ENDOWMENT RECEIVES $12 MILLION USDA AWARD FOR FOREST EASEMENTS
-Working forests, longleaf pine ecosystems, imperiled species, and military training to benefit-

U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Greenville, SC
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Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced January 14th that the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment) has been selected to receive funding through the inaugural USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

The $12 million award will fund conservation easements on working forests in four southern states. RCPP is a new program of the 2014 Farm Bill administered by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

“We are thrilled to be selected for funding in the inaugural Regional Conservation Partnership Program,” said Endowment President and CEO Carlton Owen. “This new USDA program is a bold approach to support locally-driven solutions for natural resource challenges. We commend Secretary Vilsack and NRCS Chief Jason Weller for their leadership in facilitating such an innovative, public-private partnership.”

The Endowment’s proposal was crafted in partnership with the Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (www.repi.mil), which is providing matching funds, and The Nature Conservancy (www.nature.org). The Endowment’s RCPP award will simultaneously address several important challenges. Funding will be used to place conservation easements on forests, particularly those with longleaf pine or the potential to restore longleaf pine ecosystems. Easements will help reduce forest loss and fragmentation, a key threat to both the forest industry and to a host of environmental concerns, from ecosystem services such as clean water, to wildlife habitat. Most properties will be “working forests” that will be managed for a wide range of products from lumber to paper, thus providing continued income for forest owners while supporting rural jobs.

Special emphasis will be given to forests that can be managed to benefit at-risk species, such as the Louisiana pine snake and gopher tortoise. Demonstrating that forest management and at-risk species conservation are compatible is a key goal for all partners. Further, each project will reduce threats to military readiness and training by ensuring compatible buffers. The result will be enhanced national security and greater community stability near installations.

“Private forest owners are key to natural resource conservation in the South,” Owen noted. “This project, and many others supported by the RCCP, will help forest owners retain their land and improve management of their forests thus benefitting our economy, our culture, and our environment.”

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About the Regional Conservation Partnership Program:
More than 600 pre-proposals were submitted to the 2014 RCPP; 115 were chosen and received a total of $370 million in funding. RCPP competitively awards funds to conservation projects designed by local partners specifically for their region. Eligible partners include private companies, universities, non-profit organizations, local and tribal governments and others joining with agricultural and conservation organizations and producers to invest money, manpower and materials to their proposed initiatives. With participating partners investing along with the Department, USDA’s $1.2 billion in funding over the life of the five-year Farm Bill program can leverage an additional $1.2 billion from partners for a total of $2.4 billion for conservation. Through RCPP, partners propose conservation projects to improve soil health, water quality and water use efficiency, wildlife habitat, and other related natural resources on private lands.

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The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (the Endowment) is a not-for-profit public charity working collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative, and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation’s working forests and forest-reliant communities – www.usendowment.org.

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