



A Collaborative Framework for Restoring Longleaf, Restoring the Gulf

Core Concept

A remarkable opportunity for accelerated longleaf ecosystem restoration to contribute to the ecological restoration of the Gulf Coast and the revitalization of its economy has been identified by the partners involved with the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI). To seize this unique opportunity and advance a programmatic approach across the five Gulf states, partners involved in ALRI have developed this Collaborative Framework for Restoring Longleaf, Restoring the Gulf (Framework) as an evolving “roadmap”. This Framework is in support of the ALRI *Strategic Priorities and Actions 2013 – 2015* document and expand upon a letter of May 13, 2013 from Vernon Compton on behalf of the Longleaf Partnership Council to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council). The aim is not only to focus the Gulf's multiple decision-makers on the value that healthy and productive forests bring to water quality, environmental restoration and the economy, but also to build on the success of the ALRI and to make its many assets available to meet the challenges of restoring the Gulf.

Guided by the *Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine* (2009) (Conservation Plan) and earlier efforts starting in the 1990's, the state, federal and private partners involved in the ALRI have achieved a reversal in the decline of longleaf acres and can show an increase of about 8% over the past decade. Much of this restoration has been focused in the Significant Geographic Areas (SGAs) for longleaf identified in the Conservation Plan, nine of which occur along the Gulf. In addition to crafting the overarching strategy for longleaf restoration, ALRI has also developed the necessary infrastructure of local implementation teams and state coordination teams operating across the Gulf coast. These teams are the “boots-on-the-ground” that identify, conduct, and monitor results of key longleaf restoration and acquisition efforts which benefit overall Gulf restoration. The Longleaf Partnership Council, which provides leadership and serves as forum for communication and coordination among all partners, also includes numerous technical teams serving regionally to provide science-based guidance and support. Completing this highly-functioning, vertically integrated longleaf infrastructure is the Federal Coordinating Committee (FCC), which coordinates the actions of the federal agencies. Successful deployment of all



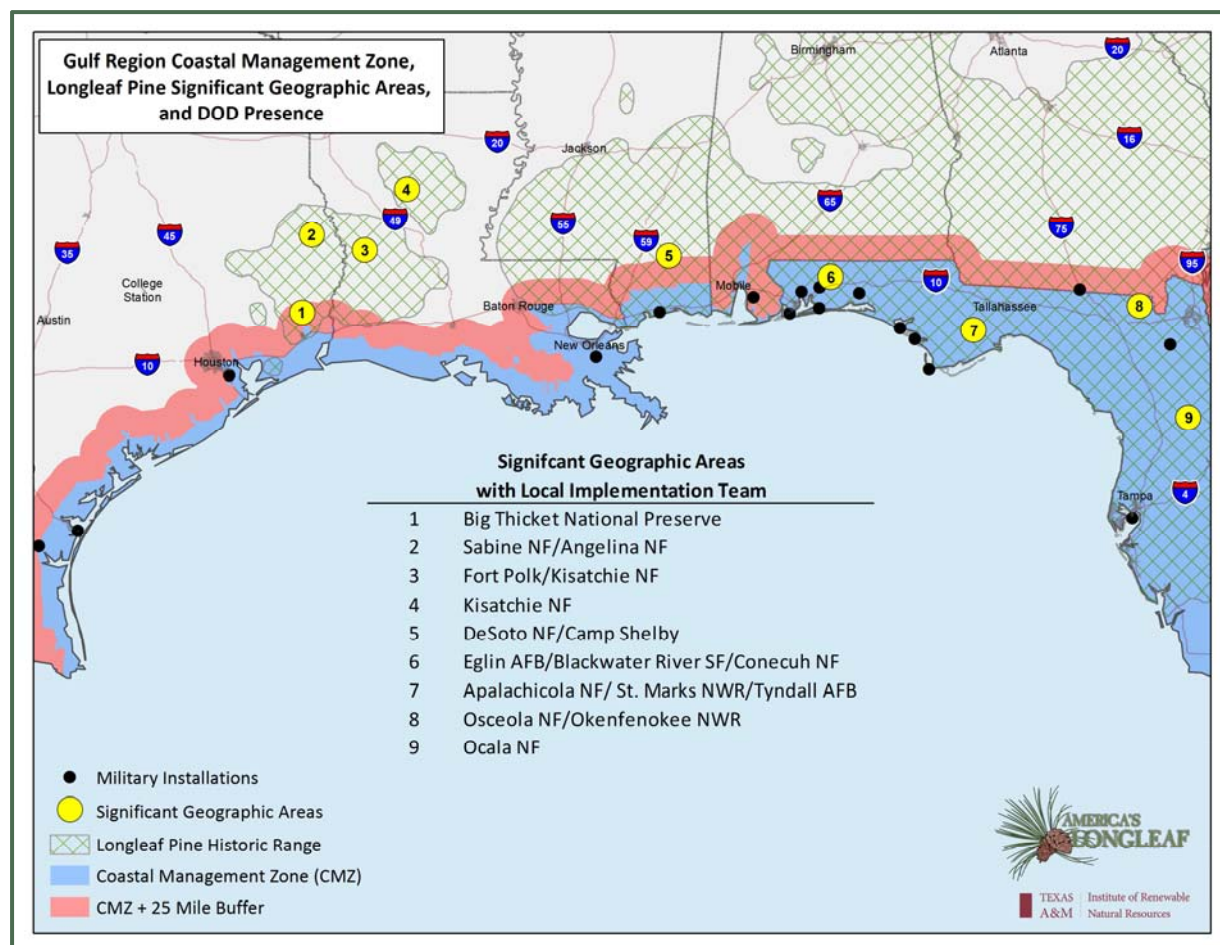
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these component parts of ALRI and associated assets can make a significant contribution to the Gulf's recovery while also accelerating longleaf restoration.¹

