

# Georgia

## Ecological Services Field Offices: Athens, Brunswick, Columbus



photo: USFWS

### Photos, top to bottom:

*Researcher holds two-day old, endangered red-cockaded woodpecker chicks.*

*Georgia Interagency Burn Team member ignites prescribed fire in longleaf pine forest.*

*Endangered West Indian Manatees migrate off the Georgia coast during winter months.*

*Endangered fringed campion, *Silene polypetala*, exists in only a few Georgia counties.*



photo: USFWS, Mike Hobbs

### Station History

- Established in 1977 and increasing in 1997 to three offices due to expanding commercial and residential growth in state.

- Budget FY 05: \$2,362,000.

- Staff: 19.

### Station Mission

- Georgia Ecological Services (Georgia ES) helps landowners, industries and local governments balance growth with protection of our nation's natural resources.

- Each office participates in wetlands conservation, watershed planning, and assisting landowners in restoring or enhancing sensitive habitats.

- Georgia ES advises other federal agencies how projects may affect listed species, partners with state agencies for species recovery, and works with non-federal groups to develop habitat conservation plans (HCPs) to protect threatened and endangered species.

### Station Highlights

*Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW)* Georgia PFW helps private landowners protect and restore wildlife habitat with 12,000 acres of habitat restored since 1995. PFW projects may restore habitat for imperiled species; restore longleaf

pine habitats, or restore degraded streams. Landowners keep all rights to land, but must maintain restored areas for a ten year minimum.

*Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC)* Georgia PFW received a Congressional earmark in 2003 of \$472,000 for aquatic habitat improvements in five priority watersheds; including Altamaha, Suwannee, Savannah, Etowah and Conasauga, and Spring Creek. Over 50 projects were implemented on private property to protect, restore or enhance nearly 40 miles of stream banks with fencing, stream buffers, bank restoration or wildlife enhancement structures. Another \$493,000 is earmarked for GSWCC.

### Wetlands Conservation

Georgia ES is a key member of the Mitigation Banking Review Team, an interagency effort to streamline use of mitigation for offsetting wetland impacts to fish and wildlife habitat. To provide clarity for regulators, Georgia ES co-wrote with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) standard operating procedures for stream mitigation.

### Etowah River HCP

Georgia ES is developing with state, county, local agencies and the University of Georgia an eleven county Habitat Conservation Plan. The HCP will define environmentally friendly development while protecting numerous endangered aquatic species and water quality in a rapidly developing area.

### Spring Creek Partnership

To conserve water quality, the six county Spring Creek Partnership was created in 2003. Georgia ES and Panama City ES advise local governments and landowners on water quality, stream-bank erosion, and aquatic habitat.



photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS, Pete Pattavina

**Sandy Tucker, Field Office Supervisor**  
105 WestPark Drive, Suite D  
Athens, GA 30606  
Phone: 706/613 9493  
Fax: 706/613 6059  
E-mail: FW4ESAthens@fws.gov  
Website: <http://athens.fws.gov>

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### *Upper Coosa Basin Aquatics Summit*

Georgia ES hosts quasi-annual summits for federal, state, private industry and non-profit scientists to discuss how to conserve one of the state's most rapidly developing watersheds.

### *Department of Defense (DOD)*

Georgia ES assists in-state military facilities including the Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Army in avoiding conflicts between training and the presence of endangered species.

### *Environmental Contaminants*

Georgia ES contaminants specialists work to identify and prevent harmful contamination of fish, wildlife, and habitat; and restore wildlife resources damaged by environmental hazards. Specialists evaluate reported hazardous materials releases, provide technical assistance to FWS refuges/hatcheries, and provide technical advice on request for FWS law enforcement investigations. The Brunswick laboratory can perform first order contaminants screening.

### *Dam Removal*

Georgia ES is assisting local efforts to remove two defunct dams in Columbus, GA. Effort could restore 2.5 miles of rapids on the Chattahoochee River and aid economic revitalization efforts.

### *Fire Ecology*

Georgia ES advises state and federal agencies on fire and fuel reduction plans in national parks, refuges, and forests. Georgia ES helped create the Georgia Interagency Burn Team (IBT), a multi-agency effort to improve wildlife habitat by prescribed fire on *private* property. Since 2002, IBT has burned over 3000 acres. Support includes \$90,000 in grants to Georgia Forestry Commission, Georgia Department of Natural Resources and The Nature Conservancy.

### *Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW)*

The Georgia Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Program extends special assurances to property owners with endangered RCW's. Over 150,000 acres are enrolled on 36 tracts. Managed by the state, FWS provides technical and financial assistance including two Private Stewardship Grants totaling \$169,000.

### *Robust Redhorse*

Georgia ES works with state agencies, non-profit groups and utility companies in three states to support recovery of this aquatic species. The *Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee* sets strategies to have six self-sustaining populations across its historic range. Efforts include stocking of 100,000 robust redhorse in five river basins.

### *Manatees*

Georgia ES works with the COE and coastal developers to incorporate measures that conserve manatee populations. Georgia ES works with coastal industry to encourage elimination of warm water thermal discharges that disrupt winter migratory patterns, exposing manatees to physiological stress and mortality.

### *Endangered Plants*

Georgia ES assisted the state and the Federal Highways Administration in preserving 1300 acres of forest along the Flint River, known for endangered plant species. Georgia ES biologists mapped rare habitats, speeding acquisition and transfer to a state wildlife management area.

### *Outreach*

The Georgia *Federal Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest* encourages conservation education in K-12. The 100 winning entries are seen in exhibit by 35,000 Georgians annually. Georgia ES also participates in events such as the Colonial Coast Bird Festival, CoastFest, Children's Water Festival, State Science Fair and RiverFest.

### **Contact Information:**

North Georgia Supervisor  
Robin Goodloe  
105 WestPark Drive, Suite D  
Athens, GA 30606  
Phone: 706/613 9493 x 221  
Fax: 706/613 6059

Coastal Georgia Supervisor  
Strant Colwell  
4270 Norwich Street  
Brunswick, GA 31520  
Phone: 912/265 9336 x 30  
Fax: 912/265 1061

Southwest Georgia Supervisor  
Stephen Parris  
P.O. Box 52560  
Fort Benning, GA 31995-2560  
Phone: 706/544 6999  
Fax: 706/544 6419

Partners for Fish & Wildlife  
Robert Brooks  
4270 Norwich Street  
Brunswick, GA 31520  
Phone: 912/265 9336 x 25  
Fax: 912/265 1061

Junior Duck Stamp Coordinator  
Deborah C. Harris  
105 West Park Drive, Suite D  
Athens, GA 30606  
Phone: 706/613 9493 x 224  
Fax: 706/613 6059

Public Affairs Specialist  
Mike Hobbs  
105 West Park Drive, Suite D  
Athens, GA 30606  
Phone: 706/613 9493 x 236  
Fax: 706/613 6059