



Athens  
Georgia  
December 2006

*2006 Guide to the*

# **USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**

**GEORGIA**



*Helping People Help the Land*

# Mission

## *Helping People Help the Land*

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# NRCS Organizational Structure



State Conservationist



# Key NRCS Staff in Georgia

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**Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
Administrative Areas  
Georgia



# Designated District Conservationists

Area	Soil and Water Conservation District	NRCS District Conservationist
1	Catoosa County Coosa River Limestone Valley West Georgia Clayton County Cobb County DeKalb County Fulton County Gwinnett County Henry County Lamar County Pine Mountain Rockdale County Roosevelt Towaliga	Cindy P. Askew, LaFayette Sheri E. Teems, Rome Machelle Simmons, Calhoun Sam Sharpe, Carrollton Angie Billups, McDonough Valerie Pickard, Marietta Stephen C. Leslie, Lawrenceville Valerie Pickard, Marietta Stephen C. Leslie, Lawrenceville Angie Billups, McDonough Carmen Westerfield, Barnesville Jack L. Fokes, Jr., Buena Vista Stephen C. Leslie, Lawrenceville Kevin Keel, Newnan Carmen Westerfield, Barnesville
2	Blue Ridge Mountain Hall County Stephens County Upper Chattahoochee River Broad River Lincoln County McDuffie County Oconee River Piedmont Warren County Brier Creek Columbia County Upper Ocmulgee River Walton County	Douglas Towery, Blairsville George Belflower, Gainesville Russell F. Biggers, Toccoa Russell F. Biggers, Toccoa Forrest W. Ferguson, Hartwell Rory Richardson, Washington J. Cread Brown, Louisville Carol Boss, Commerce Dennis Brooks, Madison J. Cread Brown, Louisville J. Cread Brown, Louisville Vacant, Augusta Dennis B. Brooks, Madison Jose' V. Pagan, Monroe
3	Ocmulgee River Flint River Lower Chattahoochee River Middle South Georgia	Ray Jones, Vienna Eddie Glover, Albany Lyndon McCavitt, Dawson Mary Leidner, Tifton
4	Alapaha Altamaha Satilla River Coastal Ogeechee River Ohooppee River Central Georgia	Harold B. Simpson, Jr., Nashville Bo Bannister, Douglas Rita Barrow, Brunswick Shaun Ford, Richmond Hills William G. Thrift, Statesboro Sidney Lanier, Swainsboro Britt S. Parker, Dublin

## Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations

Area 1	Griffin	Michael Watson	Area 2	Athens	Earl Brantley
Area 3	Americus	Charlie Frear	Area 4	Waycross	David Ferrell

# District Conservationists & RC&D Coordinators

## Alphabetical List of District Conservationists and RC&D Coordinators

<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Telephone</b>			
			Napier	Jim	229-776-4488
Askew	Cindy	706 638-2207	Nichols	Elizabeth	912-285-5975
Bannister	Clemon L. (Bo)	912-384-4811	Oliver	Harold E.	912-876-6485
Barrow	Rita	912-265-8092	Pagan	Jose	770-267-1359
Belflower	George (Buddy)	770-536-6981	Palmer	Scotty	706-453-7021
Biggers	Russell	706-886-8223	Parker	Britt S.	478-275-0425
Billups	Angie	770-957-5707	Pickard	Valerie	770-792-0647
Blackburn	Austin V.	912-564-2207	Reese	Karen	229-732-6211
Boss	Carol	706-335-7145	Richardson	Rory	706-678-2630
Brooks	Dennis	706-342-1315	Riley	Joseph	706-894-1591
Brown	Cread	478-625-7771	Sanders	K. Byron	478-552-6073
Brown	Jerome	770-339-6071	Sharpe	Sam	770-832-8942
Cabe	Doug	706 625-9943	Simmons	Machelle	706-629-2582
Cleland	Steve	229-723-3825	Simpson	Harold B.	229-686-2363
Comegys	Alex.	912-583-4432	Steen	Bert	229-246-8282
Ferguson	Forrest	706-376-2876	Stephens	Rebecca	912-564-2207
Ford	Shaun	912-265-8092	Teems	Sheri	706-291-5651
Futch	Joey A.	912-367-4368	Thompson	Kimberly C.	912-529-6652
Glover	Eddie	229-430-8509	Thrift	William G.	912-265-8043
Hall	Graylen	229-268-9106	Towery	Doug	706 745-2794
Haygood	Cindy	678-333-6346	Westerfield	Carmen	770-358-3223
Hill	Forrest	706 885-0101			
Jones	Luther D.	912-367-7679			
Jones	Ray	478-956-6490			
Keel	Kevin	770-251-4283			
Lanier	Sidney C.	478-237-8037			
Leidner	Mary	229-382-4776			
Leslie	Steve	770-963-9288			
McCavitt	Lyndon	229-995-5811			
McCranie	Charles V.	478-374-8140			

# Conservation Security Program

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## Program Highlights

*The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary program that rewards farmers with a history of good farmland conservation through stewardship and incentive payments. The program is designed to reward the best conservation stewards of the soil, water and other natural resources in targeted watersheds through 5-10 year contracts. The program provides equitable access to benefits to all producers, regardless of size or type of farm operation.*



The Conservation Security Program (CSP) expanded to allow an additional 60 new watersheds nationwide in 2006, along with farmers in 18 original watersheds being eligible to modify their contracts and include enhancement for doing more conservation on their farms.

Georgia's 2006 CSP selected watershed was the Little Ocmulgee located in Dodge, Laurens, Telfair, Twiggs, Bleckley and Wheeler counties. Applications were received from 64 farmers. Fifty-eight applications were selected for funding. These farmers received a total of \$1.1 million in CSP payments for having applied a high level of conservation practices on over 23,000 acres. Water, animal, plant and air quality resource concerns met the

Tier 3 criteria for addressing resource concerns by 53 Georgia farmers.