The many state and federal agency and private conservation partners involved in ALRI are in place and ready to become systematically engaged in advancing Gulf restoration. Actions called for under this Framework can serve to enhance coordination and communication among all ALRI partners.

How Longleaf Restoration Complements Gulf Recovery

The Draft Initial Comprehensive Plan (May 2013) (Draft Plan) recently released by the Council makes clear the role that large scale forest projects such as longleaf restoration can play in Gulf restoration. For starters, the Draft Plan reflects the Council's commitment to science-based decision-making and to a regional ecosystem-based approach, both of which are principles already guiding longleaf restoration activities found in the Conservation Plan. Moreover, a number of the goals and objectives in the Council's Draft Plan, including habitat restoration, improving water quality, enhancement of community resilience, and revitalization of the Gulf economy are ones that longleaf pine restoration directly supports.



¹ For more information on ALRI and the Conservation Plan, please go to www.americaslongleaf.org.



The fire-dependent longleaf ecosystem is one of the most ecologically diverse in the world with 29 federally-listed species, including the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Gopher Tortoise. Appropriately, coastal forests and pine savannas are explicitly identified under the Habitat objective in the Draft Plan as habitats worthy of restoration, enhancement and protection.

The beneficial role of properly managed forests, including longleaf, in ensuring watershed health is well established and longleaf restoration clearly involves improved silvicultural management practices which the Draft Plan explicitly anticipates being implemented in support of its Water Quality objective. With regard to the Community Resilience objective, longleaf restoration is also consistent with the emphasis on resiliency through providing an economically and ecologically sustainable environment. None of this should be surprising since the longleaf ecosystem once dominated the Gulf's coastal plain, providing extensive wildlife habitat and abundant clean water. More resistant to hurricanes, droughts, most forest pests, and catastrophic fire than other pines, longleaf is a good option for climate change adaptation as well.

With respect to the goal of restoring and revitalizing the Gulf's economy, expenditures for longleaf restoration create jobs and other benefits for the broader economy. In a recent study of the economic impacts of restoration activities on the Osceola National Forest in Florida, every dollar spent generated \$2.40 in direct economic activity, with such diverse industries as forestry, retail, accommodations and food services on the receiving end—not to mention significant job creation². Over the longer term, economic benefits of forest restoration are related to the ongoing supply of forest products, recreation and tourism opportunities and related job creation. The forest products industry is a key component to the economies of the five Gulf States, providing an estimated \$75.8 billion impact on the economy and employing some 560,000 people. In addition, highly-valued longleaf forests can serve as a hedge against conversion of forestland to more intensive land uses.

