



OFFICIAL NEWS RELEASE

MISSISSIPPI FORESTRY COMMISSION

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Land Acquisition Creates Largest Connecting Tract of Protected Land in Mississippi

JACKSON, Miss. - The Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC), in partnership with the Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service, is proud to announce the state's newest Forest Legacy Program tract on the Leaf River in George and Greene counties.

The Leaf River Forest Legacy Tract is comprised of 2,100 acres of working forestland along the Leaf and Pascagoula Rivers. Securing this property through state ownership will conserve forest habitat and connect over 450,000 contiguous acres between the De Soto National Forest and the Pascagoula River Wildlife Management Area. This acquisition will constitute the largest tract of contiguous protected lands for conservation in Mississippi.

“Through the Forest Legacy program, our state partners are able to better protect and conserve the long-term integrity of working forestland rather than simply allowing it to be lost to development” said Tony Tooke, Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service’s Southern Region. “This land acquisition will serve as a major milestone for forest conservation in Mississippi for generations to come and provides an excellent opportunity for further collaboration between the De Soto National Forest and the Mississippi Forestry Commission.”

Plans for the Leaf River Forest Legacy Tract include development into a working demonstration forest that will provide multiple benefits, including timber, wildlife habitat, and water quality in the Leaf River.

“This is an incredible achievement and we’re humbled by the opportunity to continue to deepen our conservation roots in this area, especially with it being the Nature Conservancy’s 40th anniversary of working along the Pascagoula River” said Alex Littlejohn, Associate State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Mississippi. “We’ve been committed to conserving and restoring land along the Pascagoula, and through our conservation partnerships over 70,000 acres along the river have been protected. To now have the ability to connect over 450,000 acres of conserved lands with this acquisition is exciting to say the least.”

The goal of Mississippi’s Forest Legacy Program is to protect important forests in the state that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses through both land acquisition and conservation easements. The Forest Legacy Program has been used in other states to purchase key forests, or the development rights on those forests, to protect them as working forests forever.

“We are grateful for all of the partners who made this project possible – the USDA Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, the Mississippi Secretary of State, and the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain” said Charlie Morgan, State Forester, Mississippi Forestry Commission.

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) funding comes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), the federal government’s main source of funds to protect land. LWCF, which was created by Congress in 1965, is funded not through taxes, but through royalties paid by energy companies for offshore gas and oil drilling.

On October 4, 2016, at Noon the Leaf River Forest Legacy Tract will be dedicated with a ceremony on the banks of the Leaf River.

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Established in 1926, the Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) protects the state’s valuable forest resources from wildfire, manages approximately 480,000 acres of forested School Trust Land, and delivers quality forest management services and assistance to both rural and urban landowners. Our mission is to provide active leadership in forest protection, forest management, forest inventory, and effective forest information distribution, necessary for Mississippi’s sustainable forest-based economy.

There are approximately 19.8 million forested acres in Mississippi. The forestry and forest products industry has a \$12.3 billion economic impact on the state of Mississippi and represents almost 70,000 jobs.

Resources:

Mississippi Forestry Commission Website - www.mfc.ms.gov

Click [here](#) to visit the MFC on Facebook

Click [here](#) to visit the MFC on Twitter

The Nature Conservancy - www.nature.org/mississippi

U.S. Forest Service - www.fs.fed.us

Forest Legacy Program - www.mfc.ms.gov/forest-legacy



Mississippi's newest Forest Legacy property is on the Leaf River in George and Greene Counties.

Photo Credit: Becky Stowe, The Nature Conservancy