The most common conservation enhancements being completed by these CSP farmers were: split application of nitrogen for nutrient management, scouting for pest by using a professional scout, utilizing a conservation tillage system that increased organic matter in the soils and recycling of oil and other lubricants.

# CSP Success Story

## CSP Cotton Farmer is Rewarded For Good Conservation Stewardship



District Conservationist Chuckie McCranie and landowner, Tim Robinson on his cotton operation in Dodge County.

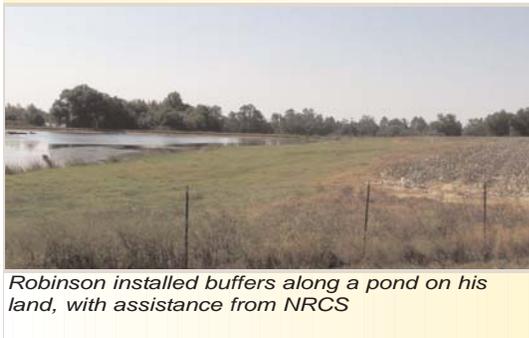
Tim Robinson describes his cotton and wheat operation as “something he got thrown into.” However, his outstanding conservation practices are not the work of an amateur.

Robinson’s farm is located in Eastman and dates back three generations to his grandfather and uncles, who still farm land in the area. Born in Atlanta, Robinson’s father took a job selling insurance, causing the family to move to Eastman when he was 5 years old. Robinson’s mother was a native of Dodge County, which made the transition back around family much easier. At



Cotton field on Robinson’s farm

nine years old, Robinson says that his father and uncles began to get him involved in the farming operation.



Robinson installed buffers along a pond on his land, with assistance from NRCS

Robinson started work-

ing with NRCS years ago on terraces and buffers around his pond and has kept excellent records of fertilization, soil management and other practices to improve conservation stewardship on his operation.

Practices found on his farm include regular soil sampling, defined nutrient applications, minimizing pesticide use, planting pest-resistant seed varieties, crop scouting and controlling invasive weeds on a spot basis.

Robinson’s cotton yielded 2 bales per acre this year. He grows wheat as a residue crop, producing extra organic matter on the soil to improve soil fertility and moisture. Wheat stubble protects young cotton seedlings in the early developmental stages.

“Fertilizer has been abused,” Robinson said. “In the past, we used cultivators and plows for fertilizer application. Strip-tilling has helped us cut down on our fuel consumption.”

He credits conservation techniques on highly erodible land as being critically important to his success. Those innovative techniques included strip tillage, waterways and grass borders.

Robinson admits that he became involved in NRCS conservation programs on his operation because of the rewards for preserving his operations with good conservation management practices.

“We were using all these practices before we ever heard of CSP,” Robinson states. “Monetary reward is always a good incentive for using programs like CSP.”

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Landowners and others wanting to do business with the government can now do it online! NRCS is one of three USDA Service Center agencies that now offer online services.

The United States Department of Agriculture has implemented a new process for registering customers who choose to conduct electronic transactions with USDA agencies. This new process was implemented on October 21, 2003.

Under the new process, a customer can register for access to eGov applications by visiting

<http://www.eauth.egov.usda.gov>

At this site, the application will take the customer through a simplified registration process.

When registered, the customer will need to visit their local service center and have their identity verified by presenting one of four forms of id; State Drivers License; State issued identification card; US passport or a Military ID.

The service center staff will then be able to activate the account and provide the customer with access to many current and future eGov applications.

# Emergency Watershed Protection Program

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## Program Highlights

*The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) provides local communities with emergency technical and financial assistance to address natural resource concerns resulting from a natural disaster.*



Flood damage in Georgia



An example would be downed trees blocking road crossings at creeks.

These impediments cause blockage to creeks or small drainage ways, threatening damage to roads, bridges and other structures and increased risk to human life.

Georgia received over \$2.79 million of EWP funding in November of 2004.

These funds are being used to apply emergency conservation measures in three counties: Gilmer, Rabun, and Towns. These counties suffered damage as a result of Hurricane Ivan, Jeanne, and other storms that occurred in 2004.

Emergency measures authorized include debris removal, streambank protection, bio-engineering, road and culvert headwall protection, and road-slide stabilization.

# Emergency Watershed Protection Success Story

## Emergency Program Helps Gilmer County Recover From the Storm

September 16, 2004 introduced Gilmer County Georgia to Hurricane Ivan. At this meeting, fourteen inches of rain fell in less than 10 hours at the head of Clear Creek in the Cartecay Watershed.

Homes, bridges, roads, and all types of agricultural operations were destroyed. Trees, weakened by southern pine beetle infestations, fell and blocked streams.



*Above: Stream returned to original course and reestablished in grass.*



*Below: Old streambed filled with stone.*

Streambeds were filled with rock and rerouted into new channels while other streams were clogged by blockages of trees, tires, and even lawnmowers. People were trapped in their homes and not sure if the house would stay or float away. Luckily, there are programs available to Americans to help them after this type of storm event. Everybody has heard of FEMA, and their involvement with the aftermath of storms, but who picks up where they leave off?

Ag lands have the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) to assist landowners; but who takes the debris out of the stream, off the banks, and helps prevent further destruction and potential loss of life when the next storm event occurs?

The answer is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP). A team of NRCS personnel visited sites designated disasters areas by the Gilmer County government. Contractors and engineers spent hours preparing contracts and practice specifications.

The county obtained signatures from landowners involved with each project site. When all of the documents were completed according to NRCS policy and all of the signatures were obtained by the county, the

project was released to contracting companies for bids.

Georgia NRCS provided financial and technical assistance from the start through the completion of this project.

# Environmental Quality Incentives Program

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## **Program Highlights**

*The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides a voluntary conservation program for farmers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.*

- *On private lands with farmers and ranchers,*
- *On a voluntary basis,*
- *Using local, state, tribal and federal partnerships,*
- *Providing flexible technical, educational, and financial assistance,*
- *Assisting Farmers and Ranchers in complying with federal, state and tribal environmental laws, and*
- *Encouraging environmental enhancement.*

In 2006, approximately 1,000 Georgia Farmers benefited from \$14.7 million in Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) cost share funds. Georgia livestock producers received over 66% of the EQIP dollars.

