

Could Your Watershed Be a Keeping Forests Pilot?



Keeping Forests is working with partners in a small number of Southern watersheds to develop and test a new model for investing in privately owned forests as essential infrastructure.

These pilots are meant to produce more than successful local projects. Together, they will help determine what can be replicated across the South, what must remain locally designed, and what institutions, partnerships, funding approaches, and evidence are needed to sustain this work over time.

We are looking for watersheds with both a compelling opportunity and committed local partners who want to help build that regional model.

What We Look For

No watershed will meet every criterion. We are looking for places where several of these conditions come together.

Forests are essential to the watershed.

Privately owned forests play an important role in water quality, water supply, flood resilience, wildlife habitat, economic vitality, or other benefits that matter to the region.

Significant growth or investment is changing the landscape.

The watershed is experiencing, or preparing for, major development or infrastructure investment—data centers, advanced manufacturing, energy development, housing growth, transportation, or other economic expansion that increases pressure on forests, water resources, or working lands.

There is an operational reason for institutions to invest.

A utility, manufacturer, developer, energy company, public agency, or other institution depends on the watershed for water, infrastructure resilience, regulatory performance, supply-chain continuity, risk reduction, or another core operational need. Healthy forests could help protect or improve the conditions that institution relies on.

Forest loss is a meaningful concern.

Development pressure, changing ownership, parcelization, weak markets, or other forces are making it harder to keep forests intact and actively managed.

The forest economy still has a foundation to build from.

The local forest economy may be under pressure, but it has not declined beyond recovery. Landowners still have access to some combination of markets, foresters, loggers, mills, contractors, or landowner organizations capable of supporting management on the ground.

Local partners are prepared to lead.

A local organization or coalition has the relationships, credibility, and capacity to convene partners and remain actively involved throughout the life of the pilot.

What Keeping Forests Brings

Keeping Forests serves as a regional partner, bringing expertise, relationships, and capacity that many local organizations do not have in-house. Our role may include:

- ✦ Conservation finance expertise to help identify institutions with an operational reason to invest and develop a viable investment strategy.
- ✦ Community-based social marketing expertise to design landowner and stakeholder engagement around how people actually make decisions.
- ✦ A multidisciplinary team that can help evaluate opportunities, convene partners, support pilot design, and develop practical implementation strategies.
- ✦ Documentation of lessons so that successful approaches can inform future pilots across the South.
- ✦ Mapping and landscape analysis to understand watershed conditions, development pressure, forest conditions, and institutional opportunities.
- ✦ A decade of experience across the South on private forest retention, forest markets, collaborative strategy, and regional partnerships.
- ✦ Assistance identifying funding opportunities and, where appropriate, pursuing public, philanthropic, or institutional funding alongside local partners.

Keeping Forests does not arrive with a predetermined program or guaranteed funding. Every pilot is developed collaboratively around local conditions while contributing to a broader regional model.

What We Ask of Watershed Partners

A pilot requires an active local implementation team. It is not a project that can be handed off to Keeping Forests. We ask local partners to:

- ✦ Assemble or participate in a working team with the relationships and capacity to move the pilot forward.
- ✦ Convene local stakeholders and maintain those relationships throughout the work.
- ✦ Connect the work with private landowners and the organizations that serve them.
- ✦ Help identify funding opportunities and, when possible, pursue funding jointly or introduce potential funders.
- ✦ Bring practical knowledge of the watershed, its communities, institutions, and forest economy.
- ✦ Help identify and engage institutions with an operational reason to invest.
- ✦ Participate in pilot design, implementation, evaluation, and refinement.
- ✦ Share lessons so they can strengthen future pilots across the South.

During most phases, partners should expect to contribute several hours each month through planning meetings, coordination, and working sessions. Periods of active stakeholder engagement may require additional time for workshops, forums, institutional meetings, landowner outreach, or other locally led activities.

If a pilot advances, partners should expect the work to become a multi-year collaboration focused not only on local outcomes, but on helping build a regional model.

Is This the Right Fit?

Before reaching out, consider:

- 01 Is your watershed experiencing significant growth, development, or infrastructure investment?
- 02 Could healthy forests help address an operational need for one or more institutions?
- 03 Does the local forest economy still have enough capacity to build from?
- 04 Is there a committed local team prepared to help lead a multi-year effort?
- 05 Are local partners interested in helping develop a model that can be applied in other Southern watersheds, not only their own?

If the answer to most of these is yes, we would welcome a conversation.

Start the Conversation

You do not need a finished proposal.

We are interested in hearing from organizations that see a credible opportunity, have partners prepared to work together, and want to help build a model that can strengthen investment in Southern forests.

Tell us about your watershed, what is changing there, the institutions that depend on it, and the partners who would be prepared to participate.

CONTACT US

Why Pilots?

Learn how these pilot watersheds fit into Keeping Forests' broader strategy for building long-term investment in Southern forests.

→ [Read more about our strategy](#)

KEEPING  FORESTS

WHERE WE WORK

Keeping Forests works across the Southern United States:

ALABAMA • ARKANSAS • FLORIDA • GEORGIA • KENTUCKY • LOUISIANA • MISSISSIPPI • NORTH CAROLINA • OKLAHOMA •
SOUTH CAROLINA • TENNESSEE • TEXAS • VIRGINIA