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**Celebrating the Nation's Leading Forest Restoration Effort and Recommitting for Another 15 Years for Longleaf Pine Restoration**

**WASHINGTON, November 15, 2023** – Today, America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative celebrated its initial fifteen years of conservation success and announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding to renew partnership efforts to restore longleaf pine forests across the South for another fifteen years.

Longleaf pine forests were once the dominant forest type in the southern U.S., blanketing some 90 million acres. They are among the most species-rich ecosystems outside the tropics. These forests — home to more than 40 threatened and endangered species — have played an outsized role in the economy and culture of the South.

Forestry and conservation leaders from across the United States, including representatives from federal, state and private agencies, were joined by U.S. Department of Agriculture Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Meryl Harrell, U.S. Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Shannon Estenoz, and Honorable Brendan Owens, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations, and Environment, to recognize years of longleaf pine restoration accomplishments and to reaffirm the commitment to continue restoring longleaf pine ecosystems across federal, state and privately managed lands.

“When I signed the original memorandum of understanding in 2010 pledging USDA’s support, little did we know that the effort to restore America’s longleaf pine forests would evolve into what many consider the most successful landscape-scale initiative in North America and a national model for collaboration,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom J. Vilsack. “Longleaf pine is vital to the culture, ecology and economies of the South, and there is more work to be done to ensure these forests and the many benefits they provide are restored across the region. With the signing of this new memorandum, we are joining with our federal, state, private and non-profit partners to renew our efforts to restore longleaf pine.”

Longleaf pine ecosystems now span just 5% of their historic range due to the conversion to other forest types, conversion to other land uses, as well as the suppression of fire – which is critical to restoring and maintaining this fire-adapted forest.

Partners have worked across the South to restore longleaf pine to its historic range. Since 2010, over 1.7 million acres of longleaf pine trees have been planted, over 17 million acres have been treated with prescribed fire, and over 363,000 acres have been protected for their value as longleaf pine habitat. In total, more than 21 million public and private acres have been impacted through on-the-ground



management activities. The partnership has added longleaf pine forests, strengthened local economies, contributed to national defense, and made the forests of the South more resilient to climate change.

These efforts have increased longleaf pine cover from a historic low in the 1990s to more than 5 million acres today, with more longleaf pine forests being added every year.

Longleaf pine restoration is a priority for numerous agencies and private and public organizations, including those part of the 33-member Longleaf Partnership Council, a group of non-government entities, state and federal agencies, local implementation teams, private landowners and representatives from private industry and the academic sector. The Longleaf Partnership Council promotes effective communication and collaboration among partners working to conserve longleaf pine ecosystems across the South while providing a forum where these diverse partners can bring their objectives and contributions together to achieve marked longleaf pine restoration success.

“Healthy, resilient forests like the longleaf pine ecosystem are critical to DoD's mission success and provide the natural infrastructure we depend on to support military training and testing activities as well as other ecosystem services crucial to mission sustainment,” said Honorable Brendan Owens. “Working with partners to restore longleaf forests supports national defense by preventing land use conflicts that can limit military activities, enhancing installation and landscape resilience to climate-related threats, and expanding habitat for imperiled species. The DoD is proud to be part of ALRI’s impressive accomplishments to date and looks forward to charting the next 15 years for this iconic southern American forest.”

“The Department of the Interior is proud to play a part in the America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative,” said Shannon Estenoz, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. “This coordinated effort helps restore and protect one of the most diverse and imperiled ecosystems in North America, the Longleaf Pine ecosystem. It is vital for our federal agencies to support local efforts, on both public and private lands, to restore and manage this iconic ecosystem.”

“At NFWF, landscape scale restoration is what we do, and the America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative is such a great model for many other conservation initiatives,” said Holly Bamford, Chief Conservation Officer of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. “We collectively have achieved so much through our longleaf work and are excited to join our many partners in celebrating the longleaf pine restoration successes of the past fifteen years.”

America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative and the Longleaf Partnership Council also recently released a new [Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine \(2025-2040\)](#) which serves as a blueprint for partners working to restore this ecosystem during the next 15 years.

“The tremendous longleaf ecosystem accomplishments achieved since 2009 are a direct result of the successful collaborative efforts of the many partners that have played a role in America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative over the years,” said Carol Denhof, Longleaf Partnership Council Chair. “With this event, we are not only celebrating these successes and renewing our relationships with our Federal agency partners, but we are also looking towards the future of ALRI with the launch of the second



iteration of the Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine. We acknowledge that there is still much to be done to reach our restoration goals, and this strategic, science-based plan will serve as a framework as we continue our work to restore, manage, and conserve healthy longleaf forests for generations to come.”

**More information**

- America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative is a collaborative effort of multiple public and private sector partners that actively supports range-wide efforts to restore and conserve longleaf pine ecosystems. The vision is to have functional, viable longleaf pine ecosystems with the full spectrum of ecological, economic and social values inspired through the voluntary involvement of motivated organizations and individuals. To learn more, visit <https://americaslongleaf.org/>.
- More than 40 species associated with longleaf pine ecosystems are federally listed as threatened or endangered, including the red-cockaded woodpecker, gopher tortoise and eastern indigo snake. It also provides critical habitat for game species.

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