

For nature,
for people, for Georgia.
Together, we find a way

2023 GEORGIA IMPACT REPORT



The Nature Conservancy in Georgia

FY23 Board of Trustees

Yolanda Adrean

Nina Butler

Dr. Marsha Certain

Chris Clark

Dr. Robert Cooper

Revonda Cosby

Clint Cox

Dane Dickie

Linda DiSantis

Carolyn Gibbs

Dr. Dionne Hoskins-Brown

Bailey Izard

Catherine Lautenbacher

James Marlow

Nancy Clair McInaney, *Chair*

Scott C. Satterwhite, CFA

Nick Vrolijk

Christopher "Chris" Weber

Jeannie Wright

The Nature Conservancy
Georgia

ON THE COVER © iStock/Wirestock LEFT TOP TO BOTTOM © TNC/Georgia; © John Roling/TNC Photo Contest 2019; © Hugh Nourse THIS PAGE © Rich Reid; INSET © Courtesy Monica Thornton



Letter from the Executive Director

What an incredible year. When I started as The Nature Conservancy in Georgia's Executive Director in December 2022, I knew that I was joining one of the largest, most effective conservation organizations in the state. What I did not know, however, is that I would have the opportunity to lead one of the smartest, most dedicated teams that I have had the pleasure of working with throughout my career.

Our conservationists continue to lead the way both when it comes to building on our ongoing efforts and crafting innovative solutions which address the most critical environmental needs of our time. We had a banner year for our tree planting program with more than 1.4 million seedlings going in the ground across the state, covering nearly 2,400 acres. Our fire program continues to be among the leaders in all 50 states with almost 40,000 acres treated with prescribed fire between our own burns and partner burns.

In addition to our land management, we expanded on our coastal management as well. We are working with communities, governments, and non-profit partners along the coast to create new tools that help plan for the future as the climate changes and sea levels rise. In addition to that adaptation work, we are also exploring new opportunities to protect our salt marshes through a partnership with the University of Georgia.

I have had the chance to see much of this work for myself as I crisscross the state to familiarize myself with our entire portfolio of work, from coast to climate to freshwater. I have met the people who are literally wading through the mud and the muck every day to support a thriving environment which supports animals, plants, and people alike.

At every turn, I have been amazed at the passion that our team brings to the table each day. There is a great deal of work that needs to be done in Georgia, from expanding our protected lands in the Dugdown Corridor to removing countless stream barriers which impede the health of our freshwater ecosystems. When I see the work that we are doing firsthand, however, the challenges suddenly seem much smaller.

None of this work would be possible without our supporters. From our donors who lend us their financial support to our volunteers who donate their time and energy, we are committed to a shared vision of a Georgia where our lands, waters, and air are kept clean for generations to come. We are grateful to everyone who has decided to become a part of The Nature Conservancy in Georgia.

As I look back on my first year as Executive Director, I feel more energized than ever about the future of conservation in Georgia. Together, there is no limit to what we will accomplish.

Monica Thornton

Trustee Profile Nancy Clair Laird McInaney

What inspired you to serve as chair of the TNC GA board of trustees?

My dad, Cody Laird, Jr, Tricia Allen, and Mary Beth Jordan. They were former Trustees I served with, and it was my turn to build on the momentum and great work they had done for The Nature Conservancy in Georgia.

What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of from your time as chair?

Boulder hopping across the river. What I mean by that is during my two-year tenure, we had changes to navigate to set us up for success and continued impact. As we came out of the pandemic, we closed and opened our new three-year strategic plan. We said goodbye to Deron Davis as he transitioned to North America TNC and welcomed Monica Thornton as our new State Director. We lost our beloved Sheila Barrie who was the glue that kept the many parts of TNC's executive team and board humming. So, what I am most proud of is that as a team, board and staff, we gracefully got across the river and are strongly positioned to continue making an impact across the state of Georgia and beyond.

What have you taken away from your time as chair?

