



2024
Securing a Resilient Future
Georgia Impact Report

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Letter from the Executive Director



Thanks to your support, 2024 was a remarkable year for conservation in Georgia. From one of the biggest expansions of our footprint in the state in decades to finding new ways to bridge the gap between people and nature, we are doing more than ever to ensure our lands, waters, plants, and animals will thrive for generations to come.

While the dual crises of biodiversity loss and climate change loom large, the good news is that we have the power to address those threats. Here in Georgia, one such tool is prescribed fire, which we use to help restore and rejuvenate our imperiled longleaf pine ecosystem that once flourished throughout the state. We treated more than 50,000 acres with prescribed fire in 2024, which enables longleaf pine trees to thrive and fosters a healthier ecosystem for countless species that call those forests home. In support of that work, we also planted over 1 million native trees, the majority of which was longleaf pine. Though there is a long way to go to restore the species to its former glory, we are a proud part of its recovery.

Much of that work takes place in the Chattahoochee Fall Line in Southwest Georgia, where after years of planning, we opened a new regional headquarters to bolster both our efforts and those of partners like the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Forestry Commission, and many others in the government and non-profit sectors. Conservation is a team effort, and we can accomplish so much more working with other like-minded organizations, which is even more important at this critical juncture for nature.

In addition to our land restoration efforts, which saw us bring more than 4,000 new acres under our protection, we also focused our attention to Georgia's aquatic ecosystems, from our rivers to the coast. We continued to identify outdated and obsolete dams and culverts that no longer serve any purpose except to impede freshwater species that need open routes to feed and reproduce. In our coastal communities, which are among the most vulnerable to climate change, we supported innovative new climate resilience programs, from a salt marsh pilot study to urban forest rejuvenation.

All these programs only scratch the surface of the work we are doing across the state. In just the two years that I have served as Executive Director, I have seen an incredible amount of growth in our capacity and impact. We added two new key positions to the Georgia team, with Jami Buck joining us as Deputy Executive Director of Operations and Resource Development and Jason Lee as Deputy Executive Director of Conservation. These two hires, in addition to many talented scientists and conservationists, have set the stage for an even brighter future.

None of these successes would be possible without the support of our generous donors and trustees, people who have committed themselves to leaving the world a better place than they found it. Every red-cockaded woodpecker that is born and every longleaf pine tree planted can be traced back to those who make our work possible. To you, I say thank you, and I cannot wait to see what more we accomplish in the coming years.

Sincerely,

Monica Thornton
Executive Director, The Nature Conservancy in Georgia

Remembering Marsha Certain

Conservationist, Trustee, and Friend (1954-2024)

By Brian Wills, Senior Associate Director of Development

My first meeting with Marsha was 10 years ago. I reached out to her to thank her for a recent gift to TNC and invited her to lunch. She accepted and I got to meet her for the first time. I vividly recall immediately phoning Deron Davis, state director at the time, that I had met someone who should help lead our organization. She talked about the importance of our barrier islands and the beauty to be found there. She asked me about the Conservancy's policy work and the need she recognized on that front. She had many questions and offered interesting insight to the conservation issues facing our region. My conversation with her that day ended with her showing me several of her favorite kayak routes in South Georgia. To say she loved nature, and the outdoors is a great understatement—she cherished the natural world and spent a great deal of her time kayaking and hiking and just “being” outside.

As a Trustee of The Nature Conservancy in Georgia, she led from a vantage point of love—love for our rivers, trees, and coastline. And love for the people with whom she served and worked alongside. Marsha was attentive and informed about the issues facing our planet. A medical doctor by trade, Marsha was also a scientist in the broader sense of the word. She understood nature through that lens and enjoyed the interaction she had with TNC science and conservation staff members. I always got a kick out of simply watching her listen to Christi or Ashby or any of our field experts. Like them, she was both curious and concerned.

I recall the day Deron and I met her at her office to ask her to consider a board position. She was definitely curious as to why Deron would come down from Atlanta to meet with her—you could see it in her expression. When Deron asked her to join the board, her eyes got teary. She seemed very moved by the invitation. And of course, she accepted.



