

New Initiatives Enhance Critical Habitats

By: Brian A. Chandler, National Wild Turkey Federation

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), the leading conservation organization dedicated to improving upland wildlife habitat, and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service are partnering on two initiatives to enhance critical ecosystems on private land across 16 states.

The Golden-Winged Warbler Initiative and Longleaf Pine Initiative will improve habitat on private land for targeted species and countless other wildlife and plant species that flourish in the same habitat.

"These are landscape-scale habitat initiatives that will have far-reaching effects," said James Earl Kenamer, Ph.D., the NWTf's chief conservation officer. "The NWTf and our expert wildlife biologists are uniquely positioned to be the driving force behind these critical, on-the-ground habitat improvements. These initiatives will make significant impacts on golden-winged warblers, longleaf pines and the countless other species that depend on these shared habitats."

Daily, 6,000 acres of prime upland habitat are lost to development. Improving existing habitat will make a significant, long-term impact on upland wildlife and help counter these ongoing losses.

The golden-winged warbler songbird is listed as a Federal Species of Special Concern and has experienced dramatic declines, particularly throughout the greater Appalachian region, due to the loss of critical breeding habitat. Golden-winged warblers require patchy shrubland and forest edges, which are also critical for a wide range of species, including wild turkeys, ruffed grouse and migratory birds.

Longleaf pine forests once covered an estimated 90 million acres across the Southeast; today only three percent remains. Longleaf forests are home to hundreds of wildlife species, including 29 species that are listed as threatened or endangered, and are important to the continuation of these species. This habitat is extremely important for wild turkeys.

Through these free public-private initiatives, the NWTf will work with 725 private landowners to help them improve habitat on their land by providing technical assistance and preparing habitat management plans. These efforts will provide expert guidance and help landowners participate in existing federal cost-share programs to help fund these critical improvements. The NWTf also will conduct 38 wildlife habitat management field days to provide landowners with the tools to help wildlife on their lands



High quality golden-winged warbler habitat, consisting of patchy shrublands and forest edges, as depicted in the top photo, has been in decline.



Longleaf pine forests, once common throughout the southeast, are slowly being restored. A young planted longleaf pine forest is shown in the bottom photo.

Top photo by: Brian Chandler, NWTF. Bottom photo by: Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech.

In Virginia, private lands on the Blue Ridge divide and westward to the West Virginia line can potentially qualify for the Golden Winged-Warbler Initiative. Private lands in Virginia's coastal plain can potentially qualify for the Longleaf Pine Initiative.

The NWTF is having a Longleaf Pine Initiative Field Day in Yale, Va., at the Ruritan Club July 18, at 09:30 am. There will be presentations and field trips on wildlife habitat and forestry. Landowners with questions or interest in NWTF programs should contact Brian A. Chandler.

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Editor's Note: Brian A. Chandler will also be speaking about the Golden-Winged Warbler Initiative during the Fall Forestry & Wildlife Field Tour in Roanoke County in October. See the Events Calendar for details.