GEORGIA
2019 Year in Review
Our partnerships have resulted in:

- 380,000+ acres permanently protected
- 92,736 acres of land managed
- 17,000 Camden County residents living within the 100-year floodplain
- 130 controlled burns led or assisted by chapter staff
- 48.5 gopher tortoise populations protected
- 8 living shorelines currently implemented along the coast
- 5 dam removal and culvert replacement projects underway

We all know the biggest challenges facing the planet today. We see them right here in Georgia—climate change, drought, wildfires and more.

In this Year in Review, I am pleased to share with you how The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Georgia is building on our legacy of innovation and leadership to tackle these challenges.

The work shared here, and more that isn’t reflected in these pages, is only made possible by your generosity. We are driven by our commitment to future generations of Georgians and our desire to ensure they have access to the natural beauty and adventure that we can too easily take for granted. Thank you for your continued support.

Deron Davis
Executive Director

Cover: American oystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus), © Carlton Ward Jr.; Above: Solo rower on the Chattahoochee River, Georgia, © Tom Wilson; Back cover: Beach on the north end Little St Simons Island where the Altamaha River meets the Atlantic Ocean, © Blake Gordon Photography
Georgia’s biodiversity is staggering, with over 4,400 species of plants and animals. Today, habitat loss is the greatest threat facing wildlife in Georgia. TNC’s longstanding commitment to habitat protection, combined with lower land prices and the demand for communities with protected greenspaces, present an opportunity for TNC to rally resources and conserve more critical lands than ever before.

Boots on the Ground

The weather is right, the crew is ready, and after months of careful planning and coordination, the moment has come to put fire on the ground.

That’s the exciting moment TNC’s fire workers experience when they tilt their drip torch and fire starts consuming fuel and moving across the land. In fiscal year 2019 our fire professionals led or assisted on burns of approximately 44,000 acres from the Southern Blue Ridge to the Chattahoochee Fall Line to the Osceola National Forest. Each controlled burn makes the forest safer for people and wildlife, ensures ecosystem health and reduces wildfire risk.

We also played a role in the protection of 11,933 acres, including lands that are now part of the Chattahoochee Fall Line and Sheffield/Paulding Wildlife Management Areas.

TNC also planted 1 million longleaf pine trees across the state at locations including Moody Preserve, Ohoopee Dunes Wildlife Management Area, Oakbin Pond Preserve and more.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Worked with state and federal partners to protect the 7,090-acre Hilliard tract in Marion County, which was added to the Chattahoochee Fall Line Wildlife Management Area.
- Gained Georgia congressional support that enabled passage of the Farm Bill, The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act.
- Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act passed with more than 82% voter support.
Raccoon Creek: A Success Story 10 Years in the Making

The Raccoon Creek watershed is a very special place. It hosts the remnants of a montane longleaf pine forest and is home to fox squirrels, Bachman’s sparrows, the Northern long-eared bat and 43 native fish species, including the federally endangered Etowah darter. It is also a place for research and learning just 35 miles from Atlanta.

The Nature Conservancy partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Kennesaw State University and Paulding County in 2010 to develop an action plan to identify and prioritize future protection and restoration sites and educate local landowners on how the management of their property impacts the watershed.

Removing three barriers to fish movement became a top priority: replacing the culverts at Lee Road Crossing over Pegamore Creek with a free-standing bridge, removing the lip of the Braswell Mountain road crossing, and replacing the Raccoon Creek Road crossing culverts with a 50-foot free standing bridge.

Nearly 10 years later, all three of these projects soon will be complete—thanks to the vision and dedication and of our partners, who each played a key role in this conservation win.

A C H I E V E M E N T S

- Initiated a multi-dam removal and stream restoration project on Conservancy-owned property near the Chattahoochee Fall Line. Expected project completion: 2020.
- Reached a fish passage milestone with the removal of a culvert and construction of a free-standing bridge at Raccoon Creek Road in Paulding County. This project reconnects habitat for target fish species, including the federally threatened Cherokee darter and the federally endangered Etowah darter.

FRESHWATER

Rivers, streams and creeks traverse our state—supplying drinking water, fueling the economy and providing unparalleled recreational opportunities. Georgia’s rivers also are home to some of the largest, most diverse and unique communities of freshwater fish and amphibians in North America. The Nature Conservancy is committed to balancing the availability of clean water for communities with the protection of habitat.

Photo caption to come. © Photo Credit
Georgia’s iconic 100-mile coast has never been more important to the state’s economy and ecology. It provides high quality habitat for land and water species, shields inland communities from the impacts of climate change and fuels multimillion-dollar tourism and commercial fishing industries. As climate change threatens the Georgia coast with rising sea levels, worsening storms and increased rainfall, TNC is investing in nature-based solutions for coastal resilience and adaptation.