Trustee Marsha Certain (far left) on a paddle trip with TNC staff © TNC

Who she was mattered down here on the coast. People knew her and trusted her. I was speaking to a group once and frankly, no one was really paying attention. During the Q&A someone asked if we had any board members they might know. I said, “Marsha Certain is on our board.” The entire room changed. They immediately had lots of good questions and treated me as a friend instead of an unknown speaker. I told her many times about how much credibility she gave TNC. She was too modest to simply accept that and would respond by waving off any attempt to tell her she was special. But she was special. Many times, it was she that made me feel our work down here really mattered. After all, she was a child of this place. Of this coast. If its future mattered to her then it should matter to all of us.

Marsha cared about the people in her world. She made herself available to talk, to help, to collaborate, to move our organization forward. I always had the impression she was proud of what we did together as The Nature Conservancy in Georgia. The idea I most want to communicate is that Marsha Certain was my friend. I miss her. Those lucky enough to have known her, her kindness, her humanity, her fearlessness, were better for having had her as a friend. TNC certainly was.



Today, our planet is threatened by the dual crises of rapid climate change and biodiversity loss—and addressing both is crucial. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is pursuing bold solutions that will benefit biodiversity, sequester carbon and reduce risk to the people and places most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Conasauga River Valley, Above Norton Bridge, Murray and Whitfield Counties © Alan Cressler

Overview of TNC 2030 Goals

The Escalating Climate and Biodiversity Crises

- **Three quarters** of the carbon dioxide emissions driven by humans have occurred since 1950.
- There has been a nearly **70% average decline** of birds, amphibians, mammals, fish and reptiles since 1970.
- We have **years, not decades**, to address these existential threats.

Research has shown that if we move toward more sustainable goals now, a future where people and nature thrive is within our reach. *The Nature Conservancy recognizes 2030 as a milestone year to make a positive impact for our planet, and we invite you to join us in realizing these ambitious global goals for 2030:*



Climate

reduce or store 3 gigatons of CO₂ emissions per year—the same as removing 650 million cars off the road—and help 100 million people who are most likely to be affected by climate-related emergencies such as floods, fires and drought



Ocean

conserve nearly 10 billion acres of ocean—more than 10 percent of the world’s ocean area



Lands

conserve 1.6 billion acres of healthy lands, including working lands, forests, grasslands and other habitats rich in carbon and biodiversity



Freshwater

conserve more than 620,000 miles of rivers—enough river length to circumnavigate the globe 25 times—and 74 million acres of lakes and wetlands

How Our Work in Georgia Makes a Global Impact

Since 1969, the Nature Conservancy in Georgia has protected more than 425,000 acres, safeguarded the rivers that traverse our state and cared for our envied coast. Georgia boasts countless species of plants and animals that affect the health of ecosystems stretching far beyond our borders.

As a result, TNC is acquiring new skills, working at larger scales and investing more human and financial resources than ever to maximize our impact in Georgia and around the globe. Our work in Georgia through 2026 will contribute to TNC's global conservation goals to help create a world where people and nature thrive.



Clockwise from left:
Driftwood beach © Margaret Hamilton/
TNC Photo Contest 2021; Longleaf pine
forest near Columbus, Georgia © Mark
Godfrey/TNC; The Altamaha River at
dawn © Keith Lazelle; A loggerhead
hatchling © Donna Garcia



A flowering Krameria lanceolata plant found in longleaf pine sandhills © Alan Cressler

Land Acquisition Highlights

Restoring a Critical Conservation Corridor in the Oconee Forest

The Oconee National Forest was established primarily to help address issues around soil erosion and habitat loss and degradation since the early 1900s. Since then, the forest has become an anchor for the largest network of protected lands within the Georgia Piedmont, representing one of the greatest land protection and restoration opportunities in Georgia.

Thanks to generous donor support, TNC has acquired 1,675 acres across five tracts in Jasper, Jones, Greene and Putnam Counties. Previously owned by the Weyerhaeuser Company, this land is now permanently protected and will be incorporated into the Oconee National Forest within 2-3 years. TNC will partner with the U.S. Forest Service to restore the land, connecting key terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in the Georgia Piedmont and creating a more resilient landscape that will be better able to withstand the impacts of climate change. This acquisition may also provide habitat for rare plant species, red-cockaded woodpeckers and migratory songbirds and bats. By protecting these lands, TNC is working to mitigate the effects of climate change while strengthening the biodiversity of this important region.

