

Recovering America's Wildlife Act

Good for Georgia's Wildlife, Economy and People



Bald eagle (Tom Wilson/Georgia Nature Photographers Association)

The natural world provides countless benefits to human health, well-being and prosperity. Yet as wildlife and their habitats disappear in America, those benefits are lost. And our nation suffers.

More than 12,000 species in the U.S. are considered in dire need of conservation. Unfortunately, there is no dedicated funding to conserve these species and help prevent thousands from becoming endangered.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act is the answer to that crisis. The act marks the most crucial investment in wildlife conservation in our generation. It will fund proactive work to restore wildlife, stimulating our economy, expanding outdoor recreation and conserving our natural heritage for future generations.

In 2022, Georgia DNR's Wildlife Resources Division received \$1.52 million in State and Tribal Wildlife Grants. This allowed us to make headway in conserving our 640 at-risk species and their habitats. But the funding is a small fraction of what is needed to carry out Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan, which guides efforts to conserve wildlife and wildlands before they become rarer and more costly to restore.

Other states face the same challenge. Wildlife agencies and partners cannot keep up with species in decline – to understand their unique needs and do the broad-scale work required to stabilize populations.

The following pages show what Georgia could achieve through Recovering America's Wildlife Act. Passage will reap benefits tenfold here and across the nation: keeping species off the endangered list, creating jobs, strengthening natural infrastructure and protecting vital ecosystem services such as pollination and water filtration. The act will also boost the outdoor recreation economy and add wildlife-viewing opportunities, providing millions of jobs and contributing billions in consumer spending. It's no wonder that in 2021 Georgia's Legislature *unanimously* approved a resolution urging Congress to pass the act.

Passing Recovering America's Wildlife Act means we can start these critical projects now!



Working for Wildlife

Conserving Habitats on Private Lands



Red-cockaded woodpecker; right, DNR staff working with a landowner (DNR)

More than 90% of the land in Georgia is privately owned. Land conversion resulting in habitat loss is the leading threat to the resiliency of wildlife in the state.

To conserve high-priority species – including animals, plants and insects that pollinate plants – it is vital to provide private landowners with information about the wildlife on their property and enhance their ability to manage the habitats those species need. Although DNR's Wildlife Resources Division provides these services, interest has grown so much staff is unable to meet the demand.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: Wildlife Resources will strengthen prescribed fire programs, helping landowners and communities statewide by reducing the risks associated with catastrophic wildfires and enhancing habitat for native plants and animals. Private landowners, land managers and consultants will also be provided tools, education, training and incentives to spur their use of key management actions in fire-dependent uplands, wetlands and other priority habitats.

Using the Working Lands for Wildlife model, staff will team with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and private landowners to apply conservation practices with incentives available through Farm Bill programs. Programs such as the Forestry for Wildlife Partnership, Safe Harbor Program and Candidate Conservation Agreements will be expanded to provide technical support for voluntary conservation agreements benefiting high-priority species on private lands.

Partners: Private landowners, Georgia Forestry Commission, NRCS, The Nature Conservancy, The Orianne Society, Tall Timbers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Benefits ■ Local jobs involving technical guidance and habitat management ■ Less risk of catastrophic wildfires ■ Healthier pollinator populations for agriculture ■ Improved habitat for recreational use ■ Enhanced capacity for private lands to capture, use and store carbon

Estimated Federal Funds: \$2.5 million a year for staffing, equipment and partner support.



Working for Wildlife

Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade



Federally listed eastern indigo snake; DNR game warden (DNR)

Georgia DNR game wardens have protected wildlife through education and enforcement for decades. With the growing illicit trade in wildlife – centered on nongame species – they are investigating more nongame violations. However, because of limited funding, this is still a small percentage of their work.