Those involved with Confined Animal Feeding Operations will install 141 Waste Storage Facilities, 37 Mortality Facilities, and 26 Composting Facilities. Grazing operators will use their EQIP funds to install 283 miles of fence, 287 Heavy Use Areas, and 356 Livestock Watering Facilities.

Interest in addressing water conservation issues continued to rise in 2006, with over 150 inefficient center pivots systems being retro-fitted to low pressure drop nozzle systems. There are also seven new subsurface micro irrigation systems planned.

EQIP 2006 introduced two special emphasis areas that were highly received by producers. The idea of transferring poultry litter out of counties that have more then can be used on available acreage, lead to the poultry litter transfer pilot project. This project sought to move this litter to areas in Georgia with more land available for applications. Over 450 applications were received with 52 contracts being awarded, resulting in 25,000 tons of poultry litter being transferred.

With increasing prices of oil driving the cost of nitrogen fertilizer up, interest in the use of crimson clover as a cover crop has grown. Crimson clover can provide over 50 lbs. of nitrogen per acre if managed properly. To promote the use of this excellent nitrogen source, a special cost share incentive was provided in 2006. Eight farmers elected to try this alternative cover crop on 1600 acres of cotton.

# EQIP Success Story



## The Variable Rate Irrigation (VRI) System

A Variable Rate Irrigation (VRI) system allows for water to be applied in areas that need irrigation, while areas that are not cropped or could use a lower rate, receive little or no water. It is added to an irrigation center pivot that has already been retrofitted with drop nozzles and regulators. VRI allows producers to turn off nozzles and/or vary pivot speed to conserve 10% to 100% of the water over non-cropped areas and areas that normally become saturated while irrigating.

The first commercial VRI system in the entire world was unveiled to the general public on January 27, 2005. VRI has been in research phase for the past 5 years at the UGA NESPAL facility in Tifton, GA.

After extensive testing and astounding results, UGA determined that it was time to move this system into the commercial sector. The Flint River Conservation District encouraged the University to make this move as a way to help reduce water consumption in the Flint River Basin. An engineering firm was contracted to bring this system from the test phase to a commercial product.

The conservation water saving value of the 20 systems that were chosen to participate in this program averages approximately 17%. An average of 3% to 4% of the 17% water savings can be contributed to the end gun shutoff which in most cases was already on the system; however, the VRI computer and Global Positioning System (GPS) system allowed the farmers to set the precision of the end gun shutoff much more effectively.

The potential water conservation varies from field to field, but could range from 5% to 35%. In order



## EQIP Success Story continued

to maximize these savings, 21 VRI systems were funded in 2004 and 15 more systems were planned for 2006. Funding for the project comes through the Ground and Surface Water Conservation Component of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

### **Earth Day: A Celebration of Water**

A Earth Day VRI demonstration called "Celebration of Water" was held to show this innovative system. National and local officials saw one of 20 irrigation systems fitted with variable-rate nozzles that spray precise amounts of water only where needed.

"What you've prototyped here is certainly something that will be used by the rest of the nation for precision agriculture," said Deputy Under Secretary Merlyn Carlson, as the 2,200-foot center-pivot irrigation system passed over the 328-acre field.

"The variable-rate irrigation pilot project has been a great success," said Carlson. "We support this culture of responsibility," he added.

"The natural resources of the Flint River Basin are being strained to support the needs of farmers and the environment," said farmer Marty McLendon, chairman of the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District, "The variable rate irrigation system is a proactive way to reduce the amount of water needed by the agricultural community without jeopardizing their livelihood."



*Participants learn about VRI system.*

### **Irrigation Nozzle Retrofitting Program**

The Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS have retrofitted approximately 90 higher pressure systems to low pressure drop nozzle technology with booster pumps and end gun shutoff.

These practices combined have a water savings potential of 12% -17%. The Flint River District has assisted NRCS in encouraging 50 additional participants for the 2005 EQIP sign-up, which are in the process of being retrofitted now.

# Farm & Ranch Lands Protection Program

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## **Program Highlights**

*The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and rangeland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA partners with State, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the fair market value for the conservation easement. The program provides matching funds to State, Tribal, or local governmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements or other interests in land.*



In 2006, three proposals were received from sponsors to protect 350 acres of farmland located in Bartow and Oconee Counties with a conservation easement value of \$1.8 million. Two proposals were selected and will provide permanent protection of 300 acres of Georgia farmland.

# Farm & Ranch Lands Protection Program Success Story

## Fred Greer Wins Prestigious National Cattleman's Beef Association Environmental Stewardship Award

The National Cattleman's Beef Association (NCBA) Environmental Stewardship Awards Program (ESAP) Committee announced seven Regional ESAP award winners. Fred Greer of Hayston Farms was one of those award winners.

NCBA hired a video firm to develop a video of the winner's farms and ranches and is scheduling site visits with each winner, including Mr. Greer, to accurately describe the environmental benefits of conservation practices applied. Of particular interest is wildlife, water quality and livestock production.

*Editors Note: District Conservationist Dennis Brooks interviewed farmer Fred Greer for the Success Story Project. Below are highlights from that interview.*

### **How long have you been farming?**

"All my life on this farm, my father before me, his father before him. I'm a 5th generation farmer here in Mansfield, GA."

### **Are you the only member of your family that farms?**

"No. My wife and children help. As stated above, our family for generations has farmed."

### **What natural resource concerns did you have on your land that caused you to seek assistance?**

"None specifically. Our family has always sought to utilize the latest research in agriculture and all available technology and programs."

### **How did you first learn about the conservation technical assistance provided by NRCS?**

"Our farm has always practiced conservation measures, especially my father. He was the greatest conservation practitioner and innovator I have ever known. I've tried to follow his steps and add and improve. Our family has always worked and cooperated with NRCS predecessor, Soil Conservation Service, ASCS (FSA), Cooperative Extension Service, Experiment Stations of University of Georgia, etc."