Two things. One, how incredible the staff and board are at TNC. The more I get to know them, the more I respect and appreciate them. They are salt of the earth people - smart, strategic, kind and fun. The second is the scale at which TNC, along with its partners, makes an impact in Georgia, across the country and around the world.

How did you come to be so passionate about conservation?

My family. My mom and dad horsepacked us into the wilderness of the Wind River Range, WY and the Beartooths, MT. There is a picture of me when I was eight years old washing the dishes at the camp, front teeth missing with a big smile, delighted in being in the middle of the wilderness with my family. I continued chasing my brothers down rivers and still spend as much time as I can in nature. With the urgency of climate change and biodiversity decline, I am compelled to act.

What is your favorite memory of working with TNC?

Every time I go on a field trip with a TNC scientist, I learn about the incredible interconnectedness of place - nature, economics, and the social

interweaving. We are part of the web, not separate from it, and have a responsibility to take care of it.

I read an article recently about people eventually living on Mars or the moon. While that is incredible, I will stick to Earth, this amazing planet where, if we are willing to embrace humility, we can learn so much.

What is your favorite TNC preserve/TNC managed place in Georgia? Favorite natural place in Georgia overall?

Georgia has so many different incredible ecosystems that it is hard to pick just one. I love Broxton Rocks Preserve in southeast Georgia, a magical place with incredible history and biodiversity. I love the marshes of the coast and the creeks of the North Georgia mountains. One of my go-to places is Edge of the World on the Amicalola River in the Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area. It is so fun to boulder hop, swim, and take some time to delight in nature.

Any final words as you roll off as Chair?

One of my favorite expressions is "Nature bats last." Nature based solutions make economic sense for people and nature. TNC is a leader in making that happen. For every \$1 someone donates to TNC, \$11 is leveraged with TNC and its partners. TNC is a science based, non-partisan, solutions-oriented organization to get work done at scale in Georgia, across the nation and around the world. If you find yourself losing sight of the way forward, TNC has a path.



Fresh water



BY THE NUMBERS

93%

of 2023 farmers would participate if the auction were offered annually.

45%

of farmers would change their crop planning if the auction were offered annually.

9

contracts for 2023 growing season on approximately 970 acres of irrigated land.

Pilot projects and partnerships lay the foundation for conserving freshwater biodiversity.

Innovation Guides Action in the Lower Flint River

The Nature Conservancy continued to work as part of the Georgia Flow Incentive Trust (GA-FIT) to help farmers explore innovative ways of sustaining farmland and local streams during severe drought. In 2022 and 2023, GA-FIT held auctions that offered farmers incentives for voluntarily reducing or suspending irrigation near Ichawaynochaway Creek in Southwest Georgia if drought conditions emerged. The accomplishments of this pilot project far surpassed expectations and include:

- Implemented successful field trials of new incentive approaches to voluntary irrigation suspension
- Recruited over 55% of eligible farmers in the project area to participate in an incentive auction



- Generated “willingness to pay” data for voluntary irrigation suspension incentives by contract type, water source, and crop type
- Developed an on-line incentive auction portal that provided a seamless and positive experience for farmers and can be used as a template for future incentive auctions
- Successfully executed eight irrigation suspension contracts on 830 acres in 2022 and nine contracts on 1,010 acres in 2023
- Established the Georgia Flow Incentive Trust and catalyzed its growth, which has since attracted over \$55 million in additional funding to improve drought resilience in the Lower Flint River Basin.
- Developed positive brand recognition for GA-FIT among farmers, resource managers, elected officials, policy makers, and other stakeholders
- Provided a strong proof of concept for new voluntary irrigation suspension incentives as a potential management measure for a Lower Flint River Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for federally protected freshwater mussels
- Transferred knowledge gained in this project to audiences in and beyond Georgia through the GA-FIT website, more than 25 presentations to audiences of water resource managers and



...

