

Forest Legacy Project

Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative

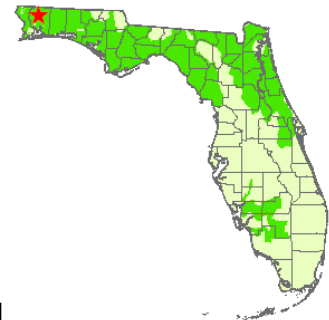
Santa Rosa County, Florida



FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2022 Forest Legacy Program Funding \$4,475,000
FY 2022 Non-Federal Cost Share \$4,448,000
FY 2022 Project Costs \$8,923,000
FY 2022 Project Acres 4,249

Forest Legacy Funding To Date \$8,800,000
Total Project Costs \$21,173,000
Total Project Acres 11,333



★ Project Location
Forest Legacy Areas

Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
GCLI-Coldwater Tract	4,962	\$5,710,000	\$4,210,000	\$1,500,000	Funded 2019
GCLI-Redesign	2,122	\$6,540,000	\$4,590,000	\$1,950,000	Funded 2017
GCLI-Three Hollow Creek	4,249	\$8,923,000	\$4,475,000	\$4,448,000	In Review 2022

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Once covering over 90 million acres, longleaf forests have been reduced to just 4.7 million acres, with most remnants on public lands. Maintained by fire, they are one of the world's most vulnerable and diverse ecosystems, with 900 plant species found nowhere else and 30 federally threatened/endangered species. The Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative (GCLI) is a strategic effort in Florida/Alabama to conserve up to 200,000 acres and restore 150,000 acres of longleaf on private lands. Complementing the redesigned 2,122-acre FY17/18 and 4,962-acre FY19 projects, GCLI-Three Hollow Creek (THC) will protect an additional 4,249 acres via CONSERVATION EASEMENT, which will be restored/maintained as a working longleaf forest in perpetuity. The largest longleaf restoration effort on private lands in history, this is an unprecedented opportunity to further the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative's goal of 8 million acres of longleaf by 2025. It will also serve as a model for other private forest owners to restore lands essential to returning longleaf to its historic range, 90% of which is in private ownership. With over 25 partners, it builds upon 3,719 adjacent acres already protected and another 43,000 acres with approved funding.



Loblolly stand on subject tract (Photo by Lauren Day)

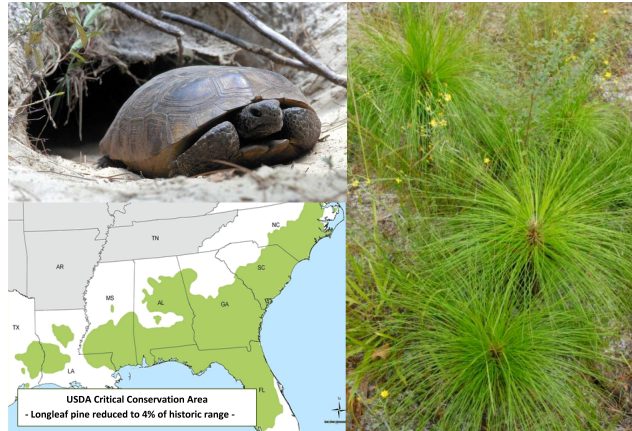
PROJECT FEATURES

Important

- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS-TIMBER:** In the Santa Rosa/Escambia County region, forest-related industries infuse over \$1.5 billion into the economy. THC will create/retain critical forest-related jobs;

develop and expand markets for longleaf lumber, poles and products; and keep land on local tax rolls.

