

MISSISSIPPI'S FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

Deadline for applications – June 1, 2023



What is the Forest Legacy Program?

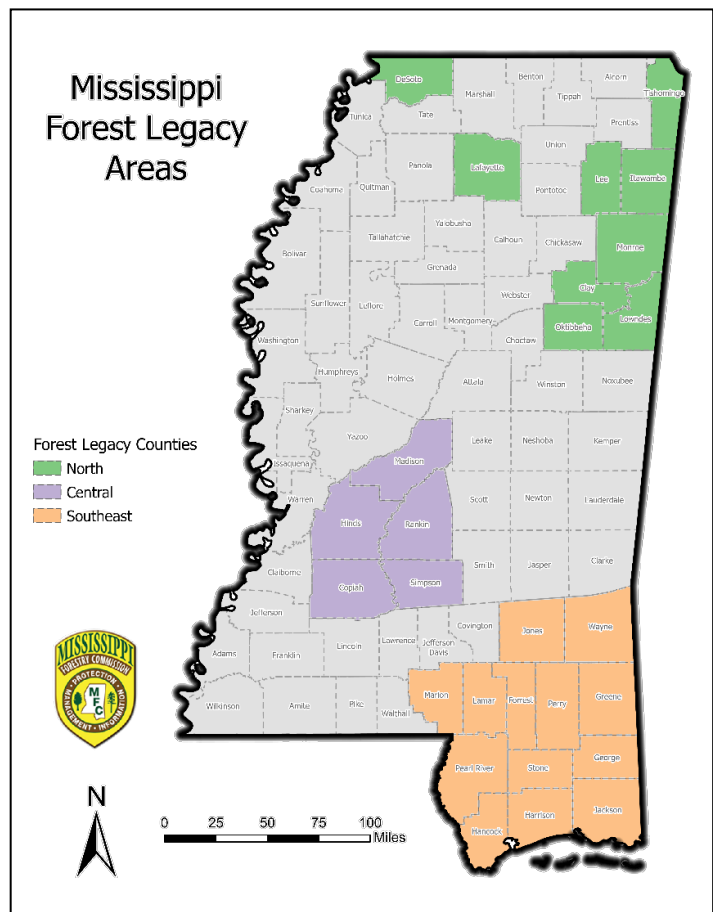
The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is a conservation program administered by the USDA Forest Service in partnership with the Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) to encourage the protection of forest lands *through conservation easements or land purchases*. **FLP's purpose is to identify and protect environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses and to promote forestland protection and other conservation opportunities.** Forestlands that contain important fish and wildlife habitats, scenic, cultural, recreational and/or water resources or other ecological values and that will support continuation of traditional forest uses receive priority in FLP.

How does Forest Legacy work?

The FLP collaborates with private landowners to acquire conservation easements that permanently limit property interests and use to protect forest values. The FLP also purchases and accepts donations of forestland. Lands purchased in fee title remain in ownership by a local, state or federal agency. Tracts nominated by landowners for the FLP must be within one of the designated Forest Legacy Areas (FLA) and must meet the FLP state and national program objectives. Federal funds via a competitive grant to the MFC may provide up to 75 percent of FLP project costs. The remaining 25 percent (cost share) must come from non-federal sources. The FLP only works with willing sellers or donors.

Where are the Forest Legacy Areas in Mississippi?