The illegal commercialization of wildlife exceeds \$19 billion a year in the U.S., trailing only guns, drugs and human smuggling. This wildlife trade is often connected to other crimes. DNR's Law Enforcement Division has uncovered networks of black-market wildlife dealers in the state and region.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: The additional funding, coupled with recent regulatory changes targeting the trade in nongame, will help our game wardens curtail the illegal collection of animals and plants, and allow the Law Enforcement Division to invest in intelligence and monitoring focused on international trade that is depleting Georgia wildlife. Also, for the sale and transport of invasive and injurious species DNR regulates, the act will provide for more training, needed equipment for patrols and investigations, additional monitoring, and community outreach to inform the public about regulations.

Partners: DNR Law Enforcement Division, Georgia Department of Agriculture, UGA Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health, Georgia Forestry Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and private landowners.

Benefits ■ Increased enforcement and community outreach ■ Equipment purchases from local vendors for patrol ■ More robust investigations involving rare species ■ Reduced illegal collection and trade in native wildlife ■ Fewer negative impacts from importing invasive species

Estimated Federal Funds: \$2.2 million a year for staffing, equipment and supplies.



Boosting Urban Outreach and Planning Green Growth



Birding in Atlanta; DNR biologist helps children at a butterfly release (DNR)

Georgia is one of the fastest growing states in the U.S., with a population that already exceeds 10.7 million and is expanding exponentially in size and diversity. Engaging urban and suburban residents can have lasting impacts on the conservation choices individuals and communities make.

Providing more outdoor recreational opportunities and increasing the public's understanding of the importance of healthy ecosystems can positively affect residents' health and well-being, as well as the conservation of native wildlife and natural habitats.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: Expanding the Wildlife Resources Division's Urban Wildlife Program will provide enhanced and critical technical assistance to metro communities across the state. At the same time, we will be able to give technical assistance to municipal planning and recreation departments, supporting their efforts to incorporate greenspace, wildlife habitat corridors and managed forests in the urban/suburban landscape.

Our Wildlife Viewing Grants Program will be scaled up to provide needed funding for creating and upgrading accessible wildlife-viewing opportunities on public and private lands. Informed by survey data, education and outreach programs will be targeted to the needs of urban and suburban communities, providing those Georgians the recreation and wildlife-viewing opportunities they lack.

Partners: Local communities and schools, consultants, Georgia Audubon, DNR's Coastal Resources and Parks and Historic Sites divisions, UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, Georgia Forestry Commission, Georgia Conservancy, Georgia Wildlife Federation, Atlanta Botanical Garden, State Botanical Garden of Georgia, and individual and corporate landowners.

Benefits ■ Jobs for local contractors, consultants and governments ■ Improved education and health outcomes for residents ■ New outdoor recreation and ecotourism opportunities ■ Greater understanding of wildlife ■ More effective conservation of high-quality natural habitats in and around urban/suburban areas ■ Improved engagement, relevancy and trust between DNR and constituents

Estimated Federal Funds: \$1.5 million a year for urban programming, research, planning and contracts.



Working for Wildlife

Deploying Watershed Conservation Teams



DNR mussel survey; right, federally threatened goldline darter (DNR)

The Southeast is a hotspot for aquatic diversity, one of the world's richest areas for freshwater crayfishes, fishes, mussels and snails. Reflecting this status, Georgia ranks among the top five states in native species.

However, Georgia is also a leader in at-risk aquatic life. About a quarter of the fishes and mussels found in the state along with a third of crayfishes are imperiled or critically imperiled. Restoring these species and their habitats is vital, and it involves water-quality implications that will help people and communities.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: The Wildlife Resources Division will carry out needed measures through regional teams targeting priority watersheds and species of greatest conservation need identified in Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan. Those regions and watersheds: **northwest** (Coosa, Tallapoosa and Tennessee drainages), **northeast** (Blue Ridge portions of the Tennessee, Savannah and Chattahoochee), **Atlantic** (Piedmont and Coastal Plains portions of the Savannah, Ogeechee and Altamaha), **Gulf** (Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint basin downstream of Atlanta, plus the Ochlockonee and Suwanee) and **coastal** (Satilla and St. Marys and coastal parts of the Altamaha, Ogeechee and Savannah).

