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**SFI® Grant Encourages Private Landowners to Maintain Forest Corridors in North Carolina's Cape Fear Arch**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — Connecting a network of private forests could help bears, wild turkeys and other species travel uninterrupted across parts of the Cape Fear Arch in southeastern North Carolina. A Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Inc. (SFI) Conservation and Community Partnership Grant is supporting landowner outreach by The Nature Conservancy's North Carolina Chapter to make this vision a reality.

"We want to encourage buffering and forming corridors between existing managed lands. But this can't be achieved solely by buying land to be set aside for conservation. We need private forest landowners to participate. The underlying goal of the project is to promote long-term forest management and conservation on private lands," said Dan Ryan, a Program Director with The Nature Conservancy.

The program helps land owners develop a forest management plan. This is a key program benefit. Having a forest management plan gives landowners access to expertise and cost-sharing through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This federal program provides financial and technical assistance to landowners who are restoring forests by planting longleaf pine and other tree species. The program also helps landowners meet federal, state, tribal and local environmental regulations.

"We are excited to be able to support this Nature Conservancy project. We are confident it will help keep privately held working forests as forests. Our hope is it will promote forest certification and longleaf restoration in the context of managed forests, and create important connections between longleaf pine habitats," said Kathy Abusow, President and CEO of SFI Inc.

The Nature Conservancy also relies on two key partners: The National Wild Turkey Federation and Resource Management Service (RMS), LLC, a private timberlands investment firm managed by forestry professionals. RMS is also an SFI Program Participant.

"We are pleased to be partners in this project. By working together we can demonstrate the compatibility of longleaf restoration and sustainable forest management. The success of this project will offer a great example that might be followed in other regions and forest types," said Craig Blair, President and CEO of RMS.

The Nature Conservancy also views the landowner outreach project as a pilot effort that could be scaled up in the future. "We are establishing excellent working relationships with our partners and based on early reactions from landowners I'm confident this model could be applied across North Carolina and in other states," said Ryan.

SFI provided a \$27,000 grant for the landowner outreach project. Since 2010, SFI has awarded more than \$1.9 million to foster research and to pilot efforts to better inform future decisions about our forests. When leveraged with project-partner contributions, that total investment exceeds \$7.1 million.

**About Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc. (SFI)**

SFI Inc. is an independent, nonprofit organization that is solely responsible for maintaining, overseeing and improving the internationally recognized Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program. Across the United States and Canada, about 250 million acres are certified to the SFI forest management standard. In addition, the SFI program's unique fiber-sourcing requirements promote responsible forest management on all suppliers' lands. SFI chain-of-custody certification tracks the percentage of fiber from certified forests, certified sourcing and post-consumer recycled content. SFI on-product labels identify both certified sourcing and chain-of-custody claims to help consumers make responsible purchasing decisions. SFI Inc. is governed by a three-chamber board of directors representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally. Learn more at [www.sfiprogram.org](http://www.sfiprogram.org) and [www.sfiprogram.org/Buy-SFI](http://www.sfiprogram.org/Buy-SFI).

**About The Nature Conservancy**

The Nature Conservancy was founded in 1951 and formally chartered in North Carolina in 1977. It pursues non-confrontational, pragmatic, market-based solutions to conservation challenges. The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Its diverse staff includes more than 600 scientists, located in all 50 U.S. states and more than 35 countries. The Nature Conservancy works with local governments and timber management organizations in the southeast coastal plain of North Carolina to protect the highest priority forest habitats through acquisition or conservation easements. One of the organization's principal strengths is its presence in the local landscapes.

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