

2025

Local Solutions, Global Reach

# Georgia Impact Report

The Nature  
Conservancy 



## Letter from the Executive Director

To all of our supporters,

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude and pride for all that we have accomplished together. The Nature Conservancy in Georgia has made extraordinary strides in protecting our lands, waters, and communities—progress that would not have been possible without the steadfast support of our donors, the vision of our trustees, and the tireless dedication of our staff.

In 2025, we expanded protection across Georgia's most treasured landscapes—from the Satilla River and Chattahoochee Fall Line to the Appalachian foothills—safeguarding thousands of acres of forests, wetlands, and river corridors. We strengthened our resilience against climate change through prescribed fire, strategic reforestation, and recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene. We advanced freshwater restoration projects like Holly Creek and championed species recovery for the trispot darter. Along our coast, we launched the Georgia Oyster Resiliency Initiative and expanded living shoreline projects, ensuring that our communities and ecosystems thrive together.

These achievements are not isolated victories; they are part of a larger global effort. By protecting Georgia's forests, rivers, and salt marshes, we contribute directly to The Nature Conservancy's 2030 goals—tackling carbon emissions, conserving oceans and freshwater, and supporting communities on the frontlines of climate change.

None of this would be possible without you. To our donors, thank you for your generosity and belief in our mission. To our trustees, thank you for your leadership and guidance. To our staff, thank you for your passion and perseverance in the face of challenges. Together, we are building a legacy of resilience and hope for generations to come.

As we look ahead, I am inspired by the momentum we have created and the impact we are making—not just in Georgia, but across the globe. With your continued partnership, we will ensure that people and nature thrive side by side.

With heartfelt thanks,

**Monica Thornton**

Executive Director  
The Nature Conservancy in Georgia

## TRUSTEE STORY

### Trustee Story

In the history of The Nature Conservancy in Georgia, there are few people who have done more than Jeannie Wright.

In addition to serving in leadership roles within both our chapter and the national Trustee Council, Jeannie has traveled on countless TNC-led trips from Montana to Argentina to get hands-on experience with our work and make her an even more effective advocate. She is also our immediate past trustee legacy ambassador, having served in that role for 16 years, which is fitting given that she has been a member of the Legacy Club for more than three decades. Her support, which includes 39 years of consecutive giving, has also been instrumental in funding a wide variety of projects in critical ecosystems around the world, including the Rocky Mountains, Tropical Andes and Patagonia, to name just a few.

Her extraordinary commitment to TNC is why we elected her as a lifetime trustee in 2025, **the first person in our chapter's history** to receive that honor.

Jeannie's passion, dedication, and expertise serve as an example to everyone with a desire to make a difference. She has directly supported TNC projects around the globe, she has brought hundreds, if not thousands of new supporters into TNC, and as a Legacy Club member, she has committed to sustaining our work for every generation that comes after her. She is more than an ambassador for our work, she's a champion, one who finds beauty in every acre we protect and knows exactly how to prescribe that same fire in every person she speaks to. Jeannie is one of the pillars upon which the Georgia chapter is built, having helped to shape our strategies and advocate on our behalf for longer than almost anyone else in our state, staff and trustee alike.

Every animal, plant, river, forest, and person in Georgia has benefitted from Jeannie's commitment to nature and we could not be more grateful for her vast contributions.

All photos courtesy of Jeannie Wright





## Overview of TNC 2030 Goals

Today, our planet is threatened by the dual crises of rapid climate change and biodiversity loss. Addressing both is crucial. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is pursuing bold solutions that will benefit biodiversity, sequester carbon and reduce risk to the people and places most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Research has shown that if we move toward more sustainable goals now, a future where people and nature thrive is within our reach. **The Nature Conservancy recognizes 2030 as a milestone year to make a positive impact for our planet, and we invite you to join us in realizing these ambitious global goals for 2030:**



### GOAL 1: TACKLING CARBON EMISSIONS

We will avoid or sequester 3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually—equal to taking 650 million cars off the road every year.



### GOAL 2: HELPING PEOPLE ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

We will help 100 million people at severe risk of climate-related emergencies, such as floods, fires and drought.



### GOAL 3: DEEPENING SOLUTIONS FOR OUR OCEANS

We will conserve nearly 10 billion acres of ocean—more than 10% of the world's ocean area.



### GOAL 4: SAVING HEALTHY LANDS FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

We will conserve 1.6 billion acres of land, including forests, grasslands and other habitats rich in carbon and biodiversity.



### GOAL 5: CONSERVING THE WORLD'S FRESHWATER

We will conserve more than 620,000 miles of river systems and 74 million acres of lakes and wetlands—enough river length to stretch around the globe 25 times.



### GOAL 6: WORKING ALONGSIDE LOCAL LEADERS

We will support the leadership of 45 million people from local and Indigenous communities whose well-being and livelihoods depend on healthy oceans, freshwater and lands.

## Regional Spotlight on the Southern U.S.

The Nature Conservancy's work across the Southern U.S. is as intricate and diverse as this vast landscape itself, which spans from the Gulf coast states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida and up through Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia. Yet we are united and driven by the urgency of this pivotal moment, in which TNC seeks to tackle climate change, protect habitat, strengthen communities, and secure abundant food and clean water.

To maximize the South's critical contributions to a healthy future for people and nature, we're focused on five priorities:

### Resilient & Connected Lands

Through decades of scientific research and analysis, TNC has identified some 83 million acres across the Southern U.S. as part of a Resilient and Connected Network (RCN) of lands. The RCN—with its supporting layers of data—provides a roadmap for TNC and our partners to protect, connect, manage and restore lands essential to the conservation of biodiversity in the face of a changing climate. Our highest RCN priorities are the Appalachians, the longleaf pine system, and the Gulf and South Atlantic coastal lands—all of which scored highest for resilience.

