



*To: Mississippi Media  
June 20, 2008*

## **Financial opportunities loom large for Delta farmers enrolling land into a new USDA-CRP program together with a private forest restoration program**

Two planting programs are now available to Mississippi Delta producers, jointly offering multiple financial incentives, cost-shares and income opportunities to restore cropland into bottomland and wetland black bear habitats while reforesting the region.

The two programs are a new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) being offered by the Mississippi Farm Service Agency (FSA), entitled State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), and a private forest restoration program called GreenTrees. If a landowner's eligible acres meet both programs' criteria, the combined enrollment incentives can provide the producer 604 freely established trees per acre and a potential take home income of at least \$250 or more per acre in the first year alone. Further annual and periodic incomes would be available throughout the terms of each program.

Federal funds have been awarded through the SAFE program to restore 7,950 acres of critical black bear habitat in 18 Delta counties. SAFE will function as a new Conservation Reserve Program practice (CP 38) and open enrollment in these 18 counties begins Monday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>. According to the USDA, the Mississippi Black Bear SAFE program seeks to restore native bottomland hardwood and wetland forests in areas that have been identified as an important zone for black bear recovery. These local habitat conditions will be favorable to bears by incorporating a mix of soft and hard mast species to provide year-round foraging opportunities, escape cover and elevated den cavities. On a larger scale, this SAFE project will help form core habitat and travel corridors.

SAFE financial incentives include annual soil rental payments on enrolled acres, a \$100 per acre sign-up incentive, 50% of establishment cost for restoration efforts, along with practice incentive payments equal to 40% of eligible installation costs. Landowners are required to sign a 10 – 15 year contract for all acres enrolled in SAFE.

### ***Additional Private Incentives Offered by GreenTrees***

Aimed at large scale reforestation in the Delta region, the GreenTrees program is a privately funded initiative that combines fast-growth cottonwood trees with an identical number of slower growing mixed hardwoods, which are flood tolerant. The 604 trees per acre inter-planting is a Mississippi FSA-approved tree planting option for all CRP-hardwood practices, including SAFE. Therefore, if a producer's land meets the criteria for both programs, they can receive the financial incentives offered by both SAFE and GreenTrees together.

GreenTrees pays \$350 per acre directly to the producer within the successful planting and establishment period of the new trees. This payment can provide free cash flow in the first year and cover tree-planting costs. Additional potential incomes include recreation income created by quality wildlife habitat developed from the fast-growth forest, all timber income allowed from numerous allowed harvestings, and future carbon income as the trees mature. The combined financial incentives and income opportunities from both programs offer tremendous financial opportunities while being far less dependent on weather extremes, fluctuating commodity market prices, and rising fuel and production costs.

Producers can enroll marginal farmland, clear pastures or cultivated acres in the GreenTrees program independently from any government program. Producers enrolling in SAFE or any other CRP-hardwood practice do not have to choose a cottonwood/hardwood inter-planting practice.

For producers interested in finding out if their acres qualify for this tree-planting practice, a GreenTrees Mississippi representative will work directly with producers to quickly verify whether or not the producer's acres contain soils suitable for the cottonwood/hardwood planting. If they do, and the producer is also enrolling in CRP, GreenTrees will assist NRCS as needed to write the inter-planting into the producer's conservation plan.

For more information about CP38-SAFE enrollment, producers should contact their county FSA office. For more information about GreenTrees, producers should contact Blaine Lanier at 662-560-7362 or visit [www.green-trees.com](http://www.green-trees.com).

***For questions about this Press Release or the GreenTrees program, please contact Mr. Page Gravely, Senior Director for C2I, LLC at 540-687-4252 or [page@c2invest.net](mailto:page@c2invest.net)***