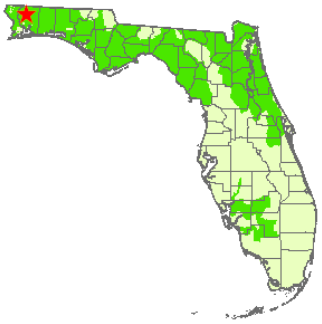
Forest Legacy Project

Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative - Phase 3

Multi-State Effort (Alabama, Florida). Santa Rosa County, Florida

FUNDING HISTORY



FY 2019 Forest Legacy Program Funding	**$4,500,000**
FY 2019 Non-Federal Cost Share	**$1,500,000**
FY 2019 Project Costs	**$6,000,000**
FY 2019 Project Acres	**4,962**
Forest Legacy Funding To Date	**$2,290,000**
Total Project Costs	**$15,566,000**
Total Project Acres	**10,923**

Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Phase 1	2,671	$3,066,000	$2,290,000	$776,000	Funded 2017
Phase 2	3,290	$6,500,000	$3,250,000	$3,250,000	Proposed 2018
Phase 3 - Coldwater Tract	4,962	$6,000,000	$4,500,000	$1,500,000	Proposed 2019

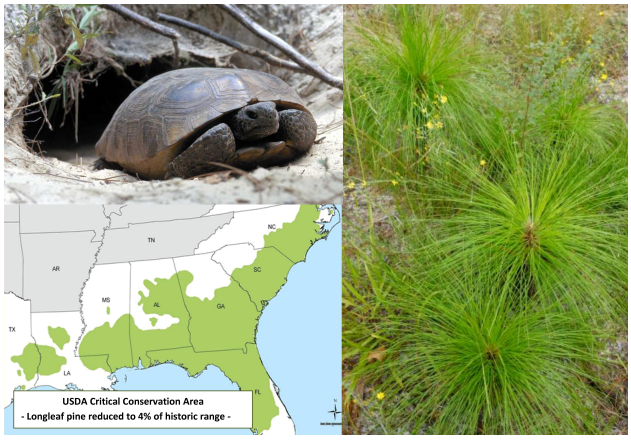
GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Longleaf pine. (Photo by Lauren Day)

Originally encompassing over 90 million acres, longleaf forests have been reduced to just 4.7 million acres, with most of the remnants scattered across public lands. Maintained by regular fire, they are one of the most threatened and ecologically diverse ecosystems in the world, with 900 species found nowhere else on earth and 30 federally threatened/endangered species. The Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative (GCLI) is an ambitious effort in Florida/Alabama to conserve up to 205,000 acres in the same ownership and restore 150,000 acres of longleaf. It is the largest longleaf restoration effort on private lands in history and an unprecedented opportunity to make significant progress towards the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative's goal to increase longleaf to 8 million acres by 2025. It will also serve as a model for other private forest owners to restore lands essential to reestablishing longleaf across its historic range, 90% of which is in private ownership. GCLI Phase 3 – Coldwater Tract ("CWT") will protect 4,962 acres via CONSERVATION EASEMENT, which will be restored/maintained as a working longleaf forest in perpetuity. With over 25 partners, it will build upon nearly 40,000 acres of easements already in progress.

PROJECT FEATURES

Important

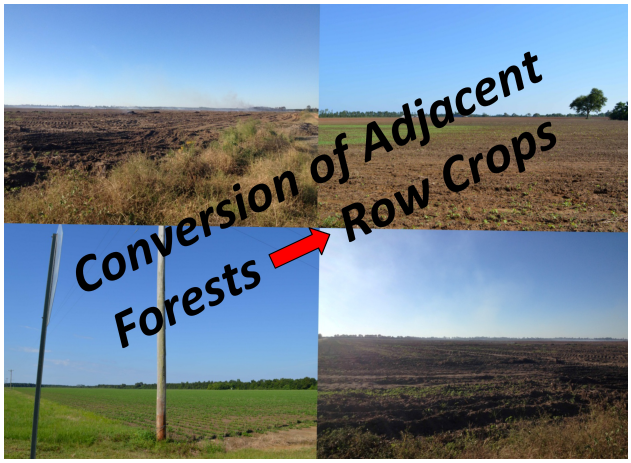


Longleaf pine historic range; critical habitat for Threatened gopher tortoise. (Photo by Dan Hipes)

