



Forest Service

Cherokee National Forest

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News Release

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USDA announces \$1.3 million East Tennessee Aquatic Habitat for At Risk Species Project

WASHINGTON, Jan. 14, 2021 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest more than \$46 million this year through the [Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership](#) for projects that mitigate wildfire risk, improve water quality, and restore healthy forest ecosystems on public and private lands. Funding for 37 projects includes \$13 million for eight new projects and \$33.3 million to complete work on 29 projects previously selected in 2019 and 2020.

Through the projects, USDA's Forest Service (FS) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are working hand-in-hand with agricultural producers, forest landowners, and National Forest System lands to improve forest health using available Farm Bill conservation programs and other authorities.

“The Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership continues to provide an excellent example of the shared stewardship model,” said Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen. “The program enables federal, state, and local partners to work across boundaries and jurisdictions to accomplish joint management goals at a much larger scale.”

The East Tennessee Aquatic Habitat for At Risk Species project is designed to apply multiple small-scale restorations strategically to achieve landscape scale conservation. It will do this by focusing efforts on 34 high priority catchments within the Cherokee National Forest and adjacent areas within 3 miles of the National Forest boundary.

Applying restorations in those areas substantially improves habitat and restored reaches are connected directly to at-risk source populations. Priority streams occur in both the North and South zones of Cherokee National Forest. The project aims to support Brook Trout, hellbenders, Tennessee Dace, and other at-risk aquatic species.

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The project is estimated to be funded for \$1.3 million through Fiscal Year 21 and will be shared by the FS and NRCS.

Partners in this project include: Local Soil Conservation Districts from Johnson County, Sullivan County, Carter County, Washington County, Unicoi County, Blount County, Monroe County, McMinn County and Polk County, Tennessee Division of Forestry, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Trout Unlimited, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Tennessee Department of Environment & Conservation, Conservation Fisheries Inc., Defenders of Wildlife, and Nashville Zoo

Added NRCS Acting Chief Kevin Norton: “These Joint Chiefs projects are proof positive of what can be achieved when there is collaboration at all levels – federal, state, and local. We’re proud to help continue these conservation partnerships and successes with these next eight projects.”

The Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership enables NRCS and FS to collaborate with agricultural producers and forest landowners to invest in conservation and restoration at a big enough scale to make a difference. Working in partnership, and at this scale, helps reduce wildfire threats, protect water quality and supply, and improve wildlife habitat for at-risk species.

Through the new three-year projects, landowners will work with local USDA experts and partners to apply targeted forestry management practices on their land, such as thinning, hazardous fuel treatments, fire breaks, and other systems to meet unique forestry challenges in their area.

For full project descriptions and information on completed projects, visit the [Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership website](#).

Successful Partnerships

USDA has invested more than \$247 million over seven years in Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership projects, which focus on areas where public forests and grasslands intersect with privately-owned lands. This year’s selections bring the total number of projects to 93.

Since 2014, these projects have delivered important forest and rangeland funding to 40 states and Puerto Rico.

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More Information

Agricultural producers and forest landowners interested in a project to mitigate wildfire risk should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn if their land is eligible.

All USDA Service Centers are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with FSA, NRCS, or any other Service Center agency should call ahead and schedule an appointment. Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel, and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Visitors are also required to wear a face covering during their appointment. Our program delivery staff will continue to work with our producers by phone, email, and using online tools. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

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