“The success of the GA-FIT project is highlighted by the high participation rate of farmers and the Advisory Board’s willingness to help draft and implement an Habitat Conservation Plan for federally protected mussels of the Lower Flint Basin. It’s a positive indication that the region will move toward adaptively managing water to sustain biodiversity along with the agricultural economy.”

...

Paula Marcinek
Freshwater Director

- academic researchers, and two research manuscripts that will be submitted to academic journals
- Supported robust stakeholder engagement through the GA-FIT Advisory Board, which will continue to provide leadership with the HCP and will facilitate the integration of project results into Georgia’s water policy, planning, and management

The outcomes of the pilot incentive auctions were well received and are informing recommendations for policies and practices related to drought management in the region, and potentially beyond.

Creature Feature: Trispot Darter

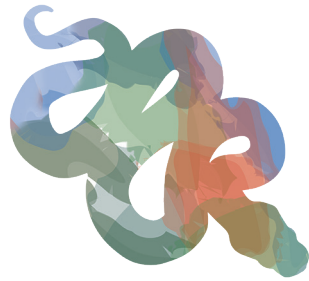
The Nature Conservancy is a partner in an America the Beautiful Challenge grant received by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources that highlights actions to recover the trispot darter (*Etheostoma trisella*). This \$2,000,000 award gives partners the resources to train students from local colleges in conducting barrier assessments for at least 300 road crossings and prioritizing them for replacement of at least 5 with fish-friendly designs to enable trispot darter to access seasonal spawning habitat.

Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest

The Nature Conservancy and the Conasauga Ranger District completed two projects along the CCC Camp Road within the Chattahoochee National Forest to reduce sediment flowing into Holly Creek. The first project involved replacing 14 culverts that proved to be inadequate in managing water and sediments flowing into the river from surrounding steep topography. TNC also implemented a paving project that will reduce sediment entering a sensitive segment of Holly Creek that is home to multiple threatened or endangered aquatic species.



Land



BY THE NUMBERS

GOOD FIRE IN GEORGIA

60

More than 60 controlled burns on 12,477 acres led by The Nature Conservancy.

26,423

Assisted partners with controlled burns on an additional 26,423 acres.

2,263

Acres Protected

We are dedicating significant resources and capacity towards conserving, restoring and managing lands around the state.

It was a good year for longleaf pines

The Nature Conservancy, together with our partners and volunteers, had several opportunities to protect and restore longleaf pine trees around Georgia—good news for our state’s air, water and wildlife. For example, thanks to generous **support from partners like UPS Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Arbor Day Foundation, we planted over one million trees all across Georgia!**

TNC and partners also moved the needle forward as part of some key, ongoing projects related to the protection and management of Georgia’s longleaf pine forests.



As part of the **Chattahoochee Fall Line Conservation Partnership (CFLCP)** The Nature Conservancy and our partners made progress engaging new and diverse audiences in west Georgia and east Alabama in learning about the importance of the region’s iconic longleaf pine ecosystem. As part of this effort, TNC provided training and technical and financial assistance to stakeholders who expressed a desire to conserve, restore and manage longleaf pines on public or private lands. This effort complements other priorities—land protection and stewardship—the partners are pursuing in this part of the state.



...
“I think the quality I’m most proud of in our few—our mighty few—our band of conservation professionals—is how hard they punch above their weight class. All across the state, a relative handful of dedicated and capable TNC staff are leading diverse and impressive teams of partners. Our wonderful partners would no doubt be doing good work all on their own, but I truly believe that it’s that extra juice from TNC that often kicks in and moves the work from good to great. And we couldn’t do what we do without our supporters.”
...

