November 20, 2015

Mr. Scott Stewart, National Forest Legacy Program Coordinator  
Mr. Michael Murphy, Region 8 Forest Legacy Program Coordinator  
USDA Forest Service  
Via: sstewart@fs.fed.us and mwmurphy@fs.fed.us

Re: Letter of Support for the Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative, Forest Legacy Project

Dear Mr. Stewart and Mr. Murphy:

On behalf of The Longleaf Alliance, I am writing to support the Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative submitted by the Florida Forest Service for FY17 Forest Legacy funding. This project, and the larger 205,000-acre effort it is part of, are a rare opportunity to conserve and support the restoration of the longleaf-wiregrass habitat on a landscape scale within one of the most significant areas for longleaf pine. It will provide a model for other large, commercial forest owners to do the same, which is critical to returning longleaf pine to its historic landscape.

In addition, as the Project Director of the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP), I want to highlight the importance of the project as recognized by GCPEP partners. GCPEP formed in 1996 to conserve and restore the dwindling longleaf pine ecosystem and since that time the public and private partners have worked together on over 1.25 million acres in northwest Florida and south Alabama. Recently, the larger project (including the subject tract) was identified as a high priority for protection in the GCPEP landscape.

In addition to longleaf conservation and restoration, GCPEP partners have worked diligently to reconnect the lands in the landscape to aid in the recovery of rare species, provide more adequately for wildlife movement, protect key portions of multiple watersheds, and provide additional recreational opportunities for the public. The Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative and larger project of which it is part will add significantly to conservation goals by providing a critical linkage in the Florida Ecological Greenway Network and protecting the watersheds of the Perdido, Escambia, and Blackwater Rivers essential for the health of the Gulf of Mexico. The proposal also buffers military bases and maintains local economic opportunities related to the timber industry.

The Longleaf Alliance strongly supports funding for longleaf conservation and restoration efforts within the GCPEP landscape and hopes the Forest Legacy program will continue to recognize the significance of the longleaf ecosystem. Thank you for your consideration of this important project and please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Vernon Compton  
GCPEP Project Director  
The Longleaf Alliance
November 20, 2015

The Honorable Tom Tidwell, Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Tidwell:

I write to express The Conservation Fund’s support for the inclusion of the Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative project in the Fiscal Year 2017 President’s Budget for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The Florida Forest Service is submitting this project for consideration under the U.S. Forest Service’s Forest Legacy Program (FLP).

At The Conservation Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states to protect more than 7.5 million acres of land since 1985. In Florida, we have helped preserve nearly 120,000 acres at an acquisition cost of approximately $509 million and a fair market value of approximately $635 million, passing more than $125 million in savings on to agencies and taxpayers.

Through the Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative project, the Florida Forest Service will place a perpetual conservation easement on 2,671 acres of existing forestland. One of the most ecologically diverse habitats in the world, the longleaf pine ecosystem has been reduced to just 4% of its historic range with the most of the remnants scattered across public lands. This project is part of an ambitious effort in Florida and Alabama to conserve ±205,000 acres under the same ownership as a working longleaf forest. This is the largest longleaf conservation/restoration effort on private lands in history and will serve as a model for other private, commercial forest owners essential to re-establishing longleaf across its historic range. The project will also provide significant watershed protection benefits, protect land within a key area of the Florida Ecological Greenway Network, buffer and protect military installations, and support the local timber-based economy.

The Conservation Fund is working with the Florida Forest Service to conserve this important property. Thank you for your efforts to preserve the imperiled longleaf ecosystem and for your consideration of this Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative FY17 LWCF-FLP request.

Sincerely,

Lawrence A. Selzer
President & CEO
November 23, 2015

Mr. Scott Stewart, National Forest Legacy Program Coordinator
Mr. Michael Murphy, Region 8 Forest Legacy Program Coordinator
USDA Forest Service
Via: sstewart@fs.fed.us and mwmurphy@fs.fed.us

Re: Letter of Support for Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative, Forest Legacy Project

Dear Mr. Stewart and Mr. Murphy:

Please note that the Florida Wildlife Federation (FWF) strongly supports the Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative being submitted by the Florida Forest Service for FY17 Forest Legacy funding. This project is part of a landscape-scale effort that will perpetually conserve working forest lands via conservation easements and support the restoration of longleaf-wiregrass habitats. Moreover, the effort will help protect the watersheds of the Escambia, Perdido and Blackwater Rivers, essential for the health of important estuaries and the Gulf of Mexico.

The proposal also buffers military bases and maintains local economic drivers related to the timber industry.

Thank you very much for your consideration and support of this project.