### Resilient & Connected Freshwater

The South stands out as a global hotspot for freshwater biodiversity. Our waters boast 40% of the world's mussel species; almost 80% of all U.S. and Canadian fish species; and an extraordinarily high diversity of turtles, crayfish and other aquatic creatures. Through our Resilient & Connected Freshwater strategy, TNC is conserving floodplains, expanding our Sustainable Rivers Program and enhancing freshwater connectivity. Our highest-priority watersheds include the Appalachians, Mississippi River Basin and Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa rivers, followed by the Altamaha-St Mary's, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint, Cape Fear, and Chowan-Roanoke river systems.

### Ocean & Coasts

The Southern U.S. features over 50% of the nation's contiguous shorelines, yet only a fraction of our ocean waters and coastal habitats are protected. Meanwhile, coral reefs, estuaries and fisheries are teetering on the brink. Our opportunity to turn this tide of loss is now. And turn it we must—because healthy, productive marine and coastal ecosystems feed our people, provide recreation and drive vital sectors of our economy. TNC is focused on scaling up conservation of estuaries and bolstering healthy fisheries.

### Living with Fire

For centuries, North America's Indigenous peoples have used fire to steward the land. Our ecosystems adapted accordingly: Their health and resilience depend on periodic fires. The early 1900s, however, ushered in a well-intentioned but misguided national focus on fire suppression. Add increasingly extreme weather to the mix, and today many communities face unhealthy and incendiary conditions on lands that surround vulnerable homes and businesses—lands we also depend on for clean water, wildlife habitat and recreation. To keep people and nature healthy, we must co-exist with fire. TNC works with partners to increase prescribed and Indigenous cultural burning and to help communities live more safely with fire.

### Climate Mitigation

We already face increases in the frequency and intensity of heat waves, storms, flooding and wildfires. Consequently, people and nature are experiencing poor water quality, adverse health impacts, habitat degradation and loss, and a host of risks to safety and well-being. TNC seeks to lessen these impacts via two key strategies—Natural Climate Solutions and Renewable Energy Deployment—that capture and reduce carbon while generating benefits for local communities. Investing in our Southern forests and peat wetlands can make a tremendous contribution to a more livable climate.

## How Our Work in Georgia Makes a Global Impact

Since 1969, the Nature Conservancy in Georgia has protected more than 425,000 acres, safeguarded the rivers that traverse our state and cared for our treasured coast. Georgia boasts countless species of plants and animals that affect the health of ecosystems stretching far beyond our borders.

As a result, TNC is acquiring new skills, working at larger scales and investing more human and financial resources than ever to maximize our impact in Georgia and around the globe. Our work in Georgia over the next five years will contribute to TNC's global conservation goals to help create a world where people and nature thrive.



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- 1 Salt Marshes of the St. Marys River, GA
- 2 Georgia Oyster Reef
- 3 Historic Live Oak Trees in City of Brunswick, GA
- 4 American Egret
- 5 Blue Crab harvest
- 6 Roseatte Spoonbill
- 7 Spanish Moss on Oaks
- 8 Shrimp Boat fleet in Brunswick, GA

All images © SoberGlass Photography



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# RESILIENT & CONNECTED LANDS

**“My family has been working with The Nature Conservancy for decades to center conservation in everything we do. Public-private partnerships like this provide support for us to integrate our conservation values into our forestry operation, which is essential because doing right by our land is how we ensure that we’ll be able to keep enjoying abundant wildlife in perpetuity. Our partnership has stretched across two generations, and I’m grateful that we have been able to do so much good for nature and the communities that rely upon it.”**

- DR. ANDREW DREELIN

## LANDS

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### Land Acquisition

#### **Saving Critical Habitat Along the Satilla River**

Protecting undeveloped land on the lower Satilla River supports a wide array of biologically diverse ecosystems and is critical to the climate resiliency of Georgia’s coast. Thanks to generous donor support, The Nature Conservancy acquired the Lumberjack and Saratoga tracts, totaling 3,250 acres along the lower Satilla River. This conservation achievement represents a crucial step forward in our ongoing efforts to create a connected corridor of protected lands along this coastal blackwater river system.

The Lumberjack tract, spanning portions of Brantley and Camden Counties, protects vital bottomland forests and emergent wetlands that play an essential role in filtering contaminants and improving water quality along the coast. This undeveloped area includes significant groundwater recharge zones that help combat salt water intrusion and provides habitat for threatened and endangered species, including hairy rattlesnake and shortnose sturgeon.

Beyond its ecological value, the Lumberjack acquisition supports climate resilience, as low-lying areas will naturally transition to salt marsh as sea levels rise, providing wildlife corridors for affected species. The property also includes Hog Pen Bluff, which will become a new public access point to the Satilla River—the only such access point in 33 river miles in either direction.

TNC is collaborating with state and nonprofit partners to transfer the bulk of the property to the State of Georgia, ultimately making all of the land available to the public as a Wildlife Management Area, enhancing recreational opportunities while ensuring long-term protection of this ecologically significant landscape.

#### **Expanding Protected Land on the Chattahoochee Fall Line**

In 2025, The Nature Conservancy added approximately 600 acres to the existing 400-acre Dreelin conservation easement. This strategic acquisition in Marion and Talbot Counties expands the growing network of protected lands in the Chattahoochee Fall Line region, where TNC and the U.S. Army have safeguarded more than 36,000 acres of native longleaf pine habitat.

