

THIS IS YOUR GEORGIA

WINTER 2023/24

www.GeorgiaConservancy.org



King Springs Pecan Farm by Nathan Lee

Georgia Farmland Conservation Program

The next steps in our efforts establishing the state's first conservation fund targeting private agricultural lands, has the Georgia Conservancy working with the Georgia Department of Agriculture to create the Georgia Farmland Conservation Program (GFCP) framework, including application form, processes for proposal evaluations, and grant award timelines.

During last year's Legislative Session, the Georgia General Assembly overwhelmingly passed the GFCP enabling legislation, Senate Bill 220, to offer farmland owners a financial incentive to conserve lands facing development pressure. The legislation was created by the Georgia Conservancy in concert with Representative Richard Dickey, Senator Russ Goodman, and the Department of Agriculture.

Per the establishing legislation, priority will be given to property applications that protect agricultural lands susceptible to development, subdivision, and fragmentation, taking into consideration the project's current state of cultivation, the potential for a funding match, and priorities such as protection of soil quality, water quality, and habitat, as well as watershed conservation, climate resiliency, local conservation plans, and public viewshed.

As the framework of the program is defined, we seek to ensure that the GFCP has a proposal process that is not onerous for applicants and that seeks to protect farmland in geographically-diverse areas of the state.

During the 2024 Legislative Session, the Georgia Conservancy will work with Governor Brian Kemp's office, the Department of Agriculture, and the General Assembly to seek appropriations for the first year of the program. The goal is to have the the process firmly established, with the application period open and advertised as early as possible.

To learn more, please visit: www.georgiaconservancy.org/land/georgia-farmland-conservation-fund



THIS IS YOUR GEORGIA The President's Letter

We are pleased to share the numerous conservation impacts that your vital support makes possible - a “first” in Georgia farmland conservation; hundreds of hours of service impacts across the state; community engagement focused on sustainable growth, and advancements in the protection of critical coastal natural assets, like our state marine mammal and precious salt marsh.

You choose to support Georgia Conservancy because you believe as we do: that every acre matters.

Whether we choose to use land to sustainably create community, grow food and fiber essential to our well-being; or provide habitat for the natural world that also sustains us and brings us joy; the decisions around how we use our land resources are a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

This Is Your Georgia!

Katherine Moore
President

SUPPORTING GEORGIA THROUGH STATEWIDE SERVICE

Projects engage Georgians in the protection of our precious places



Tabby ruins at Middle Place, Ossabaw Island by Megan Varner

Giving back to Georgia and Georgians is at the heart of the Georgia Conservancy. Since our founding in 1967, you've joined us in supporting our natural areas and communities through a variety of service projects.

In 2023, from our Coast to metro Atlanta, the Georgia Conservancy has provided our supporters the opportunity to engage in meaningful service projects resulting in nearly 600 cumulative hours of service.

At Dekalb County's **Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve**, Georgia Conservancy volunteers spent a morning preparing a beautiful meadow along the Preserve's Lake Trail for future restoration with native flowering plants.

A service project on **Tybee Island** saw volunteers provide much-needed help to local officials' efforts to build a more resilient coastline. A total of 35 sand dune fences were installed along the island's beachfront. Dune fencing on Tybee is an essential part of the City's nature-based management plan and dune restoration after recent hurricanes.

Along one of Atlanta's newest trail projects, the **Woodall Rail Trail**, volunteers cleared overgrown and invasive vegetation from the bike/ped trail's planned path, providing space for trail construction and future plantings of native species.

During our **Ossabaw Island Service Weekend**, participants cleared vegetation from the ruins of tabby cabins that had once housed the enslaved individuals who lived and worked in bondage on the island. This work, which uncovered a previously undocumented cabin, will help ongoing and future archaeological research and preservation at Ossabaw Island's Middle Place.

Our annual **Sapelo Island Service Weekend** supported the agricultural program underway in the island's Hogg Hummock community and helped with maintenance projects at the UGA Marine Sciences Institute.

At **Sweetwater Creek State Park** in Douglas County, volunteers made important improvements to the White Trail, allowing for safer and easier access for users of the Park's all-terrain Action Track wheelchairs.

Thank you to all of our volunteers and to Bronco Wild Fund and Your Local Ford Dealer for supporting our service projects at Sweetwater Creek State Park, Woodall Rail Trail, and Tybee Island!

Learn more about our Stewardship Trips Program at www.gaconservancy.org/trips

UPDATES ON STATEWIDE EFFORTS

Middle and South GA Prescribed Fire Support

With only 9% of Georgia's land publicly-owned, the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of private lands is vital. To support Middle and South Georgia's private forestland, the Georgia Conservancy is conducting outreach to landowners in strategic counties. An application period is open until Nov. 17 for cost-share assistance to qualified landowners who manage their land with prescribed fire.

