



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape to lead new Regional Conservation Partnership Program



The Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape (SISL) partnership is excited to announce approval of a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) for the 3.5-million-acre SISL area. RCPP is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds innovative solutions to natural resource challenges. The Natural Resources Conservation Service within the US Department of Agriculture oversees the federal program.

This RCPP will increase private lands conservation on farms and forests in southern Indiana. NRCS will provide funding to the partnership over the next five years to permanently protect and restore over 2,500 acres of forestland through conservation easements, restore an additional 5,000 to 10,000 acres of oak-hickory forest ecosystems, and increase sustainable farming practices on tens of thousands of acres.

“Since nearly 90% of the land in SISL is owned and managed by private landowners, it is critical to our rural way of life, including our rich agricultural and natural heritage, that these landowners have the support and resources needed to sustainably manage their lands. Furthermore, having a landscape dominated by rural uses supports the critical missions of our four military installations and ranges.” Michael Spalding SISL Program Coordinator

Since designation in February 2022, the SISL partnership has been working on ways to advance the pace and scale of conservation in southern Indiana. This RCPP will help achieve many of the program's goals. The diverse partnership advancing this project includes NSA Crane, Atterbury-Muscatatuck Training Center, The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative, American Bird Conservancy, Let the Sunshine IN, Indiana Forestry and Woodland Owners Association, Indiana DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife, Central Indiana Land Trust, and Indiana State Department of Agriculture Division of Soil Conservation.

Landowners interested in learning more about conservation on their farms and forests should reach out to SISL Program Coordinator Michael Spalding at mspalding@sentinellandscapes.org or 812-855-1898.

“Indiana Forestry and Woodland Owners Association educates our members and informs the general public about the benefits of good forest management, including the recognition that we are and will continue to lose our oak woodlands and forests without more action. By partnering on this RCPP, we can combine the power of our outreach and education with significant funding to private landowners to restore southern Indiana's forests.” IFWOA Executive Director Liz Jackson

“Healthy oak-hickory forests are critical to supporting wildlife, regulating our climate and supplying valuable economic products,” said Indiana NRCS Acting State Conservationist Curtis Knueven. “While oak-hickory forests are still abundant across the eastern half of the United States, the conditions are lacking in most forests to support the next generation of trees. Projects like this one help ensure our forests are conserved, restored and made more resilient to climate change through proper management practices.”

“The National Wild Turkey Federation supports the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Through our organization's USDA-NRCS partnership through the National Forestry Initiative, we have witnessed firsthand the increased interest and need that private forest landowners have for technical assistance and cost share opportunities to carry out important conservation work. NWTF foresters in this region may be utilized in assisting in carrying out the technical resources associated with this RCPP with private forest landowners through their respective NRCS offices,” said Michael Mitchener, the National Forestry Initiative Coordinator with NWTF.

“The Let the Sun Shine In – Indiana Collaboration is very excited to learn that funding through this project will be available to help Indiana forest landowners to manage their property, and restore and maintain our imperiled oak-hickory ecosystems. Oak trees are keystone species in the ecosystem and support many types of birds and wildlife. This project, which will assist landowners with their forest management practices, will help create large blocks of private and public land with similar management strategies. This will benefit both the wildlife and people of Southern Indiana.” Judi Brown Let the Sun Shine IN Coordinator with the American Bird Conservancy Central Hardwoods Joint Venture

“This is one of the most rich and diverse areas in the world. It’s also one of the areas of the country with the highest adoption rate and in-depth knowledge of soil health systems. Because of the long history of conservation in this part of the state, we still have a wealth of soil and timber resources that we can work with. I’m excited for the tools this project will bring to our conservation partners, farmers, and landowners as they work to protect this area’s cropland, surface waters, timberland on a landscape scale... and for what it means to the wildlife that depends on the area’s health and preservation.” Conservation Cropping Systems Director Lisa Holscher

Christian Freitag, Executive Director of Conservation Law Center, which oversees the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape program, added “This RCPP is among the largest public investments in Indiana conservation ever. This project will make our water cleaner, our forests healthier, and help us address growing climate change issues like heavier drought and flood cycles. And it’s all voluntary. Everyone can support efforts like these.”

Background:

The Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape (SISL) is a collaboration of diverse partners who are advancing the pace and scale of conservation throughout a three and a half million-acre swath of south-central Indiana to protect military missions on four critical installations and ranges.

Founded in 2013 by the U.S. Departments of Defense, Agriculture, and Interior, the mission of the federal partnership is to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, prepare for drought and flood, and bolster agricultural and forestry economies. In February 2022, the federal government designated SISL, at the time one of only ten such areas in the country, recognizing the significance of southern Indiana’s four military installations and the area’s rich natural and agricultural heritage.

The SISL partnership, coordinated by the Conservation Law Center (CLC) at Indiana University’s Maurer School of Law, includes federal agencies, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations who work with private and public landowners to advance sustainable land management practices for natural resource, agricultural, and military interests. Email: mspalding@sentinellandscapes.org

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ABOUT: *Conservation Law Center (the Center) is an independent, non-profit organization that provides legal counsel to conservation organizations and works to improve state and federal conservation law and policy. The organization works with clients on a wide range of transactional, policy, and litigation matters pertaining to both regional and national conservation issues. The Center has particular interest and expertise endangered species*

protection and litigation, natural habitat protection, conservation easements, and the protection of freshwater ecosystems especially in the Great Lakes region. Conservation Law Center was founded in 2005 by attorney W. William Weeks, former EVP and COO of The Nature Conservancy, who currently serves as the Center's board chair.

The Center also operates the Conservation Law Clinic in partnership with the Indiana University Maurer School of Law in Bloomington. In that capacity, the Center works with student interns on its live projects, advising clients and researching legal and policy solutions on regional and national conservation issues.

More information about Conservation Law Center is available at:
<http://www.conservationlawcenter.org>.