Activities will vary from monitoring species to restoring riparian areas and providing technical support to minimize the impacts of infrastructure projects, improve aquatic connectivity and expand water trails.

Partners: The extensive network required for this approach will include Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center, U.S. Geological Survey Georgia Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia River Network, Georgia Water Planning Regions, The Nature Conservancy, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Riverkeepers, Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute, UGA River Basin Center and other academic institutions and local governments.

Benefits ■ Watershed conservation actions that enhance water quality for human uses and decrease water treatment costs ■ Economic gains for outdoor gear manufacturers, outfitters and local communities from developing aquatics-related recreational opportunities ■ Reducing the need to federally list species and promoting recovery that can lead to down-listing or de-listing species

Estimated Federal Funds: \$2.75 million a year, including about \$250,000 per basin for contracted work.



Working for Wildlife

Adding and Upgrading Education Centers



Campfire cooking at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center; right, a Smithgall Woods program (DNR)

Education is a key part of Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan. The long-term success of conservation efforts in the state depends on the public's knowledge and appreciation of Georgia's wildlife resources.

Working with school systems, Regional Educational Service Agencies and other state and federal agencies, the Wildlife Resources Division manages seven regional education centers: Charlie Elliott near Mansfield, Go Fish (Perry), Smithgall Woods (Helen), Arrowhead (Armuchoe), McDuffie (Dearing), Grand Bay (Valdosta) and Sapelo Island. Facility resources and staffing at the centers vary greatly.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: Wildlife Resources will expand the network from seven to nine centers, adding education centers in west and southwest Georgia through partnerships with local schools and other organizations. Each center also will be improved – with upgraded classrooms and exhibits, outdoor pavilions, trails and other instructional areas – and staffed full-time to meet the education needs of children and adults. Staff capacity will be enhanced to provide more classes and programs on-site, hold public events, and increase outreach at local and regional festivals.

Support also will be strengthened for efforts to provide training for DNR staff and partner organization programs on conservation topics relevant to State Wildlife Action Plan goals.

Partners: Local schools, public and private colleges, research institutions, the Georgia Wildlife Federation, other DNR divisions (Parks and Historic Sites, Coastal Resources and Law Enforcement), the Environmental Education Alliance of Georgia, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Benefits ■ Local jobs and internships in education and outreach, plus for facility maintenance
■ Enhanced training for teachers, students, the public and DNR staff ■ Increased involvement in outdoor recreation ■ Greater understanding and support for natural resources and their conservation

Estimated Federal Funds: \$2.5 million a year, including capital improvements, staffing and contracts.



Mapping Habitats and Conservation Corridors



Montane longleaf pine; right, Wildlife Action Plan greenway corridors (DNR)

Georgia has a wide range of habitats, from Blue Ridge Mountain forests to barrier island beaches. This wealth of habitats supports significant wildlife diversity, including many rare animal and plant species.

A dynamic statewide habitat map is crucial for planning our economic and conservation future. Knowing the extent of Georgia's natural habitats can improve project planning, preserving the most rare and sensitive areas along with more common habitats, all helping empower communities and our economy.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: The primary focus is a statewide mapping and inventory of high-priority habitats to inform local, state and regional land conservation efforts. Georgia is at the nexus of the Southeast, touching five states and all five major ecoregions. With a well-planned conservation network, Georgia can achieve a connected wildlife corridor system that benefits wildlife and people.

These potential greenways are identified in Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan. Work with the Georgia Department of Transportation, developers and local governments will be key to enhancing connectivity and conserving our natural resources. A state corridor working group will help guide this process.

Partners: The Longleaf Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, The Jones Center at Ichauway, the University of Georgia, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Defense, Georgia DOT, Open Space Institute, The Conservation Fund, local governments, private landowners, and developers.

Benefits ■ Greater understanding of natural habitats ■ Promotion of sustainable economic development, improved land-use planning and eco-tourism ■ Economic boost from new hunting, fishing, birding and other outdoor recreation opportunities ■ Improved quality of life for Georgians

Estimated Federal Funds: \$750,000 a year, including staffing, mapping, analysis and outreach.



