to help private landowners protect, improve and restore longleaf pine forests. In South Carolina, NRCS works with various conservation partners around the state to bring an awareness of longleaf pine issues and seek solutions for forest restoration. Oftentimes, these partnerships are the key to success when it comes to putting conservation on the ground and increasing conservation on a landscape scale, and this has truly proven to be the case in Chesterfield County, South Carolina.

In Chesterfield, local partners have joined forces to form the Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership to address longleaf pine conservation issues.



Longleaf wiregrass stands at the Carolina Sandhills Wildlife Refuge, above, are regularly managed with prescribed fire to create an open and lush habitat that is preferred by many native wildlife species.

Federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations and private landowners comprise the Partnership. Participants, including the Chesterfield Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and NRCS District Conservationist Charles Babb and Soil Conservation Technician Sue Griggs, share a mutual interest to engage private landowners in the restoration and sustainability of longleaf pine forests. Due to the great demand for financial assistance for forestry management, the Partnership, and especially the Chesterfield SWCD, has played a vital role in applying for additional grant funding to promote the conservation of longleaf pine ecosystems in Chesterfield County.

Currently, the Partnership has received over \$760,000 in grants through both the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Service. These grants have enabled them to offer a variety of incentives to private landowners, including cost-share dollars to implement forestry-related management practices on their land to restore, improve and maintain longleaf pine forests. The grant funding has also enabled the Chesterfield SWCD to hire a full-time employee, Jimmy Lisenby, as the Longleaf Coordinator, to oversee the grants, obligate grants funds and work with private landowners submitting applications for financial assistance.

“This partnership works and functions well among the partners, while drawing in landowners. It has grown into a real community”, said Sue Griggs.

Although the Chesterfield SWCD holds the agreement with landowners, Babb and Griggs provide conservation technical assistance, such as helping with conservation plans, reviewing site checks, and helping to maintain the District’s longleaf pine website. Landowners can use the website to submit applications for funding online.

In addition to offering financial and technical assistance, the Partnership provides landowner education, such as work-



Indian Blanket, Partridge Pea and Aster, above, are some of the native species that are planted to promote understory restoration in longleaf pine forests.

Fish and Wildlife. There are plan in the future to offer the entire four-part series. Landowners can voluntarily participate in the program, which is a three-day training on the restoration of longleaf pine that includes classroom workshops, demonstrations and field trips.

While the grant funding covers several forestry-related conservation practices, such as longleaf establishment, chemical spraying for site preparation and prescribed burning, the Chesterfield SWCD is also supplying landowners with additional resources not covered. To aid in understory restoration, the District has purchased a seed harvester that allows them to harvest native seeds in longleaf pine forests, with minimal damage to the plants, and, in turn, give the seeds to landowners to plant themselves. They also have a specialized no-till seed planter available for landowners to use, which prevents soil disruption when planting the seed and is important for understory growth.

“We are taking the subject of longleaf pine beyond what is usually done”, said Lisenby. “By educating landowners on the entire comprehensive ecosystem of longleaf pine forests, we are helping to ensure the sustainability of the species for decades to come”.

The Partnership has had a major impact on improving the restoration of longleaf pine forest in Chesterfield County. A current total of 2,894 acres of longleaf pine planted through grant funding, with an additional 700 acres of longleaf planned for planting this winter through grant funding recently obligated to landowners. NRCS has also restored 6,164 acres of longleaf through WHIP and EQIP in Chesterfield County.

The Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership is a great example of how partners can work together to achieve a greater conservation impact. By leveraging resources, through dollars obligated or technical assistance applied, they are helping to address a major priority resource concern through the restoration of longleaf pine forests, while improving wildlife habitat and the health and sustainability of private lands for future generations.

shops or hands-on prescribed burning training throughout the year, to help private landowners become a Certified Prescribed Fire Manager (CPFMM). This certification would enable landowners to be qualified to conduct prescribed burning on their own land. Both Babb and Griggs are Certified Prescribed Fire Managers, and are qualified to write smoke management plans.

“We would like to develop a mentoring program to train both landowners and community members to be a CPFMM, and in turn, have those who are trained, to train landowners,” said Babb.

The Partnership is also offering **Longleaf Academy 101**, which is part of a four-part series hosted through the Longleaf Alliance and funded through a grant from the US



To aid in understory restoration, awns from wiregrass seed, above, are harvested by the Partnership using a seed harvester and given to landowners under contract.