- THC supports $\pm 1,000$ forest-related jobs, including mill workers, loggers, foresters and contractors, which are critical to the local economy. It generates $\pm 13,500$ tons of pine pulpwood and sawtimber annually which supplies 9 local mills with a current annual stumpage value of \$523,000.
- THC is third party certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and follows existing forest management plans. Once under easement, an updated management plan will guide conversion from loblolly to longleaf as stands reach final harvest age and ensure development of the longleaf ecosystem.
- THC includes planted pine (3,471 acres - primarily loblolly), natural areas (650 acres - water, stream buffers), and non-forest (128 acres - roads, food plots, logging ramps). All planted pine and some non-forest acres will be converted to longleaf and fire applied at least once every four years.
- Longleaf forests are unique with an open, grassy understory, maintained by regular fire. The reintroduction of fire will improve habitat, create jobs for burn crews and reduce wildfires (a major economic benefit). Recently, use of prescribed burns has increased on the larger ownership by 25%.
- The site contains soils that are suitable for longleaf pine restoration. THC contains numerous soils appropriate for forestry and agriculture, with the largest groups being Troup, Lucy and Bonifay soils. At present, the average site index for pine trees (all species) is 67 feet at 25 years of age.
- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS NON-TIMBER:** Alternative annual income is generated from THC through recreational/hunting licenses, a common practice in this area, with approximately 300 visitors annually. Common game species include Bobwhite Quail, White-tailed Deer and Eastern Wild Turkey.
- THC supports nearby Naval Air Station Whiting Field and Eglin Air Force Base (both critical economic drivers) by preventing development that is incompatible with their missions. Whiting is the busiest air station in the world, supporting $\pm 14,600$ jobs and having an economic impact of $\pm \$1$ billion.
- Construction of a new naval airfield, on a section of land ~ 3 miles south of THC, is almost complete, replacing an existing airfield whose use has been hindered by encroaching development. THC will help protect the new airfield from incompatible development.
- **THREATENED/ENDANGERED SPECIES:** Federally listed/candidate species known to occur on-site include Gopher Tortoise and potentially Eastern Indigo Snake and Gulf Sturgeon (Florida Natural Areas Inventory/FNAI). The site has seasonal ponds suitable for reintroduction of Flatwoods Salamander.
- State listed species likely to occur on-site include: Alligator Snapping Turtle, Gopher Frog, Florida Pine Snake, Little Blue Heron, Blackmouth Shiner, Bluenose Shiner, Crystal Darter, bogbutton, small-flowered meadowbeauty, Florida flame azalea and others (FNAI).
- THC represents a major opportunity to expand Gopher Tortoise habitat on private lands. Gopher Tortoise are present on THC's uplands and their burrows provide habitat for up to 360 animal species (Gopher Tortoise Council). At least two viable populations will be created/conserved on this property.
- **FISH, WILDLIFE, PLANTS AND UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES:** In addition to those above, THC protects existing/potential habitat for more than 34 species of concern, such as Florida Black Bear, Eastern Chipmunk, Swallow-tailed Kite, Bachman's Sparrow and others (FNAI).
- THC contains 650 acres of natural areas, including abundant streams and bottomland forests. It supports over 175 resident and migratory bird species that rely on these forests for stopover, breeding and wintering habitat (state land mgmt. plans, eBird.org).
- Once in longleaf, the reintroduction of fire, longer timber rotations, active forest management for open canopy conditions and the elimination of heavy mechanical site-prep will dramatically improve habitat for additional rare and protected species associated with the longleaf pine ecosystem.



Longleaf historic range; habitat for Gopher Tortoise; nearby GCLI longleaf (Photo by Dan Hipes and Lauren Day)

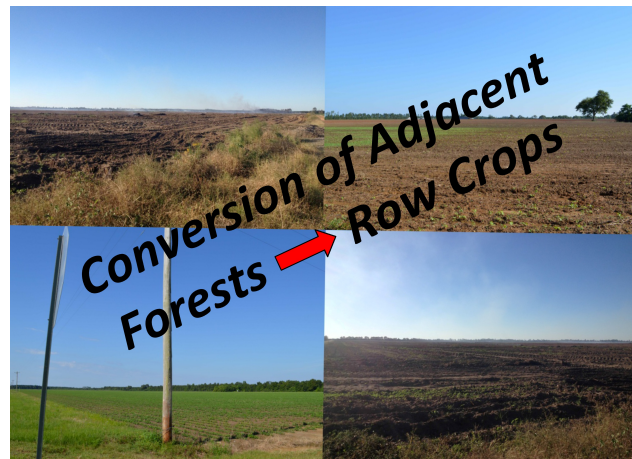
- **WATER SUPPLY/WATERSHED PROTECTION:** Surface waters flow via Pond and Three Hollow Creeks to the Blackwater River (Outstanding Florida Water), Yellow River Marsh Aquatic Preserve, Blackwater Bay and the Gulf. Studies show longleaf uses significantly less water than other pines when managed with fire.
- THC contains approximately 6.8 miles of streams that, along with surrounding bottomland forests, clean and filter surface waters from nearby agriculture/development. It recharges a sand and gravel aquifer that is the primary source of potable water for ±160,000 Santa Rosa County residents.
- **PUBLIC ACCESS:** Pursuant to local tradition, the landowner provides access to THC to over 300 individuals and guests per year via hunting/recreational licenses for hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, horseback riding and birding. Many are local families who have used this land for generations.
- **SCENIC:** THC protects the view-shed along nearly 1.5 miles of County Road 182. This area is popular with the region's large cycling community, including the Blackwater Cyclists and West Florida Wheelman, both of whom have ~200 members.
- **HISTORIC/CULTURAL/TRIBAL:** The Florida panhandle was home to the Pensacola and Creek tribes with lithic scatter noted on site. It later became a vital area for timber and naval stores. THC includes the remnants of a historic dam, which was part of a once-thriving sawmill in the early-mid 1800s.

Threatened

- **LAND AND LANDOWNER**

CIRCUMSTANCES: THC was acquired by the current owner in 2006 from International Paper. As a Timber Investment Management Organization with obligations to investors, the landowner has a limited window to sell an easement.

