

# Sustainable Forests

A resource for Georgia landowners, sponsored by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee of Georgia.

## A Plan for Wildlife

As a forest landowner, wildlife may already be an important part of your overall plan. You might manage for game species like turkey, quail or deer by planting vegetation that attracts these species or you may cultivate non-game species on your land to support a personal hobby such as bird watching. Whether you're actively managing for wildlife or not, your property provides habitat for wildlife and it's helpful to understand the various animal and plant communities on your property.



Gray Treefrog

In this issue of *Sustainable Forests*, the Georgia Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Implementation Committee turned to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to help update you on the state's new conservation plan for native plants and animals. Although the state of Georgia has been a steward of natural communities for decades, the Federal government recently required each state to develop a formal Wildlife Action Plan.



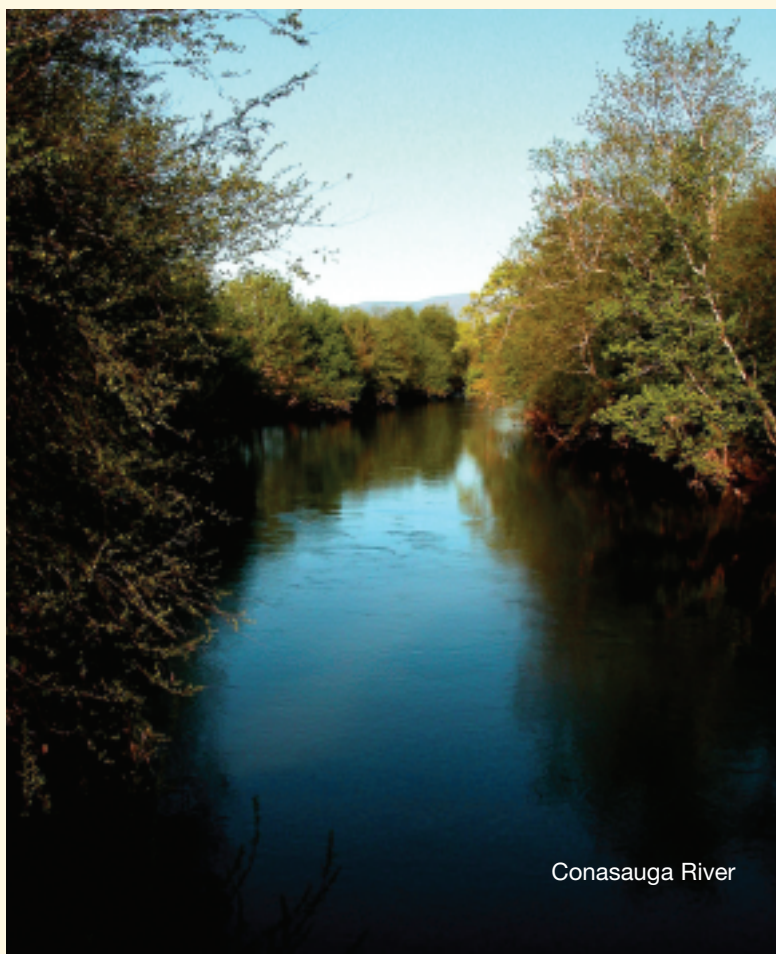
*In this issue, learn more about the plan, the implications for you as a forest landowner and about some of the resources available to you.*

## Getting the “Big Picture” on Wildlife Conservation

One of the remarkable characteristics of Georgia is its natural diversity. The largest state east of the Mississippi River, Georgia contains a great variety of habitats scattered across five physiographic provinces. This environmental diversity contributes to a high diversity of native plants and animals. In fact, Georgia is one of the most biologically diverse states in the nation, ranking second in the number of amphibians, third in the number of freshwater fishes, third in the number of crayfishes, seventh in the number of reptiles and seventh in the number of vascular plants.

Unfortunately, many of these species are becoming increasingly imperiled as a result of human activities. Like many other Southern states, Georgia has experienced rapid population growth

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Conasauga River

# Getting the “Big Picture” on Wildlife Conservation

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and development over the past several decades, and these changes have created significant challenges for wildlife conservation.