Expanding Protected Land Along the Chattahoochee Fall Line

Through a landmark conservation effort, TNC has secured the long-term protection of more than 2,300 acres of ecologically significant land along Georgia's Chattahoochee Fall Line. In partnership with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, TNC has transferred ownership of this property to be managed as part of the existing 17,400-acre Chattahoochee Fall Line Wildlife Management Area.

The Fall Line is an approximately twenty-mile-wide band of land running northeast through Georgia from Columbus through Augusta featuring a wide range of habitats, including upland pine, bottomland hardwoods, sandhills, river bluffs, seepage bogs, seasonal herbaceous ponds and longleaf pine forests. It is also the geological boundary separating Georgia's Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions, dissected by the watershed of the Chattahoochee River and its tributaries as they fall from higher to lower elevations.

This diverse landscape, spanning three distinct ecoregions, is also home to a remarkable array of rare and threatened species, including Georgia's gopher tortoise and the red-cockaded woodpecker. By consolidating these lands under public stewardship, TNC has ensured these critical habitats will be permanently protected, an important step toward safeguarding the region's exceptional biodiversity.



An overhead shot of the sprawling Dugdown Corridor © Russell Mick

50,000

acres burned with
prescribed fire

6364

acres of land
protected

1.2 million

trees planted

110

acres of groundcover
restored

Land Protected in FY24

1: Springbank CONUS

This 164-acre tract is adjacent to the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest at the border of Georgia and Tennessee and boasts above average climate resiliency. Acquisition also protects 0.5 miles of unnamed tributaries that flow through the property to the Conasauga River watershed which is known for its biological diversity and rare and unique aquatic fauna.

2: Hice

TNC purchased the 674-acre Hice tract and subsequently sold it to the State of Georgia Department of Natural Resources to be managed for public access as part of the Crockford-Pigeon Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Approximately 2.3 miles of unnamed streams are located on the property and serve as tributaries to Dry Creek. Many notable mussel, fish and amphibian species are found within these streams and creeks including the endemic Pigeon Mountain salamander and the green salamander.

3: Springbank Conasauga

The Springbank Conasauga tract consists of approximately 177 acres and fronts 1.1 miles of the Conasauga River which drains into the Oostanaula River, a tributary of the Coosa River in the Mobile River drainage system, the second largest river system flowing into the Gulf. Historically, about 90 fish species (10% of the North American fish fauna) occurred in the Conasauga drainage. An estimated 75 fish species are considered native to the basin and most are endemic to the Mobile River Basin.

4: Hurley

This 110-acre tract is adjacent to the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest and is entirely forested in mature white pine and natural hardwoods. Acquisition of this tract protects a portion of GA Highway 27 which is part of the culturally and historically significant Trail of Tears national trail system.

5: Jupiter-Tallapoosa

TNC subgranted private funds to the State of Georgia Department of Natural Resources for their acquisition of the 386-acre Jupiter-Tallapoosa tract which is located in the Dugdown Corridor and managed as part of the Tallapoosa River Wildlife Management Area. This tract contains 0.3 miles of Swinney Branch, a tributary to the Tallapoosa River, one of the most biodiverse rivers in Georgia.



Land Management Highlights

Creating a Conservation-Compatible Future Around Fort Moore

Along Georgia's Fall Line, a collaborative effort among the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the River Valley Regional Commission, Fort Moore, community stakeholders and conservation partners like The Nature Conservancy is helping to align military readiness, conservation and rural community development. Last year, TNC played a key role in developing the River Valley Community Compatible Development (RVCCD) Plan, which engaged six rural counties around Fort Moore in a shared vision for the future.

These communities are shaped by a unique landscape of healthy forests threaded with rivers and streams inhabited by several rare species. A key goal of the RVCCD is to maintain the region's rural character and natural resources while supporting a good quality of life for residents. This groundbreaking plan has already yielded impressive results, helping the cities of Lumpkin and Buena Vista secure millions in funding for downtown improvements and launching new initiatives to support sustainable tourism and recreation opportunities throughout the region.

Fort Moore's presence and the region's natural features are top priorities for area residents. The RVCCD plan and its implementation will help ensure economic prosperity, military readiness, healthy lands and resilient communities for years to come.



