

## USDA Approves Emergency Conservation Program and Emergency Forest Restoration Program Assistance in 14 Florida Counties

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**GAINESVILLE, Fla., Nov. 21, 2023** – U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced that 14 Florida counties are accepting applications for the [Emergency Conservation Program](#) (ECP) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP) to address Hurricane Idalia damages. The list of approved counties includes: Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Duval, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, and Wakulla. Signup for ECP and EFRP in these counties begins Nov 15, 2023, and ends Jan 14, 2024.

“These programs help producers and private forest landowners clean up and restore their farmland and forests damaged by Hurricane Idalia,” said Deborah Tannenbaum, State Executive Director for FSA in Florida. “I encourage all eligible landowners to apply for assistance by the deadline. If you haven’t participated in FSA programs, contact your local FSA office as soon as possible to complete the process of establishing customer and farm records and to determine program eligibility.”

### **Emergency Conservation Program**

ECP assists producers with the cost to restore farmland to pre-disaster conditions. Approved ECP applicants can receive up to 75% of the cost of the approved restoration activity. Program applicants who qualify as limited resource, socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers can receive up to 90% cost-share.

Approved ECP practices under this authorization include:

- Debris removal from farmland
- Grading, shaping, and releveling
- Replacing/Restoring permanent fences
- Restoring conservation structures

Producers who incurred damage are required to apply for assistance before starting any reconstructive work. FSA's National Environmental Policy Act and environmental compliance review process must also be completed before any restoration activities begin. Producers who submit applications for assistance after reconstructive work has been completed may not qualify for ECP assistance.

FSA county committee evaluation of ECP applications is based on an on-site inspection of the damaged land, taking into consideration the type and extent of damage. An on-site inspection does not guarantee that cost-share funding will be provided.

The use of ECP funds is limited to activities that return the land to the relative pre-disaster condition and the payment limitation for ECP is \$500,000 per disaster event. Conservation concerns present on the land prior to the eligible disaster event are not eligible for ECP assistance.

### **Emergency Forest Restoration Program**

EFRP provides payments to eligible owners of nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) land to carry out emergency measures to restore land damaged by a natural disaster.

The approved EFRP practices under this authorization include:

- Hardwood forest restoration
- Softwood forest restoration
- Mixed forest restoration
- Longleaf Pine restoration

Because EFRP funds are allocated based on the number of applications submitted to FSA and the extent of damage as determined by on-site inspections, producers in need of EFRP assistance should submit applications to FSA as soon as possible.

After EFRP applications are received, local FSA county committees determine land eligibility and approve applications using on-site inspections to assess the type and extent of damage. Eligible forest restoration practices include debris removal, such as down or damaged trees, to establish a new stand or provide natural regeneration; site preparation, planting materials and labor to replant forest land; restoration of forestland roads, fire lanes, fuel breaks or erosion control structures; fencing, tree shelters and tree tubes to protect trees from wildlife damage; and wildlife enhancement to provide cover openings and wildlife habitat.

To meet EFRP eligibility requirements, NIPF land must have existing tree cover or had tree cover immediately before the natural disaster event occurred and be sustainable for growing trees. The land must also be owned by a nonindustrial private individual, group, association, corporation or other private legal entity that has definitive decision-making authority over the land. The natural disaster event must have resulted in damage that, if untreated, would impair or endanger the natural resources on the land and materially affect future use of the land.

### **More Information**

For more information on ECP, EFRP and other disaster recovery assistance, please contact your [local USDA Service Center](#) or visit the [disaster protection and recovery](#) and [hurricane recovery](#) pages on [farmers.gov](#).

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