Finally, longleaf pine contributes to national defense by protecting habitats on Department of Defense (DoD) installations and across our boundaries. Longleaf pine forests provide realistic training opportunities on our installations, and shield our installations from development that curtails our military activities. Longleaf restoration also creates the large-scale, resilient habitats needed to support at-risk species, thereby avoiding regulatory restrictions on our nation's military test and evaluation, training, and operations. National defense not only secures the nation but also is a principal employer in the Gulf States. For example, in the state of Florida alone, DoD spending in 2008 amounted to \$30 billion in wages, pensions and other transfers, and goods and services. Five of the nine SGA's in the Gulf for longleaf restoration are anchored by and beneficial to a defense installation. Ensuring a strong, continued military presence in the Gulf will also contribute to a vital economy in the decades to come.

Anticipated Longleaf-related Restoration Activities

1. Restoration

Achieving longleaf restoration at scale and recovering the Gulf will require treatment of significant acres on both private and public lands. Such treatments include establishment of tree seedlings and understory plants, thinnings, removal of invasives, and extensive prescribed burning. Ensuring that restored ecosystems are

² For more information on this report, please go to:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/restoration/documents/cflrp/results/AcceleratingLongleaf/EconomicAnalysisCFLRPreport.pdf>.

available to provide habitat for federally listed species can lead to their ultimate delisting and help ensure that additional species will not need Federal protection. These same treatments will need to be delivered on many land ownerships across the five Gulf States. Accordingly, efforts must be made to identify common needs and related opportunities for coordination and collaboration across state boundaries and among multiple service providers in order to achieve greater efficiencies in program delivery. Below are some of the actions necessary to address common needs on private and public lands, as well as identified needs for support and capacity related to Gulf-wide functions:

A. Private Lands/Private Landowners

- Technical assistance (could be delivered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), State Forestry Agencies, professional consultants, and/or Non-Government Organizations (NGOs));
- Financial assistance (again, delivered via NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Partners Program, and/or State Forestry Agencies);
- Incentive payments and/or low interest loans, at least partially targeted on limited resource landowners and emerging and start-up businesses that support longleaf market development and restoration;
- Outreach and Education communications campaign to raise longleaf visibility among landowners (could be subcontracted to private vendor or multiple NGOs);
- Enhanced capacity at the local SGA level, e.g., Coordinators or other staff for local implementation teams; a network Coordinator and possibly other staff for the 5-state efforts involving multiple local teams; and support for roles to be played by key NGOs in each state and/or regionally;
- Funding for term-limited management agreements with Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMOs) and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs);
- Enhancements of nurseries for seedling and understory materials (including native seed collection and propagation, involving public and private sector efforts – such as the NRCS Plant Materials Centers, state nurseries, and private sector nurseries);
- Increase capacity for prescribed burning by landowners and burn teams from the public, private and NGO sectors (could involve landowner training, funding of long-term contracts with burn teams, increasing access to affordable liability insurance, etc.); and
- Invasive species eradication and prevention (Note: A separate gulf-region invasive species proposal is being developed by the State Forestry Agencies.)

B. Gulf-wide Coordination, Support, and Capacity

The federal agencies represented on the FCC have ongoing opportunities to highlight potential projects to agency leadership and the Administration. As of May 2013, multiple potential projects had been identified on National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, military installations and state-owned lands in all five Gulf States. While this Framework in no way alters these ongoing, internal agency processes, the FCC has the opportunity to analyze the potential value of the various proposed projects for longleaf restoration, including their relationship to the SGAs. In addition, the FCC may identify cross-cutting approaches and/or needs common to the various proposed projects that might be collectively addressed for greater efficiency. For example, planting or burning crews, National Environmental Policy Act

(NEPA) compliance staff, enhanced nursery capacity for both seedlings and understory plants, may all offer efficiencies when addressed with a Gulf-wide approach.

While FCC members are uniquely positioned to convene multiple federal agencies, local implementation teams established under ALRI provide a direct link between federal and state agency personnel to further leverage partner resources. Certain restoration activities can best be accomplished at a Gulf-wide scale across all five states. Such functions may include technical support for further planning and consistent mapping at the SGAs or areas of special opportunity (see Examples of Opportunities for Focused Longleaf Support of Gulf Restoration, below), monitoring progress and reporting, addressing common research needs, establishing demonstration areas and otherwise coordinating activities, where appropriate, across all five states. The public and private partners working together in the ALRI partnership can play an important role pursuant to the Framework.