Opposite Page 1: Sunrise overlooking silhouette of rolling hills, Chattahoochee National Forest, Georgia; 2: A Pigeon Mountain salamander sighted in Chattooga County; 3: An aerial view of the Conasauga River; 4: Forest scene with vibrant colors in the fall, Chattahoochee National Forest; 5: Tallapoosa River flowing through Haralson County

This Page Fort Moore stand bluff along Upatoi Creek © Mark Godfrey

Land Management Highlights

Seeds of Change at Broxton Rocks

Broxton Rocks Preserve is one of our state's most scenic conservation sites. Featuring a waterfall cascading over rock ledges, 30-foot-high cliffs, and cave-like crevices among the rocks, this unique land is a sought-after location for visitors and home to a variety of plant and animal species

In our largest groundcover restoration project ever in Georgia, TNC planted more than 600 pounds of native seed at Broxton Rocks. The project began in the fall of 2023 when TNC and partners assisted with burning more than 1,000 acres to prepare the land for planting. This ambitious groundcover restoration project will help accelerate our efforts to create and restore suitable habitat for red-cockaded woodpeckers and other key longleaf pine species.



A Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Picoides borealis) in a restored longleaf pine forest © Carlton Ward, Jr.

Rare Species on the Rise

After a decade of working in partnership with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to improve habitat at Sprewell Bluff Wildlife Management Area (WMA), DNR biologists have released red-cockaded woodpeckers into the area. Two pairs have already been observed nesting and laying eggs, marking a significant step toward re-establishing the species in the WMA.



Juncus Snowii growing at a TNC preserve in Southwest Georgia © J. Richard Carter

New Species Discovery

Scientists have discovered a brand new plant species in the Altamaha region of Georgia. This tiny, delicate rush plant, called *Juncus snowii*, is special because it is found nowhere else in the world except for a small area in southern Georgia. It was named in honor of biologist Frankie Snow, who has dedicated years to studying the rare and fascinating plants of the Altamaha.



Endangered green pitcher plants at a TNC preserve © Hugh and Carol Nourse 2008

Green Pitcher Plant Prospers

At one of our North Georgia preserves, Georgia's only population of federally endangered green pitcher plants thrives in a rare mountain seepage bog. Over 1,400 pitcher plant clumps grow along a single acre, where TNC staff and volunteers work diligently to protect these remarkable plants by monitoring their population and controlling invasive species. Due to the sensitive nature of the habitat, individuals are encouraged to join guided group tours, rather than visiting on their own.

Restoring Georgia's Forests with Planting and Prescribed Fire

BY THE NUMBERS: GOOD FIRE IN GEORGIA



50,583 acres

Protected in FY24



A total of **64**
controlled burns on

14,078 acres

led by The Nature Conservancy



Assisted partners with controlled
burns on an additional

36,505 acres

The Nature Conservancy's commitment to forest health reached new heights this year, combining our strategic prescribed fire operations with ambitious tree planting initiatives. TNC Georgia has one of the most significant prescribed fire operations among our chapters nationwide, treating tens of thousands of acres annually to rejuvenate forests and foster healthier ecosystems for plant and animal species. In FY24, we supported five fire teams in environmentally significant locations, including the Altamaha and the Southern Blue Ridge, and applied prescribed fire to more than 14,078 acres.

This year also marked a significant milestone in our forest restoration work, with the planting of more than 1.2 million trees, including longleaf, slash and shortleaf pine species. These planting efforts and our prescribed fire program are rejuvenating Georgia's iconic forest landscapes.

Through carefully controlled burns, we are creating the conditions that countless native species need to thrive while reducing the risk of destructive wildfires. Adding to our conservation impact, all timber harvests for TNC will now be Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified, ensuring sustainable forest management practices that protect our ecosystems and human communities.



An active prescribed burn at Moody Forest © Rich Reid



The Altamaha River winding through Long and Wayne counties © Alan Cressler

FRESHWATER

Restoring a Critical Conservation Corridor in the Chattahoochee Forest

There are more than 325 species of fish in Georgia's rivers, streams and lakes, one of which is the federally threatened trispot darter. The Coosa River Basin is home to this small fish, found in only a few places in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee. Unfortunately, man-made obstacles like dams and road crossings threaten its survival.

The Nature Conservancy is working with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Limestone Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council, the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute, Dalton State College, and the University of North Georgia to restore habitat connectivity for the trispot darter. With funding from a \$2 million federal grant, researchers are studying ways to restore habitat connectivity and help this unique species thrive.