- ECONOMIC BENEFITS-TIMBER: In the Santa Rosa/Escambia County region, forest-related industries infuse over $2 billion into the economy. The CWT will create/retain critical forest-related jobs; develop and expand markets for longleaf lumber, poles and products; and keep land on local tax rolls.
- The CWT supports 1,800-2,000 forest-related jobs, including mill workers, loggers, foresters and contractors, in an area whose economy depends heavily on these activities. It generates ±17,400 tons of pine pulpwood annually which supplies 9 local mills and has an estimated annual value of $285,000.
- The CWT contains the following acreages: planted pine (loblolly, longleaf, slash- 3830 acres); natural areas (water, stream buffers- 993 acres); and non-forest (roads, food plots, logging ramps– 139 acres). Planted pine will be converted to longleaf and fire applied at least once every four years.
- Longleaf forests are unique with an open, grassy understory, maintained by regular fire. The increased use of prescribed fire will improve habitat, create jobs for fire crews and reduce wildfires (a significant economic benefit). Use of fire has increased on the larger ownership by 25%.
- The CWT is third party certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and follows existing forest management plans. Once under easement, an updated management plan will guide conversion from loblolly and slash pine to longleaf as current stands reach final harvest age.
- The CWT contains soils suitable for forestry and agriculture, with the largest groups being Troup, Lakeland and Dothan soils. At present, the average site index for pine trees (all species) is 63 feet at 25 years of age. The site contains soils that are very suitable for longleaf pine restoration.
- ECONOMIC BENEFITS NON-TIMBER: Alternative annual income is generated from the CWT through recreational/hunting licenses, a common practice in this area, with approximately 120 visitors annually. Common game species include bobwhite, white-tailed deer and turkey.
- The CWT supports nearby Naval Air Station Whiting Field and Eglin Air Force Base (both critical economic drivers) by preventing development that is incompatible with their missions. Whiting is the busiest air station in the world, supporting ±14,600 jobs and having an economic impact of ±$1 billion.
- A section of land approximately three miles south of the CWT will become a naval airfield as early as fall of 2018, replacing an existing airfield whose use has been hindered by encroaching development. The CWT will help protect the new airfield from incompatible development.
- THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT: The CWT provides habitat for federally listed/candidate species including: gopher tortoise, eastern indigo snake and narrow pigtoe/round ebonyshell/fuzzy pigtoe mussels (Florida Natural Areas Inventory/FNAI). Gulf sturgeon inhabit waters downstream.
- The CWT provides habitat for state listed species including: Alligator snapping turtle, gopher frog, Florida pine snake, little blue heron, blackmouth shiner, bluenose shiner, crystal darter, bog button, small-flowered meadow beauty, Florida flame azalea and others (FNAI).
- The CWT represents a significant opportunity to expand protected gopher tortoise habitat on private lands. Gopher tortoise (state threatened/federal candidate) are present on the CWT's uplands and their burrows provide habitat for as many as 360 animal species (Gopher Tortoise Council).
- FISH, WILDLIFE, PLANTS AND UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES: In addition to those above, the CWT contains habitat for more than 34 species of concern, such as Florida black bear, eastern chipmunk, swallow-tailed kite, Bachman's sparrow, northern bobwhite, mayfly and others (FNAI).
- The CWT contains 993 acres of natural communities in good condition, with abundant streams and bottomland forests. It supports over 175 resident and migratory bird species that rely on these forests for stopover, breeding and wintering habitat (state land mgmt. plans, ebird.org).

