



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Contact:

Rob Blumenthal, 202-857-0166, [rob.blumenthal@nfwf.org](mailto:rob.blumenthal@nfwf.org)

## **NFWF Announces Inaugural \$2.19 million in Grants to Benefit Forests and Wetlands within the Greater Mississippi Alluvial Valley**

*Seven grants support efforts to restore, enhance and protect more than 60,000 acres of forest and wetland habitats, benefiting wildlife and water quality*

**MEMPHIS, Tenn. (July 31, 2018)** – The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) today announced seven conservation grants totaling \$2.19 million to restore, enhance and protect forest and wetland habitats in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. The grants will generate \$1.5 million in matching contributions for a total conservation impact of more than \$3.6 million throughout Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas.

The grants were awarded through the [Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley Restoration Fund](#), a partnership between NFWF and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Forest Service, with private funding from International Paper’s Forestland Stewards Partnership, the Walton Family Foundation and the American Forest Foundation’s Southern Woods for At-Risk Wildlife Initiative.

“The Mississippi Alluvial Valley is one of the most biologically rich and productive forested wetland ecosystems in North America,” said Jeff Trandahl, executive director and CEO of NFWF. “We see great opportunity to improve water quality, benefit local communities and support populations of ducks, fish and other wildlife — all while keeping commerce flowing on the river.”

In total, the projects will restore 25,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forest, enhance more than 13,000 acres of existing bottomland hardwood and upland forest habitat, restore and improve hydrologic function to 24,000 acres of wetlands and floodplains, and protect nearly 22,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forest and wetland habitats with conservation easements.

Grant recipients will work with hundreds of landowners to establish and enhance bottomland hardwood and upland forests, and restore wetland and floodplain hydrology to improve wildlife habitat and water quality.

The Mississippi Alluvial Valley is a vast forested wetland system that provides important habitat for migratory birds – approximately 40 percent of North America’s waterfowl and nearly 60 percent of all U.S. bird species migrate or winter in the region. Conversion of forests to cropland, as well as flood control and drainage projects for agricultural development and river navigation, have taken their toll on the valley’s rich bottomland hardwood forests and wetlands that support

wildlife and safeguard clean water. The Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley Restoration Fund was launched to help restore and protect these nationally significant habitats.

“We are excited that NRCS and US Forest Service are contributing to this private lands restoration effort in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley”, said Homer Wilkes, director, USDA Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team. “Through this, we hope to build on previous conservation efforts as well as expand them across the diverse communities of this culturally and agriculturally rich area.”

“International Paper is proud to support these forestry and wetland programs through our Forestland Stewards Partnership,” said Tom Cleves, vice president of Global Citizenship. “Our entire business depends upon the sustainability of forests. Through partnerships like this, IP will continue to lead the world in responsible forest stewardship to ensure healthy and productive forest ecosystems for generations to come.”

The Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley Restoration Fund was established by NFWF in 2018. The fund invest in on-the-ground projects that restore, enhance and conserve bottomland hardwood forest and wetland habitats. Its work is expected to benefit hunters, farmers and local communities through improving habitats for ducks and fish, and improving water quality within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley region. It is anticipated that the funding opportunity will solicit request for proposals on an annual basis.

“We are excited to join with International Paper and all the non-profit and public sector partners that have come together to restore thousands of acres of bottomland hardwood forests in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley,” said Moira McDonald, director of the Mississippi River initiative for the Walton Family Foundation. “This restoration benefits water quality, wildlife, and forest health, all the while providing economic opportunities for landowners.”

“Across the South, nearly 60 percent of the forests are owned by family forest owners. These individuals care about wildlife and want to do right by the land,” said Tom Martin, President and CEO of the American Forest Foundation. “We are proud to be a part of the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley Restoration Fund, to help landowners get the support and resources they need to take an active role in their land and improve habitat for at-risk species.”

A complete list of the 2018 grants made through the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley Restoration Fund is available [here](#).

### **About the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**

*Chartered by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores the nation’s fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal, corporate and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 4,500 organizations and generated a conservation impact of more than \$4.8 billion. Learn more at [www.nfwf.org](http://www.nfwf.org).*

### **About International Paper**

*International Paper (NYSE: IP) is a leading global producer of renewable fiber-based packaging, pulp and paper products with manufacturing operations in North America, Latin*

*America, Europe, North Africa, India and Russia. We produce corrugated packaging products that protect and promote goods, and enable worldwide commerce; pulp for diapers, tissue and other personal hygiene products that promote health and wellness and papers that facilitate education and communication. We are headquartered in Memphis, Tenn., and employ approximately 52,000 colleagues located in more than 24 countries. Net sales for 2017 were \$22 billion. For more information about International Paper, our products and global citizenship efforts, please visit [internationalpaper.com](http://internationalpaper.com).*

**About the Walton Family Foundation**

*The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. The children and grandchildren of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving K-12 education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. In 2017, the foundation awarded more than \$535 million in grants in support of these initiatives. To learn more, visit [waltonfamilyfoundation.org](http://waltonfamilyfoundation.org) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).*

**About the American Forest Foundation**

*The American Forest Foundation (AFF), a forest conservation organization, works on the ground with families, partners and elected officials to promote stewardship and protect our nation's forest heritage. A commitment to the next generation unites our nationwide network of forest owners working to keep our forests healthy and producing the clean water, wildlife habitat and sustainable wood supplies that all Americans count on from forests.*

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