



Outdoor News Bulletin

New Groundbreaking Conservation: Successful Reintroduction of the Reticulated Flatwood Salamander

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Resource Management Service, LLC (RMS), one of the world's largest and most experienced providers of timberland investment services, recently achieved a groundbreaking conservation milestone by [successfully reintroducing](#) the federally listed reticulated flatwood salamander (*Ambystoma bishopi*) in collaboration with multiple agencies and partners.

The species was reintroduced to a private forest in Florida's Santa Rosa County, with no regulatory risks to the landowner or neighboring properties. The initiative, which involved an [innovative approach with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program](#), sets a new standard for the future of species reintroduction. It was made possible in part through funding from the Conservation Without Conflict Coalition, supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and from the Naval Air Station at Whiting Field.

RMS is committed to advancing forestry and fostering appreciation for the societal importance of privately owned forests. The company strives to be a leading force in creating forest value while ensuring sustainable land use.

The reticulated flatwood salamander project brought together a diverse group of partners with a shared conservation vision. These include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), the Naval Air Station at Whiting Field, the Longleaf Alliance, the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP), and Tangled Bank Conservation (TBC). The goal was to reestablish a viable population of the reticulated flatwood salamander within its natural range and contribute to its full recovery.



The reticulated flatwood salamander is a moderately sized amphibian, typically ranging from black to chocolate-black with fine, irregular lines and specks across its back. This species lives only in the lower southeastern coastal plain of the United States, specifically Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina.

Historically, the salamander inhabited the longleaf pine ecosystems, particularly the longleaf pine-wiregrass flatwoods and savannas that once covered 32 million acres but have since been reduced to 5.6 million acres of potential habitat. They breed in small, isolated ephemeral ponds within the longleaf pine understories, where their larvae develop. As adults, they spend most of the year underground in the upland areas before migrating back to their breeding ponds.

Threats to the species include habitat loss, destruction or alteration of breeding sites, land use conversion, changes in hydrology, soil disturbance, and fire suppression. The species has been listed as [endangered since 2009](#), and ongoing conservation efforts focus on restoring and protecting their habitats to ensure their survival.

Promoting healthy habitat through easements

In 2018, RMS executed the first-ever Regional Conservation Partnership Program Healthy Forest Reserve easement with the National Resources Conservation Service on over 3,700 acres in Santa Rosa County. This easement, part of the Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Pine Forest Restoration Initiative, included as its focal species the reticulated flatwood salamander. This property historically hosted a flatwoods salamander pond, with two documented occurrences of the species in 1945 and 1990.

The precedent-setting easement requires the establishment and maintenance of longleaf pine in perpetuity, maintaining both a working longleaf pine forest and a functional longleaf ecosystem. The agreement also calls for regular prescribed burns.

The Conservation Fund was RMS' primary partner in successfully securing this easement. To reintroduce the reticulated flatwoods salamander back to this property, RMS began collaborating with various partners that included USFWS, FWC, GCPEP, TBC, Virginia Tech, and Eglin AFB. (Escribano Point WMA and Eglin AFB are home to the only known populations of this species.)



In 2022, RMS and USFWS representatives met to discuss the feasibility of restoring the reticulated flatwoods salamander on the RMS-managed property. One major challenge was how to reintroduce a federally endangered species on private lands without regulatory risks to the landowners or neighboring properties. The USFWS, in collaboration with the National Alliance of Forest Owners' Wildlife Conservation Initiative (WCI), RMS, and through innovative application of the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, developed an innovative agreement for species introductions without regulatory risk.

In October 2023, RMS signed the first-ever Partners Program Agreement for reintroduction. The agreement covered the reintroduction of the reticulated flatwood salamander on the Coastal Headwaters tract in Santa Rosa County. Environmental DNA (eDNA) work conducted by TBC in the historic pond confirmed the species was not currently present, setting the baseline for the reintroduction effort at zero. RMS collaborated closely with key partners to secure support for the reintroduction, as success required three essential components: support from the major partners (particularly FWC and Eglin AFB, which are home to the salamanders); suitable habitat; and salamanders for reintroduction.

In 2024, RMS and its partners focused on building relationships, identifying suitable habitats, and, with help from FWC and Eglin AFB, securing salamanders for the project. Virginia Tech played a key role in identifying wetlands and potential reintroduction sites on the Coastal Headwaters tract, while GCPEP conducted on-site wetland restoration work. The Naval Air Station Whiting Field and Conservation Without Conflict helped fund the reintroduction efforts.

With many of the partners present, Alex Hinson, President and CEO of RMS, successfully released the first reticulated flatwood salamanders to private lands in a historic conservation milestone in January 2025. GCPEP had previously captured the salamanders, taken genetic samples, and transported them from Escribano Point to the release site. Following the release, an unseasonably harsh and prolonged freeze occurred, but GCPEP later visited the site and confirmed that multiple salamanders had survived the unusual weather event. They plan a second release for 2026.

The power of partnerships



The reintroduction of the reticulated flatwood salamander exemplifies collaborative conservation and the principles of [Conservation Without Conflict](#). It results from strong partnerships between landowners, land managers, the WCI, FWC, and USFWS.

As the first-ever Partners Program Agreement for reintroduction, the project is a model for future reintroduction of listed species on private lands. It provides a framework for other private landowners to support species recovery without regulatory risk.

As roughly two-thirds of all land in the U.S. is privately owned, private landowners are crucial to the success of many conservation efforts. This project shows that private working forests are essential to species conservation and that voluntary conservation approaches can often be more effective than regulatory measures.

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