- Once replanted in longleaf, the reintroduction of fire, longer rotation timber management and the elimination of heavy mechanical site-prep will dramatically improve habitat for additional rare and protected species associated with the longleaf pine ecosystem.
- WATER SUPPLY AND WATERSHED PROTECTION: Surface waters of the CWT flow through four named creeks into Big Coldwater Creek (a state paddling trail), the Blackwater River (an Outstanding Florida Water), Yellow River Marsh Aquatic Preserve, Blackwater Bay and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico.
- The CWT contains approximately nine miles of streams that, along with surrounding bottomland forests, clean and filter surface waters from nearby agriculture/development. It recharges a sand and gravel aquifer that is the primary source of potable water for ±161,000 Santa Rosa County residents.
- PUBLIC ACCESS: Pursuant to local tradition, the landowner provides access to the CWT to over 120 individuals and guests per year via hunting/recreational licenses for hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, horseback riding and birding. Many are local families who have used this land for generations.
- SCENIC: The CWT protects the view-shed along nearly five miles of public road frontage, popular with the area's large cycling community. It also protects the Big Coldwater Creek state paddling trail, a scenic waterway that enjoys substantial public use.
- HISTORIC/CULTURAL/TRIBAL: The CWT contains five sites listed in Florida's historical record, the "Master Site File." These are most likely the remnants of a 20th century farmstead, with some evidence of prehistoric activity. This region was occupied by the Pensacola and Creek tribes.

Threatened



Thousands of acres of adjacent forestland converted for row crops. (Photo by Eric Howell)

- LACK OF PROTECTION: The CWT is zoned Agriculture, allowing forestry, agriculture, subdivision and residential/commercial development at a density of 1 unit per 15 acres. It lacks any legal restrictions to prevent fragmentation or conversion to more intensive uses.
- The Santa Rosa County Comprehensive Plan identifies a significant portion of the CWT as containing prime farmland. The County is a leader in the state in the production of peanuts, cotton and number of acres in Class I prime farmland, making conversion to row crops a significant threat.
- LAND AND LANDOWNER CIRCUMSTANCES: The CWT was acquired by the current owner in 2006 from International Paper. As a Timber Investment Management Organization with obligations to investors, the landowner has a limited window to sell an easement.
- Over the past several years, the owner has received numerous offers to purchase their property for conversion to more intensive agriculture. In light of the new naval airfield, there is a significantly increased threat of commercial and residential development in the surrounding area.
- Given trends in forestry, agriculture and development and the fact this landowner has a unique vision but a narrowing window to complete, this overall project is likely the last time the opportunity will exist to conserve these lands as an intact, working longleaf forest and prevent fragmentation.
- ADJACENT LAND USE: Most of the adjacent land not owned by this owner has been converted to row crops, such as peanuts, cotton and corn. Conversion of forests to crops/other uses, including over thirteen thousand acres in the general GCLI region, has greatly increased over the past five years.
- The CWT is under numerous flyways, including those of Eglin, Whiting and the new naval airfield. Eglin and Whiting complete over 100,000 operations/year in the area. Recent base realignment and closures in other areas have increased use/training at these bases and development pressure in the region.
- Residential development is greatly on the rise in Santa Rosa County, in particular in the area around the project. 2013-2014 saw $150 million in investment in residential construction, the most in a single

year since 2006. It also saw 1,155 residential building permits issued, the most since 2007.

- Santa Rosa County is one of Florida's fastest growing counties, within one of the nation's fastest growing regions. From 2000-2010, the county's population grew by 28.6%. The CWT's proximity to abundant waters and beaches (30 miles south) intensifies development pressure.
- ABILITY TO DEVELOP: The CWT is highly developable with five miles of road frontage on paved public roads. With at least 80% of the site containing well-drained upland soils, available electricity and an underlying aquifer, it can be easily converted for both rural development and row crops.