The property sits adjacent to several other protected tracts, creating a contiguous corridor of more than 23,000 acres along Fort Benning’s

eastern boundary. This connectivity is crucial for wildlife movement and ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change.

With its rolling topography and natural sandhills, this property holds tremendous potential for ecological restoration. Through careful management and prescribed fire, these lands will provide ideal habitat for the federally threatened red-cockaded woodpecker and the gopher tortoise, a candidate for federal protection.

This easement not only preserves important wildlife habitat but also supports Fort Benning’s Army Compatible Use Buffer program by preventing incompatible development that could restrict essential military training activities. The protection of this tract will maintain the ability to conduct prescribed burns—a critical management tool for military operations and habitat restoration.

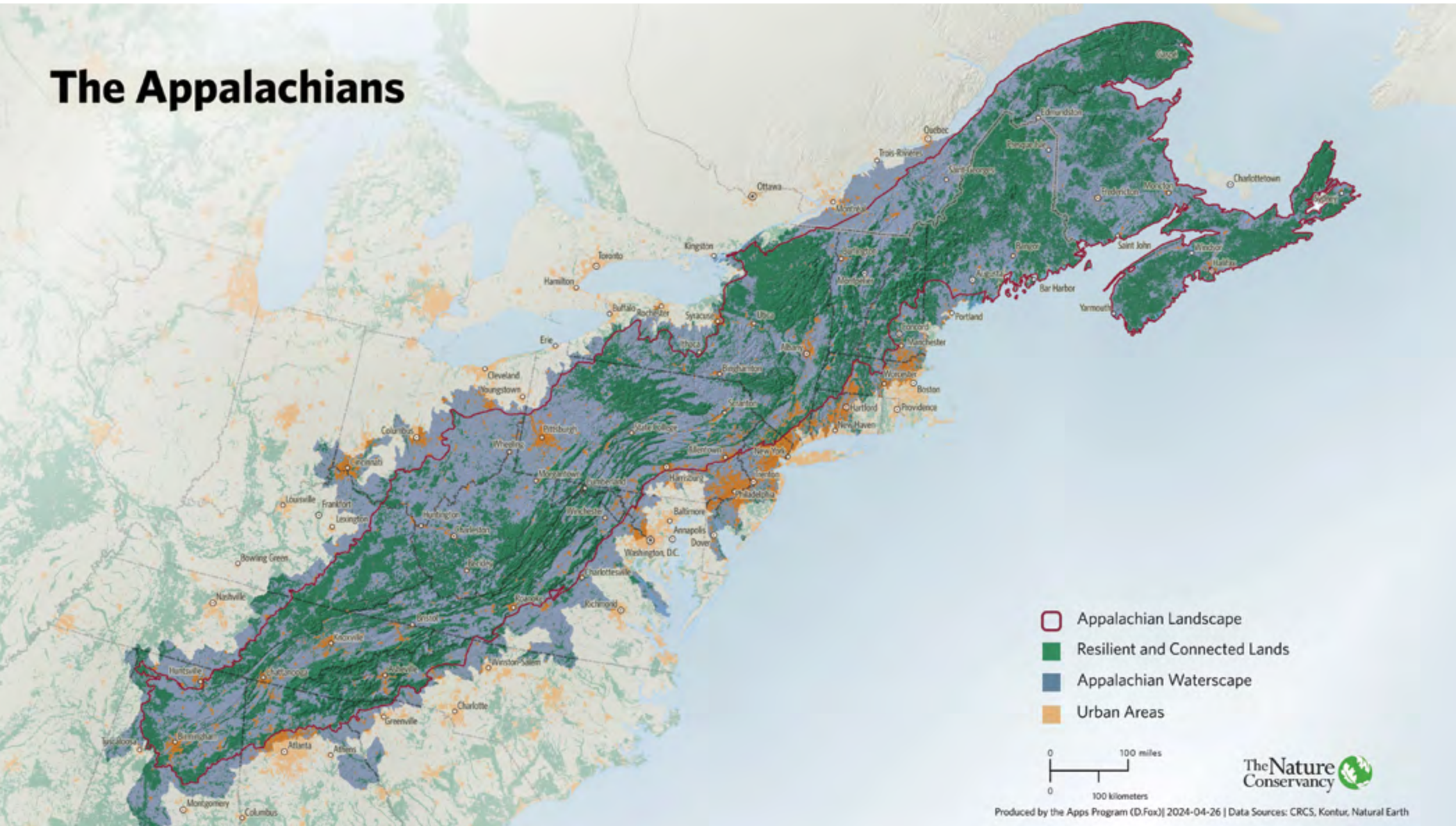
#### **Securing North Georgia’s Forested Landscapes**

In a significant expansion of protected forestland in north Georgia, The Nature Conservancy acquired two strategic tracts totaling more than 200 acres in 2025. The Acres & Acres and Morgan properties will be temporarily held by TNC before their transfer to the United States Forest Service, permanently expanding the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

The 160-acre Acres & Acres tract in Lumpkin County lies just eight miles from historic Dahlonega Square. In an area that is particularly vulnerable to development, its protection creates a vital wildlife corridor and preserves public recreation opportunities. In Chattooga County, the 40-acre Morgan tract borders the Chattahoochee National Forest on three sides, and its protection will expand the footprint of the forest within the Appalachian landscape.

These acquisitions support TNC’s larger Appalachians program work to expand the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest footprint, increasing climate resiliency, species habitat, recreational opportunities and access, and improved connectivity within the forest.

