



# Georgia Rockcress

## Why is the Georgia rockcress proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with a critical habitat designation?

Only about 5,000 individual Georgia rockcress plants still exist.

Therefore, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, proposes to list the Georgia rockcress as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), with a critical habitat designation. About 786 acres of riparian, river bluff habitat are being proposed for designation. The purpose of this regulation is to conserve Georgia rockcress and its habitat under the ESA. The proposed critical habitat is located in Georgia including Gordon, Floyd, Harris, Muscogee, Chattahoochee, and Clay Counties; and in Alabama, including Bibb, Dallas, Elmore, Monroe, Russell, Sumter and Wilcox Counties. The Service is required to make a listing determination, and, if prudent, designate critical habitat for this species as part of a settlement with the Center for Biological Diversity.

The Service found that habitat degradation and the invasion of exotic species, more than outright habitat destruction, are the most serious threats to the rockcress' continued existence. Disturbance, associated with timber harvesting, road building, and grazing, has created favorable conditions for the invasion of exotic weeds, especially Japanese honeysuckle, in this plant's habitat.

## What does it look like and what are the habitat requirements of the Georgia rockcress?

Georgia rockcress is a perennial herb up to 35 inches tall. The basal leaves are two to three inches long, and form a basal rosette. Leaves usually last through the fruiting season. Flowering occurs from March to April, with fruiting beginning in May and into early July. Georgia rockcress is primarily associated with high bluffs along major river courses, with dry to moderately moist soils of open rocky woodland and forested slopes. Georgia rockcress

generally grows in a variety of dry situations, including shallow soil accumulations on rocky bluffs, sloping rock outcrops, and in sandy loam along eroding riverbanks.

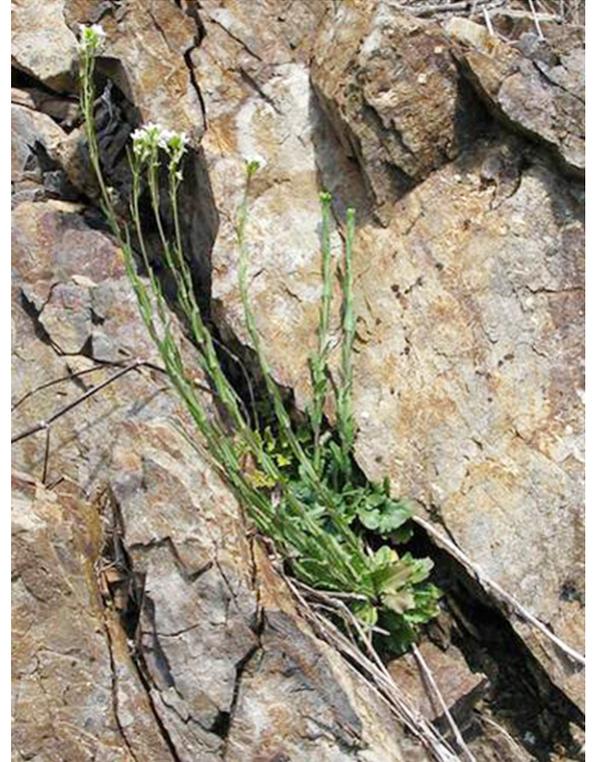
## What recovery actions are already underway to protect the Georgia rockcress?

Some recovery actions are already underway to conserve Georgia rockcress. The largest population of the plant (more than 1,600 stems) occurs on Fort Benning Georgia. The Service is working with Fort Benning to revise its Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan to protect Georgia rockcress and its habitat. In addition, Georgia Power also manages and maintains one of the largest populations of Georgia rockcress (about 1,000 stems) in Harris and Muscogee Counties.

## What is a critical habitat designation and what does it mean for landowners and federal agencies?

The ESA requires the Service to identify the location of habitat essential for the conservation of the species, called "critical habitat." This identification helps federal agencies identify actions that may affect listed species or their habitat, and to work with the Service to avoid or minimize those impacts. Identifying this habitat also helps raise awareness of the habitat needs of imperiled species and focuses the conservation efforts of other partners such as state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individual landowners.

Although non-federal lands are included in the areas proposed as critical habitat for the Georgia rockcress, activities on these lands will not necessarily be affected unless they are authorized, funded, or carried out by a federal agency. In such cases, the lead federal agency will need to consult with the Service to ensure actions do not jeopardize the plant or adversely modify its critical habitat.



*Georgia rockcress*  
by Michelle Elmore, The Nature Conservancy

## For more information:

A complete description of the listing and critical habitat designation can be found in the Federal Register at <http://www.regulations.gov>, or on the Georgia Ecological Services' website at <http://www.fws.gov/athens/>

Paper copies of the final rule which includes maps are also available by contacting

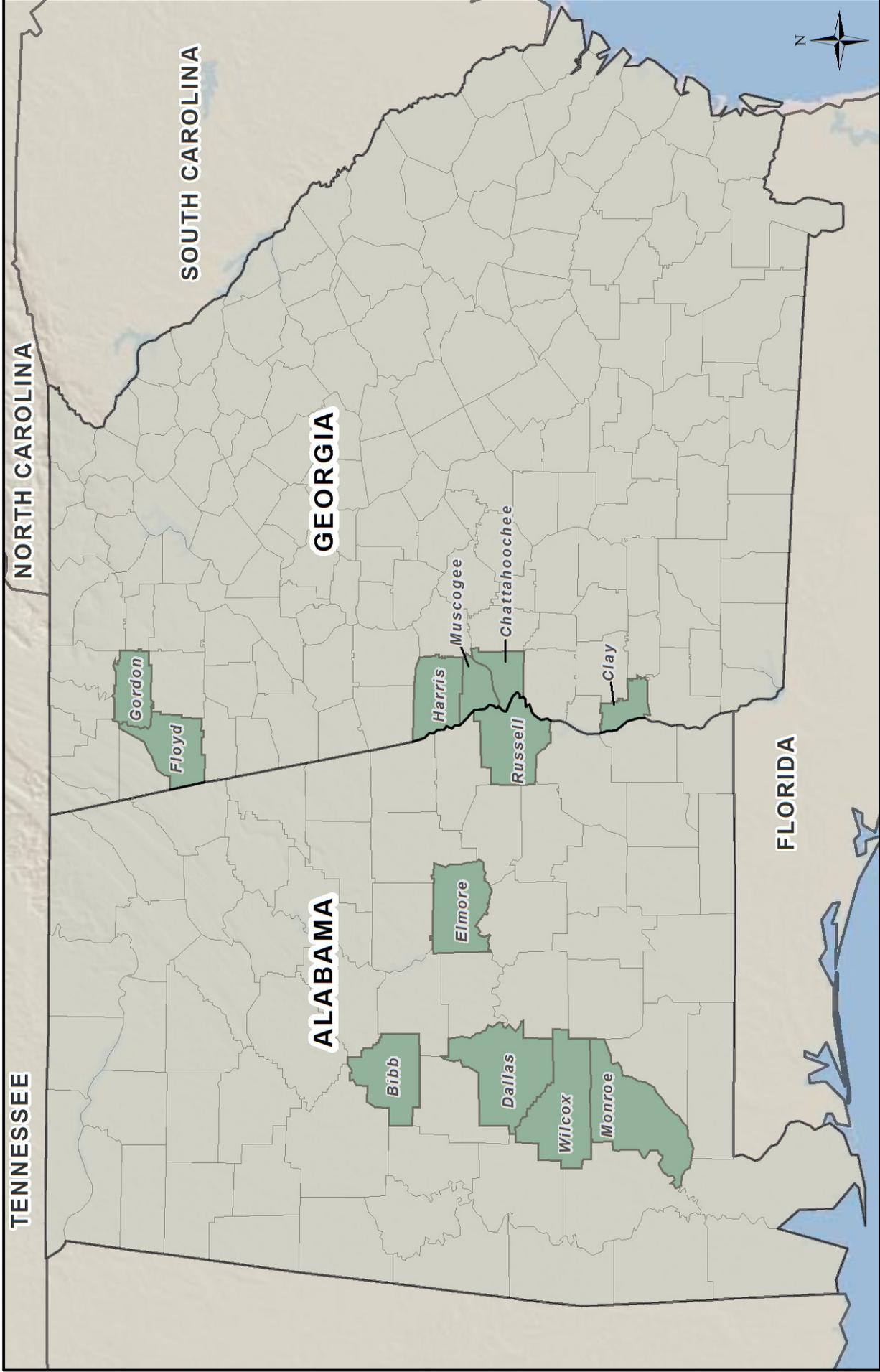
Jimmy Rickard  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Georgia Ecological Services Office  
105 Westpark Drive, Suite D  
Athens, Georgia 30606

Phone: 706/613 9493, extension 223  
Fax: 706/613 6059  
E-mail: [james\\_rickard@fws.gov](mailto:james_rickard@fws.gov)



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

# Counties in Alabama and Georgia Containing Proposed Critical Habitat Units for Georgia Rockcress (*Arabis georgiana*)



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Georgia Ecological Services Field Office  
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