Protecting rare and endangered fish like the trispot darter is crucial for maintaining the biodiversity of Georgia's river ecosystems. The Nature Conservancy's efforts to remove barriers and improve habitat will help safeguard this threatened species for the future.

Yellow Creek Culvert Replacement Benefits Aquatic Life and Local Community

From the stoic sturgeon to the tiny trispot, fish migration plays an important role in river systems, increasing genetic diversity within populations making them more resilient to climate change and catastrophic events, transporting nutrients throughout the stream network and increasing the overall biodiversity of species.

Working with our partners, TNC is improving fish passage and migration across Georgia, including Murray County's Yellow Creek, a critical tributary in the globally significant Conasauga River Basin. Through strategic culvert replacement, partners restored natural hydrologic function and aquatic organism passage, benefiting several rare species like the federally threatened trispot darter. The project opened nearly two miles of suitable habitat for fish migration and reduced stream bank erosion.

Before this project, the roadway regularly flooded when the stream overtopped the crossing during storms. By replacing an undersized plastic pipe with a modern aluminum bottomless box culvert and realigning the stream, the team not only enhanced ecological resilience but also provided climate-resilient infrastructure that will lower long-term road maintenance costs for the local community.



Conasauga River Valley, Wetlands, Conasauga River Wildlife Management Area and Private Lands, Murray and Whitfield Counties
© Alan Cressler

58

miles of protected
streams & rivers

7

miles of reconnected
and restored
streams



Priority Landscape: Chattahoochee Fall Line

TNC helped establish the Chattahoochee Fall Line Conservation Partnership to protect the area’s ecologically diverse longleaf pine forests and wetlands while meeting the needs of the local community and Fort Moore. With 37,000 acres protected to date, TNC and partners are working to expand our efforts to protect and restore another 35,000 acres of forest, which is home to rare gopher tortoises and red-cockaded woodpeckers; pitcher plants and wild orchids; and rivers, shoals and forests that support diverse plant and animal populations.

The Chattahoochee Fall Line (CFL) program made significant strides in FY24, expanding its reach and impact. TNC acquired the 500-acre Alexander property in southwest Georgia, managed 11,300 acres through controlled burns and planted nearly 170 acres with longleaf and shortleaf pines. Community engagement flourished with the Forestry & Wildlife Expo at Marion County High School, which attracted more than 450 attendees. The Longleaf for All workshop in Talbotton successfully engaged a diverse group of private landowners, setting a foundation for future collaborations. After a decade of partnering with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to improve habitat at Sprewell Bluff WMA, red-cockaded woodpeckers were reintroduced to the area, with two pairs already laying eggs. Additionally, CFL timber harvests achieved the prestigious Forest Stewardship Council certification, underlining our commitment to sustainable forestry practices.



New Home for Conservation: CFL Program Headquarters

The Chattahoochee Fall Line program celebrated a milestone with the completion of its new headquarters. This state-of-the-art facility, strategically located in the heart of the Fall Line region, will help accelerate TNC Georgia's conservation efforts in this ecologically significant area.

The building was designed with energy efficiency in mind, reflecting TNC's commitment to environmental stewardship. With dedicated spaces for research, community outreach and collaborative work, the headquarters will enhance the program's capacity to manage lands, engage partners and advance conservation initiatives. This new base of operations positions the CFL program to expand its impact, fostering stronger connections with local communities and ecosystems alike.



Opposite Page
Rushing waters in the Chattahoochee Fall Line
© Russell Mick; *A gopher tortoise in Columbia County* © Marc Del Santro

This Page *The diverse plants and landscapes that make up the Chattahoochee Fall Line* © Russell Mick; *Three generations of leaders in the CFL, from left to right Mike Hensley, Michele Elmore and Wade Harrison* © TNC



Jekyll Island Marsh in Georgia © Alan Cressler

OCEAN AND COAST

Putting a Price on Coastal Resilience

Across the eastern coastline, experts estimate that 70% of all salt marsh has been lost, primarily due to development and climate change. These vital ecosystems not only protect coastal communities from flooding and storm surge but also serve as essential habitat for commercially and recreationally important fish species.

Through a partnership with the University of Georgia, TNC has developed groundbreaking research to determine the socioeconomic benefits that salt marshes provide for coastal flood risk reduction and the role insurance mechanisms can play in their protection and restoration. This innovative approach helps identify who benefits the most from marsh protection, the value marshes provide in reducing flood risk to coastal structures and how insurance policies could incentivize investment in this critical natural infrastructure.

Insurance represents a promising possibility for integrating nature-based solutions as it:

- Puts a price tag on risk
- Provides incentives for risk reduction
- Creates formalized payout structures

By highlighting salt marshes' flood mitigation potential, we can empower coastal residents, policymakers and the insurance industry to help safeguard these irreplaceable natural ecosystems that sustain marine life, build climate resilience and power the region's coastal economies.

Guardians of the Golden Isles

The Nature Conservancy is taking bold steps to protect Georgia's crucial coastal ecosystems through the Golden Isles Resiliency Network. At a recent workshop in Brunswick, our team joined forces with local environmental groups and government agencies to tackle the pressing challenges facing Georgia's marshlands and coastal communities. The workshop's goal was to share information on climate adaptation and resiliency projects, increase communication and collaboration among organizations and seek feedback on how the network will engage with its partners and the community in the future.

By bringing together diverse partners, The Nature Conservancy is leading the charge to combat climate change and sea level rise, with a long-term vision to build climate-resilient communities in Brunswick and Glynn County.

Our collaborative approach means we're working hand-in-hand with local organizations to preserve the unique environmental and cultural heritage of coastal Georgia.

Trees to the Rescue: Improving Climate Resilience in Brunswick

This year, The Nature Conservancy kicked off the Urban Tree Resiliency Plan in Brunswick, GA, funded by a generous donation from the Wells Fargo Foundation.

Developed in collaboration with TNC scientists, the City of Brunswick and local stakeholders, the plan includes goals and strategies to help the city and its partners support a well-managed urban tree canopy, which will play an increasingly important role in coastal flood and stormwater retention, heat reduction and air purification for the community. The plan serves as an implementation guide to help improve climate resilience in Brunswick and save millions of dollars in avoided infrastructure costs.

By investing in Brunswick's urban forest, this initiative not only protects the city's residents from climate threats but also creates a thriving ecosystem where people, plants and wildlife can flourish together.



American alligators native to the Southeast © Alan Cressler



Sunrise at Driftwood Beach, Jekyll Island, GA © AdobeStock

CLIMATE



Solar panels © iStock

TNC Contributes to Georgia's First Climate Action Plan

The Nature Conservancy welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the development of Georgia's first-ever climate action plan—the Peach State Voluntary Emission Reduction Plan. Working with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD), TNC provided expert guidance on natural climate solutions and helped connect key stakeholders to shape this groundbreaking initiative.

The comprehensive plan outlines multiple emission reduction strategies, with natural climate solutions featured prominently. These strategies include afforestation, reforestation, improved soil management practices and coastal conservation. The plan recognizes that Georgia's natural lands currently offset approximately 47 million metric tons of carbon dioxide annually, highlighting the critical role of conservation in addressing climate change.

Georgia EPD submitted the plan in early 2024 to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program. Although Georgia's plan was not selected for next-round implementation funding, this collaborative effort marked a significant milestone in the state's climate journey and positioned natural climate solutions as essential tools for reducing emissions and building resilience across the state.

Guiding Georgia's Solar Future with Smart Siting

The Nature Conservancy continues to lead Georgia's transition to renewable energy development in lower-impact locations. The Georgia Low Impact Solar Siting Tool (GA LISST) developed by TNC is an innovative mapping resource that helps land developers, utilities and local governments identify optimal locations for large-scale solar installations while protecting sensitive ecosystems. TNC recently enhanced the tool's data analysis and user interface, making it even more valuable for sustainable energy planning. The GA LISST analyzes critical factors including environmental sensitivity, development requirements and species protection, particularly for imperiled state species like the gopher tortoise.

This science-based approach is accelerating Georgia's clean energy future while safeguarding natural habitats. By identifying lower-impact sites earlier in the process, the tool helps reduce project delays and protect vital ecosystems. Working alongside conservation partners and utility and industry leaders, TNC also led the development of recommended practices for new solar development in Georgia, positioning the state as a leader in responsible renewable energy expansion.