# The Appalachians



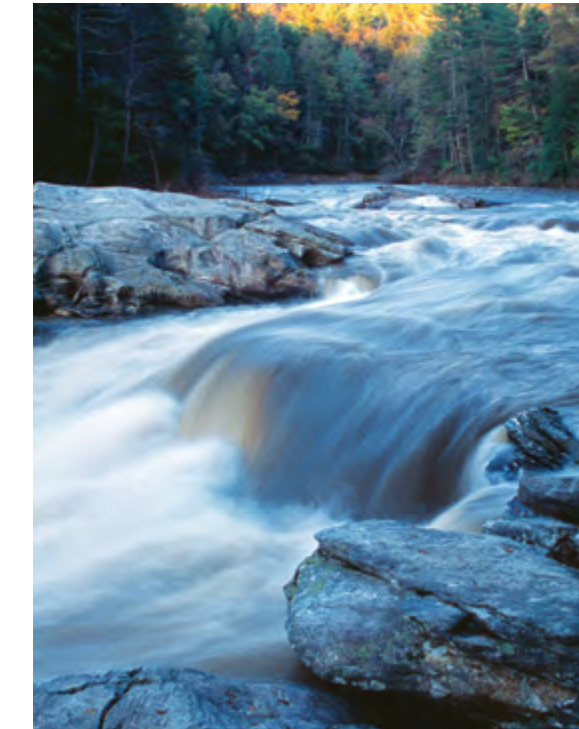
## The Appalachians: A Priority Landscape for Conservation

The Appalachian Mountains represent one of North America’s most extraordinary natural treasures and a key priority landscape for The Nature Conservancy in Georgia. Spanning 2,000 miles from Alabama to Canada, this ancient mountain range contains the world’s most diverse temperate deciduous forest, with an astonishing variety of trees, plants and wildlife found nowhere else on Earth.

In Georgia, the southern reaches of the Appalachians harbor remarkable biodiversity, including more salamander species than anywhere else in the world and exceptional freshwater ecosystems supporting hundreds of rare aquatic species. These mountains also serve as critical climate corridors, allowing plants and animals to migrate and adapt to changing conditions along elevational gradients.

The Conservancy’s work in Georgia’s Appalachians focuses on strategic land protection, forest restoration and freshwater conservation. By safeguarding large, connected landscapes and working with public and private landowners, TNC is helping maintain the region’s extraordinary ecological values while supporting sustainable forestry and outdoor recreation.

The Appalachians also provide essential services for millions of people, including clean water for countless communities, natural flood control, carbon sequestration and recreational opportunities. Through collaborative conservation efforts with diverse partners, TNC scientists are working to ensure this irreplaceable landscape remains resilient in the face of climate change and continues to adapt to new challenges.



## Land Protected in FY25

### 1: Dreelin-Juniper Creek

TNC purchased a conservation easement over the 603-acre Dreelin-Juniper Creek tract as part a landscape-scale conservation project supporting Fort Benning's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program. This acquisition enhances the opportunities for longleaf pine restoration, reintroduction of the federally threatened Red-cockaded Woodpecker and protection of the gopher tortoise.

### 2: Five Rivers

The Five Rivers tract consists of 1,024 acres and extends protection within the lower Altamaha River Corridor and buffer military operations at Townsend Bombing Range. The tract contains over 2.4 miles of rivers and streams, including Buffalo and Briardam Swamps and their associated tributaries. This, in hand with the approximately 715 acres of woody wetlands, provides excellent opportunities for aquatic restoration.

### 3: Lumberjack

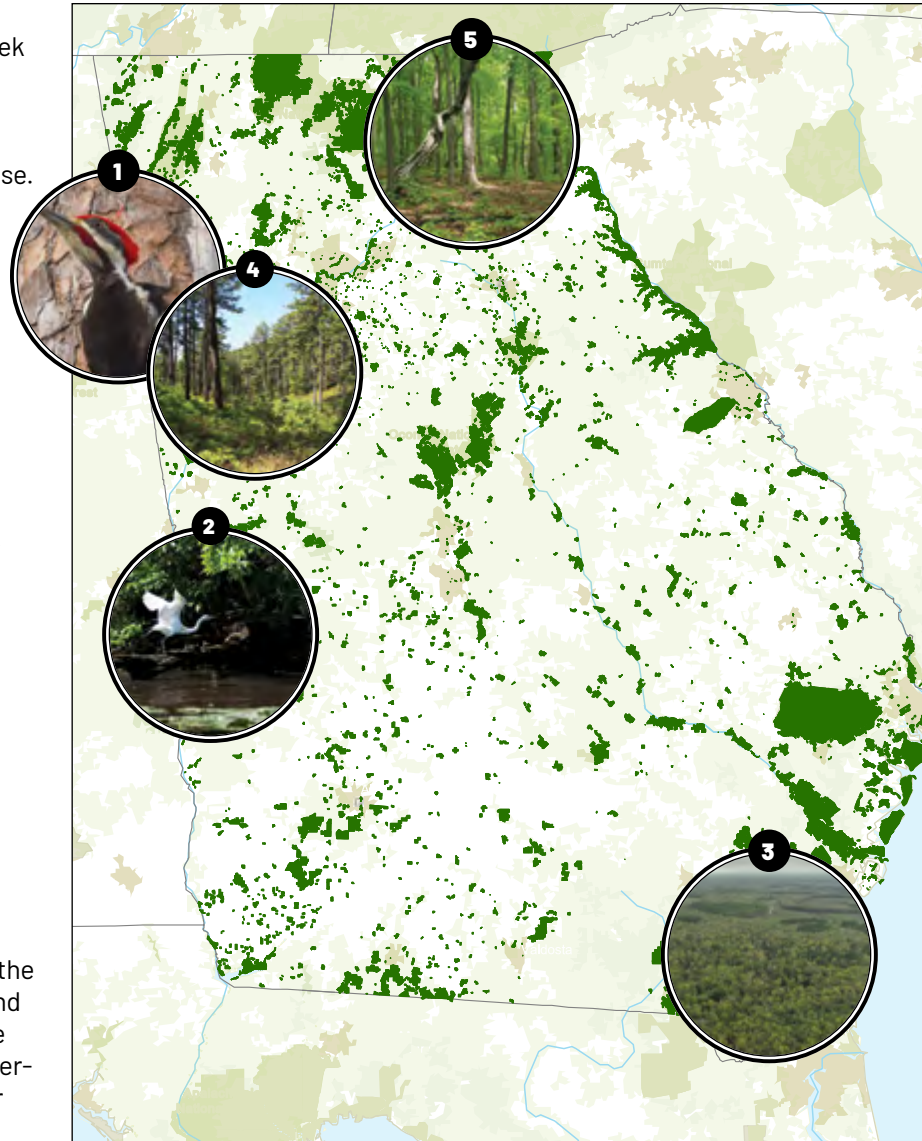
TNC's acquisition of the 2,115-acre Lumberjack tract extends protection within the lower Satilla River watershed and increase the climate resiliency of Georgia's coast. The tract contains 5 miles of frontage along the Satilla River and at least 1 mile of smaller streams and their associated tributaries. Lumberjack represents a new and important Satilla River Water Trail access point, a significant recreational tourism draw to the area.