Strategic

GCLI supports continued military operations and greenspace buffer for airfields. (Photo by Joseph Pick, U.S. Air Force)

- CONSERVATION STRATEGY: The CWT is an unprecedented effort to conserve land and restore longleaf over a vast area under the same ownership and serve as a model for other private forest owners. The project will enhance the largest contiguous area of longleaf in the world - including Blackwater State Forest, Conecuh National Forest and Eglin Air Force Base – in total over 1 million acres.
- CONSERVATION PLAN–NATIONAL: The CWT is within the largest Significant Geographic Area identified as a priority in the Range-Wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine. It will also significantly further the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative's goal to reach 8 million acres of longleaf by 2025. Engaging with large private forest owners is critical to their success.
- The CWT will further U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) efforts to restore longleaf, including those above in which they are both partners; private landowner incentive programs; numerous longleaf Land & Water Conservation Fund proposals; and the USFS Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. It will also further the recovery plan for the Eastern indigo snake.
- The CWT furthers Natural Resource Conservation Service programs, including their: 1) Longleaf Pine Initiative; 2) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Critical Conservation Area - Longleaf Pine Range; 3) Gulf of Mexico Initiative, Escambia/Blackwater River Focus Area; and 4) FY17-18 Gopher Tortoise Implementation Strategy.
- The CWT will provide permanent greenspace for nearby military facilities, thereby supporting national security. It will do so by protecting flight paths, preventing future land use conflicts and providing long-term planning ability for the Dept. of Defense. The landowner is willing to allow compatible military training and the CWT could provide conservation mitigation opportunities.
- CONSERVATION PLAN-REGIONAL: The CWT is located in the heart of the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP), a partnership of public/private landowners in NW Florida/SE Alabama to conserve and restore the longleaf ecosystem. In 2015, the landowner became an official partner in GCPEP and GCLI has been identified as their top multi-state conservation priority to reestablish longleaf.
- CONSERVATION PLAN-STATE: The CWT supports the Florida Forest Service 2010 Action Plan by addressing several issues of importance to the state, including supporting sustainable forest markets, reducing further fragmentation of longleaf ecosystems, meeting the challenges of climate change, improving economic viability of forests and protecting water quality and quantity.
- The CWT forwards Florida's 2012 State Wildlife Action Plan by protecting longleaf pine/savanna (a designated endangered ecosystem), preventing habitat loss/fragmentation, protecting water resources and increasing prescribed fire. It is located within a high priority for the Florida Ecological Greenway Network as it increases connectivity and is highly ranked on the state's Florida Forever list.
- COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS: Highlighting the national significance of the overall project, the landowner has been awarded a $5 million RCPP grant to acquire an easement on 3,800 acres just south of the CWT and the acquisition process is underway. The landowner is also in the process of completing easements on over 14,000 acres with the state's Rural and Family Lands Protection Program.

Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	1
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	1
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	0
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	1
Readiness Total Tally Score	**5**

Supporting Parties

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Florida Forest Service; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Florida Department of Environmental Protection; Northwest Florida Water Management District; Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; The Conservation Fund; The Longleaf Alliance; Florida Wildlife Federation; Audubon Florida; Florida Defenders of Wildlife; and U.S. Senator Bill Nelson.