Learn more at www.gaconservancy.org/land/gsl

North Atlantic Right Whale Outreach

This winter welcomes the return of our state marine mammal, as the North Atlantic right whale journeys south for calving season in our warmer waters.

With their protection more important than ever, the Georgia Conservancy is engaged in a number of efforts to support this critically-endangered species, including boater education and research to advance marine life-friendly commercial fishing practices.

Learn more at www.gaconservancy.org/coast/right-whale



North Atlantic right whale and calf by NOAA

South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative

In October, Georgia Conservancy and Chatham County celebrated with partners the finalization of the South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative (SASMI) Plan.

This unprecedented approach to protect Georgia's 300,000-plus acres of salt marsh is just beginning. Throughout 2024, the Georgia Conservancy will support the rollout of the Plan, which identifies future marsh migration pathways, priority restoration areas, and marsh conservation imperatives.

Learn more about the SASMI plan at www.gaconservancy.org/coast/coastal-marsh-resiliency

THRIVING COMMUNITIES

Statewide smart growth engagement

Have you seen us? The Georgia Conservancy is crisscrossing our state engaging with towns and neighborhoods to creatively support efforts to build and sustain thriving communities.

Throughout 2023, we have worked with leadership and citizens in both Gilmer and Toombs counties to help position their communities for an expansion of equitable, sustainable housing opportunities that protect community character and natural assets.

After months of synthesizing data and stakeholder input, we've compiled a final report and organized recommendation events for **Gilmer County** during October and November. In the **Toombs County** communities of Lyons and Vidalia, a Housing Summit in October brought together local leaders, members of the public, and agency officials around the focal point of housing opportunity.

In 2007, Georgia Conservancy's *Blueprints for Successful Communities* program completed a comprehensive plan for the **Piedmont Heights** neighborhood of Atlanta. Sixteen years later, we have returned with Canvas Planning to help the community update this guiding document with a goal of being incorporated into the City of Atlanta's newest Comprehensive Plan.

Thirty-five miles south of Atlanta, the Georgia Conservancy is partnering with the small city of **Senoia** to create a conservation strategy for the future. Popular for its rustic charm and as a major filming location for *The Walking Dead*, its appeal has attracted a wave of new development. Our efforts include mapping natural assets and recommending responsible development and conservation mechanisms.

And in **Marietta**, our staff is helping citizens better connect with (and to) The Mountain to River Trail through a trail activation study. As part of the study, we will lead community engagement and feedback opportunities, study land use around the trail, and make recommendations to improve trail usability, design, and activation.

Learn more at www.georgiaconservancy.org/growth

CELEBRATING GEORGIA AT "PRECIOUS PLACES"

Thank you sponsors and attendees of our inaugural event



What a night! The Georgia Conservancy would like to thank everyone who supported and joined us for our inaugural *Precious Places* event at The Roof at Ponce City Market in Atlanta on October 13!

Precious Places was the perfect opportunity for conservationists to celebrate our communities and achievements while honoring the state's precious natural and built places - because every acre matters.

Your support allows the Georgia Conservancy to forward our mission to protect Georgia. Together, we can realize our shared vision - *a Georgia where all people and the environment thrive.*

A special thank you to our Georgia Conservancy Natural Partners and Precious Places sponsors!

Check out the photos at www.georgiaconservancy.org/precious-places

TRIPS AND EVENTS

Upcoming Stewardship Trips and Events

Right Whale to Save Fundraiser and Art Show
(November 14 on Tybee Island)

Ebenezer Creek Paddle & Service Weekend (December 1-3)

Cabretta Beach Weekend Adventure (February 2-4)

The Oyster Roast in Savannah (February 24)

Registration for our winter and early spring Stewardship Trips will be announced in December, so be on the lookout!



Cabretta Beach Weekend Adventure by Will Brawley

For more upcoming events:
www.gaconservancy.org/calendar



SAVE THE DATE! THE OYSTER ROAST IS COMING!

There is no place like coastal Georgia. Precious, vulnerable and ours to conserve. For more than 56 years, the Georgia Conservancy, with the support of individuals like you, has passionately worked to protect and conserve coastal Georgia. With celebration in our hearts and the future of Georgia's coast on our minds, we invite you to our annual Oyster Roast, hosted at Grove Point in Savannah on Saturday, February 24. The Oyster Roast will feature local oysters and clams from Sapelo Sea Farms, live music, local Georgia beer, and much more!

Learn more about tickets and sponsorships at www.gaconservancy.org/oysterroast

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