### **How has your operation benefited from the application of the conservation treatments?**

"Too many to list individually. Conservation benefits economically and environmentally."

### **What would you like future generations to know about your conservation philosophy?**

"Work with nature, not against her. Our natural resources are limited, but many are renewable, some are not. Plan and practice conservation today, don't wait until tomorrow."



*Greer standing among trees on his farm*

# Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

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## Program Highlights

*NRCS in cooperation with the Georgia Grazing Lands Conservation Coalition (GGLCC) encourage forage and livestock producers to adopt practices that promote the efficient use of their grazing land resources, while conserving soil and protecting water quality through maintenance of healthy forage systems. Accomplishing the objectives is facilitated through on-farm cost-share demonstration projects, area- and state-wide conferences, development and distribution of grazing management resources, and funding of innovative research and land management projects.*

In 2006, \$200,000 of Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) funds was obligated to three projects that continue the emphasis of improving the management of Georgia's grazing lands. Georgia Cattleman's Association and GGLCC will be cooperating to continue the cost-share practice demonstration projects on individual farms. Also, the Madison County Cattleman's Association will receive funds to provide partial support to ongoing research related to tall fescue, broiler litter application, and grazing management conducted by USDA-ARS. Finally, a Pine Country RC&D project will demonstrate to landowners how to make the transition from CRP-planted trees to silvopasture systems on two or three area farms.



# National Resources Inventory

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## **Program Highlights**

*The National Resources Inventory (NRI) is a statistically based survey that has been designed and implemented using scientific principles to assess the trends of soil, water, and related resource conditions on nonfederal lands in the United States.*

NRI is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) tool to provide Congress natural resources information. Section 302 of the 1972 Rural Development Act and legislation in 1977 and 1985, requires a USDA report to Congress on natural resource conditions.

Since the early 1970s, resource data has been gathered on a random sample of 160-acre land tracts called Primary Sample Units (PSUs).

Resource information available in NRI includes:

Land Use - Cropland, Forestland, Pastureland, Urban Land, Transportation, Federal, Wetlands, Water Erosion, Developed Land, Land Cover, Forest, Grass, Water, Crops, Prime Farmland.

The entire 1997 NRI database is available to the public on CD. The national release of 2003 data (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/>) shows Georgia losing prime farmland to development at the third fastest rate in the nation. In good news, the nation showed its first 'net-gain' of agricultural wetlands since the NRI began in 1982.

# Plant Materials Program

**Program Manager:** David Lamm, Acting

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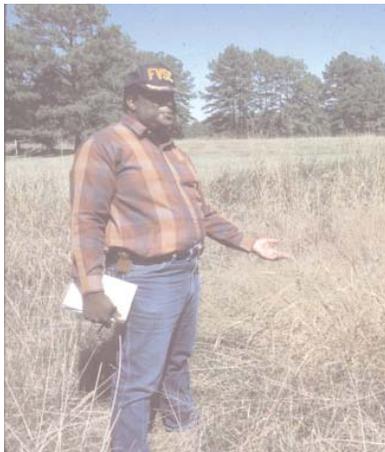
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## **Program Highlights**

*The Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center (PMC) is a branch of the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. It is one of 27 plant materials centers located throughout the United States. The Center is located on the Northwest corner of Americus, Georgia, in Southwestern Georgia and is approximately 40 miles North of Albany. Areas served include Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina and parts of Tennessee and Florida.*

The PMC's mission is to develop plant materials and state-of-the-art plant science technology to solve natural resource problems and meet the objectives of environmental programs. The emphasis of the PMC is using native plants, developing test and release and providing superior adapted plants to commercial growers along with production and management technology.



*Don Surrency evaluating switchgrass*

The Plant Materials Center has eight active studies involving plants native to the Southeastern U.S. Emphasis is technology development on seeding rates, establishment, growth, management and culture of native warm season grasses. Big bluestem, switchgrass, little bluestem, indiagrass and eastern gamagrass show great potential as forage, wildlife habitat improvement, carbon sequestration, nutrient reclamation, erosion control, conservation buffers, alternative fuels, etc.

Plant Materials assistance to small farmers in Georgia included special initiatives and inclusions in field days, tours, field demonstrations, etc. Sponsored a silvopasture field day on

Mack Evans Farm, a small farm in Early County, Georgia. Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center provided the seed to incorporate native grasses in the silvopasture system.

'Tropic Sun' Sunn Hemp, a potentially new cover crop adapted to the Southeast is being grown in California. Sunn Hemp is well adapted, and as a cover crop can play an integral role in residue management systems. It can produce sufficient biomass to provide ground cover and Nitrogen to a following summer cash crop. Seed should be available in 2007 or 2008 in commercial seed sources in the Southeast.

The Jimmy Carter PMC staff sponsored a Prescribed Burn Demonstration with native grasses at the PMC. Trained 32 people that came from NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Soil & Water Conservation Commission, farmers, Georgia Department of Natural Resources and Lower Chattahoochee River Soil & Water Conservation District.

# Plant Materials Program Success Story

## Silvopasture Maximizes Land Use in Early County

Silvopasture, the practice of intentionally combining the production of trees and/or shrubs, forage crops, and livestock through intensive management, works to simultaneously produce forest products, high quality forage, and livestock on the same land area.



*Attendees listen to speakers at the Silvopasture Field Day*

One of the major benefits of silvopasture is that many cool and warm season grasses and legumes yield high levels of quality forage when grown under as much as 50 percent shade. This concept is being applied to design integrated timber/grazing systems in conifer stands, especially loblolly pine in the Southeast.

Mack Evans, an Early County small farmer and host farm site for the 2006 Silvopasture Field Day, bought his first herd of cattle in 2003 and noticed his trees growing faster since he adopted silvopasture. He received cost-share funding through the

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help plant pasture grass.