Mike Hensley
Chattahoochee Fall Line Program Director



In collaboration with diverse partners, TNC accomplished additional land protection within the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) located around Fort Moore (formerly Fort Benning) which expanded the critical conservation corridor in the heart of this landscape. Within the ACUB, the partners are working with willing private landowners adjacent to the installation to sustain rural and conservation-friendly land uses. This effort supports the partners’ goals of establishing a 75,000-acre conservation buffer around Fort Moore that allows room for the 182,000-acre military installation’s mission-based activities while preserving and restoring natural lands that support a thriving longleaf pine forest, several at-risk species such as the gopher tortoise and red-cockaded woodpecker, and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Lessons learned from TNC’s work across the state informed the recently completed **River Valley Community Compatible Development (RVCCD) Plan**. After collaborating over a two-year period, representatives from the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the River Valley Regional Commission, Fort Moore, the ACUB partners and six surrounding counties completed this plan. Moving forward, it will guide economic development in this part of Georgia and Alabama that promotes land uses in alignment with Fort Moore’s military mission, maintains the region’s rural character, and protects the area’s natural resources.



Creature feature: Species monitoring yields good news

The Nature Conservancy’s scientists carved out time to check in on Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers at TNC’s Moody Forest Natural Area, finding a population that is on the path to recovery. They also anecdotally learned about an increase

in Bachman’s and Henlow’s sparrows at TNC’s Broxton Rocks Preserve following the implementation of a new timber management plan. And, two federally endangered species showed signs of improvement: green pitcher plant at the Reed Branch Wet Meadow and mat-forming Quillwort at Heggie’s Rock.



Coast



CRS EXPLORER TOOL

Building upon our work in Camden County and City of St. Marys, The Nature Conservancy worked with partners in Glynn County, the City of Brunswick and Jekyll Island to employ the CRS Explorer tool in visualizing portions of the floodplain that are eligible for Open Space credits in the FEMA program, and identifying additional flood prone areas that might qualify in the future if protected from development. The tool made it possible to click each eligible parcel to reveal data on ownership, acreage, tax value and potential points required to generate discounts on flood insurance premiums.

Pursuing proactive approaches to building coastal resilience that benefit wildlife and Georgia communities.

There's A Tool For That

There is a sea change taking place along Georgia's coast. An overhaul of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) signals potential modifications to flood insurance premiums that would impact property owners in coastal communities who are experiencing more frequent and intense storms, sea level rise and flooding due to climate change. In response, The Nature Conservancy developed a tool to identify open spaces within Georgia's floodplains that would help build resiliency if preserved.



Why open space? Conserving undeveloped, open natural areas provides an opportunity to retain a floodplain's ability to store and slowly release excess water, improve water quality and support wildlife, and allow ecosystems to migrate in the face of climate change. Open spaces also provide social and economic benefits to communities, and prevent risky development in ecologically important areas.

Specifically, TNC's tool provides data and mapping capability to help decision makers identify areas that are eligible for Open Space Preservation (OSP) credits in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Community Rating System (CRS) to reduce flood risk and associated annual flood insurance premiums for homeowners. Known as CRS Explorer, the new tool also allows communities to interactively explore areas that aren't currently counted for credit in this federal program, but could be in the future if they are legally protected from development. Planners can overlay additional data, like habitat assessments or flooding frequency, to further make the case to protect these areas and support local planning decisions.



...
"This new tool contributes to TNC's efforts across the coast to guide communities in protecting low-lying flood prone lands from development so that nature can do the important work of providing resilience against the effects of climate change."

...
Ashby Worley
Coastal Climate
Adaptation Director

Two GA projects supported by SOAR

The Nature Conservancy in Georgia supported two projects via the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) Initiative. "Shell to Shore," is an oyster shell recycling non-profit launched by Seabear Oyster Bar in Athens with the support of TNC. After diners consumed oysters, the shells were gathered from Seabear and other inland restaurants, cleaned and "cured" in Athens, and transported back to the coast to support oyster farming and restoration. In all, more than 8 tons, or 16,000 pounds, of shells were gathered, cured, and transported back to the coast to be used for restoration and living shoreline projects.

A single adult oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water every day, removing excess nutrients and other pollutants. These reefs also provide habitat for hundreds of marine species and help protect shorelines from erosion by serving as natural buffers against rising tides and hurricanes.

