

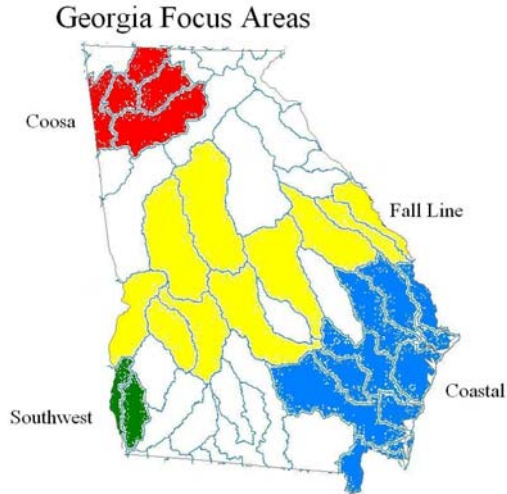


GEORGIA

Introduction and General Description

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is a voluntary program to assist private landowners with wildlife habitat restoration and improvement on their land. Georgia is the biggest state east of the Mississippi River in size and more than 90% of the land in Georgia is privately owned. Therefore, the future health of Georgia's land, water, and wildlife depends upon private landowners.

In Georgia, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has worked with landowners to restore habitat since about 1995. Projects are focused in watersheds where conservation efforts will provide the greatest benefit for federal trust species which include: migratory birds, anadromous (migratory) fish, and threatened and endangered species. Projects include restoring longleaf pine habitat, the restoration of degraded streams and riparian areas, and the restoration and improvement of endangered, threatened, and rare species habitat. Since 1995, approximately 350 private



landowners have restored or enhanced about 15,000 acres of wildlife habitat through the Partners program in the state.

Georgia Activities

- Longleaf pine ecosystem restoration.
- Stream bank stabilization and restoration.
- Restoration of riparian and flood plain areas.
- Exotic invasive species control and management.
- Restoration, enhancement, protection of habitat for threatened, endangered, or rare species.

million acres in the Southeastern U.S. Today, less than 3 million acres remain (over 97% decline), mostly in the Coastal Plains of the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas. Over 30 plant and animal species associated with longleaf pine ecosystems are threatened or endangered, including the red-cockaded woodpecker, flatwoods salamander, hairy rattleweed, and the eastern indigo snake. Other rare plant and animal species that are associated with longleaf pine habitats include the sandhills rosemary, Pickering's Morning-glory, Bachman's sparrow, and gopher tortoise.

Habitats of Special Concern

The longleaf pine ecosystem once covered an estimated 90

Threats

Habitat loss is the greatest threat facing wildlife habitat in Georgia today. Georgia's population has grown to 8 million people in 2000, up 26% from a decade ago. As a result, thousands of acres of wildlife habitat are lost each year to accommodate the expanding human population. Some of these threats to wildlife and habitat include: residential and commercial development including road construction, loss of habitat, lack of implementation of best management practices (BMPs) on agricultural and forestry lands, conversion of forest stands to slash and loblolly pine plantations, and lack of prescribe fire, and the influx of exotic invasive species.

Conservation Strategies

In order to achieve the goal of increasing wildlife habitat, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Georgia has developed a strategic plan to help guide its restoration efforts. This plan was developed using information from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' *Georgia Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS)*, and with input from several partners. This plan emphasizes focus areas, focus species, and focus streams, while building partnerships with private and public entities, and promoting voluntary conservation.

Longleaf Pine Habitat

The longleaf pine ecosystem once dominated much of the forest landscape in the coastal plain of Georgia. Currently this endangered ecosystem exists only in a few scattered areas in the state.



Mature longleaf pine habitat.

In Georgia, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is working with the Georgia Forestry Commission, the Longleaf Alliance, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and other organizations to help landowners restore and enhance the longleaf pine habitat. Restoration activities are focused in the coastal plain region of Georgia. An important component of this ecosystem is the ground-cover of wiregrass and other herbaceous plants. To fully restore this ecosystem, the Partners program assists landowners in reforestation and implementing prescribe

fire programs in existing longleaf pine stands. Restoration costs for longleaf pine habitats generally range from \$175/acre up to \$450/acre. Enhancement of



Riparian buffer fence.

longleaf ecosystems usually costs anywhere from \$15/acre (for prescribe burning) up to \$125/acre (for midstory control and removal).

Streams and Riparian Areas

Streams and riparian areas in Georgia are important to many fish and wildlife species, some of which are federally listed. Many streams are degraded due to human disturbance. The Partners program is working with the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission to assist landowners in restoring the integrity of streams and riparian areas by fencing out cattle and re-establishing buffer areas. This reduces erosion and stabilizes the stream.

Some of the focus areas for these projects include the Conasauga and Etowah Rivers in North Georgia, the Flint River and Spring Creek in West Georgia, and the Altamaha River system in Southeast Georgia. Costs of these projects generally range from \$1.25 to \$4.50 per linear foot.



Streambank restoration

Endangered, Threatened, and Rare Species

Georgia has about 63 species of federally listed endangered and threatened species and many more state listed and rare species. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has assisted landowners with projects that restore and enhance habitat utilized by these rare species.

For example, the Partners program in Georgia has assisted landowners in restoring and enhancing nesting and foraging habitat for the endangered wood stork. Some projects have included assisting landowners in obtaining fish for foraging ponds, creating or enhancing wood stork feeding ponds, and controlling undesirable

understory vegetation in wood stork nesting ponds.



Nesting wood storks.

Partners

- Georgia Forestry Commission
- Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Longleaf Alliance
- The Conasauga River Alliance
- Etowah River Alliance
- Limestone Valley RC&D
- Seven Rivers RC&D
- Golden Triangle RC&D
- Upper Suwannee River Watershed Initiative
- Spring Creek Watershed Partnership
- Upper Chattahoochee River Keeper
- University of Georgia
- Auburn University
- Farm Services Agency
- Glynn County Board of Commissioners
- City of Jesup
- City of Lakeland

- City of Douglas
- Southeastern Natural Sciences Academy
- U.S. Forest Service
- City of Chickamauga
- Stephens Co. Soil & Water Conservation District
- Wayne County School Board
- Walker County Board of Education
- Appling County Middle School
- Tattnall County High School
- Gordon Central High School
- Georgia Conservancy
- Sandy Creek Nature Center
- Elachee Nature Science Center
- Emanuel County School Board
- Douglas County
- City of Alpharetta
- Floyd College
- Dade County
- Oconee County
- Ware County
- Morgan County
- Brantley County
- Bacon County
- Darton College
- Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- South Georgia Youth Park
- Private landowners

Accomplishments

- Since 1995, wildlife habitat on private lands has been restored, or enhanced, or protected on over 350 Partners for Fish and Wildlife projects.
- The Partners Program has restored or enhanced over 8,500 acres of longleaf pine habitat.

- Approximately 80 miles of stream and riparian habitat have been restored or enhanced.
- About 30 federally endangered and threatened species have benefited from projects in some way.

Future Needs

- Restore and enhance 3,500 miles of stream and riparian habitat.
- Restore and enhance approximately 5 million acres of longleaf habitat.

- Work with private landowners and others to enhance and restore rare species habitat on about one million acres throughout the state.

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