Evans purchased some land in the late 70's that had been in his wife's family for more than 100 years and planted it in loblolly pine. "For me, it was an investment," he said. "After doing some research, I found that farmers can make more money out of saw timber," he added.

Evans came back to Jakin in 2003 to manage his trees—after spending another 5 years with Eastman Kodak.

After doing some research, I found that farmers can make more money out of saw timber," Evans said. "I would go on the web at night. I found silvopasture on a USDA web site."

In 2005, Evans visited the Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center in Americus to obtain information on native warm season grasses. Later, he decided to plant 'Iuka' eastern gamagrass and a mixed native grass which included big bluestem, Americus indiagrass, alamo switchgrass and little bluestem. It is ready for grazing this year.

Evans thinned his pine stand in 1996 and again in 1999 and was receiving a "nice income" without managing his farm.

## Plant Materials Program Continued

Evans, who said he gets all of his farm information from the Internet, was surfing the web one day looking for information on removing understory vegetation and discovered silvopasture. “I would go on the web at night. I found silvopasture on a USDA web site.” Silvopasture is an agroforestry practice that combines trees, forage plants and livestock management.

Evans called USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) District Conservationist Joe Wilson, who said “Mack that’s a great idea!” Current District Conservationist Steven Cleland echoed the sentiment and recommended silvopasture as a good conservation practice because it maximizes the use of the land while helping conserve the natural resources.



*Farmer, Mack Evans looks at Silvopasture Field Day*

“Farmers out here don’t use the universities as much as they should—the researchers do the work and it just sits on the shelf,” he said.

“You’d be surprised at how many people stop and say your cows are out,” he laughed.

Evans would also like to develop a mentor program for new farmers. “There was no farmer I could go to—to talk about silvopasture.”

Some farmers might have stopped here, but Evans keeps on finding innovative ways of maximizing his farm income.

He rents land 6 months out of the year from his

neighbor who is using no-till, a conservation practice that reduces soil erosion and improves soil quality. Evans came up with the idea to rent the land and graze cattle on it during the winter months. “A lot of farmers thought it was kinda weird—renting six months—but it’s a win-win situation—using winter grazing as a cover crop,” he said.

Cleland said that he hopes other farmers will model this farming operation. “He’s innovative in his approach; he’s really put the work in to gather information,” Cleland said.

Evans was selected as a participant in the 2005 Georgia Agri-Leaders Forum, whose mission is to provide a forum for developing individual leaders skilled in communications, educated in local, national, and world affairs, familiar with the changing needs of our society, and prepared to meet the present and future challenges.

# Resource Conservation & Development

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## Introduction

*The purpose of the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program is to accelerate the conservation, development and utilization of natural resources, improve the general level of economic activity, and to enhance the environment and standard of living in designated RC&D areas. The program also establishes or improves coordination of activities in rural areas. Current program objectives focus on improvement of quality of life through natural resources conservation and community development leading to sustainable communities and sound management and conservation of natural resources.*

The RC&D Council Program in Georgia consists of 11 Council areas comprising 127 counties of Georgia's 159 counties. RC&D programs provide assistance to people in their Council areas by helping them plan and implement projects in their communities that will make them better places to live and work. Councils are governed by volunteers from within the Council areas. The Natural Resource Conservation Service pro-

## Georgia RC&D Councils

Central Savannah River 3456D Peach Orchard Road Augusta, Georgia 30906 (706) 798-7967 Fax: (706) 798-9445	Limestone Valley 125 Red Bud Road, Suite 7 Calhoun, Georgia 30701 (706) 625-7044 Fax: (706) 625-9943	Seven Rivers 400 East Park Avenue, Suite 5 Baxley, Georgia 31513 (912) 367-7679 Fax: (912) 367-1184
Chestatee-Chattahoochee 624 Green Street, N.E. Gainesville, Georgia 30501 (770) 536-1221 Fax: (770)535-1721	Oconee River P.O. Box 247 Watkinsville, Georgia 30677 (706) 769-7922 Fax: (706) 769-3184	Two Rivers 900 Dallis Street LaGrange, Georgia 30240 (706) 885-0101 Fax: (706) 885-0103 <a href="http://www.tworiversrcd.org">www.tworiversrcd.org</a>
Coastal Georgia 502 East General Steward Way, Suite B Hinesville, Georgia 31313 (912) 876-6485 Fax: (912) 877-8021	Pine Country 105 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive Soperton, Georgia 30457 (912) 529-6652 Fax: (912) 529-6000	Upper Ocmulgee River 750 S. Perry Street, Suite 212 Lawrenceville, Georgia 30045 (770) 339-6071 (678) 442-1329
Golden Triangle 712-R County Street Blakely, Georgia 31723 (229) 723-3841 Fax: (229) 723-3842 <a href="http://www.enhancinggeorgia.org">www.enhancinggeorgia.org</a>	Rolling Hills 512 Mainstreet Cedartown, Georgia 30125 (678) 333-6346 <a href="mailto:rlnghills@netscape.net">rlnghills@netscape.net</a>	

# RC&D Continued

vides technical and administrative support through NRCS personnel, including a full-time coordinator.

During 2006, RC&D Councils in Georgia created 8 businesses and 29 new jobs for the state of Georgia. They planned four watersheds totaling over 200,000 acres; and they administered technical and financial assistance for approximately 2,200 acres of wildlife habitat creation. It is also estimated that RC&D Councils implemented 265 projects totaling over \$14 million in assistance during the year.

## Photo highlights from the 2006 National RC&D Council Conference in Savannah, GA



# Watershed Rehabilitation Program

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## Program Highlights

*The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL 83-566), August 4, 1954, as amended, authorized NRCS to cooperate with States and local agencies to carry out works of improvement for soil conservation and for other purposes including flood prevention; conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water; and conservation and proper utilization of land. NRCS implements the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act through three programs:*

- *Watershed Surveys and Planning*
- *Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations*
- *Watershed Rehabilitation*

Since 1953, 357 project dams have been built in Georgia. The Georgia Safe Dams Program has categorized 150 of these as "High Hazard" structures, indicating a potential loss of life if the dam were to fail. Preliminary investigations indicate that some \$120 million will be needed to upgrade these structures and ensure compliance with current dam safety regulations.