- Over the past several years, the owner has received numerous offers to purchase their property for conversion to more intensive agriculture. In light of the new naval airfield, there is a significantly increased threat of commercial and residential development in the surrounding area.
- Given trends in forestry, agriculture and development and the fact this landowner has a unique vision but a narrowing window to complete it, this overall project is the last opportunity to conserve these lands as an intact working longleaf forest and prevent fragmentation.
- **LACK OF PROTECTION:** Zoning is Ag-2, allowing forestry, agriculture, subdivision and residential development at 1 unit/15 acres. There are no legal restrictions preventing conversion to agriculture or development, which are in high demand and unless protected, likely to occur in the next 5 years.
- The Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) identifies a large portion of THC as having Prime Farmland or Farmland of Local Importance. This area is a leader in production of peanuts, cotton and acres in Class I prime farmland, making conversion to row crops a significant/imminent threat.
- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** Most of the adjacent land not under this owner has been converted to row crops, such as peanuts, cotton and corn. Conversion of forests to crops and other uses, including over 13,000 acres in the larger GCLI region, has greatly increased over the past five years.
- THC is under numerous flyways, including those of Eglin, Whiting and the new naval airfield. Eglin and Whiting complete over 100,000 operations/year in the area. Recent base realignment and closures in other areas have increased use/training at these bases and development pressure in the region.
- Residential development is greatly on the rise in Santa Rosa County, in particular in the area around the project. 2013-2014 saw \$150 million in investment in residential construction, the most in a single year since 2006. It also saw 1,155 residential building permits issued, the most since 2007.
- Santa Rosa County is one of Florida's fastest growing counties, within one of the nation's fastest growing regions. From 2013-2018, the county's population grew by over 10%. THC's proximity to



Thousands of acres of adjacent forestland converted for row crops. (Photo by Eric Howell)

abundant waters and beaches (30 miles south) intensifies development pressure.

- **ABILITY TO DEVELOP:** THC is highly developable with 1.5 miles of frontage on County Road 182. With at least 80% of the site containing well-drained upland soils, available utilities and an underlying aquifer for water, it could be easily converted for both rural development and row crops.

Strategic

- THC will leverage previous successful Forest Legacy projects: Wolfe Creek Forest FY17, the redesigned GCLI FY17/18 and GCLI FY19. These projects will buffer and help create connectivity between Blackwater River State Forest and other protected areas, while expanding the footprint of longleaf pine and protecting water resources downstream.
- **CONSERVATION STRATEGY:** GCLI/THC is an unprecedented effort to conserve and restore the longleaf ecosystem over a vast area under private ownership and serve as a model for other private forest owners. The project will enhance the largest contiguous area of longleaf in the world - including Eglin Airforce Base, Blackwater State Forest and Conecuh National Forest – in total over 1 million acres.
- **CONSERVATION PLAN–NATIONAL:** GCLI/THC is within the largest Significant Geographic Area identified as a priority in the Range-Wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine. It will also further the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative's goal to reach 8 million acres of longleaf by 2025. Engaging with large private forest owners is critical to their success.
- GCLI/THC will further U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) efforts to restore longleaf, including the plans above in which they are both partners; private landowner incentive programs; numerous longleaf Land & Water Conservation Fund proposals; and the USFS Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. It will also further the Eastern Indigo Snake Recovery Plan.
- GCLI/THC furthers NRCS programs, including their: 1) Longleaf Pine Initiative; 2) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Critical Conservation Area - Longleaf Pine Range; 3) Gulf of Mexico Initiative, Escambia/Blackwater River Focus Area; and 4) FY17-18 Gopher Tortoise Implementation Strategy.
- GCLI/THC provides permanent greenspace for nearby military facilities, thereby complementing REPI and supporting national security. It protects flight paths, prevents future land use conflicts and provides long-term planning ability for the Department of Defense. The landowner is willing to allow compatible military training and GCLI/THC could provide conservation mitigation opportunities.
- **CONSERVATION PLAN-REGIONAL:** GCLI/THC is located in the heart of the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP), a partnership of public/private landowners in NW Florida/SE Alabama to conserve and restore the longleaf ecosystem. In 2015, the landowner became an official partner in GCPEP and GCLI has been identified as their top multi-state conservation priority to reestablish longleaf.
- **CONSERVATION PLAN-STATE:** GCLI/THC supports the Florida Forest Service 2010 Action Plan by addressing several issues of importance to the state, including supporting sustainable forest markets, reducing further fragmentation of longleaf ecosystems, meeting the challenges of climate change, improving economic viability of forests and protecting water quality and quantity.
- GCLI/THC forwards Florida's 2012 State Wildlife Action Plan by protecting longleaf pine/savanna (a designated endangered ecosystem), preventing habitat loss/fragmentation, protecting water resources and increasing prescribed fire. It is located within a high priority for the Florida Ecological Greenway Network as it increases connectivity and is highly ranked on the state's Florida Forever list.
- **COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS:** Highlighting the national significance of the larger GCLI effort, the landowner recently completed an easement on 3,719 adjacent acres with NRCS-RCPP. Conservation is also in progress on 43,000 acres within the larger GCLI footprint.



GCLI supports continued military operations and greenspace buffer for airfields. (Photo by Joseph Pick, U.S. Air Force)

Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	0
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	1
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	1
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	0
Readiness Total Tally Score	4

Supporting Parties

Florida Forest Service; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Naval Air Station Whiting Field; Florida Department of Environmental Protection; Northwest Florida Water Management District; Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; The Conservation Fund; The Longleaf Alliance; Florida Wildlife Federation; Audubon Florida; and Florida Defenders of Wildlife.

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