

Texas Longleaf Implementation Team Declaration of Partnership

This **Declaration of Partnership** is entered into between various federal, state, and non-governmental organizations to enhance cooperation, coordination, and communication efforts in support of longleaf pine ecosystem conservation as envisioned by the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative.

The purpose of executing this **Declaration of Partnership** is to formalize the relationship between partners in a local place-based project. The **Declaration of Partnership** defines, in general terms, the basis on which signatory agencies or organizations will cooperate and, as such, does not constitute a financial obligation to serve as a basis for payment of expenditures. Expenditures of funds, human resources, equipment, supplies, facilities, training, public information, and expertise will be provided by each signatory agency or organization to the extent that their participation is requested and resources are available.

Background

The Texas-Louisiana Longleaf Taskforce (hereafter Taskforce) was established in 2010 with the goal to accelerate the restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem on both private and public forestlands. Building on a long history of longleaf management, the Taskforce (<http://txlalongleaf.org/>) is a broad stake-holder group comprised of interested parties: land owners, private individuals, consultants, organizations and industry. The task force form and function is similar to a state level team in the larger, range-wide *America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative* (hereafter Initiative). The Initiative's purpose is to increase longleaf pine acreage across the south from 3.4 to 8.0 million acres by 2025. A Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine guides actions and strategies of the Initiative. Within the Conservation Plan, sixteen "Significant Geographic Areas" or SGAs have been identified to spatially target longleaf restoration; at least half of the targeted acreage from the Conservation Plan's goal is identified in these SGAs. Within Texas, there are two SGAs centered on the following public lands (1) Sabine/Angelina National Forests, (2) Big Thicket National Preserve.

The taskforce members overlap in their interest to promote restoration of the longleaf pine native ecosystem on public and private lands within the preliminary project areas. It was agreed that two of the most SGAs for restoration in Texas would be areas known as Longleaf Ridge (Figure 1) and the Big Thicket (Figure 2). These two areas have an anchor of existing native longleaf stands and represent a highly suitable landscape for implementation of a place-based project as envisioned by the Initiative.

The Texas-Louisiana Longleaf Taskforce developed a strategic plan with a vision, mission, and governance structure. In order to achieve its goal to restore longleaf in east Texas, the taskforce encouraged The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Texas to seek funding in 2013 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for a part time coordinator and focus efforts on the specific geographies of Longleaf Ridge and Big Thicket. TNC was awarded the NFWF funds and serves as the initial fiduciary for the place based project in Texas to focus on the SGAs. TNC consulted with the taskforce leadership and contracted services for a part time coordinator to lead efforts for the taskforce to focus on the SGAs.

The taskforce recognized that through cooperation, duplication of effort could be reduced and capacities merged to improve efficiency and promote synergy. The taskforce remains a broad stake-holder group with participants across the geography of east Texas. It is appropriate to execute a partnership declaration that will formalize the place-based group known as the “Texas Longleaf Implementation Team” (TLIT). The TLIT follows the general structure used by the taskforce. However, the TLIT governance is with a specific focus on the significant geographic areas of Longleaf Ridge and Big Thicket with the following vision, mission and structure:

Vision

Maintain, improve, and restore functional longleaf pine ecosystems that provide sustainable economic, ecological, and social values.

Mission

The mission of the TLIT will be to promote the maintenance and restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem on private and public forestlands, including its cultural and economic values, through a collaborative network of diverse stakeholders and working groups. Specific goals to accomplish this mission include (1) provide technical assistance to private landowners, (2) increase educational opportunities for practitioners and landowners, (3) improve collaboration and partnerships, and (4) seek funding to assist restoration efforts that meet TLIT goals.

Structure

Coordinator – facilitate business meetings, manage and oversee activities of TLIT, within the guidelines and limitations in their contract of hire by the fiduciary.

Fiduciary(s) – qualified organization that has (have) responsibility for grant fund administration, distribution, and accountability.