To address the conservation needs of Georgia's wildlife in an effective and systematic way, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildlife Resources Division developed the Wildlife Action Plan, also known as a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

## Plan Objectives

The planning process identified specific short- and long-term conservation objectives, including an update of the state protected species list and increased emphasis on improving awareness of high-priority species and habitats. Some of the plan objectives that are designed to **maintain, enhance and protect high-priority species and habitats** include:

- Voluntary land protection and incentive-based habitat management programs.
- Reintroduction of prescribed fire, hydrologic enhancements and vegetation management to restore natural habitats.
- Improved protection of isolated wetlands, headwater streams and caves.
- Stopping the spread of invasive/noxious species by identifying problem areas, developing control strategies, and providing technical and financial assistance to landowners.
- Minimizing impacts from development and other activities by improving environmental review procedures and facilitating training for and compliance with Best Management Practices for Forestry.
- Establishment of a consistent source of state funding for land protection to support wildlife conservation.

The Wildlife Action Plan emphasizes proactive conservation that benefits all wildlife species and prevents further declines in rare species.

## The Role of Private Landowners

**Private landowners are the key to the success of the Wildlife Action Plan.** Public lands in Georgia represent less than 7 percent of the total area of the state while family forest landowners like you own 65 percent of the state's forests. Georgia DNR recognizes that private landowners are essential partners in wildlife conservation and implementation of the Wildlife Action Plan.

“Beyond the challenges related to the state's tremendous biological diversity, we knew that our plan had to consider private lands to be successful,” says Dr. Jon Ambrose, Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator for DNR's Wildlife Resources

Division. “Private lands play an important role in maintaining the rich diversity of our state. To conserve Georgia's wildlife diversity, we need to enhance partnerships with private landowners and expand programs that provide technical and financial assistance for habitat protection and restoration on private lands.”

**The Sustainable Forestry Initiative management guidelines are compatible with the goals of Georgia's Wildlife Action Plan.** These guidelines address the need for landowners and land managers to identify and conserve rare species populations and sensitive natural habitats, maintain water quality, combat invasive exotic species, and generally maintain or enhance wildlife habitat. By implementing the SFI management guidelines, private landowners can help ensure a healthy environment teeming with wildlife.



Relict Trillium



Box Turtle



# Sustainable Forestry & Wildlife

Since 1995, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee in Georgia has promoted the practice of sustainable forestry in Georgia—with SFI program participants adhering to the SFI Standard on their lands and in their wood procurement prac-

tices. Recent changes to the SFI Standard have increased the emphasis on identifying and protecting wildlife habitat, particularly for species of special concern.

SFI program participants that own forests are developing stand- and landscape-level measures that promote habitat diversity and conservation on their own lands, while all SFI program participants are encouraging the protection of important species and habitat in their states. The new Georgia Wildlife Action Plan is timely in that it provides structure and helps



prioritize needs in the state, including the role of public and private lands. The plan also respects private property rights of landowners.

With a little thought and planning, private forestland owners can continue to enjoy all of the benefits of a sustainably managed forest, including income, personal enjoyment, wildlife diversity and beauty. SFI program participants have made a commitment to support important habitat needs and we hope non-industrial private landowners like you will join in the effort. It may be a lot easier than you think!

## Q&A:

### **Q. What is the status of the Georgia Wildlife Action Plan?**

**A.** The draft plan was completed in August 2005 and was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in October 2005. Georgia DNR is currently implementing several components of the plan.

### **Q. Does the Wildlife Action Plan consider all wildlife or just endangered or threatened species?**

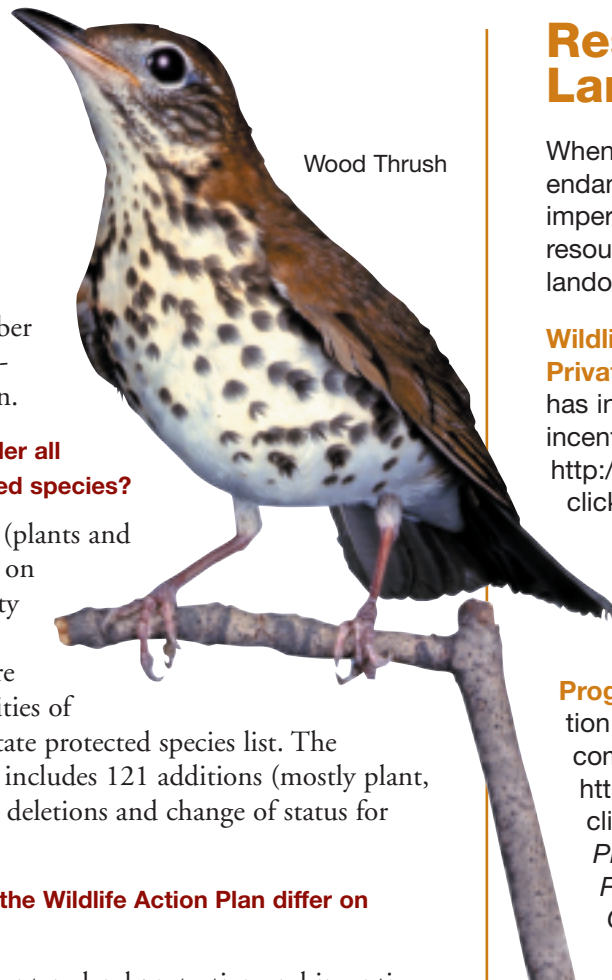
**A.** While the plan considers all wildlife (plants and animals) and habitat types, the focus is on maintaining populations of high-priority species and habitats, which includes endangered or declining species and rare natural communities. One of the priorities of the plan was the revision of Georgia's state protected species list. The updated list was recently approved and includes 121 additions (mostly plant, crayfish and mussel species), 18 species deletions and change of status for another 43 species.