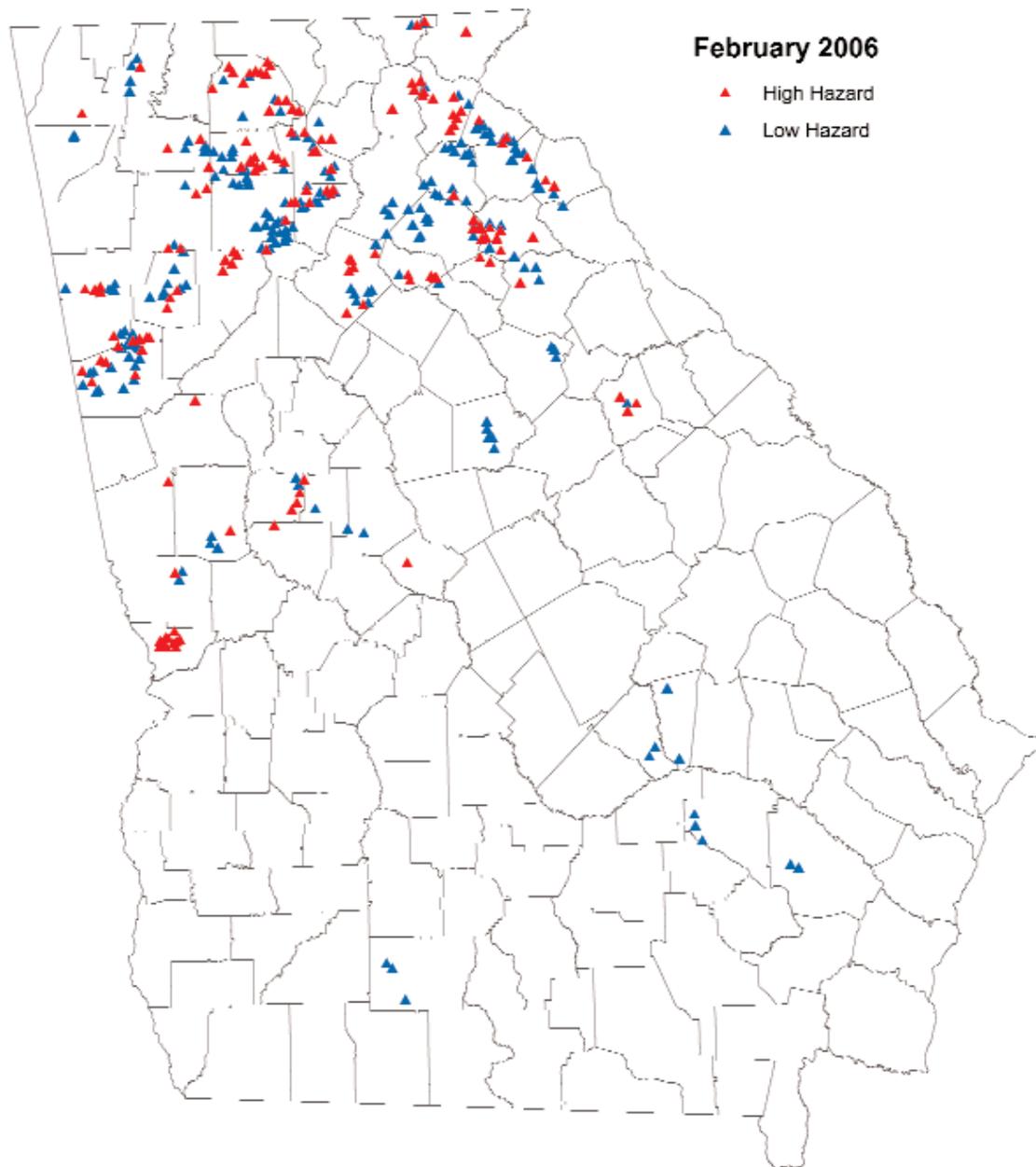
NRCS project dams provide \$19 million worth annually of benefits to local communities through flood protection, water-based recreation, municipal water supply, and other water uses.

One of the major issues involved with aging dams is the safety and health of an estimated 15,000 people downstream from the dams. Many dams were originally built in rural areas to protect agricultural lands. Homes, businesses and roads have now been built downstream, and increased damages would occur if they were to fail.

Congress passed legislation in November 2000 that authorized NRCS to provide financial and technical assistance for rehabilitation of dams that were originally constructed under NRCS Small Watershed Protection Program. During 2005, NRCS upgraded Yellow River Watershed Dam No. 17 for \$1.75 million.

Three Yellow River dams, along with Haynes Creek-Brushy Fork Creek, are currently working their way through the design phase towards construction of upgrades. The hazard classification was documented on 10 additional watershed dams: Etowah River, Mill-Canton Creek, Palmetto Creek, Grove River, Little Sandy Trail Creek & Trail Creek, three dams of the South River and two dams of Sandy Creek.

