

## **SEFireMap: Overview & Status Update**

### **from NRCS, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, and the Longleaf Alliance**

**April 2019**

#### **Overview: SEFireMap (A new effort to develop fire mapping in Southeastern U.S.)**

Development of a map to track both prescribed burn and wildfire activity will serve as a decision support tool to maximize the effectiveness of prescribed burn practices on private lands to achieve the varied objectives of NRCS and its partners such as keeping working lands working, restoring the longleaf pine ecosystem, supporting DoD's military and training mission, conserving listed and at-risk species, managing for wildfire risk, and minimizing the need to conserve species through regulation.

The project will be achieved through remote analysis of imaging data, supported by collation of spatial data (when available) to document, track, and "ground-truth" actual fire activity. Achievement of a SEFireMap would allow USDA Programs, America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative, the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning & Sustainability (SERPPAS), and other partners to identify under-served areas as they exist or emerge, and then prioritize deployment of technical and financial support.

Deliverables would include a "dashboard" for regional, state and local decision-making. With wildfire risk increasing, the importance of enhancing and expanding prescribed burn implementation is great, while both funding and burn crews are in short supply. Therefore, it's imperative that we and our partners have a reliable method to select priority geographies to manage natural resources and wildfire risk. The current funding level is \$1,300,000, available for the period 2019-2022 as a planned Above-States Initiative award from the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service to the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities for assistance in management of the project. A planned sub award to The Longleaf Alliance will augment technical assistance for decision-making. A determination of the need for additional funds will be made once a final Scope of Work (SOW) and Budget is developed for the project. To conduct a Scoping assessment of similar projects or tools, and to assist in development of the SOW, a Technical Oversight Team will be established through a Statement of Interest process to solicit information and qualifications from technical staff among our partners and others, as necessary.

#### **Status Update: NEXT STEPS**

1. **Funding Obligation** – The funds have been approved within NRCS and an obligation is anticipated by May 2019 to the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities. An early sub award to The Longleaf Alliance will provide continuous technical support for the project.
2. **Scoping Phase** – A full assessment of existing datasets, spatial information, modeling, tools, and approaches will be conducted nationally. In 2018, the Good Map committee of SERPPAS conducted an assessment within the Southeast and identified several interesting tools that could contribute to this concept. A more in-depth assessment will be conducted nationally to optimize decision-making, use of funds, and the utility of the SEFireMap. A primary goal is to ensure that we are aware of similar efforts in other regions of the country, that we learn of any new technologies available, and that we collaborate as appropriate to ensure seamless fire planning at larger geographies of the U.S. (e.g. especially the Western states where fire management is a top priority).
3. **Technical Oversight Team (TOT)** – USDA will establish a technical oversight team to assist with the assessments in the Scoping Phase, to develop and/or review a project SOW, and to follow

this project through all phases of its development, providing technical review and input to ensure success. The TOT will be comprised of 6-10 applicants from across the partnerships and may include contractors with specific skills not otherwise available. The TOT's role will be advisory to NRCS and the Endowment, with their recommendations given strong consideration. A short statement of interest will be made available and candidates will be selected from among receipts; a formal request to the candidates' agency or organization of employment will follow.

4. **Scope of Work (SOW)** – Based on information collected in the Scoping Phase, a SOW will be developed by either the TOT or a selected vendor. If the latter, the SOW will be reviewed and by TOT before moving forward.
5. **Budget & Timeline Development** – Based on the SOW, a detailed budget with timeline will be drafted. These will also receive TOT review with recommendations. If a need for additional funding support is identified, the partners will be contacted to collaborate on meeting that need.
6. **Data Integration** – NRCS will work with the selected vendor(s) to develop an acceptable approach by which prescribed burns conducted using Farm Bill funds under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) can be captured within the new SEFireMap. As the Farm Bill is the primary source of funding for prescribed burns on private lands, this is a critical action. Personally identifiable information (PII) of USDA program participants will be protected in this process, as required by statute.
7. **Internet Host Site** – The partnership will work together to identify and secure funding support for an independent web portal that meets federal security requirements and is immune from a closure decision by any one agency or partner. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has indicated their interest in managing joint funding to meet this longer-term need.

**Prepared by:** Bridgett Costanzo, USDA-NRCS Acting Longleaf Pine Initiative Coordinator, in consultation with the Endowment for Forestry and Communities and The Longleaf Alliance.