Managing Habitats on State Lands with Teamwork



Managing a controlled burn; right, restoration by fire (DNR)

On state lands, restoring and maintaining important habitats – such as longleaf pine forests and woodlands, sandhill scrub, Coastal Plain bogs, cypress ponds, prairies, outcrops and barrens, and maritime forests – is vital to conserving many at-risk species and maintaining Georgia’s incredible wildlife diversity.

At the center of this work is prescribed fire, the most effective habitat management tool for many of Georgia’s species of conservation concern.

With Recovering America’s Wildlife Act: The Wildlife Resources Division will create regional management teams to lead habitat restoration on wildlife management areas, parks and other state lands. Along with prescribed fire, emphasis will be placed on restoring native groundcover and controlling invasive species that degrade habitat quality.

Teams of wildlife technicians stationed in each division region will manage state lands, addressing invasive plants and animals (primarily feral hogs), conducting controlled burns and restoring native plant communities. Research on the results will inform further efforts and adaptive management.

Partners: The Nature Conservancy, The Orianne Society, The Longleaf Alliance, Coastal Wildscapes, USDA Forest and Animal and Plant Health Inspection services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the University of Georgia, Jones Center at Ichauway, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and other research institutions, Georgia Forestry Commission, DNR’s Parks and Historic Sites and Coastal Resources divisions, Georgia Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Department of Defense.

Benefits ■ New jobs in habitat management ■ Increased sales of equipment and supplies ■ Enhanced hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities ■ Reduced wildfire threats to state and nearby private lands ■ Greater support for prescribed fire and natural habitats management

Estimated Federal Funds: \$2.3 million a year, including salaries, equipment and contracted work.



Working for Wildlife

Recovering Listed Animals and Plants



Nesting loggerhead sea turtle; right, Canby's dropwort (DNR)

Georgia has 80 species that are either listed or candidates for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. Another 249 species are protected under state law. Efforts to conserve and recover these animals and plants are essential to maintaining Georgia's wildlife diversity.

The recovery goal is to reduce threats, protect habitat and achieve population levels that support downlisting or delisting a species. This focus, a key part of Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan, requires significant commitment and long-term work by DNR's Wildlife Conservation Section and its partners.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: Our efforts to recover federally listed species – such as North Atlantic right whales, red-cockaded woodpeckers, gray bats, Atlantic sturgeon, loggerhead sea turtles, Canby's dropwort and hairy rattlesnake – will be expanded. The funding will also support more extensive measures to preclude federal listing of state-protected species such as the gopher tortoise, Henslow's sparrow, southeastern American kestrel, striped newt, sandhills rosemary and Georgia aster.

This effort will include research and surveys aimed at determining the conservation status of species, monitoring populations, reducing human-caused and other threats, and working with public and private landowners to conserve habitat.

Partners: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, NOAA, U.S. Department of Defense, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, The Orianne Society, The Conservation Fund, University of Georgia, Jones Center at Ichauway, Georgia Forestry Commission, Georgia Department of Transportation, and private foundations, landowners and volunteers.

Benefits ■ Reduced regulatory burdens on landowners and others as listed species recover ■ Additional permanent and seasonal jobs, including for contractors ■ Sales of equipment and supplies

Estimated Federal Funds: \$4.4 million a year, including salaries, supplies and contracted work.



Working for Wildlife

Expanding Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism



Bat boxes and an observation platform (right) funded by DNR Wildlife Viewing grants (DNR)

While Georgia has tremendous potential for increasing wildlife viewing and nature tourism, there is a lack of access and information on the availability of these opportunities.

Tapping into that potential and promoting wildlife viewing and nature tourism will help the Wildlife Resources Division achieve its mission to conserve and promote fishing, hunting and wildlife resources. Reaching wildlife viewers not only advances conservation, it supports sustainable economic development.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: The Wildlife Resources Division will expand its Georgia Birding and Wildlife Trails and Wildlife Viewing Grants programs, identify and promote wildlife-viewing opportunities on state lands, and work with individual and corporate private landowners interested in providing wildlife-viewing opportunities on their properties. The agency will also team with conservation partners to increase access to rivers, creating interpretive trails and exploring public-access opportunities.