2. Acquisition and Easements

A review of the acquisition and easement projects proposed in Appendix A to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's Draft Plan reveals a number of significant proposed projects involving the longleaf ecosystem.³ In addition, several proposed projects are in proximity to military installations and may support Gulf restoration, the military mission, and benefit longleaf.

A review of the separate listings of potential projects being developed by the States would undoubtedly yield more longleaf and/or military-relevant projects. For example, the online listing of projects submitted to the State of Florida includes several large longleaf acquisition/easement and/or restoration projects. Members of the Longleaf Partnership Council are working with local implementation teams to compile and map priority tracts for longleaf in conjunction with state and federal agencies.

Creative easement and management approaches with TIMOs and REITs could also create landscape-scale opportunities for restoration. Combining acquisitions and easements, with public and private land management activities could benefit longleaf and Gulf restoration goals to a scale not previously realized. Ultimately, identified projects of merit could be bundled together and shared with decision-makers and partners to raise awareness of the extensive conservation and restoration opportunities in the Gulf.

In summary, ALRI can adapt its pre-existing responsibilities and functions of communication and coordination



³ See the projects proposed by NRCS at pp 12-13; by the Forest Service in all 5 states at pp. 13-15; by FWS at 16-21; and DoD/Army Corps, specifically the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) buffer "place holder" entries at pp. 59-60.

among longleaf partners to seize the unique opportunity to accelerate Gulf recovery through longleaf restoration.

Examples of Opportunities for Focused Longleaf Support of Gulf Restoration

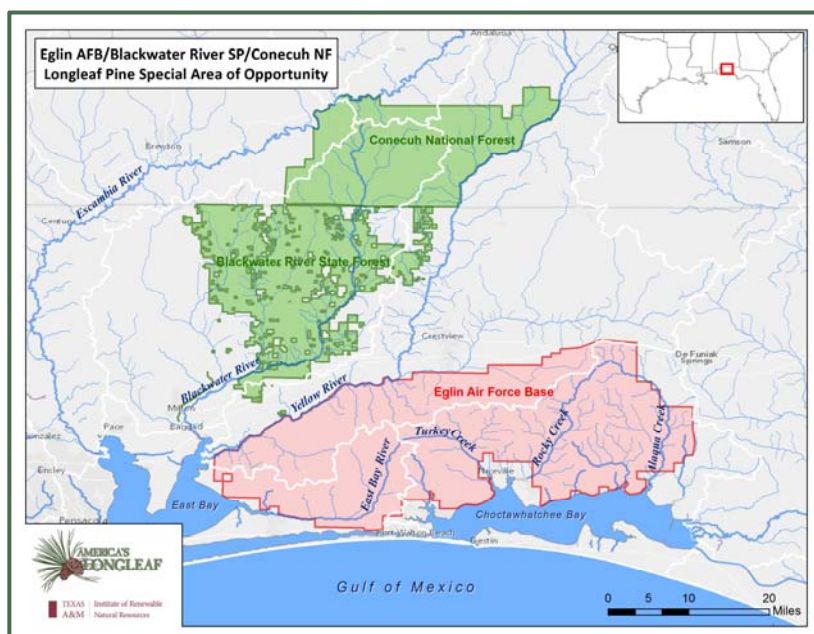
While all longleaf restoration proposals falling within the longleaf range warrant the Council's consideration, four areas illustrate opportunities for accelerated longleaf restoration at scale. Three of these are SGAs previously identified in the Conservation Plan (Eglin Air Force Base/Blackwater State Forest/Conecuh National Forest, Apalachicola National Forest/St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, and Desoto National Forest/Camp Shelby) and a fourth (Headwaters of Mobile Bay) provide excellent examples of opportunities to address the economic and ecological health of the Gulf through longleaf restoration. Several other SGAs (Osceola National Forest/Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Ocala National Forest, Kisatchie National Forest/Fort Polk, Angelina/Sabine National Forest, and Big Thicket Nature Preserve) are in close proximity to the coast and show promise for Gulf restoration. Longleaf ecosystem restoration activities that provide restoration benefits can be easily initiated if the Council identifies these areas as priorities. Once the Council has determined its geographic region of greatest concern and funding levels are known, the activities proposed in these example landscapes can be scaled accordingly.

(Please see descriptions and maps below for more details.)