A policy meeting with Rep. Buddy Carter and TNC trustees on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC © Office of Rep. Carter

POLICY



Director of Land Stewardship Erick Brown surveys the damage from Hurricane Helene at Broxton Rocks © GPB

Under the Gold Dome

In FY24, TNC continued to support federal and state policies to secure nature-forward solutions for people and wildlife in Georgia. During the 2024 legislative session, the Georgia General Assembly took several actions beneficial to advancing conservation in the state, including:

- Establishing study committees to evaluate disaster mitigation and resilience
- Establishing a study committee to evaluate community solar
- Introducing a bill that would pause tax breaks for new data centers while the state studies related impacts on local infrastructure, resources and job creation. After passing with bipartisan support, the bill was ultimately vetoed by the governor.



A sunny day in the Dugdown Corridor
© Russell Mick

Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act Funds New Conservation Projects

The General Assembly approved \$20.6 million to fund 12 conservation projects through the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program:

- Five grants were awarded to local governments and nonprofit organizations for the acquisition, development or stewardship of local parks or trail systems.
- Three projects focus on the acquisition of conservation lands by the GA Dept. of Natural Resources, including more than 2,000 acres in the Dugdown Corridor.
- Four of the grants were designated for state land stewardship projects.

A photograph of a cypress swamp. Tall, slender cypress trees with characteristic buttresses stand in a body of water. The water is dark and reflects the trees and the sky. In the foreground, several large, green lily pads float on the water's surface. The background shows a dense forest of cypress trees, some with Spanish moss hanging from their branches. The overall scene is serene and natural.

Priority Landscape: The Okefenokee Swamp

*The entrance to a winding trail through a cypress forest at the edge
of Billy's Lake inside the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge
© David Walter Banks*



A cypress tree standing alone in Chesser Prairie Inside the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge © David Walter Banks



Clockwise from left: A barred owl perched high in a tree above Floyds Island in Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp © Walter Banks; Marshland lit against the hues of the setting sun, lit by color-gelled flashes © David Walter Banks; A night photo of the swamp from the Bluff Lake camping platform © Alan Cressler

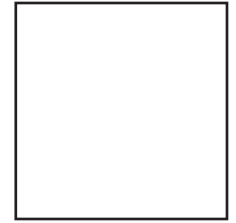
Few areas can match the variety and sheer abundance of wildlife in the Okefenokee. Located in the southeast corner of Georgia, the Okefenokee Swamp spans around 700 square miles and is one of the largest swamps in North America. The swamp includes a wide range of habitats, including wet and dry prairies, cypress swamps, winding waterways and forested uplands. American alligators patrol the waters, and the land is also home to the endangered eastern indigo snake, among 60 other reptile species. In fact, these diverse habitats support a staggering number of species, including more than 400 vertebrates. Wading birds like blue herons, wood storks and white ibis frequent the swamps, as do more than 200 other types of bird. The swamp also contains the headwaters of two rivers: the Suwannee and the St. Marys rivers.

Spanning 438,000 acres, the Okefenokee is one of Georgia's most precious natural treasures and is in the process of becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, recent developments threaten the swamp's very survival. In February 2024, Georgia's Environmental Protection Division issued draft permits to Twin Pines Minerals for the construction of a titanium mine within 3 miles of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Experts maintain that mining in this location will threaten the water levels of the swamp and the two rivers it feeds, increasing wildfire risks, harming fish and wildlife and releasing toxic contaminants into nearby surface and groundwater.

This year, TNC and a bipartisan majority of Georgia lawmakers supported HB71 to prohibit mining near the Okefenokee Swamp, but the bill did not pass during the 2024 legislative session. As long as plans for the mine move forward, TNC will continue taking action to protect the Okefenokee for generations to come.



The Nature Conservancy in Georgia
270 Peachtree St. NW
Suite 1040
Atlanta, GA 30303




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Eastern Tiger Swallowtail © TNC Photo Contest 2022

A photograph of a mountain range at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a warm, golden yellow, and the mountains are silhouetted against the light. In the foreground, there are trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange and red.

The heart of The Nature Conservancy's mission is to conserve lands and waters on which all life depends. The reality of increasingly urgent threats requires us to reaffirm our commitment to our mission, and pursue it in ways that allow for nature to adapt to a changing climate.

Together, we are building the future of conservation in Georgia.

Springbank CONUS © Byron Jorjorian