The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Southern Company, Cargill, and Nestlé announced a seventh round of funding for the Southeast Aquatics Fund projects. Eight new watershed-based habitat restoration, enhancement and assessment projects totaling $2.4 million were awarded. The eight awards announced generated $1.8 million in matching contributions from the grantees, providing a total conservation impact of $4.2 million.

The Southeast Aquatics Fund is a competitive grants program that supports watershed-based restoration to improve the health of southeastern aquatic systems and secure populations of native freshwater aquatic species. Utilizing a habitat-based approach means a diversity of species benefit, from game species to at-risk species, helping to reduce the possibility of future listings under the Endangered Species Act.
Research and Assessment of the Trispot Darter and Alabama Rainbow Mussel (AL)
Grantee: Cawaco Resource Conservation & Development Council
Grant Amount: ............................................... $397,700
Matching Funds: ............................................. $113,300
Total Project Amount: ................................. $511,000
Support surveys to assess and propagate Alabama rainbow mussels and study the range and habitat of the trispot darter. Project will survey within the Big Canoe Creek and other subwatersheds in the Middle Coosa Watershed and will continue work on suitability assessments and reintroduction efforts for Alabama rainbow mussel.

Assessing Freshwater Mussel Distribution and Potential Remediation in the Upper Chipola River (AL, FL)
Grantee: Troy University
Grant Amount: .................................................. $125,000
Matching Funds: .............................................. $205,400
Total Project Amount: ..................................... $330,400
Reassess 20 listed historical freshwater mussel sites in the Upper Chipola River and identify locations suitable for remediation and stocking of mussels. Project will search and model for new populations, quantify habitat connectivity barriers and other environmental constraints to guide management, and hold landowner workshops focused on environmental stewardship in the context of stream integrity resulting in insight on freshwater mussel declines.

Restoration Planning and Sediment Reduction in Urban Headwaters of Locust Fork and Middle Coosa (AL)
Grantee: The Nature Conservancy
Grant Amount: ............................................... $100,000
Matching Funds: .............................................. $188,300
Total Project Amount: ................................. $288,300
Complete a conceptual design for stormwater planning and implementation in the urban headwaters of Locust Fork watershed and design and install a bioswale in the urban headwaters of Big Canoe Creek watershed. Project will help abate stormwater and reduce sedimentation in the Locust Fork watershed and will reduce sedimentation in the Big Canoe Creek watershed, benefiting the trispot darter and Coosa creekshell mussel.

Managing Ranchlands in Central and South Florida to Improve Water Quality
Grantee: Florida Conservation Group
Grant Amount: .................................................. $550,000
Matching Funds: .............................................. $596,800
Total Project Amount: ..................................... $1,146,800
Provide technical assistance to south-central Florida’s ranchers enrolled in NRCS cost-share programs to develop grazing and other management plans that utilize best management practices for prescribed grazing and burning. Project will improve cattle and land management through prescribed fire and rotational grazing, decreasing soil compaction and nutrient run-off, as well as encouraging native vegetation retention and wildlife habitat, thus improving quality and quantity of surface water.

(continued)
Using Remote Sensing and Machine Learning to Improve Grazing Lands Management (FL)
Grantee: National Grazing Lands Coalition
Grant Amount: ........................................ $449,000
Matching Funds: ........................................ $101,300
Total Project Amount: ................................ $550,300
Use remote sensing, machine learning and artificial intelligence to help producers optimize stocking rates; plan rotations, rest and recovery days; monitor forage growth; and improve forage-based beef production efficiency. Project will utilize improved grazing management practices to increase soil carbon sequestration and increase water holding capacity and filtration of the soil, benefitting water quality and aquatic species in Lake Okeechobee and the surrounding watersheds.

Engaging Agricultural Producers to Stabilize Flow in the Lower Flint River (GA)
Grantee: Flint Riverkeeper
Grant Amount: ........................................ $50,000
Matching Funds: ........................................ $15,700
Total Project Amount: ................................ $65,700
Work with landowners in the lower Flint River watershed to implement an auction for irrigation, conduct monitoring, and improve irrigation efficiency. Project will help stabilize flows in the lower Flint River, benefiting species such as freshwater mussels and striped bass.

Riparian Restoration and Plant Propagation in the Conasauga River Basin (GA, TN)
Grantee: Limestone Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council
Grant Amount: ........................................ $327,300
Matching Funds: ........................................ $583,200
Total Project Amount: ................................ $910,500
Improve riparian habitat through landowner outreach and conservation assistance while also promoting riparian plant propagation for the Conasagua basin. Project will provide technical assistance to farmers to implement best management practices to protect streams, and will establish a repository of local ecotype native plant material for future riparian restoration, benefiting aquatic species such as the blue shiner, trispot darter, bridled darter, Alabama moccasin shell, and others.

Landowner Education for the Implementation of Sustainable Grazing Practices (FL)
Grantee: Association of Florida Conservation Districts
Grant Amount: ........................................ $450,000
Matching Funds: ........................................ $0
Total Project Amount: ................................ $450,000
Educate landowners in north and central Florida to promote improved grazing lands management through state and federal cost share programs. Project will engage 480 landowners resulting in 55,000 acres with improved grazing practices, improving carbon sequestration and water quality on the landscape.

Banded sculpin