1. Eglin Air Force Base /Blackwater State Forest /Conecuh National Forest SGA

Anchored by a military installation, a state forest and a national forest, this SGA in Florida and Alabama enhances water quality, provides habitat for rare and protected species and drives the local economy. To date, it has already benefited from longleaf restoration efforts, but tremendous additional opportunities exist. The Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) is a highly capable local implementation team in place and is ready to expand restoration efforts when additional funding is available. In addition, the Forest Service, a member of GCPEP, has proposed several projects. These include:

- Conecuh National Forest Consolidation project (acquisition of 4,000 acres of inholdings in 29 tracts, headwaters of Blackwater & Yellow Rivers, critical habitat for endangered Gulf Sturgeon and 8 federally-listed mussels, feeds Pensacola Bay estuaries);
- Conecuh National Forest Inholdings Restoration (restoration of native longleaf pine, wetland and riparian systems where degraded on the 4000 acres of acquired inholdings);

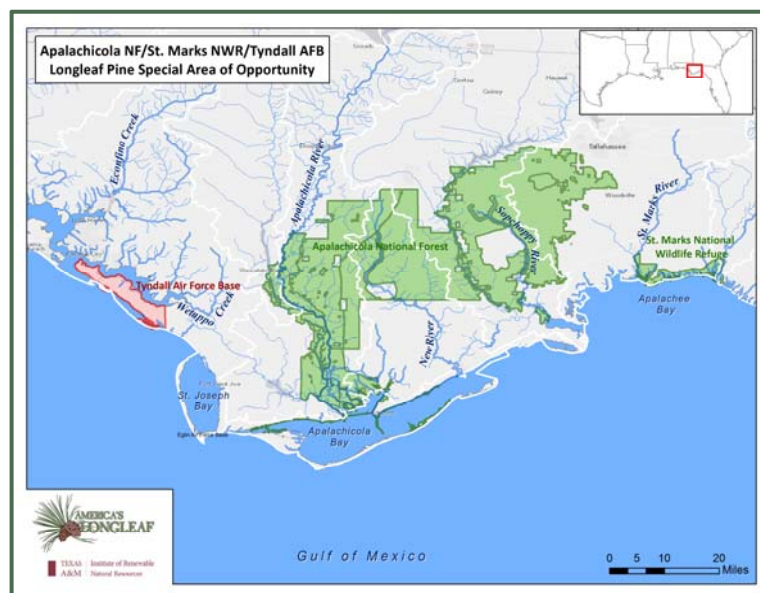


- Conecuh National Forest Corridor (100,000 acres, large landownerships in longleaf pine landscape, headwaters of 6 rivers that feed the Gulf. Connects existing state/federal public lands, located in key military flight corridors); and
- Conecuh National Forest Corridor Restoration (restoration of native longleaf pine, wetland and riparian systems where degraded on corridor acquisitions)

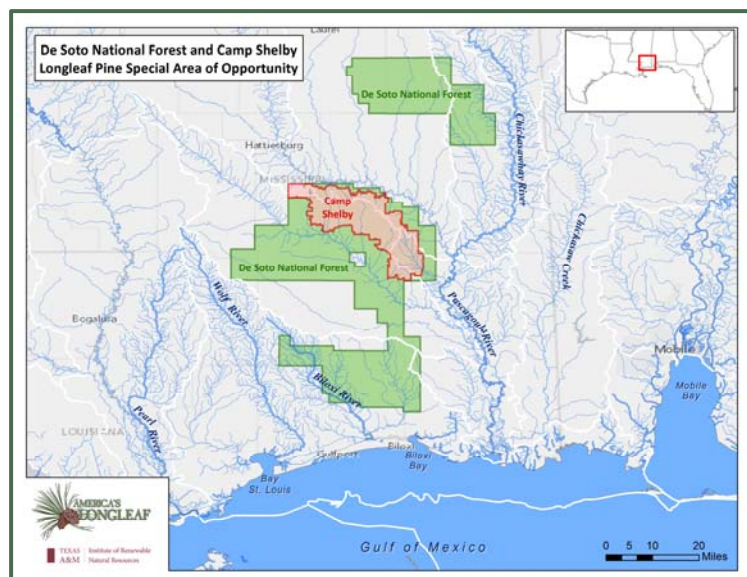
Additional projects in this SGA may be added.