# Watershed Rehabilitation Program Continued...



# Soil Survey

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## Program Highlights

*In Georgia, the National Cooperative Soil Survey program is a joint effort of the NRCS and other federal, state, and local agencies. Soil survey activities in Georgia include:*

- *Making and publishing detailed soil surveys*
- *Updating older soil surveys*
- *Digitizing modern soil surveys*
- *Developing soil property and interpretive data*
- *Completing scientific soils studies*
- *Assisting with the use of soil data*

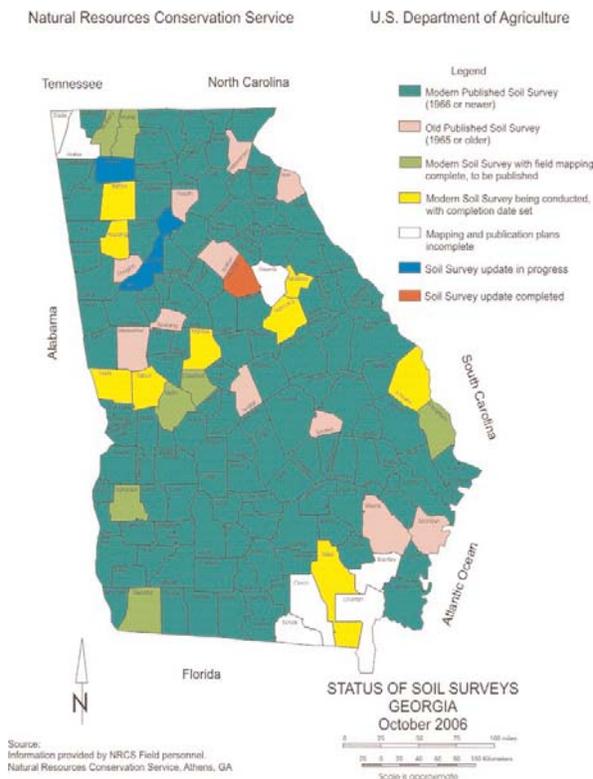
Soil surveys provide a comprehensive inventory of soil resources and conditions that describe soil erodibility, soil productivity and properties that affect suitability for many uses. NRCS is authorized by Congress to conduct a soil survey of the nation and territories including the

Pacific Basin, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

One hundred and thirty four Georgia counties have published soil surveys, 7 counties have completed surveys that are being published, 11 are presently being surveyed, 1 county has been updated, and 2 other updates are in progress.

There are now 63 survey areas (115 counties) with a Soil Survey Geographic database that include digitized soils and associated properties.

All of the digitized soil surveys are available to the public through the web soil survey, which is an interactive, web-based delivery system. More information can be found at <http://web-soilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>.



# Technical Service Providers

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## **Program Highlights**

*The Technical Service Provider program was outlined in the 2002 Farm Bill. The TSP program requires the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to allow producers to receive technical assistance by individuals and entities other than NRCS. This provision is designed to ensure NRCS has the capacity to address the significant workload associated with implementing Farm Bill programs. TSP assistance is another tool for NRCS to use in the implementation of conservation programs.*

Seventy four individuals and organizations are certified through the Technical Service Provider (TSP) program to provide technical services in Georgia. Twenty eight Georgia producers were funded to receive technical assistance on EQIP contracts on Residue Management and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans this year.

NRCS has also entered into agreements with five different organizations this year to provide technical assistance on wildlife habitat, forestry management, and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans to Farm Bill Program participants throughout the state.

# Watershed Program

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## **Program Highlights**

The Watershed Program helps sponsoring organizations in the development of a plan on watersheds of 250,000 acres or less.

During planning, problems such as water quality, flooding, water and land management, and sedimentation are evaluated and works of improvement are proposed to alleviate problems.

The resulting watershed plans estimates benefits, costs and cost-sharing rates. The plans arrange operation and maintenance necessary to justify Federal assistance to install works of improvement.

## **Watershed Operations Program**

Since 1952, a total of 77 small watershed projects have been approved for operations in Georgia. Some \$189 million of water quality improvements, soil erosion reduction, flood protection, recreation and wildlife habitat establishment have been planned on 5.2 million acres. There are currently two active flood prevention projects and six active watershed protection projects. In 2005, long-term contracts were completed with 20 landowners for almost \$1 million.

The following are active watershed protection projects:

Lower Little Tallapoosa River Watershed - Carroll County; South Chickamauga Creek Watershed - Walker and Catoosa Counties; Pisco Creek Watershed - Brooks County; Turkey Creek Watershed - Dooly County; Five Points Area Watershed - Macon County; Tobesofkee Creek Watershed - Lamar and Monroe Counties.

## **Watershed Planning and Surveys Program**

The Watershed Program helps sponsoring organizations in the development of a plan on watersheds of 250,000 acres or less. Resource concerns associated with impaired water quality, limited water supply, flooding, land management, sedimentation, recreation and fish and wildlife habitats are eligible for evaluation. Watershed Plans and Environmental Assessments propose alternative courses of action to alleviate identified problems. Public benefits, costs and cost-sharing rates are identified as a necessary prerequisite to justify federal financial assistance for installing works of improvement.

In 2006, NRCS in Georgia provided \$216,000 in technical assistance to eleven communities. The Big Cedar Creek Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment was completed. Project Sponsors selected a plan calling for \$1.7 million in technical and finan-

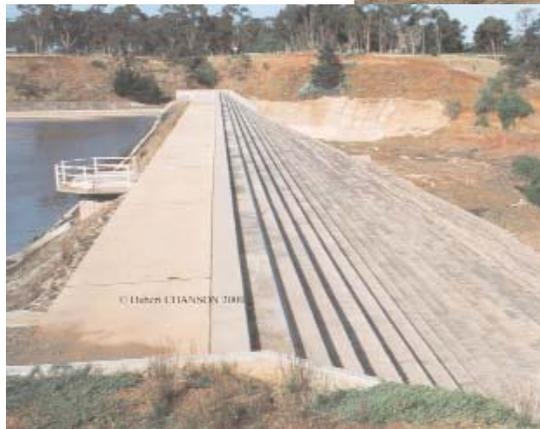
# Watershed Program Continued...

cial assistance to improve water quality in the Polk County area.

An emerging resource concern associated with water supply led to three communities submitting requests for federal assistance under the Watershed Planning and Surveys Program. NRCS-Georgia has requested almost \$4 million in technical assistance funding to provide needed assistance to these communities with over 60,000 beneficiaries.

## River Basin Program

In implementing the River Basin Program, NRCS cooperates with federal, state and local agencies to make surveys and investigations of river basins as a basis for the development of coordinated water resource programs. Reports on investigations and surveys provide useful information to be used in the development of water, land, and related resources in agricultural, rural and urban areas within upstream watershed settings.