### **Q. Does the conservation approach of the Wildlife Action Plan differ on private vs. public lands?**

**A.** On private lands, the focus is on voluntary land protection and incentive-based habitat management programs. On public lands, the emphasis is on habitat restoration and management, and rare species recovery.

### **Q. Who provided input on the plan?**

**A.** The Georgia Wildlife Action Plan was developed with input from a diverse group of stakeholders, including state and federal agencies, private conservation agencies and private landowners including non-industrial and industrial or corporate landowners.



Wood Thrush

## Resources for Landowners

When it comes to managing for endangered, threatened or critically imperiled species, there are many resources available to private landowners. A few are listed below:

**Wildlife Resources Division, Private Lands Program:** This website has information on the conservation incentive program. Log on to <http://www.georgiawildlife.com>, click on the *Hunting* page, then on *Landowner Programs*. Phone: 770-761-1697

**Wildlife Resources Division, Natural Heritage Program:** This website has information on rare species and natural communities. Log on to <http://www.georgiawildlife.com> and click on the *Nongame Animals and Plants* page, then on "Georgia Rare Species and Natural Community Information." Phone: 770-918-6411

**Sustainable Forestry Initiative:** "Biological Diversity and Wildlife Habitat Considerations in Managed Forests" is available as a pdf document. Log on to <http://www.afandpa.org>. Go to *Forestry* & click on *SFI*: In the sidebar, click on *Publications* and then *Current SFI Publications* to access the pdf. Phone: 800-878-8878

# Issues & Solutions

The Georgia Wildlife Action Plan identifies 25 types of problems that can impact the state's wildlife and habitat diversity. Here are some examples of significant issues and possible solutions:

## The Issue: *Invasive Exotic Species* -

Non-native plants and wildlife are degrading natural habitats and negatively impacting native species throughout the state. Examples include: Chinese privet, cogon grass, hemlock woolly adelgid (an Asian insect that kills hemlock trees), feral hogs, flat-head catfish and channeled apple snail.



Channeled Apple Snail

### Solutions:

Combat the spread of these species by identifying problem areas, developing specific control strategies, providing technical and financial assistance, improving landowner awareness and actively controlling populations of these exotic species.

## The Issue: *Altered Fire Regimes*

- This may include suppression of fires in fire-adapted communities, prescribed burns conducted in the wrong season and fires that are too intense for habitats that are not adapted to fire.

**Solutions:** Protect habitats such as hardwood ravines from intense fires and reintroduce prescribed fire as appropriate, particularly in fire-adapted habitats such as longleaf pine forests.



Prescribed Fire

## The Issue: *Dam Construction and Road Crossings* -

Construction of dams and poorly installed culverts can impact habitat quality of streams and wetlands and create migration barriers for fish and other aquatic species.

**Solutions:** Identify and protect ecologically important aquatic and wetland habitats before construction. Eliminate barriers at road crossings by minimizing stream crossings and properly installing culverts.

For More Information about SFI, call 706-542-7691 or log on to [www.sfi-georgia.org](http://www.sfi-georgia.org) or [www.aboutsfb.org](http://www.aboutsfb.org)



### Sustainable Forestry Initiative SFI Implementation Committee

Warnell School of Forestry  
and Natural Resources  
University of Georgia  
Athens, Georgia 30602-2152

[www.sfi-georgia.org](http://www.sfi-georgia.org)

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