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# News Release

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## **USDA, Partners to Invest over \$16 Million in Two Targeted Conservation Projects across Georgia**

**ATHENS, GA**, February 18, 2016 — State Conservationist Terrance O. Rudolph of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Georgia announced today that two projects in Georgia were selected for the [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) (RCPP): Southern Sentinel Landscapes Conservation with NRCS investing \$7.5 million and Wetlands and Wildlife for Georgia Watersheds with NRCS investing \$802,000. Partner commitments will more than double NRCS contributions.

“We put out a call for projects that will deliver the most conservation for the taxpayer dollar and our partners answered,” said Rudolph. “These projects are harnessing the power of public-private partnership – bringing in new partners, new resources and new ideas to the table; resulting in a significant investment in conservation to benefit our soils, water and wildlife as well as ensuring military preparedness.”

The two projects in Georgia are:

- The Southern Sentinel Landscapes Conservation project has 20 partners with the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities taking the lead. This project will span across three states; Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina. This project will protect and restore 17,500 – 21,500 acres of longleaf and other working forest habitats on private lands important for at-risk species. The goal of this multistate effort is to reduce the likelihood that target species will be listed under the Endangered Species Act and to demonstrate the compatibility of working lands management with at-risk species conservation. These sites and species address shared conservation interests of the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, and Interior on proposed or potential Sentinel Landscapes. The proposed project advances goals of the Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine, the NRCS Longleaf Pine Initiative, and each state’s Forest and Wildlife Action Plans, while also contributing to military installation compatible-use buffers. This proposal builds on the RCPP award the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities received in 2014.



- The Wetlands and Wildlife for Georgia Watersheds project has eight partners with The Nature Conservancy – Georgia taking the lead. This project will serve two of Georgia’s important watersheds in which agricultural and timber producers own significant acreage, and in which natural resource concerns are of great conservation interest. Degraded or drained wetlands, habitat alteration and non-point source pollution threaten native wildlife resources and a broader wetland and pineland ecosystem of the Suwannee River whose natural fire and flood patterns have been altered. NRCS funding will be used to incentivize key producers to protect and restore the most critical wetlands areas and provide models for other producers to emulate.

Through the 2015 and 2016 rounds, USDA and partners are investing up to \$1.5 billion in 199 strategic conservation projects. Projects are selected on a competitive basis, and local private partners must be able to at least match the USDA commitment. For this round, USDA received 265 applications requesting nearly \$900 million, or four times the amount of available federal funding. The 84 projects selected for 2016 include proposed partner matches totaling over \$500 million, more than tripling the federal investment alone.

RCPP draws on local knowledge and networks to fuel conservation projects. Bringing together a wide variety of new partners including businesses, universities, non-profits and local and Tribal governments makes it possible to deliver innovative, landscape- and watershed-scale projects that improve water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, soil health and other natural resource concerns on working farms, ranches and forests.

Water quality and drought are dominant themes in this year’s RCPP project list with 45 of the 84 projects focusing on water resource concerns.

USDA is committed to invest \$1.2 billion in RCPP partnerships over the life of the 2014 Farm Bill. Today’s announcement brings the current USDA commitment to almost \$600 million invested in 199 partner-led projects, leveraging an additional \$900 million for conservation activities in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

See the [full list of 2016 projects](#).

Since 2009, USDA has invested more than \$29 billion to help producers make conservation improvements, working with as many as 500,000 farmers, ranchers and landowners to protect over 400 million acres nationwide, boosting soil and air quality, cleaning and conserving water and enhancing wildlife habitat.

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