



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **PRESIDENT BUSH TO PROPOSE RECORD-LEVEL SUPPORT TO KEEP PRIVATE FORESTED AREAS INTACT**

*\$90.8 Million Request Will Strengthen Conservation Program Protecting Private Forests*

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn., Jan. 31, 2003—President Bush will propose record-level funding for USDA’s Forest Legacy Program as part of his 2004 budget request according to Agriculture Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Mark Rey. The \$90.8 million request is a \$21 million increase over the fiscal 2003 request and represents a \$60.9 million increase since fiscal 2000.

“America’s privately-owned forests provide a host of essential goods and services that we need and use every day, such as clean water. The Forest Legacy Program helps to conserve these important places using an incentive-based, non-regulatory approach for willing buyers and sellers,” said Rey. “President Bush is strongly committed to the Forest Legacy Program, which ensures that our nation’s privately-held forested landscapes remain intact.”

Rey made the announcement at a ceremony for the Cummings Cove Forest Legacy Project, Hamilton and Marion Counties, Tenn., which will turn 2,400 acres of private forested land into a wildlife management area. This tract will provide important open space, protect crucial wildlife habitat, sustain water supplies and allow for recreational use while complimenting a larger conservation strategy for the Tennessee River watershed and gorge. The State of Tennessee, Trust For Public Land, Tennessee River Gorge Trust and Tennessee Forest Stewardship Committee are key partners in the project with USDA’s Forest Service. The Forest Service contributed \$1 million to the project.

Every day, the United States loses about 4,000 acres of open space, including almost 2,000 acres of forestland. The nation’s private forests, which make up about 400 million acres and are essential for water quality, wildlife protection and recreational values, are becoming increasingly fragmented and converted to non-forest uses. The Forest Legacy Program, in partnership with individual states and local organizations, assists willing landowners in ensuring the continued existence of a healthy and productive forest and protecting key resources.

Rey said that the additional funding would go a long way in supporting additional vital projects like Cummings Cove that will help sustain the ecological integrity and economic viability of our nation’s private forests through partnerships and collaboration.

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The Forest Legacy Program, <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/flp.htm>, established by Congress in 1990, allows the Forest Service to work with state forestry agencies to provide incentives to private landowners through the use of conservation easements and fee-simple purchases to conserve forested lands from fragmentation, assure traditional uses and preserve public values. Currently, 33 states are participating in the program and more than 140 projects have been completed nationwide. Tennessee has been a participant in the program since June 1999. Cummings Cove is the second project completed in the state; six others are ongoing.

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