

Georgia Wildlife Action Plan

What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

Georgia snapshot

Geography: Georgia contains portions of five major physiographic provinces and a wide variety of habitats ranging from high-elevation cliffs to underground caverns, from piedmont granite outcrops to coastal plain pitcherplant bogs, and from headwater streams to the mouth of the Altamaha River.

Landscape:

Less than 10% of Georgia is publicly owned, and most of this public land is found in the mountains of North Georgia or in the lower Coastal Plain. While ample opportunities exist for wildlife habitat improvements on public lands, expansion of programs that provide technical and financial assistance for protection and restoration of habitat on private lands is critically important for maintenance of Georgia's wildlife diversity.

Wildlife: Georgia is one of the most biologically diverse states in the nation, ranking second in number of amphibians, third in the number of freshwater fishes, third in number of crayfishes, seventh in the number of reptiles, and seventh in the number of vascular plants. Moreover,

Georgia ranks sixth in the nation in overall species diversity based on numbers of vascular plants, vertebrate animals, and selected invertebrates.

Georgia's planning approach

The general approach taken in the planning effort was to emphasize activities that would lead to more effective wildlife



Wood Storks/Georgia DNR

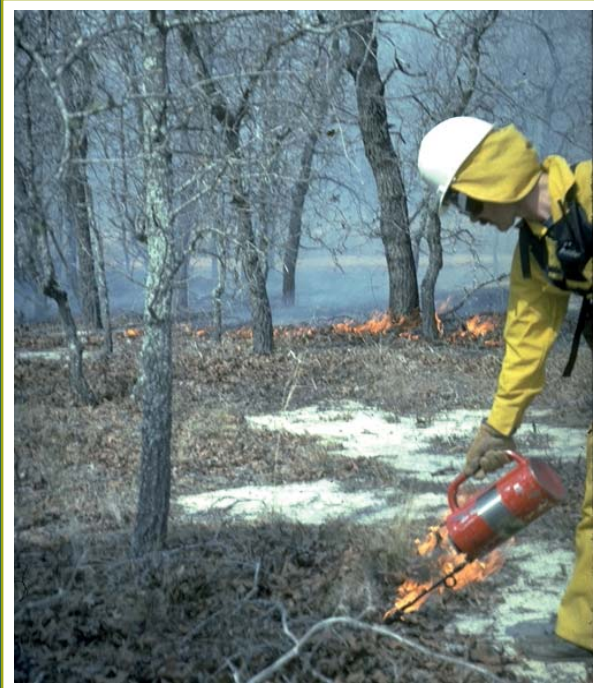
conservation at local and state levels. The goal of the Wildlife Action Plan is to conserve Georgia's animals, plants, and natural habitats through proactive measures emphasizing voluntary and incentive-based programs on private lands, habitat restoration and management by public agencies and private conservation organizations, rare species survey and recovery efforts, and environmental education and public outreach activities.

Innovative analytical approaches and methods were utilized to explore new ways of identifying and addressing conservation priorities for species and habitats in Georgia. Examples include development of datasets and analytical tools to allow historic vegetation mapping, and the use of land cover data,

“Growing up on a farm in rural Georgia, I learned early on the most basic principles of stewardship. I learned them from my father and from the land itself. And that most basic lesson was simply this: If you take care of the land, the land will take care of you.”

– Georgia Governor
Sonny Perdue

along with species-habitat models and documented rare species occurrence data, to identify potential “conservation opportunity areas”. Other approaches include delineation of high priority streams and watersheds, and the development of recommendations for new ways of sharing biodiversity information and conservation messages with other public agencies, private conservation organizations, educators, land managers, and the general public.



Controlled Burning Ochoopee Dunes/Georgia DNR

A list of 296 high priority animals and 323 high priority plants

was developed based on input from DNR staff and other biologists. High priority habitats and landscape features were also identified for each of five ecological regions of the state. Specific programs to address conservation needs for these

species and habitats were identified and ranked, and resources, partnerships, performance indicators, and monitoring needs were identified for each of these high priority conservation actions. The result is a detailed wildlife action plan that will help guide conservation of Georgia’s plants, animals and natural habitats.