### 4: Paulk-Trice

TNC subgranted private funds to the State of Georgia Department of Natural Resources for their acquisition of the 1800-acre Paulk-Trice tracts which are located in the Dugdown Corridor and managed as part of a publicly accessibly Wildlife Management Area.

### 5: Acres and Acres

The Acres and Acres tract consists of 160.5 acres adjacent to the 749,689-acre Chattahoochee National Forest. Protection of this tract expands the footprint of the forest within the Appalachian landscape, an area very high in climate resiliency and biodiversity. Acquisition also secures access to three existing U.S. Forest Service (USFS) tracts which are currently inaccessible. The tract lies in the Chestatee River-Yahoola Creek watershed which is part of the greater Upper Chattahoochee River basin, and headwaters of tributaries to Walker Creek begin on the property.



## Land Management

### Restoring Georgia's Forests with Prescribed Fire and Strategic Planting

The Nature Conservancy's commitment to forest health in Georgia reached new milestones in FY25, with our prescribed fire teams achieving substantial impacts across the state. TNC Georgia conducted or assisted with more than 117 prescribed burns totaling 31,213 acres.

In the Chattahoochee Fall Line region, our teams executed 29 burns covering 8,060 acres on conservation properties and assisted partners with an additional 3,900 acres. The program continued to advance technologically, incorporating drones for aerial ignition on 20 burns, improving efficiency and safety. Despite challenges from Hurricane Helene, our Altamaha teams completed 38 burns covering 4,967 acres across priority conservation lands. The Southern Blue Ridge fire team assisted federal and state partners with 10 prescribed burns totaling 7,036 acres, including collaboration with the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge.

Beyond fire management, TNC planted 300 acres of former cattle pasture with longleaf and shortleaf pine seedlings, strategically connecting more than 6,000 acres of TNC-managed forest with 15,500 acres of protected lands. These planting efforts and our prescribed fire program continue to rejuvenate Georgia's iconic forest landscapes.

### One Year Later: Recovery from Hurricane Helene's Impact

One year after Hurricane Helene devastated TNC's preserves in south Georgia, remarkable recovery efforts are underway at Moody Forest and Broxton Rocks. The Category 4 storm's impact was severe, toppling approximately 120 old-growth longleaf pines at Moody Forest—roughly one-third of the preserve's ancient stand—and causing extensive damage across 400 acres at Broxton Rocks.

The hurricane destroyed 27 red-cockaded woodpecker cavity trees at Moody Forest, endangering the fragile habitat of this threatened species. In response, Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) installed 19 new artificial cavities, and despite considerable setbacks, 9 of 11 woodpecker clusters successfully nested in 2025, with 20 chicks hatched and 9 banded.

We are grateful to our partners for helping with recovery efforts and clearing 22 miles of roads and firebreaks. Salvage harvesting is now complete on 80 acres at Moody Forest, and replanting plans are underway for the most heavily impacted areas.

Although the hurricane's destruction significantly impacted decades of conservation work, nature's resilience is evident. Some 200-year-old longleaf pines withstood the storm completely unscathed, demonstrating the species' remarkable adaptability and inspiring our ongoing restoration efforts.

#### Map Insets

1 Dreelin-Juniper Creek © Matt Pardue; 2 Five Rivers © Black Gordon Photography; 3 Lumberjack © Alan Cressler; 4 Paulk-Trice © Russell Mick; 5 Acres and Acres © Jeff Emmert

### BY THE NUMBERS

**GOOD FIRE  
IN GEORGIA**

**11,010  
acres**

acres of controlled  
burns led by The Nature  
Conservancy in Georgia

Assisted partners with  
controlled burns in  
Georgia on an additional

**20,203  
acres**

**4,997**

prescribed burn assists  
in other states

# RESILIENT & CONNECTED FRESHWATER

## FRESHWATER

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### Holly Creek Restoration: Protecting Aquatic Treasures

In the pristine watersheds of northwest Georgia's Chattahoochee National Forest, sediment pollution poses a serious threat to aquatic life. Holly Creek—home to 22 species of greatest conservation need, including eight federally protected mussels and fish like the trispot darter—has been particularly vulnerable to erosion from recreational use and intensifying rainfall.