2. Apalachicola National Forest /St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge SGA

Apalachicola headwaters are the sources of the clean waters for the adjoining Gulf of Mexico, sustaining estuarine habitat and the economy that depends on it. Much of the Apalachicola Bay economy is based on tourism and outdoor recreation which is dependent on a high quality natural environment. The Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance is the local implementation team in place for this SGA. As part of this partnership, the Forest Service has proposed acquisition of 1,473 acres of longleaf pine habitat, 320 acres on Ft. Gadsden Creek and 1,152 acres on Rowlett's Creek. Both sites are significant tributaries to the Apalachicola River that feed the Gulf and are critical habitat for Gulf Sturgeon. Additional projects in this SGA may be added.



3. DeSoto National Forest /Camp Shelby SGA

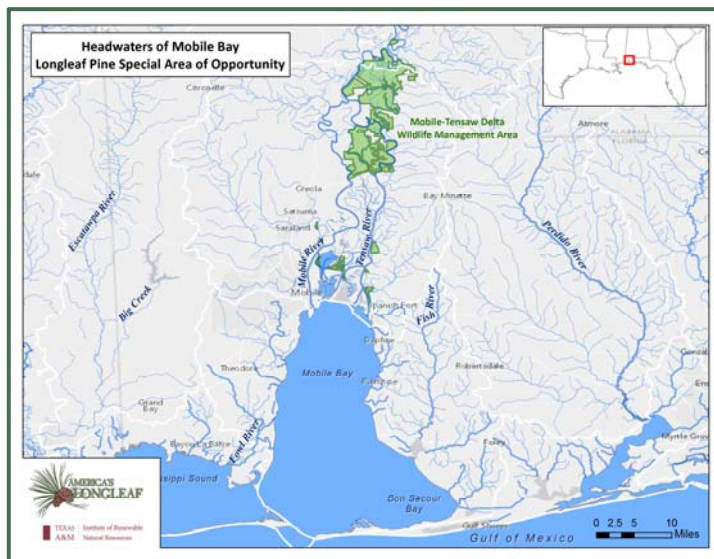


This SGA is anchored by the DeSoto National Forest and Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center and includes private lands adjacent to these public lands. The area includes the Biloxi watershed important for the Mississippi Sound and the Gulf. Major efforts to restore longleaf forests, associated pitcher plant bog habitats, and watershed health in a multi-county area could greatly benefit the Gulf.

Ecosystem restoration efforts that target endangered species, a number of “at risk” species and pitcher plant bog associates can also support local timber dependent economies and training at Camp Shelby, an important economic and national defense asset. Collaborative efforts with state,

federal, non-government and private landowners are coordinated through the DeSoto/Camp Shelby local implementation team. For example, an opportunity exists to acquire additional buffer land easements immediately to the west of Camp Shelby and the DeSoto National Forest to support compatible land use for continued military training. Additional technical assistance and landowner outreach are planned and underway and can benefit from additional funding leading to improved watershed conditions and economic vitality of the area.

4. Headwaters of Mobile Bay



While not originally identified as an SGA in the Conservation Plan due to the absence of a large federally-owned anchor, significant opportunities exist for longleaf and Gulf restoration in this area. Indeed, as early as 2001, the Evaluation of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for the Mobile Bay Estuary System indicated that the goal of providing “optimum fish and wildlife habitat in the Mobile Bay system” would benefit from converting open fields to longleaf pine forests and that “Longleaf pine habitat could be linked to gopher tortoise, Bachman sparrow and black pine snake goals.”

The Mobile River Basin in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi is the most diverse aquatic ecosystem of North America. This drainage supports a large and significant proportion of the native aquatic snail, mussel, crayfish, and fish biodiversity of North America, many of which are endemic to the region. The limiting factors for these species center on human development and modification during the past century resulting in the extinction of 69 of these aquatic species, primarily aquatic snails and mussels. Longleaf pine restoration efforts will roll back some of these impacts while ensuring that a timber products industry remains healthy and viable in the southeast.

In 2004, the FWS designated 26 river and stream segments (units) in the Mobile River Basin as critical habitat. The habitat units encompass approximately 1,093 miles (1,760 kilometers) of stream and river channels in four states. Although this is a small portion of each species' historic range, the habitat units include a significant part of the Mobile River Basin's remaining high-quality, free-flowing rivers and streams. Water quality is a limiting factor and the restoration and maintenance of sustainable timberlands is key to species survival and recovery. Water entering the streams and rivers not only supports wildlife found in these waterways but is also key to restoring the health of the Gulf of Mexico, the ultimate recipient of these waters.