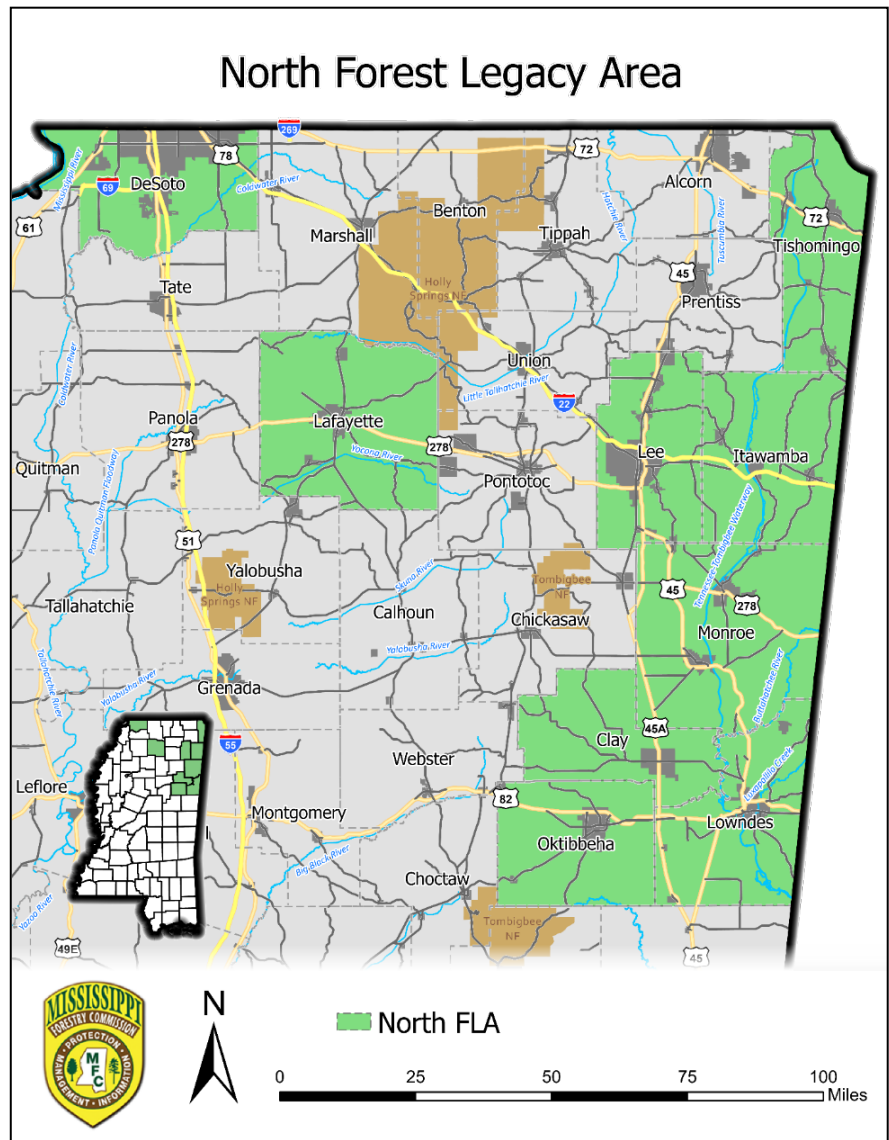
Three FLAs are defined in Mississippi: Southeast, Central and North Forest Legacy Areas. Properties nominated for FLP must fall within an FLA to be considered and must meet the state and national program objectives. The following is a map of each FLA and a list of the conservation priorities, important public lands and threats to forests in each area.



North MS Forest Legacy Area - Clay, Desoto, Itawamba, Lafayette, Lee, Lowndes, Monroe, Oktibbeha, Tishomingo

Important Forest Types in the North FLA: Bottomland hardwoods, lower slope/high terrace hardwood forests, dry hardwood forests, dry to mesic hardwood forests, bald cypress/gum swamp forests

Conservation Values and Priorities in the North FLA: Tombigbee drainage, Northeast Hills/ Tennessee River drainage, Buttahatchie River, Mississippi River, Coldwater River, Yocona River, Little Tallahatchie River, Tennessee-Tombigbee River, Bear Creek, Natchez Trace corridor, Sardis Lake, Arkabutla Lake, Horn Lake, scenic streams, riparian corridors and forested wetlands along ecoregional priority river/stream reaches, wildlife crossings and migration corridors, areas adjacent to public lands managed for conservation and mitigation banks, scenic roads, existing private conservation lands, 16th Section lands and military installations, areas adjacent to private preserves and conservation easements



Important Public Lands in the North FLA: Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway, Holly Springs National Forest, Tombigbee National Forest, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Divide Section WMA, John Bell Williams WMA, Canal Section WMA, Black Prairie WMA, Upper Sardis WMA, Trim Cane WMA, John Starr WMA, Sardis Waterfowl Area, Graham Waterfowl Area, J.P. Coleman State Park, Tishomingo State Park, Tombigbee State Park, Lake Lowndes State Park, Columbus AFB, 16th Section Lands, Lake Monroe, Elvis Presley Lake, Lake Lamar Bruce

Threats to natural forest communities in the North FLA: Urban sprawl, fragmentation/parcelization, invasive species, second home/ vacation home development, conversion of natural forest communities to pine plantations, channel modification, sand and gravel mining

Central Mississippi Forest Legacy Area - Copiah, Hinds, Madison, Rankin, and Simpson