Sincerely,

Preston T. Robertson
Vice-President/General Counsel
November 17, 2015

Mr. Scott Stewart, National Forest Legacy Program Coordinator
Mr. Michael Murphy, Region 8 Forest Legacy Program Coordinator
USDA Forest Service
Via: ssstewart@fs.fed.us and mwpmurphy@fs.fed.us

RE: Letter of Support for Forest Legacy Projects - Florida’s Coastal Headwaters Forest and Wolfe Creek Forest

Dear Mr. Steward and Mr. Murphy,

On behalf of the Defenders of Wildlife, please accept this letter supporting the awarding of Forest Legacy project funding to the Florida’s Coastal Headwaters Forest-Pond Creek tract and the Wolfe Creek Forest – Springhill tract. Both of these tracts are important components of the Northwest Florida Wildlife Habitat Network. Acquisition of these tracts will help conserve the network of wildlife habitats linking Blackwater State Forest and the Escambia River corridor (please see the below map), and help achieve our vision for a continuous, landscape-level habitat network extending from the Suwannee River to the Perdido River. These tracts will connect core habitat areas ensuring wide-ranging animals such as the endemic Florida black bear survive in the future.

[Map of Florida Wildlife Corridor Conservation Focal Areas Region 4: Western Panhandle]

Florida Wildlife Corridor Conservation Focal Areas Region 4: Western Panhandle
Generalized Future Land Use in Florida Ecological Crossways Network Priorities 1 and 2

- Study Area
- Existing Conservation
- Military Reservation
- Florida Paper Mill Project
- Open Water
- FDEP New Roadway
- FDEP Roadway Improvement
- State Brevity
- County Boundary

Generalized FLU in FESR Priorities 1 and 2
- Prior 1 - Crit. Linkages - FDEP Developed
- Prior 2 - Crit. Linkages - FLII Institutional
- Prior 1 - Crit. Linkages - FLII No Data
- Prior 2 - FLII Developed
- Prior 2 - FLII Institutional
- Prior 2 - FLII No Data
- Prior 2 - FDEP Developed
- Prior 2 - FDEP Institutional
- Prior 2 - FDEP No Data
- Prior 2 - FDEP Underdeveloped

UF

Defenders of Wildlife
3637 4th Street N, Suite 230 | St. Petersburg, Florida 33704 | tel 727.823.3888 | fax 727.823.3873
www.defenders.org

Defenders also supports these two Forest Legacy proposals because they will help protect habitat for endangered and threatened species including 7 federally listed species on the Coastal Headwaters Pond Creek tract: eastern indigo snake, reticulated flatwoods salamander, Gulf sturgeon, narrow pigtoe, round ebonyshell, fuzzy pigtoe and white topped pitcher plant. Acquisition of the Springhill tract will also help protect White-top pitcher plant plus the Hairy-peduncled beakrush, Peters’ cheumatopsyche caddisfly, Elerob’s microcaddisfly, Southeastern weasel, Gulf Coast spiny softshell, diminutive clubtail, and West Florida cowlily. Both projects will enable restoration of upland long-leaf pine forests enhancing the habitat of the gopher tortoise whose burrows provide habitat for at least 60 vertebrate and 302 invertebrate species. Additionally, the longleaf pine – wiregrass restoration of these forests will also enhance habitat for the flatwoods salamander and gulf sturgeon.

Thank you for considering the comments of the Defenders of Wildlife. We encourage the USDA Forest Service to highly rank and select the Florida’s Coastal Headwaters Forest-Pond Creek tract and the Wolfe Creek Forest – Springhill tract for funding. Please contact me at the address below if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Kent L. Wimmer, AICP
Northwest Florida Representative
1294 Avondale Way, Tallahassee, FL 32317-8451
kwimmer@defenders.org
December 7, 2015

Scott Stewart
National Forest Legacy System Coordinator
Michael Murphy
Region 8 Forest Legacy Program Coordinator
VIA Email: sstewart@fs.fed.us, mwmurphy@fs.fed.us

RE: Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative & Wolfe Creek National Forest Legacy System proposals, Florida

Gentlemen:

Audubon Florida, the state’s oldest and largest conservation organization offers strong support for both the Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative and Wolfe Creek National Forest Legacy proposals in Florida.

The 2,671 acre Gulf Coastal Longleaf project in Florida is part of the very important larger 205,000 acre effort to preserve under easement ecologically valuable segments of the remaining longleaf pine habitat in the United States. This habitat is one of the most imperiled in Florida, and absent programs such as the Forest Legacy System, we stand to lose most of this habitat due to the pressures of development and agricultural conversion of forest lands.

Likewise, the purchase of an easement over the 2,200 Wolfe Creek Forest Sprnghill Tract would protect a vulnerable forest parcel linking NAS -Whiting Field and Blackwater River State Forest. This property also is ecologically important due to its notable longleaf pine restoration qualities, and be a substantial step in buffering the economically important military base at Whiting Field.

We hope that purchase of easements over these tracts will be recommended under the Forest Legacy in FY 2017.

Sincerely,

Charles Lee
Director of Advocacy