Camden County Launches Coastal Resilience Apps

Georgia’s low-lying coastal communities face grave risks to human safety, wildlife habitat and economic stability from flooding caused by sea level rise, storm surge and other impacts of climate change. Since last year, TNC is partnering with Camden County and others on the County’s “Rise Ready” coastal resilience project designed to help planning officials and residents make informed decisions to prepare for flooding and reduce its impact.

Following months of data collection, tool development and public engagement, year one of the program—funded by a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Georgia Department of Natural Resources office of Coastal Management grant—has resulted in two new online tools for Camden County officials and residents. The Flood Risk app allows users to search addresses in the county and layer flood hazard data to generate a personalized impact of current and future potential flood risks. The Community Planning app shows users localized community planning data such as critical infrastructure and zoning with flood data to help community planners and builders make informed decisions regarding resilient land use.

Year two of the project focuses on the creation of a Community Rating System (CRS) Open Space Explorer tool to help local floodplain managers identify potential areas for preserved open space.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Explore the Rise Ready coastal resilience apps at: coastalresilience.org/georgia/
- Partners on the “Rise Ready” project are the City of St. Marys, The Coastal Georgia Regional Commission, and The University of Georgia Marine Extension & Georgia Sea Grant.
Cities are growing across the globe, and Atlanta is no exception. The capitol city’s population is expected to nearly triple by 2040. This growth has consequences—from strained power and water resources to increased carbon emissions to extreme heat and poor air quality. Every community in Atlanta will be affected, and low-income communities, like Thomasville Heights in southeast Atlanta, are likely to feel the first and longest-lasting consequences.

We are working with residents, community organizations and conservation partners to protect the South River Watershed and the surrounding forest in an equitable, sustainable way that benefits people and nature through improved water quality, a thriving tree canopy, wildlife habitat and ample public greenspace in the form of a 3,500-acre park.

**Equitable Conservation**

“Protecting the natural resources of Georgia’s urban areas in the face of growing population demands, strained infrastructure, and the generational impact of institutional bias on frontline communities requires comprehensive collaboration and partnership. The South River Watershed project—our first Cities initiative in Georgia—is a product of alliances with the community-based organizations we work with on the ground, TNC’s institutional and individual funders, and importantly, people who live in the communities directly impacted by the health of the river and the surrounding forest.”

—Ayanna Williams, Healthy Cities Director

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- Approximately 484,842 people live in communities within the South River Watershed.
- Dekalb, Henry, Rockdale and Newton Counties get their municipal water support from the South River.
- The South River ultimately flows into the Atlantic Ocean.
Protecting our environment over the long term depends on identifying, motivating and nurturing talented young people who can become the conservation leaders of tomorrow. This recruitment requires the removal of barriers that can prevent minorities and other marginalized people from entering the conservation field. Through training and internship opportunities across Georgia, we are positioning teens and young adults to become future leaders of our mission.

Our Stewardship Training for Environmental Progress (STEP) trains economically disadvantaged young adults in controlled burning and introduces them to other land stewardship methodologies. In 2018, the program expanded to the Chattahoochee Fall Line to train military veterans. The Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future (LEAF) summer internship program enables students from metro-Atlanta partner high schools to work alongside Conservancy scientists and mentors for trail maintenance, water quality monitoring, invasive species management, ecological surveys, and native species planting at sites across the state. These real-world experiences connect urban youth to nature, increasing their awareness of higher education and career opportunities in conservation.

LEAF Student Branches Out

As a 2018 LEAF intern, Arantza Peña Popo learned about prescribed fire, tested a fire hose and practiced with fire shelters. Last year, she provided for nature by helping to remove invasive species in Birmingham, Alabama. Like many of our interns, Arantza enjoys challenging herself and strives for excellence.

This year, she was a co-valedictorian at Arabia Mountain High School and the national winner of the 2019 Doodle for Google contest. Her inspiring artwork garnered a $30,000 college scholarship. Popo isn’t finished with her successes yet and is heading to the University of Southern California to study graphic design.

Georgia LEAF alumni. Many of these young adults remain engaged with TNC through college and beyond.

15,540

Acres that STEP participants helped burn at Osceola National Forest, Cumberland Island and other Georgia locations.
This has been a landmark year in conservation victories for our state. The Nature Conservancy is grateful to our partners for contributing to so many accomplishments on behalf of the environment and the people of Georgia.

Since the 1960s, The Nature Conservancy in Georgia has leveraged our scientific approach and our legacy of successful partnerships to help transform our state, making significant progress toward securing a healthy, vibrant future. Today, we are harnessing the power of advanced technology, diverse collaborations and new voices to strengthen our efforts—with exceptional results.

With visionary partners like you, we can continue leading the way in land, freshwater and ocean conservation, achieve the ambitious goals set forth in this report and ensure that places we save today are protected for generations to come. We can enhance the natural elements within Georgia’s urban environments. We can create future conservation leaders. We can bring people together and find common ground to make good things happen. And we can celebrate all the ways nature unites us.