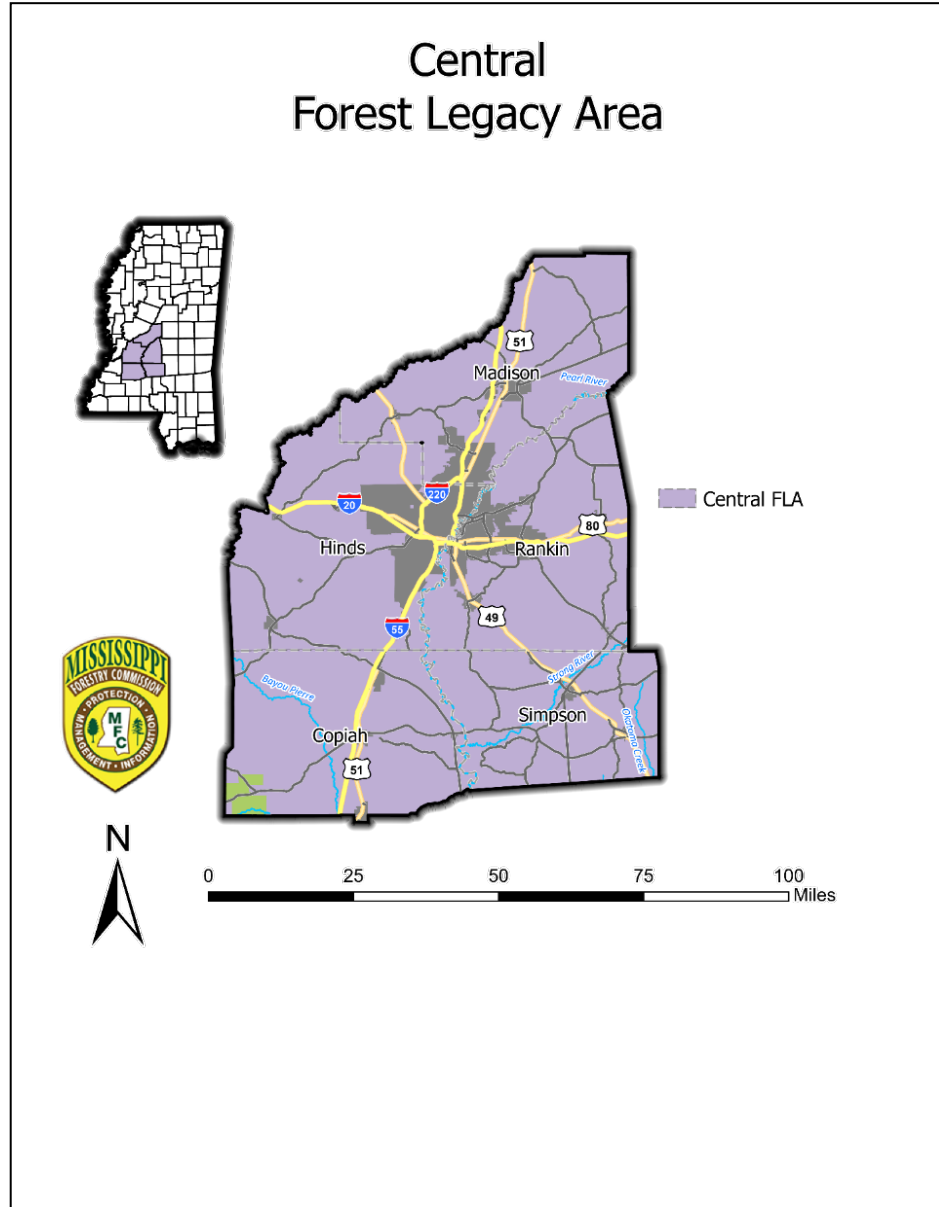
Important Forest Types in the Central FLA:

Bottomland hardwoods, bald cypress/gum swamp forests, lower slope/high terrace hardwood forests

Conservation Values and Priorities in the Central FLA:

Big Black River drainage, Upper and Lower Pearl River drainage, Bayou Pierre, Okatoma Creek, Ross Barnett Reservoir, Natchez Trace corridor, wildlife crossings/migratory corridors, riparian corridors and forested wetlands along ecoregional priority river/stream reaches, areas adjacent to public lands managed for conservation and mitigation, existing private conservation lands and 16th

