

SOUTHERN FORESTS PROJECT

GEORGIA



This project is part of a larger joint effort between The Nature Conservancy and International Paper to protect nearly 220,000 acres of ecologically important forests, rivers and streams in 10 southern states. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity will result in the largest private conservation project in the history of the southern U.S. Partners include state governments, federal agencies, the Department of Defense and timber investment entities.



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total area 24,120 acres along the Altamaha River in southeast Georgia

representative species

swallow-tailed kite
gopher tortoise
eastern indigo snake
bald eagle
pondspice
inland maritime forests
riverine sand ridge habitats

project partners

The Nature Conservancy
International Paper Company
Georgia Department of Transportation
U.S. Army - Fort Stewart
Conservation Forestry, LLC and its consortium partner, Forest Investment Associates

THE PROJECT

Spanning three counties and encompassing more than 24,000 acres, this project is the largest land conservation agreement ever completed in Georgia. Representative of The Nature Conservancy's hallmark approach to conservation, the agreement takes an innovative, partnership-oriented, science-based approach to protecting these forested lands.

Recognizing that maintaining the forests in this region provides shared conservation, economic and recreational benefits, The Nature Conservancy is working with public and private partners who have common interests in the Altamaha River watershed to protect these forested lands from being permanently lost to development. More than two-thirds of the total purchased land will continue to be in private ownership and managed as a working forest. For instance, The Nature Conservancy is working with the U.S. Army to protect 187 acres located adjacent to Fort Stewart through the Army's compatible use buffer program. In addition, The Nature Conservancy is working with the Georgia Department of Transportation to preserve and restore approximately 1,800 acres as part of their wetland mitigation program.

In all, the addition of these forests will increase total conservation lands in the lower Altamaha watershed to more than 100,000 acres.

ALTAMAHA RIVER

Encompassing more than eight million acres and draining approximately one quarter of the state, the Altamaha River watershed is one of the three largest river basins on the Atlantic Seaboard. Starting at the headwaters in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and emptying into the Atlantic Ocean, the Altamaha River watershed is the longest free-flowing – and largest intact-water system on the Atlantic Coast. The Altamaha River winds 137 miles from the confluence of the Ocmulgee and Oconee rivers, passing through bottomland hardwoods, longleaf pine forests, cypress swamps, historic rice fields and eventually forming one of the highest quality and most expansive estuarine and salt marsh systems in the world as it reaches the coast near the historic fishing town of Darien, Georgia.



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However, the health of the river system is in jeopardy. Incompatible land use practices, such as the conversion of natural areas for development, are contributing to the decline of the river system. Additionally, water withdrawals and the spread of non-native invasive species, such as Chinese tallow and flathead catfish, create multiple stresses that degrade the entire river system.

The 24,120 acres protected through this project will provide long-term benefits to the region, including recreation, tourism and continued forestry revenue while protecting the water quality of the river, estuary and coast for the benefit of both people and nature.