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Georgia

Georgia’s action plan identifies 25 types of problems affecting wildlife species and their habitats. Some of the most significant of these include invasive exotic species, altered fire regimes, and dam and impoundment construction.

Invasive exotic species are non-native plants and animals that can cause ecological and economic harm. Examples of invasive species that impact high priority species and habitats in Georgia include feral hogs, flathead catfish, channeled apple snail, hemlock wooly adelgid, cogon grass, and Chinese privet.

Altered fire regime refers to an unnatural frequency, seasonality, or intensity of

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species of Conservation Concern*	Federally Threatened/ endangered species
Birds**	328	33	7
Mammals	92	23	4
Amphibians	86	22	1
Reptiles	83	22	6
Fishes (Freshwater)	250	74	8
Mollusks	191	75	17
Aquatic Arthropods	?	47	0
Plants***	3,000+	323	25
Totals		619	58

* Each state is using its own criteria for this category. Georgia focuses on wildlife species with small or declining populations or other characteristics that may make them vulnerable (this includes legally recognized threatened/endangered species).

** Includes species known to breed in Georgia as well as migratory birds.

*** Includes vascular and nonvascular plants.

Wildlife highlights

Key Habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
Mountain Bog Ownership: mix of private and public	Bog turtle (reptile) Swamp pink (plant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hydrologic alterations Encroachment of woody vegetation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restore mountain bogs by improving hydrologic functions and removing excess woody vegetation. Propagate and release bog turtles and associated species into restored habitat
Brownwater River Ownership: mix of private and public	Robust redhorse (fish) Shoals spiderlily (plant) Altamaha spiny mussel (mollusk)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sedimentation of shoals Dams and other barriers to dispersal Invasive exotic species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect vegetated stream buffers to limit sedimentation Provide fish passage around dams and eliminate barriers at road crossings by improving culverts Control invasive species such as flathead catfish
Longleaf Pine Forest Ownership: mix of public and private	Bachman's sparrow (bird) Flatwoods salamander (amphibian) Chaffseed (plant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Altered fire regimes Habitat fragmentation Invasive exotic species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reestablish growing season fire regime to improve habitat quality Provide incentives to private landowners to restore and maintain longleaf pine habitats Reduce use of nonnative plants in landscaping and erosion control

Examples of recommended actions to conserve Georgia's wildlife

fire that reduces habitat quality. This includes suppression of fires in fire-adapted communities, prescribed burns conducted in the wrong season, and fires that are too intense for communities that are not fire-adapted. Altered fire regimes are responsible for degradation of many of Georgia's natural habitats.

The construction of dams and impoundments (from agricultural ponds to large reservoirs) can alter stream flows and water temperatures and create barriers to dispersal of fish and other aquatic species. Many of Georgia's imperiled aquatic species are vulnerable to habitat degradation and fragmentation resulting from man-made impoundments.



Invasive Channeled apple snail/Georgia DNR

Working together for Georgia's wildlife

The Georgia Wildlife Action Plan was developed with input from a wide array of public and private agencies and organizations. A steering committee composed of representatives of state and federal agencies, private conservation organizations, and private landowners provided guidance for the planning effort. An interagency committee, first convened in November 2005, is facilitating the implementation of the plan. Like the steering committee, the implementation committee includes representatives from a broad range of

public and private conservation organizations and land managing entities.

Efforts to involve the public in the development, revision, and implementation of the wildlife strategy included public meetings, numerous presentations to groups around the state, news releases, brochures, fact sheets, newspaper and radio interviews, and a project website. Throughout the planning process, updates on the wildlife action plan were provided to the public and comments on the plan were solicited. Six regional stakeholder meetings, at which more than 60 organizations were represented, were held around the state to gather input from knowledgeable individuals. A public review draft of the document was developed on May 31, 2005 and posted on the project website. The public review period was from June 1 to July 15, 2005. Six public meetings were held in June 2005 to solicit input on the public review draft prior to development of the final draft.

"This conservation strategy articulates a set of interrelated wildlife conservation goals and prioritizes methods and approaches to reach these goals. Through the development of this conservation strategy, Georgia DNR and its conservation partners have indicated their commitment to maintain the natural heritage of this great state."

- Noel Holcomb, Commissioner,
Georgia Department of Natural Resources



Stocking Lake Sturgeon/Georgia DNR

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