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## **The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Disney Collaborate to Reforest Cropland in Lower Mississippi Valley Grouped Afforestation Project**

**Baton Rouge, LA** – With only isolated patches remaining of what was once North America’s largest expanse of floodplain forest, the Lower Mississippi Valley offers fertile ground for a series of tree-planting projects that will capture carbon dioxide while restoring forests in this massive river basin. The Lower Mississippi Valley Grouped Afforestation Project (LMVGAP) is projected to sequester approximately 517,980 metric tons of carbon dioxide over 70 years.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and USDA are collaborating to enroll 2,000 acres in a program to reforest marginal cropland in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley by 2017, including 600 acres in the next six months. The collaboration is made possible in part by a financial contribution from Disney. Through the collaboration, private funding from Disney coupled with USDA conservation payments allow landowners to reforest their land, resulting in carbon sequestration and habitat restoration. To date, the collaboration has enrolled and reforested over 600 acres to demonstrate a replicable model that can be scaled up by others to achieve even broader impact. The carbon sequestration resulting from the project has been certified under the Verified Carbon Standard, and the carbon credits associated with the increase in biomass on the enrolled properties will be transferred to Disney, to help them achieve a portion of their voluntary greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals.

“NRCS values our partnership with The Nature Conservancy. Our mission is based upon helping people help the land” says State Conservationist with NRCS, Kevin Norton. “Through our private-public partnership with TNC, we can support our mission and realize perpetual environmental benefits for Louisiana. It is at the intersection of our shared values and mutual respect for the natural resources and the private land stewards that our partnership derives energy and success for the land and our customers.”

Ronnie Ulmer, Northeast Louisiana Program Director for TNC, says “Landowners and farmers in the delta of Louisiana are looking for ways to improve stewardship of their lands and realize additional income. The

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**The Nature Conservancy** is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 18 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 117 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org).

LMVGAP is a means by which they can meet both objectives and at the same time, provide benefits for the environment and save the US taxpayer money.”

As in any private carbon-offset transaction, it is crucial that potential buyers have confidence that the offsets being traded are real and verifiable. The LMVGAP establishes this confidence in several ways: 1) participating landowners must sign an affidavit stating that without the easement payments they would not have placed their property in permanent conservation; 2) the partnership employs Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) to provide credible third-party validation for the methodology and process by which carbon offsets are quantified; and 3) the VCS methodology requires that about 22% of the carbon sequestration predicted over the first 32 years of restoration be set aside as a form of insurance against uncertainty.

Keith Ouchley, State Director for The Nature Conservancy in Louisiana said, “The Nature Conservancy’s work in the Mississippi Delta is critically linked to finding win-win solutions for agricultural producers and the natural heritage of the region. We feel we can improve wildlife habitat and water quality and at the same time, support private land stewardship through our partnership with USDA-NRCS and Disney. We hope to continue this effort and elevate this private-public collaboration.”