Steering Committee – provide guidance for the TLIT and direct working groups

Working Groups – implement specific strategies and mission of the TLIT

Documentor – assist with documentation and distribution of TLIT meeting notes

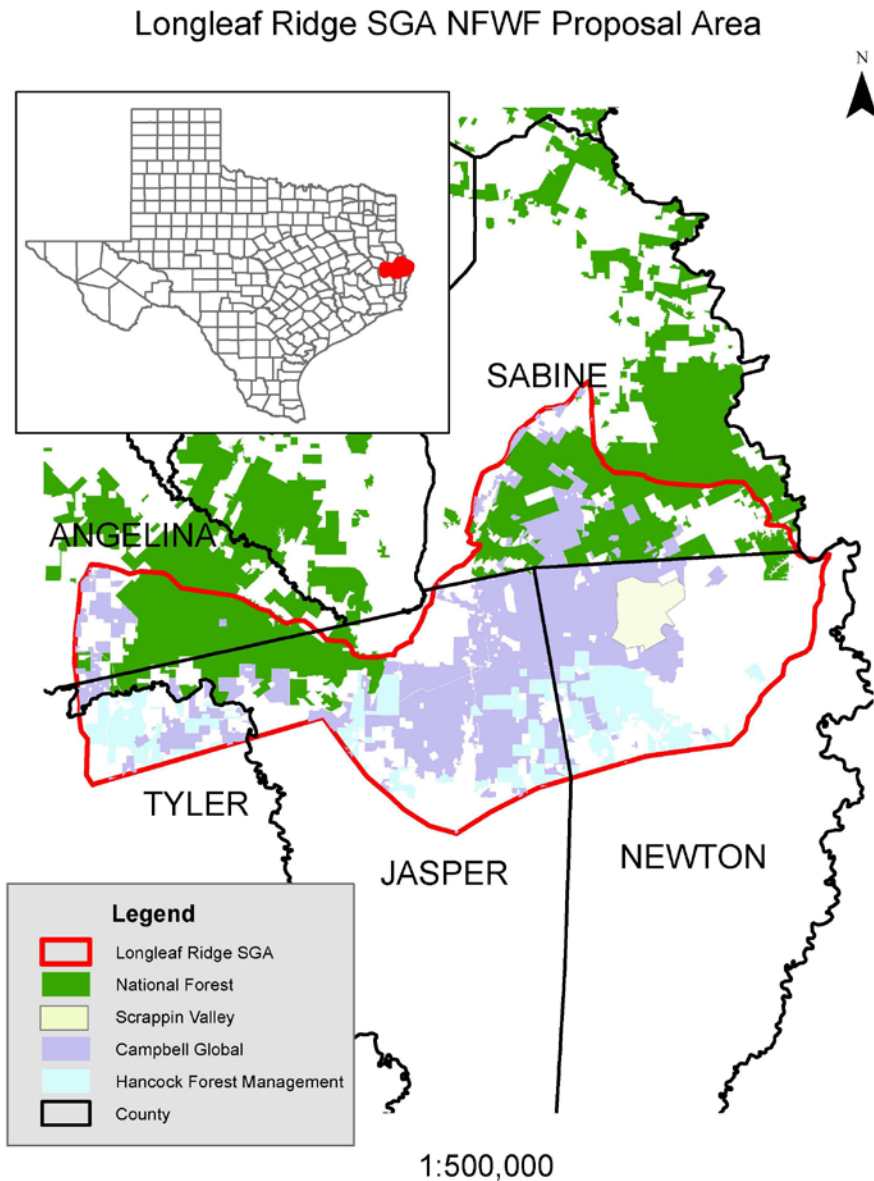


Figure 1. Project focus area for the Longleaf Ridge, SGA.

Goals

The following are adopted as mutual goals by the signatories for Texas Longleaf Implementation Team.

1. Identify mutual conservation and ecosystem management interests in the vicinity of Longleaf Ridge and Big Thicket;
2. Identify potential strategies and tools available to each Cooperating Agency for achieving the mission of the TLIT;
3. Develop action plans to expand ecosystem management beyond the established native longleaf stands to include lands where private land owners are willing to participate;

4. Seek funding and incentives for landowner projects that meet TLIT objectives;
5. Coordinate among federal and state agencies and specific programs to provide technical and financial resources in a focused, coordinated fashion;
6. Link voluntary private landowner actions with actions on public lands to more efficiently promote sustainable and secure native ecosystems that offer enduring ecological, social, and economic benefits;
7. Respect private landowner rights so their ownership and management objectives are not infringed by actions of the partnership.
8. Support strong local forest products markets and insure the application of sound silviculture practices.
9. Help private land owners sustain working forests and re-establish and maintain native forests.