Meanwhile, our pilot program to educate high school students at McIntosh County Academy with E.L. McIntosh & Son Seafood helped lay the foundation for the next generation to continue critical oyster aquaculture and shellfish restoration. The SOAR grant provided owner Earnest McIntosh with support to help develop and scale-up aquaculture methodologies and increase production while providing hands-on learning experiences for students passionate about conservation.

By investing in these farmers and organizations, we're not just contributing to our conservation goals, we're supporting livelihoods and coastal communities. We also believe that creating a more diverse industry will bring new ideas, innovations, and solutions to some of the planet's greatest challenges.



Priority Landscape

Dugdown Corridor

The Dugdown Mountain Corridor represents one of the most significant opportunities for landscape-scale restoration of the globally imperiled montane longleaf ecosystem and the protection of habitat for high-priority freshwater species. Our vision is to connect the Paulding Forest and Sheffield Wildlife Management Areas in northwest Georgia with the Talladega National Forest in northeast Alabama, a critical effort to improve connectivity within the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains. By 2025, The Nature Conservancy and our partners will complete a new regional headquarters facility to serve as a homebase for our effort to create a protected corridor for animals and plants to migrate through as our climate changes.



Priority Landscape

Chattahoochee Fall Line

The Nature Conservancy has begun to accelerate our work in the area, which has already included the planting of 425,000 trees, the conservation of roughly 35,000 acres of actively managed land, and the engagement and education of more

than 3,000 participants through local outreach and events in the last three years. We are now constructing a modern, efficient, purpose-built facility to serve as a regional home base of operations. This new facility will support our goal of protecting and restoring 35,000 more acres of forest which is home to rare gopher tortoises and red-cockaded woodpeckers; unusual pitcher plants and wild orchids; and rivers, shoals and forests which support diverse plant and animal populations.



OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE © Russell Mick
THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE © Russell Mick
© FWC

Climate



...

“Our communities, farms, and natural environments are already feeling the impacts of climate change. The Nature Conservancy is meeting this challenge by working with businesses, government agencies, and other partners to implement practical solutions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance sustainability in Georgia’s economy, communities, and natural resources.”

...

Mike O’Reilly
Director of Policy and Climate Strategy

Expanding Clean Energy and Protecting Wildlife

The Nature Conservancy worked to accelerate the adoption of clean, renewable energy in Georgia. Building on the successful 2021 launch of our Georgia Low Impact Solar Siting Tool, we collaborated with state and federal agency partners to promote access to the tool among key audiences, leading to a 30% increase in our tool’s use last year. Drawing on conservation and other data, TNC’s tool helps solar developers locate sites for future large-scale solar facilities that minimize impacts on sensitive lands and habitats.

TNC supports the expansion of home-grown solar energy as an essential step in meeting decarbonization goals for Georgia. As a founding member of the Georgia Utility Scale Solar Siting Initiative, TNC collaborates with partners in conservation groups, electric utilities, and state and federal agencies to achieve a solar energy expansion that supports wildlife and nature.

We are also working beyond our state borders to support nature-friendly solar across the Southeast. South Carolina’s Department of Natural Resources was inspired by our Low Impact Solar Siting tool to develop a similar tool of their own, modeled on ours. TNC staff presented at workshops and conferences across the South, and we continue engaging with regional conservation and military partnerships on efforts expanding the adoption of solar energy in ways that safeguard our natural systems.



Georgia Climate Conference

The Nature Conservancy co-sponsored the 2023 Georgia Climate Conference, organized by the Georgia Climate Project and hosted at the University of Georgia. The conference assembled hundreds of participants representing multiple sectors and areas of expertise around the theme “Minimizing Georgia’s risks. Maximizing Georgia’s future.”

