



## Georgia's High Priority Watersheds

### Background

The high priority waters dataset for the state was updated as part of the 2015 revision to [Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan](#) (SWAP). Based on species occurrence data, land cover, and expert knowledge, the Fishes and Aquatic Invertebrates Species Technical Team identified 221 high priority United States Geological Survey Hydrologic Unit Code 10 digit watersheds (HUC 10) to protect the best known populations of 168 high priority aquatic species (Figure 1).

### Prioritization

HUC 10 watersheds were prioritized by calculating a Global Significance Score (GSS), which was based upon the number of high priority species identified in each watershed as well as the global rarity of each species. Watersheds with the highest GSS are primarily found in the Coosa and Tennessee drainages of northwest Georgia, but also occur in the Tallapoosa, Chattahoochee, Flint, and Savannah drainages. Watersheds with high and moderate GSS occurred in all of Georgia's five ecological regions and 14 major drainages, except the Satilla. An additional 56 watersheds were designated as "significant" high priority watersheds because they contain important coastal habitats, migratory corridors for anadromous species, recent occurrences or critical habitat for federally listed species, or occur in a region of the state where high priority watersheds were poorly represented.

### Priority Watershed Categories

- High Priority - contain important populations of a high priority aquatic species.
- Significant - contain one or more of the following: important coastal habitat, a migratory corridor for a high priority diadromous species, critical habitat or a recent occurrence of an ESA listed species, or an aquatic community from an ecological region of the state where high priority watersheds are poorly represented.

### Conservation Action

The SWAP Fishes and Aquatic Invertebrates Team identified altered water quality, incompatible agricultural practices, altered hydrology, residential development, and dam and impoundment construction as significant threats to a large number of high priority aquatic species. Strong consideration should be given to conservation actions that help protect and recover Georgia's high priority aquatic species in high priority watersheds, including watershed-level protection efforts, riparian restoration, protection or restoration of natural flow regimes, and aquatic connectivity.

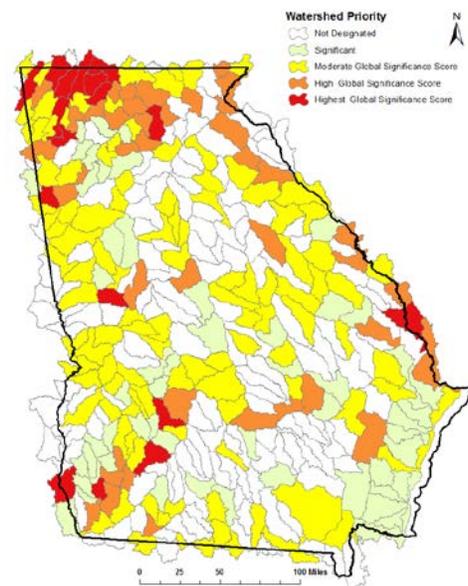


Figure 1. High priority watersheds identified during the 2015 revision of Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan.