

Georgia

Ecological Services Field Offices: Athens, Brunswick, Columbus

photo: USFWS, Mike Hobbs



Photos, top to bottom:

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.

Seeder planting native grasses.

photo: USFWS



Station History

- Established in 1977 and increasing in 1997 to three offices due to expanding commercial and residential growth in state.
- Staff: 22 plus two students.

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.

photo: USFWS, Pete Pattavina



photo: USFWS



Station Highlights

Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW)
Georgia PFW helps private landowners protect and restore wildlife habitat with 16,000 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.

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 and is coordinating with the COE on the new nationwide permits.

Georgia ES is coordinating with other state and federal agencies in University of Georgia's effort to create a GIS database and models that will help to focus conservation efforts in priority areas for wetland restoration. Watersheds were prioritized based on threats to overall health as it relates to wetland loss and riparian forest fragmentation.

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.

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.

We coordinated with the bases regarding their updated Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans. Pending base realignment and closure activities have intensified coordination with the Army regarding expected impacts to RCW's due to new training and construction at Fort Benning.

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>

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.

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 5300 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. 24 properties and 144,441 acres of upland pine habitat in south Georgia are enrolled. The program is managed by the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division which received FWS grants totaling almost \$800,000 to implement the program. The surplus birds from this program have enhanced the mitigation site, Ichauway Plantation, from a single bird in 1999 to 22 groups today.

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.

Longleaf Pine Forest Understory Restoration

The longleaf pine ecosystem has declined from a historic range of 90 million acres to approximately three million acres. The result is imperilment of this highly diverse habitat and associated species.

The establishment of native groundcover is an important component in longleaf pine restoration. The Georgia FO is part of the Northeast Gulf Understory Working Group, comprised of Federal and state agency and non-governmental organization representatives. The group is using PFW funds to accomplish native groundcover restoration on private lands by using cost-effective methods to attain structure, function, and species diversity. To date, these efforts have restored or is in the process of restoring native groundcover components on six upland projects totaling 120 acres in East Alabama and West Georgia.

This initiative contributes to the recovery of RCW and other species associated with longleaf pine habitats by:

- 1) increasing acreage of suitable habitat,
- 2) providing potential for habitat connectivity between small acreage private lands and larger tracts existing on public lands and private plantations,
- 3) promoting beneficial habitat management practices to private landowners, and
- 4) acting as catalyst for educational outreach towards private landowners.

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

West Georgia Supervisor
John Doresky
P.O. Box 52560
Fort Benning, GA 31995-2560
Phone: 706/544 6030
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