Section lands, areas adjacent to private preserves and conservation easements



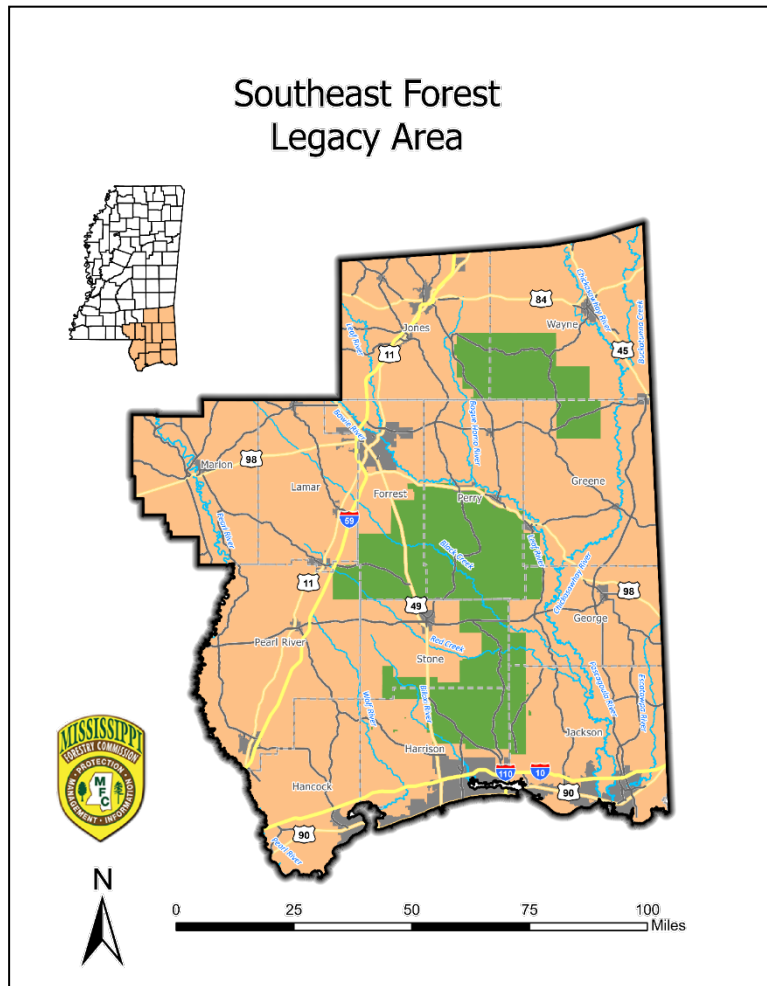
Important Public Lands in the Central FLA: Natchez Trace National Park, Ross Barnett Reservoir, Pearl River WMA, Copiah County WMA, LeFleur's Bluff State Park, 16th Section lands, Simpson County Lake, Calling Panther Lake

Threats to natural forest communities in the Central FLA: Metro area sprawl, significant suburban and exurban development, fragmentation/parcelization, flood control/channel modification, road, parkway and infrastructure construction, sand and gravel mining, conversion of natural forest communities to pine plantation

Southeast Mississippi Forest Legacy Area - Forrest, George, Greene, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Jones, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River, Perry, Stone, Wayne

Important Forest Types in the Southeast FLA: Wet pine savannas/ slash pine flatwoods, mesic longleaf pine forests, dry longleaf pine forests, bottomland hardwoods, small stream swamp forests, maritime forests, beech/magnolia forests, pine seeps

Values and Priorities for Southeast FLA: Pascagoula River drainage, Lower Pearl River drainage, Black Creek, Leaf River, Okatoma Creek, Ragland hills, Leaf River, scenic streams, barrier islands, fallout habitat for neotropical migratory songbirds, Black bear, gopher tortoise, gopher frog, pitcher plant habitat, riparian corridors and forested wetlands along ecoregional priority river/stream reaches, wildlife crossings and migration corridors, areas adjacent to public lands managed for conservation and mitigation banks, existing private conservation lands, 16th Section lands and military installations, areas adjacent to private preserves and conservation easements



Important Public Lands in the Southeast FLA: DeSoto National Forest, Chickasawhay Ranger District, Stennis Space Center, Camp Shelby, Red Creek WMA, Pascagoula River WMA, Wolf River WMA, Leaf River WMA, Old River WMA, Little Biloxi WMA, Red Creek WMA, Ward Bayou WMA, Chickasawhay WMA, Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR, Grand Bay NWR and National Estuarine Research Reserve, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Coastal Preserves, Gulf Island National Seashore, Paul B. Johnson State Park, Buccaneer State Park, Shepard State Park, 16th Section Lands

Threats to natural forest communities the Southeast FLA: Significant urban and exurban sprawl from coastal development and Hattiesburg, population shifts within the region generated by storm hazards, hurricanes, sea level rise and more frequent flooding, significant recent timber losses from hurricanes and strong storms, second home/vacation home development, decades of fire exclusion in fire-dependent forest communities, sale of industry lands to individuals, invasive species, road and infrastructure construction, conversion of natural stands to pine plantations and sand and gravel mining, fragmentation/parcelization.



Who may apply for Forest Legacy? When?

FLP is strictly voluntary. Landowners with an interest in protecting and conserving their natural forest land may make an application to the FLP Coordinator by JUNE 1 to have their property considered for nomination for federal fiscal year 2025 (begins Oct. 2024). Applications will be reviewed and ranked by MFC. If chosen for nomination, MFC will submit a proposal to the Forest Service. All tracts must fall within a defined FLA. FLP nominations that support the national and state criteria have the best chance of being nominated and funded.

What are the national and Mississippi criteria for FLP?

National Criteria – Tracts shall have significant environmental values or shall be threatened by present or future conversion to non-forest use. National priority will be given to land that can be effectively protected and managed AND that has important scenic or recreational values, riparian areas, fish and wildlife values, or other ecological values. Three national criteria are used to evaluate and score projects:

Importance – Focuses on the attributes of the property and the environmental, social, and economic public benefits gained from the protection and management of the property and its resources, now and into the future. This criterion reflects ecological assets as well as the economic and social values conserved by the project and its level of significance. Examples: working forestlands, important natural forest communities, threatened and endangered species habitat, water supply/watershed protection, tourism/public access, scenic, fish and wildlife habitat, historic/cultural, vulnerable communities, climate.

Threatened –What is the likelihood for conversion? More points will be given to projects that demonstrate multiple conditions such as lack of protection, land and landowner circumstances, adjacent land uses, and ability to develop.

Strategic – Reflects the project's relevance or relationship to conservation efforts on a broader perspective. Four considerations to make: 1-scale of a conservation initiative, strategy, or plan; 2- scale of the project's contribution to that initiative, strategy, or plan; 3- placement of the parcel within the area of the initiative, strategy, or plan; and 4-how the project complements protected lands.

Additional Considerations:

Readiness – Is there local support? Can the project be completed? Is there a completed appraisal or market analysis, draft easement conditions, survey, signed cost share commitment, signed option or purchase agreement, title search, evaluation of mineral rights, forest stewardship plan?

Climate resilience – Demonstrate how protecting the tract will contribute to climate resilience and connectivity.

State Criteria – Tracts must be in a designated FLA, *threatened* by conversion, owned by a *willing seller* and possess environmental values that can be *protected and managed effectively*.

Projects must also meet **more than one** Mississippi FLP **objective**:

- ✓ Sustain native or rare and unique forest communities.
- ✓ Protect water quality.
- ✓ Protect forests from development along lakes, rivers and buffer protected lands.
- ✓ Protect wildlife habitat.
- ✓ Maintain traditional forest uses, including hunting and fishing.
- ✓ Sustain productive forests.
- ✓ Provide public recreation opportunities.

What are the cost share requirements?

The maximum federal contribution for total program costs may not exceed 75%. Thus, the **non-federal cost share of AT LEAST 25%** must be documented and may consist of 1-the value of land, or interest in land, dedicated to FLP that is not paid for by the federal government; 2-non-federal costs associated with program implementation; and 3-other non-federal costs associated with a grant or other agreement that meets FLP purpose. Cost share (e.g., cash, in-kind donations, value of lands, bargain sales) may be contributed by the landowner, other partners such as land trusts or other organizations, public agencies, and businesses.

Federal funds from FLP may be used to cover transaction costs including appraisals and appraisal review, land surveys, closing costs, environmental and baseline documentation reports, title work, purchase of title insurance, mineral remoteness reports, conservation easement drafting or other real estate transaction expenses for fee title land acquisition. Federal funds may also be used to facilitate donations of land or interests in lands to a qualified donee, by paying expenses directly related to the donation, including land surveys, easement drafting, title work and establishing baseline information.

What is the likelihood of being selected?

Competition for FLP dollars is fierce. Limited funding and competition by other states and territories focus the selection process on the most unique forest properties that best meet national criteria. Only one or two properties will likely be nominated each year from Mississippi.

Is FLP protection for everyone?

FLP protection involves the sale of property or the purchase of a perpetual conservation easement for the development rights on a forest tract. If the property is sold, it will be owned by a government agency and managed in perpetuity for conservation. If the easement is purchased or donated, it serves as a protection strategy that locks in the future use of the forest forever by means of a deed restriction. Landowners should seriously consider the legal, tax, and estate ramifications of a conservation easement prior to applying.

What is a conservation easement?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits use of the land in order to protect its conservation values. The conservation easement is either donated in whole or part, or purchased by, the entity holding the easement. The landowner retains title and all remaining land rights not specifically conveyed or prohibited in the easement. Conservation easements acquired with FLP funds will be held by a qualified government agency.

Application deadline: June 1, 2023

Where can I find an application and more information? Visit website or contact individuals below. www.mfc.ms.gov/programs/private-landowner-services/forest-legacy-program/

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