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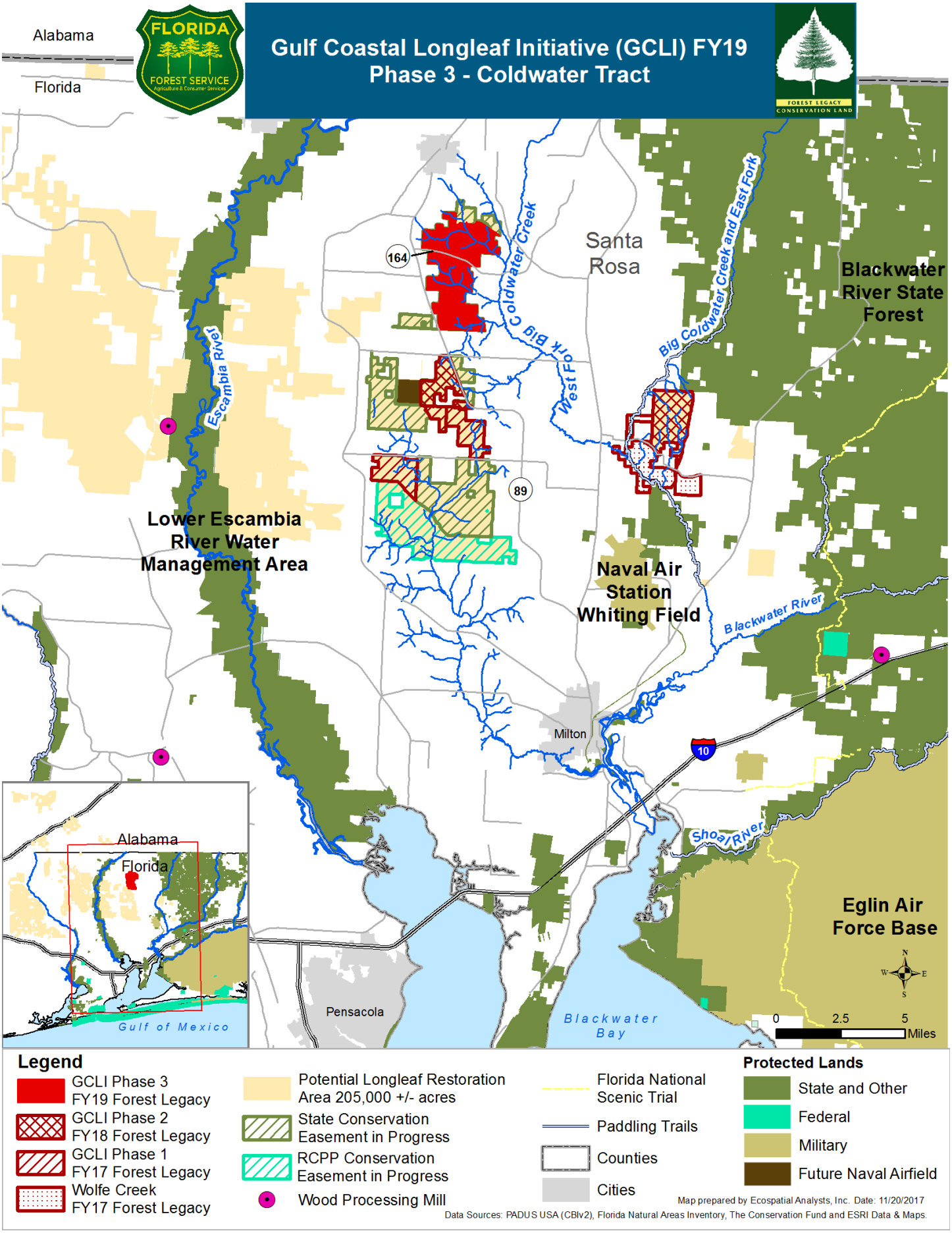
Gulf Coastal Longleaf Initiative (GCLI) FY19 Phase 3 - Coldwater Tract



Legend

- GCLI Phase 3 FY19 Forest Legacy
- GCLI Phase 2 FY18 Forest Legacy
- GCLI Phase 1 FY17 Forest Legacy
- Wolfe Creek FY17 Forest Legacy
- Potential Longleaf Restoration Area 205,000 +/- acres
- State Conservation Easement in Progress
- RCPP Conservation Easement in Progress
- Wood Processing Mill
- Florida National Scenic Trial
- Paddling Trails
- Counties
- Cities

Protected Lands

- State and Other
- Federal
- Military
- Future Naval Airfield

Map prepared by Ecospatial Analysts, Inc. Date: 11/20/2017

Data Sources: PADUS USA (CBIv2), Florida Natural Areas Inventory, The Conservation Fund and ESRI Data & Maps.