Georgia is part of a Multistate Conservation Grant-funded survey of wildlife viewers nationwide, with additional sampling planned in our state to provide Georgia-specific data. With results due this year, the survey will help fill gaps in information about viewer behaviors, experiences, perceptions and needs, guiding efforts to increase DNR's relevancy with its broader constituency and specifically shaping new efforts to support and grow wildlife viewing and nature tourism in the state.

Partners: DNR Parks and Historic Sites Division, local governments, Georgia Audubon, Georgia Ornithological Society, Georgia River Network, Atlanta Botanical Garden, State Botanical Garden of Georgia, private landowners, nonprofits and local communities.

Benefits ■ Increased wildlife viewing and recreation on state and other conservation lands ■ Sales of outdoor equipment and supplies ■ Increased understanding of Georgia's natural diversity and support for conservation ■ Engagement that underscores relevancy and trust between DNR and constituents

Estimated Federal Funds: \$700,000 a year, including salaries, equipment, supplies and contracted work.



Building Living Shorelines and Shorebird Habitat



Shorebird flock; right, an oyster bank – natural model for living shorelines (DNR)

Living shorelines incorporate natural materials such as intertidal oyster reefs and native vegetation to address coastal shoreline erosion and habitat loss. This approach to improving the coast’s natural infrastructure is a viable alternative to “hard” shoreline stabilization methods such as riprap or bulkheads.

Research indicates that living shorelines can be more resilient than bulkheads against the impacts from hurricanes and sea-level rise. They have other advantages, too, including providing essential fish habitat, serving as remediation to nutrient pollution and boosting a Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan priority species – the American oyster.

With Recovering America’s Wildlife Act: Partner organizations and contractors will be engaged to increase the adoption of living shorelines along Georgia’s coast. A related effort will include creating shorebird and seabird habitat using dredge spoil to augment or replace natural sand spits and other intertidal habitats that are being washed over and sometimes washed away by rising seas and hurricanes. These habitats, which are largely free from human disturbance and predators such as raccoons and coyotes, are important for nesting and foraging.

Partners: DNR Coastal Resources Division, local governments, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, private landowners and contractors.

Benefits ■ Local jobs to create and manage living shorelines ■ Ecosystem services, including stemming erosion ■ Increased support for healthy fisheries and nature-based tourism ■ Enhanced coastal resilience regarding protection from hurricanes and sea-level rise

Estimated Federal Funds: \$600,000 a year.



Working for Wildlife

Conserving Georgia's Wildlands



New conservation lands (left, Ceylon WMA) providing more outdoor recreation opportunities (Ceylon/Mac Stone; deer/DNR)

Land conservation is critically important to maintaining Georgia's biological diversity long-term. Using many funding sources, DNR has protected key habitats around the state over the past several decades.

However, given the rate of population growth and development in the state, there is an urgent need to continue this effort to conserve habitat for at-risk species and provide additional opportunities for wildlife-related recreation.

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act: DNR will be better able to pursue land conservation objectives in Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan. Protection tools will include fee simple acquisitions, conservation easements and long-term management agreements. Priorities will be determined by statewide analyses of the most important habitats and landscape features for wildlife conservation, as well as public recreation needs and management capabilities.

Staff will also provide technical assistance to other agencies and conservation organizations, exponentially increasing the conservation footprint in the state and region. The results will help at-risk species recover, providing multiple advantages for Georgians and their communities.

Partners: The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, Open Space Institute, private foundations, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Forest Service, The Orianne Society, Tall Timbers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Defense, Georgia Department of Transportation, The Longleaf Alliance, local governments and private landowners.

Benefits ■ Enhanced opportunities for outdoor recreation ■ Economic benefits to local communities
■ Reduced need for additional federal listings for species ■ More robust ecosystem services

Estimated Federal Funds: \$6.8 million a year, including acquisitions, due diligence and administration.