TNC's streambank stabilization project, completed just 48 hours before Hurricane Helene swept through the region, transformed a severely eroded access point into a resilient natural system. By re-contouring the bank to

disperse flood energy and installing native rock structures, our team created ecological stability and improved fishing access for visitors.

Following construction, volunteers helped replant the area with native vegetation to further secure the streambank. This project is part of our larger collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service to reduce sediment pollution in these critical waterways. Plans to pave portions of the adjacent gravel road will further diminish erosion, helping these aquatic ecosystems continue to thrive.



At left: Big Haynes Creek © Marc Del Santro  
Above: Holly Creek pre-restoration (l) and post-restoration (r) © Alan Cressler

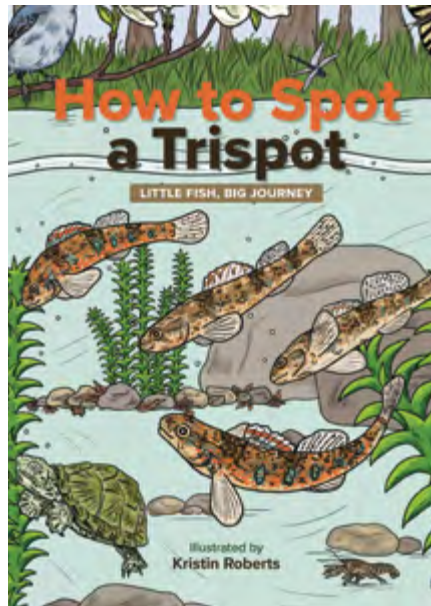
## Trispot Darter Recovery Efforts Gain Momentum

The federally threatened trispot darter, a small fish found only in limited areas of the Coosa River Basin, continues to receive crucial support through TNC's conservation efforts. In 2025, TNC provided technical assistance and a funding match for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant awarded to Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

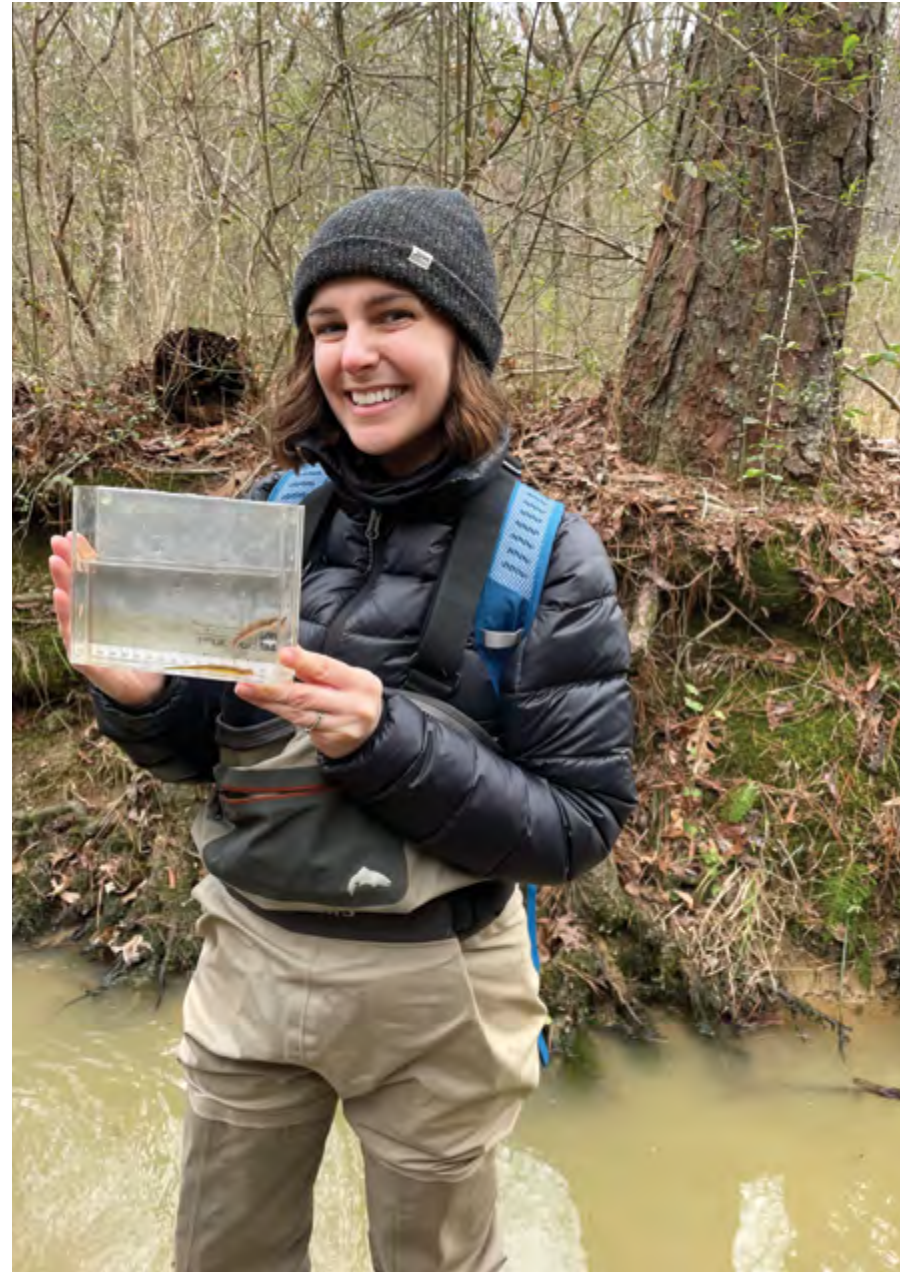
This partnership enabled Dalton State College, University of North Georgia, Georgia DNR, and Limestone Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council to complete a second year of culvert assessments, identifying and evaluating barriers that prevent fish migration throughout the watershed.

