



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Investing in Florida - 2016

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

In 2016, NRCS is investing up to \$220 million in 84 high-impact projects that impact every state in the nation, including three in Florida. This investment, which builds on the \$370 million invested for 2014 and 2015, will help conservation partners and agricultural producers conserve natural resources, leading to cleaner and more abundant water, healthier soil, enhanced wildlife habitat and many other benefits.

Everglades Headwaters Longleaf Pine

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3.7 million (CCA)

Lead Partner: The Nature Conservancy – Florida

Number of Partners: 5

Participating State(s): Florida

The Everglades Headwaters holds one of the most important collections of imperiled vertebrate wildlife in Florida and supports significant rare/endemic habitats such as the longleaf pine-dominated flatwoods and dry prairie. The project area encompasses 15,000 acres of longleaf as part of a mosaic of other habitats and agricultural uses. These habitats are an integral part of the "working watershed" of the Everglades by receiving, storing, filtering and slowly releasing rainfall to numerous creeks, and ultimately rivers, that flow toward Lake Okeechobee. This project will allow for continued productive agriculture (i.e., cattle grazing) and will help ensure the continued ecological integrity, function and promotion of water quality and quantity within this vital landscape and watershed.

Training Florida's Natural Resource Managers

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1 million (State)

Lead Partner: Florida Forest Service

Number of Partners: 4

Participating State(s): Florida

Project partners will train both public sector and private sector natural resource managers to enhance private forestland management in Florida. NRCS will provide financial assistance to landowners and the Florida Forest Service to increase the capacity of resource managers to offer technical assistance to the 400,000 forest landowners in Florida. Resource concerns to be addressed include inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife, plant and animal health, insufficient water, soil health, and water quality degradation on the ten million acres of private forestland in Florida. Results will be demonstrated by monitoring the increase in forest management plans and practices implemented using Farm Bill programs. This project will provide technical assistance to private forest owners to increase the number of landowners with conservation and forest stewardship plans, encourage Farm Bill program participation, inform landowners of longleaf pine management options and increase participation in forest certification programs.



Working Lands for Florida Panther Conservation

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$630,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Florida Fish & Wildlife Cons. Comm.

Number of Partners: 8

Participating State(s): Florida

The Florida Panther Focus Area includes areas of south and central Florida identified by the USFWS as essential to maintaining a viable Florida panther population and facilitating the natural expansion of this population north of the Calooshattee River. Approximately 29% of the area is under private ownership and includes working ranchlands that provide important panther habitat and are critical for existing and future panther recovery efforts. However, as the Florida panther's range expands and population density increases on private lands, an increase in depredation events on commercial cattle operations within the focus area has become a threat that could undermine previous collaborative efforts in the protection and recovery of the species. The economic losses sustained by cow-calf operations due to panther depredations, in combination with the costs associated with habitat management, act as a disincentive to landowners to manage their ranches for panthers and their primary prey species, white-tailed deer. Whereas the FSA and Conservancy of Southwest Florida have direct compensation programs that assist with livestock loss, and NRCS and USFWS incentive programs assist with habitat management, they are not designed to provide funding on a large scale across a targeted landscape. Achieving Florida panther recovery goals will be augmented through this project; which appeals to owners who have large acreages, diverse habitat types, and varied land uses.