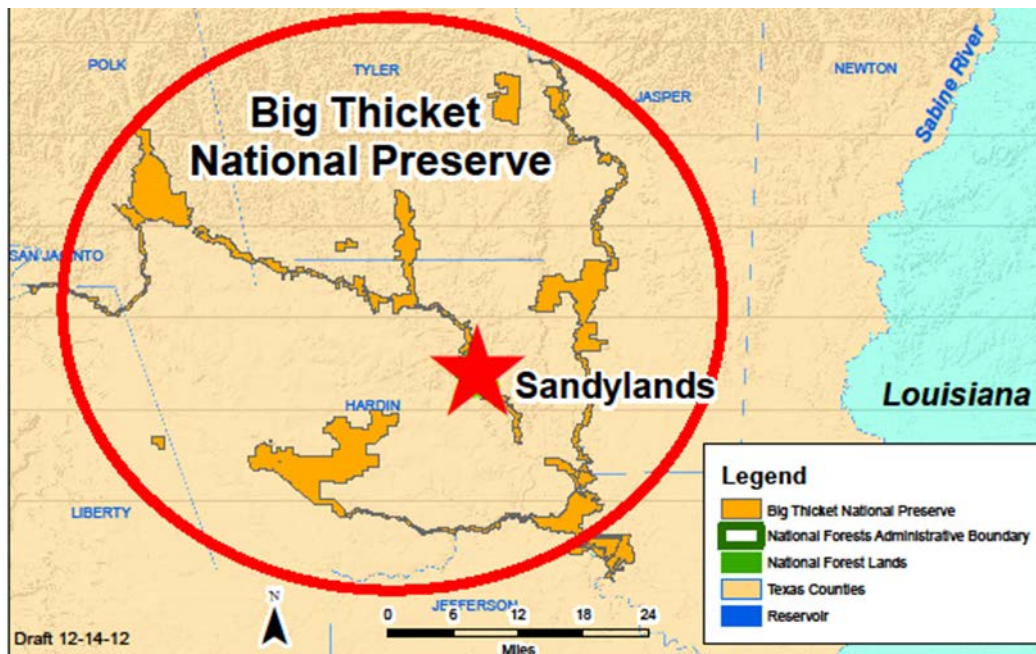


Figure 2. Project focus area for the Big Thicket SGA.

TLIT Steering Committee and Project Coordinator Organization

The TLIT Steering Committee will guide activities of the TLIT. The responsibilities of the Steering Committee include providing general oversight and guidance to the operations of the place-based project and Project Coordinator in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of the TLIT. A Chairperson shall be selected annually from the members of the Steering Committee, and will serve a one-year term. In the absence of a Project Coordinator, the Chair

will assume project coordination responsibilities. The Chair and the Coordinator may be the same person. The TLIT will meet semi-annually, or as needed each year.

An Annual Action Plan of Work will be drafted by the Project Coordinator and submitted to the Steering Committee for review. The Project Coordinator will finalize and implement Annual Action Plans of Work. The Project Coordinator will facilitate TLIT meetings and arrange administrative support, meeting logistics, draft agendas, release meeting minutes, the status and accomplishments of the current action plan, and other documentation to members. Decisions for the TLIT regarding the action plans, goals, project selection, and priorities will be done with a simple majority of the Steering Committee.

Membership

Steering Committee:

- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Texas A&M University Forest Service
- The Conservation Fund
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service-National Forests and Grasslands in Texas
- The Texas Forestry Association
- International Paper
- Campbell Global
- Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Texas A&M University Institute of Renewable Natural Resources
- National Park Service (added 2015)
- Resource Management Service (added 2015)

Steering Committee additions will be approved by the Steering Committee.

Responsibilities

Steering Committee Members will:

- Meet as requested to review progress and discuss methods of improving implementation of the place-based project.
- Assist in increasing the participation to include private landowners, both industrial and non-industrial, and others with valuable contributions.
- Assist with the promotion of longleaf restoration objectives at state, federal, and public meetings and training sessions.
- Assist in the planning and implementation of landowner field days.
- Provide education to the general public about the importance of ecosystem conservation.
- Jointly publish longleaf restoration outreach and technical information.
- Assist in establishing a baseline of current conditions, defining project area targets, and monitoring restoration accomplishments.
- Assist with integrating project accomplishments with range-wide longleaf restoration plan.

- Contribute their available skills and resources in Working Groups.