Beyond habitat restoration, this project expanded into public education with a screening of Freshwater Illustrated's "Hidden Rivers" film and the publication of a children's coloring book, **How to Spot a Trispot**, available for free download using the QR code below.

By addressing habitat connectivity and public awareness, TNC and partners are building comprehensive support for this unique species that plays a vital role in maintaining the biodiversity of Georgia's river ecosystems.



Scan to download a free copy of the **How to Spot a Trispot** coloring book



## Spotlight: Thérèse Sabioni



### Expanding Our Freshwater Conservation Team

To reinforce our freshwater conservation efforts, TNC Georgia welcomed Freshwater Restoration Specialist Thérèse Sabioni in 2025. Thérèse is focusing her expertise on the Ocmulgee River Watershed, a vital component of our Altamaha River Basin priority system.

With support from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) funding, Freshwater Restoration Specialists are collaborating with conservation and community partners to implement protection and restoration projects throughout the watershed. Their work aims to preserve critical aquatic habitats while enhancing Georgia's freshwater ecosystems that benefit wildlife and local communities.



BY THE NUMBERS  
**FRESHWATER  
IN GEORGIA**

**248**   
**miles**   
of rivers reconnected

 **26**  
**miles**  
of rivers protected

# OCEANS & COASTS

## OCEANS & COASTS

### Rebuilding Coastal Resilience Through Oyster Restoration

With your support in 2025, TNC launched the Georgia Oyster Resiliency Initiative, a groundbreaking effort to revitalize the state's depleted oyster populations and strengthen coastal communities. As keystone species, oysters offer critical ecosystem support along with economic, social and cultural benefits for coastal residents, including the local Gullah Geechee communities.

This stakeholder-led initiative brings together diverse partners—from fishers and resource managers to local governments and community leaders—to develop holistic management strategies that address ecological restoration and human relationships with oysters. The collaborative approach is inclusive by design, ensuring all voices contribute to a shared vision for Georgia's coastal future.

Through strategic partnerships across 11 coastal counties, the initiative is advancing multiple interconnected goals: protecting and restoring oyster habitat, enhancing oyster populations, and supporting sustainable fisheries and cultural practices. This integrated approach recognizes that healthy oyster populations are essential components of resilient salt marsh systems, which in turn provide vital protection against flooding, sea-level rise and storm impacts for Georgia's vulnerable coastal communities.

### Protecting Our Coast and Its Heritage with Living Shorelines

The Harris Neck Living Shoreline project is a powerful example of ecological restoration and community conservation in McIntosh County, Georgia. This innovative initiative focuses on stabilizing the eroding shoreline along the Barbour River, a vital community and ecological hub that provides essential fish habitat and supports local fisheries while preserving cultural heritage sites at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge.

By implementing nature-based solutions rather than traditional hardened shorelines, TNC is creating a more resilient coastline that can adapt to

changing conditions while maintaining public access to cherished community areas. The project has been designed with extensive community input, ensuring local knowledge and needs are part of all restoration efforts.

In 2025, TNC expanded its impact by hosting specialized Living Shorelines Training workshops for engineers and contractors in partnership with Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve (SINERR) and Georgia DNR Coastal Resources Division. These comprehensive, hands-on sessions covered design standards, permitting processes and site suitability assessments, building capacity among professionals to implement similar projects throughout Georgia's coastal communities. This training helps ensure the benefits of living shorelines will continue to protect Georgia's coastal ecosystems and cultural landmarks for decades to come.

### Five Rivers Land Protection and Wetlands Restoration Project

Last year, TNC acquired the 1,024-acre Five Rivers property in McIntosh County, a coastal area experiencing dramatic development pressure and natural resource loss. This diverse landscape encompasses pine flatwoods, bottomland hardwood forests, blackwater rivers, and swamps and freshwater tidal marsh—habitats that provide essential ecosystem support for coastal communities.

The Five Rivers project aims to restore natural hydrology by installing additional water flow-through structures that reconnect wetlands within the headwaters of McClendon Creek. These improvements will enhance connectivity across more than 8,600 acres of wetlands within the Altamaha River watershed, creating migration corridors for wildlife while significantly reducing flooding risks.

Beyond ecological benefits, the project enhances community resilience by harnessing the natural flood abatement and storm surge detention capabilities of healthy wetlands. With Georgia's coastal wetlands experiencing six-to-nine-foot tidal fluctuations daily, these systems play a critical role in water management, carbon sequestration and maintaining water quality—while also providing expanded access for fishing, hunting and outdoor recreation for local residents.



## CLIMATE

### Smart Solar: Protecting Nature While Powering Georgia

Georgia has emerged as a solar energy leader, ranking seventh in the nation with 7.4 gigawatts of installed capacity—enough to power more than 882,000 homes. As this renewable revolution continues, TNC's Georgia Low Impact Solar Siting Tool (GA LISST) has become an essential resource for developers, utilities, and local decision-makers to ensure this growth protects nature.