## Highlights from the Watershed Program

2006

- Planned, designed, and installed 58 ponds storing 2,114.5 acre-feet of water for irrigation.
- Develop watershed scale watershed plans to cover 448,000 acres.
- Helped secure \$2,462,064 in outside funding to augment NRCS financial assistance programs.

# Wetlands Reserve Program

**Program Manager:** David Lamm

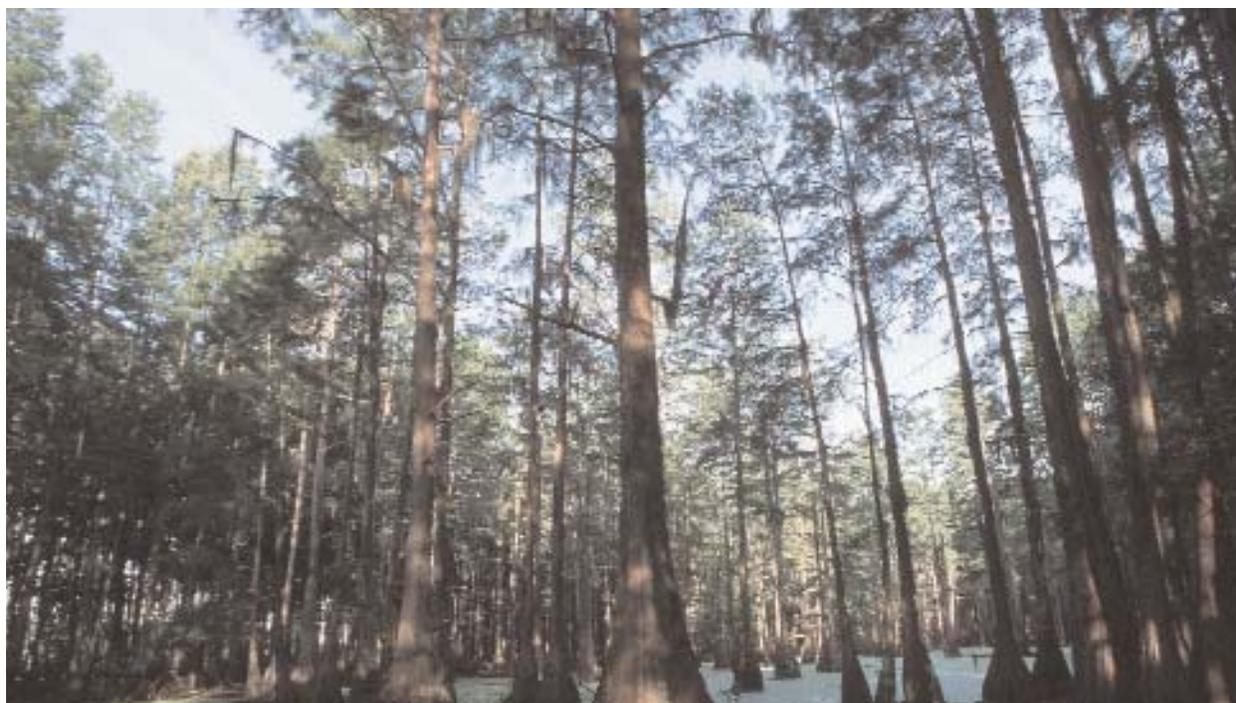
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## **Program Highlights**

*The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. NRCS provides landowners the technical and financial support to make restoration possible. The NRCS goal is to restore the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation and wildlife habitat protection.*



The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to restore, enhance, and protect wetlands. Landowners have the option of enrolling lands through permanent easements, 30-year easements, and restoration cost-share agreement.

# Wetland Reserve Program Pilot Program

## Wetland Reserve Auction Program Pilot in Brantley County

Georgia was one of six pilot states to pilot a new concept in selecting participants for the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). As the cost of conducting appraisals, program administration and technical assistance continues to rise, NRCS piloted a reverse auction that increased competition for enrolling land into the WRP while reducing NRCS program administrative cost.

The reverse auction worked by using a market analysis to establish a bid cap on a per acre basis. Participant then completed a self-ranking form that required them to answer specific questions about the acreage they are trying to restore.

The ranking score along with the per acre bid were submitted to NRCS to generate an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI).

The EBI placed participants in order by those that were providing the most environmental benefit for the dollar invested being at the top.

The EBI scores were then sent out to all participants to see were they ranked against the other offers.

They were given one opportunity to change their per acre bid which would improve their EBI and increase their chances of being selected for funding.

The Satilla River in Brantley County was selected as the pilot area and 8 offers were received.

The reverse auction lowered the average per acre bid from \$1700 to \$1200. This resulted in 7 sites being selected for funding a total of 2,000 will be protected by WRP easements.



# Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

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## **Program Highlights**

*The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) develops or improves wildlife habitat on privately owned land. Through WHIP, NRCS provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land.*

Through WHIP USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.



WHIP agreements between NRCS and the participant generally last from 5 to 10 years from the date the agreement is signed. WHIP has proven to be a highly effective and widely accepted program across the country. By targeting wildlife habitat projects on all lands and aquatic areas, WHIP provides assistance to conservation minded landowners who are to meet the specific eligibility requirements of other USDA conservation programs.

Georgia received \$335,000 in Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) funds this year. 59 contracts were approved in 33 counties. WHIP con-

tracts seek to improve one of four priority wildlife habitats: 1) Early Successional Plant Habitat; 2) Longleaf Pine Ecosystems; 3) Riparian Forest Buffers; and 4) Upland Hardwood Communities. Typical practices to accomplish this include longleaf pine planting, forest openings, field borders, and hedgerow planting.

Management of invasive species was targeted by 30 participants who will use \$44,000 in WHIP cost-share. Targeted invasive species include wild privet and Congo grass. Other practices included Longleaf Pine planting on 48 farms and Upland Wildlife Habitat on 46 sites.