Working Groups

The Project Coordinator will identify a leader for each Working Group, and as needed facilitate Working Group sessions, preparation of reports or recommendations to the Steering Committee for review, and distribution to all members. The following Working Groups have been identified:

- **Outreach Strategy**-Develop a coordinated, comprehensive outreach strategy to landowners.
- **Training**-Train practitioners and recipients on technical assistance and implementation in the field.
- **Outreach Materials**-Develop outreach materials on ecosystem services, implementing restoration, and longleaf economics and markets.
- **Mapping**-Develop tabular and map products for the project area, focusing on connectivity to other managed lands.
- **Vendor Lists**-Develop a list of vendors, growers, and forestry consultants and work with the Outreach Materials working group to make this information available to the public.
- **Landowner Recognition**-Identify restoration success stories to be included in outreach materials and develop landowner recognition materials.
- **Prescribed Fire**-Develop capacity for the application of prescribed fire.

Additional Working Groups can be identified by the Steering Committee and/or Project Coordinator.

Amendments and Review

This Declaration is subject to revision and can be amended, extended, or modified by majority consent of the Steering Committee. General members can be added by the Steering Committee.

Liability

The participants agree that they shall each be responsible for their own individual, direct liabilities and not for any other stakeholder actions, omissions or liabilities.

Other Provisions

Nothing herein is intended to or has the effect of extending any legal authority or responsibilities of any of the members nor is any provision herein intended or has the effect of modifying, restricting, enhancing or changing the legal authorities, obligations, restrictions, liabilities or requirements of any of its members. This Declaration is intended only to provide the basis for a voluntary cooperative relationship among the signatories and is not intended to, nor does it create any right, entitlement, or benefit, substantive or procedural, or trust responsibility, enforceable at law or equity, by any individual, organization, private or governmental third party, participant party or any member thereof against any party to this agreement or the United States, its agencies, its officers, or any person. This Declaration shall not be construed to create any right to judicial review involving the compliance or noncompliance with the terms of this Declaration by any signatory or the United States, its agencies, its officers, or any other person. To the extent any provision of this Declaration conflicts with current directives, or applicable regulations or laws of any of the parties of this agreement, the provisions of this Declaration will have no effect.

The partnership in no way substitutes for the decision-making process that each participating agency is required to follow by regulation, directive, or law. This forum helps to facilitate discussion among the participants, without making decisions for those agencies. The partnership is not considered a “nonfederal entity” for purposes of the Joint Ethics Regulations as its stated purpose is merely to provide a venue for communication among participants sharing similar interests; is not self-sustaining as it has no internal budgetary provisions or authority; has no decision-making authority or legal status; and cannot bind the action of any agency or organization.

Should disagreement arise about the interpretation of the provisions of this Declaration, or amendments or revisions thereto, that cannot be resolved to the mutual satisfaction of all the members to this Declaration; those provisions shall have no effect.

Terms of the Declaration

Commencement/Expiration Date. This instrument is executed as of the date of the last signature and is effective through December 30, 2019 at which time it will expire unless extended.

Withdrawal. Any of the parties may withdraw from the instrument at any time before the date of expiration by providing written notification to the Steering Committee.

Modification. Modifications within the scope of the instrument shall be made by majority consent of the parties, by the issuance of a written modification, prior to any changes being performed.

Non-fund Obligating Document. This Declaration is not a procurement instrument and does not commit any party to fund, obligate funds, request appropriations or commit a member’s resources in support of the project. Any funding activities associated with the project shall be subject to availability of funding and carried out in accordance with applicable authorities and legal requirements, including those for government procurement and printing, of the participating organizations. Such endeavors will be outlined in separate agreements that shall be made in writing by representatives of the parties and shall be independently authorized by appropriate statutory authority. Specifically this instrument does not establish authority for noncompetitive award to the cooperator of any contract or other agreement. Any contract or agreement for training or other services must fully comply with all applicable requirements for competition.

Participation in Similar Activities. This instrument in no way restricts the Partners from participating in similar activities with other public or private agencies, organizations, or individuals.

Attachment A

This will be a list of signatory Steering Committee Organizations and their designated contact for participation in the TLIT.

Attachment B

This will contain signature pages for each Steering Committee Organization.

Partnership Declaration prepared for signatures by Kent Evans, TLIT Coordinator, 2014.
Steering Committee additions approved by vote in 2015: National Park Service and Resource Management Services.