TNC also helped found the Georgia Utility Scale Solar Siting Initiative. This effort brings together unlikely partners willing to work together to protect nature and ensure solar can flourish. Through this partnership, TNC organized the development of voluntary solar guidelines focused on lower impact practices already tailored to Georgia. The guidelines along with the GA LISST are now recommended in utility environmental guidance, demonstrating the value of such partnerships.

As Georgia experiences increased pressure from extreme weather events and energy price volatility, homegrown solar energy becomes even more critical for the state's resilience. By bringing together conservation and renewable energy development, TNC's work exemplifies how economic progress and environmental protection can unite to create a more sustainable future for all Georgians.

### Georgia's Salt Marshes: Innovative Financing for Coastal Resilience

TNC and the University of Georgia have completed groundbreaking research showing just how valuable salt marshes are for protecting coastal communities from flooding. These marshes, which cover nearly 1 million acres along Georgia and South Carolina's coastlines, act like natural sponges during storms.

The study found that during one major storm, salt marshes prevented \$30-40 million in damage to homes and buildings. For individual homeowners, this natural protection could mean thousands of dollars saved on repairs, depending on where they live and the type of storm.

The project also explored how insurance programs could potentially help fund marsh restoration. By showing the dollar value of healthy marshes, TNC is creating new ways to protect these vital ecosystems while helping coastal communities become more resilient to rising seas and stronger storms.



## POLICY

### Conservation Policy Progress

In FY25, TNC advocated for federal and state policies to help people and wildlife.

At the federal level, TNC welcomed the U.S. government's January 2025 nomination of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. TNC had urged U.S. officials to support this effort that will benefit conservation and economic vitality in Georgia.

In other federal matters, TNC advocated for continued robust funding for essential conservation programs. We achieved a significant victory this summer when Congress approved \$14 billion for conservation programs that are pivotal for farmers, ranchers and other landowners.

At the state level, our advocacy efforts centered around three policy areas: protecting the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, supporting renewable energy expansion and building greater climate resilience. These efforts remain in motion when the legislature reconvenes.

Added protection for the Okefenokee came this year when a conservation partner acquired 8,000 acres near the refuge that had been a target for mining.

### Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program Supports Conservation Funding

The General Assembly approved more than \$23 million in 2025 for new conservation projects through the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program. This funding was enhanced by an additional \$1.6 million from unspent program funds from previous years, bringing total state funding for the program to \$24.6 million.

These state allocations leveraged an additional \$36.5 million in matching dollars pledged by grantees, generating more than \$61 million in total for 12 conservation projects across Georgia. This powerful public-private partnership demonstrates Georgia's commitment to protecting our state's natural resources and expanding outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.



## Welcome New TNC Staff



### Jason Lee

In FY25, we welcomed Jason Lee to The Nature Conservancy in Georgia as our new Deputy Executive Director of Conservation. Before joining TNC, Jason's career focused on wildlife and habitat conservation as the coastal Program Manager for the Wildlife Conservation Section at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The Wildlife Conservation Section is charged with implementation of federal and state programs responsible for conservation of imperiled and rare species.

As manager, Jason supervised the sea turtle, marine mammal, shorebird, habitat and invasive programs on Georgia's coast, a critical conservation area rich in wildlife, working with federal, state and private partners including TNC to further common conservation goals. Integral to managing these programs, Jason evaluated State wildlife trends and prioritized state greenspace acquisition and other conservation actions. In support of that, Jason led the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Habitat Mapping Team, which produced ambitious goals that have subsequently been implemented statewide.

Jason also recently led the 2025 Georgia SWAP Climate Change Team. Jason was instrumental in major land acquisition and management projects in Georgia, including the Altamaha Corridor, Ceylon Wildlife Management Area and the Gopher Tortoise Initiative. Now, Jason oversees all aspects of conservation, science, and stewardship for our chapter and will help us maximize the impact of our conservation work here in Georgia to help support our ambitious goals for the state, the region, and the world. Jason will also help us build partnerships with like-minded organizations and ensure that we are all effectively working together toward our shared goal – protecting Georgia's treasured places and species.

### Haynes Roberts



In 2025, we also welcomed our new Development Director, Haynes Roberts. Haynes now leads a team of dedicated and passionate staff seeking to secure resources to protect, manage and restore the state's unique natural areas. He appreciates The Nature Conservancy's collaborative approach, partnering with government at all levels, business leaders, and community organizations to seek innovative solutions to strengthen safeguards for land, water, air and wildlife from the increasing threats of climate change and for the health, safety and enjoyment of all earth's inhabitants.

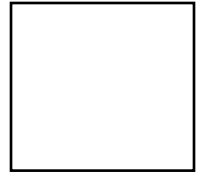
Before joining The Nature Conservancy, Haynes held various nonprofit development roles at Pace Academy, The Southern Environmental Law Center, The University of Georgia Terry College of Business, and The University of the South. Earlier in his career, he advised high-net-worth clients for Credit Suisse and consulted U.S. multinational companies for The National Foreign Trade Council.

Haynes holds a Bachelor of Political Science degree from the University of the South where he was awarded a Tennessee Williams scholarship, was elected the president of the Order of the Gownsmen and sat on the Vice-Chancellor Search Committee. He later received a master's in business administration from The Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia where he served as president of the Graduate Student Business Association.




Above: Photo courtesy of Jason Lee; photo courtesy of Haynes Roberts  
At right: Satilla River © SoberGlass Photography



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The heart of The Nature Conservancy's mission is to conserve lands and waters on which all life depends. The reality of increasingly urgent threats requires us to reaffirm our commitment to our mission, and pursue it in ways that allow for nature to adapt to a changing climate.

**Together, we are building the future of conservation in Georgia.**

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