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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TALLAHASSEE, FL -- In a historic move, it was announced today that funding for state block grant programs to help forest landowners in the Panhandle recover from the devastation created by Hurricane Michael has been made available by the United States Department of Agriculture. This is the first time that the subject-specific grants have been made available for timber.

“Category 5 Hurricane Michael left over one million acres of timber on the ground and impacted the area’s forestry community to an unprecedented degree,” said Florida Forestry Association President Edward Cole. “Forestry is a key part of the economy and the culture in the Panhandle, so the destruction was not only a blow to the landowners but also to all those who work in the forest industry.”

“The announcement today is a positive step forward in helping forestry rebuild and recover,” Cole said.

The block grants, which were authorized by the 2019 supplemental disaster aid package passed by Congress earlier this year, provide nearly \$380 million in timber crop loss payments. These dollars will supplement previously announced funding for debris clean-up and reforestation efforts through the USDA’s Emergency Restoration Forestry Program.

Florida Forestry Association Executive Vice President Alan Shelby said, “ We are extremely grateful to Secretary Sonny Perdue, Senators Rick Scott and Marco Rubio, and Congressmen Neal Dunn and Al Lawson, as well as all of Florida’s congressional delegation for their work on the disaster assistance package. In addition, we applaud Gov. Ron DeSantis, Commissioner of Agriculture Nikki Fried, Florida Forest Service Director Jim Karels and all of the elected officials and their staff who made recovery from Hurricane Michael a priority.”

More information on the funding can be found on the USDA website: bit.ly/2NvcLmk

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