First and foremost, the conference sought to address what a changing climate means for Georgia and, most importantly, what we can do about it. Other topics covered during three full days of sessions, which included TNC staff and trustees, included:

- Strategies for accelerating decarbonization in Georgia.
- Opportunities for collaborating across sectors, including urban planning, agriculture, forestry, health care, policy, education and more.
- Exploring the connection between climate and U.S. military readiness.
- Examples of success stories around building climate resilience for Georgia’s cities and towns.

Salt Marshes

The Georgia coast is home to over 380,000 acres of salt marsh, one-third of all salt marshes on the east coast. These coastal wetland ecosystems have the ability to store large quantities of carbon due to the slow breakdown of carbon in their soils, keeping it out of the atmosphere and slowing global warming. However, in Georgia, these fragile habitats are at a risk of being lost due to climate change that is playing out in visible ways that include flooding, erosion and evidence of saltwater moving further inland. This creates significant challenges not only for the people who live and make their livelihoods in these coastal areas, but for the wildlife that depends upon these habitats for survival.

TNC is working with the University of Georgia on an innovative project to fully understand the economic and other benefits of Georgia’s salt marshes in order to better protect them. The project is engaging the insurance industry to assess the flood risk reduction value that the salt marshes provide to coastal communities and the natural environment and to consider new ways to support the restoration of these resources if they are damaged by a storm.



LEFT TO RIGHT © Marc Del Santoro; © Erika Nortemann

A Legacy of Giving

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

What better legacy is there to leave for Georgia than your commitment to protecting the Earth for generations to come? Whether you are taking those first steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your estate plan, The Nature Conservancy is here to help. Don't let another day pass by.

LEARN MORE TODAY

(877) 812-3698

legacy@tnc.org

nature.org/legacy

The Nature Conservancy cannot render tax or legal advice. Please consult your financial advisor before making a gift.



Policy



BY THE NUMBERS

.....
The Department of Energy estimates that the Inflation Reduction Act will bring

\$180 million

of investment in large-scale clean power generation and storage to Georgia between today and 2030.

Advancing federal and state policies to secure nature-forward solutions for people and wildlife in Georgia.

Inflation Reduction Act Marks One-Year Milestone

The August 2022 passage of this ground-breaking law was a key legislative goal for The Nature Conservancy and an historic advance in climate policy for the United States. Through a range of smart investments and incentives, the law is expected to reduce carbon emissions by roughly 40% by 2030 – a significant leap forward in meeting our nation's climate commitments. These incentives are already benefitting Georgia, cited by several companies as key factors influencing their decision to open or expand clean energy manufacturing facilities in the state.

The omnibus spending package passed by Congress at the end of 2022 contained other important federal legislative priorities for TNC, including:

Farming Climate Solutions provisions to help farmers access carbon markets where their farming practices can support the climate while providing them with new revenue streams.

Conservation Easements

Integrity provisions that will save U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars by closing tax loopholes that some investors had exploited to profit improperly from a system designed to help landowners conserve their lands.



State Policy Protecting the Okefenokee

TNC worked with partners at the Georgia state legislature to advance the Okefenokee Protection Act, which would restrict mining along an



ecologically sensitive boundary of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in southeast Georgia. Mining in this location runs the risk of irreversibly damaging the swamp's unique water system. Although the bill did not pass during the 2023 legislative session, it gained wide bipartisan support and is well-positioned to advance in the next session. In separate but related action, more than 2,000 of our Nature Conservancy members called on the state's Environmental Protection Division to deny permits for a proposed mine at the sensitive Trail Ridge area near the swamp.



The Nature Conservancy in Georgia
 1270 Caroline St, Suite D120-357
 Atlanta, GA 30307
 (404) 873-6946

Nonprofit Org
 US Postage
 PAID
 Tucson, AZ
 Permit #2216

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Donate Now  nature.org/givegeorgia



VISIT US
 ——— ONLINE ———

 facebook.com/NatureConservancyGA
 [@Nature_GA](https://twitter.com/Nature_GA)
 nature.org/georgia

Be a part of the conversation

