

water. water. everywhere!

After years of drought, 23 counties in Georgia suffered an epic flood event in 2009. Look inside to learn about the NRCS and its Emergency Watershed Protection Program can be used to assist in recovery efforts.



Helping People Help the Land

2009 — 2010 Program Guide

Athens, Georgia

December 2009



75 Years of Helping People Help the Land

For 75 years we have provided leadership in a partnership effort to help America's private land owners and managers conserve their soil, water, air, land and other natural resources.

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was established by an act of the 74th Congress on April 27, 1935 when Congress passed Public Law 46 (Soil Conservation Act) which declared that soil erosion was a menace to the national welfare and authorized broad powers to the new agency to attack the problem.

Our name was changed October 20, 1994, as part of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

From the date of our establishment, NRCS employees have provided technical assistance based on sound science, suited to a customer's specific needs and we have provided financial assistance for many conservation practices and will continue to do so.

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Did you know?

NRCS has provided technical assistance to producers in 2009 to develop 2,275 conservation plans on 278,377 acres throughout the state. See feature stories at www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov. Click on news/success stories.



NRCS Organizational Structure



State Conservationist

Administrative Assistant to the
State Conservationist

Office Automation Clerk

AREA 1
Assistant State
Conservationist
for Field Operations

AREA 2
Assistant State
Conservationist
for Field Operations

AREA 3
Assistant State
Conservationist
for Field Operations

AREA 4
Assistant State
Conservationist
for Field Operations

State
Conservation
Engineer

State
Administrative
Officer

Assistant State
Conservationist
(Programs)

Assistant State
Conservationist
(Operations)

State Public
Affairs
Specialist

State
Soil Scientist

State
Resource
Conservationist

Key NRCS Staff in Georgia



State Public Affairs Specialist

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Georgia NRCS Administrative Areas

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Area 3 - Americus

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Area 4 - Waycross

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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 Fulton County Cobb County Gwinnett County Henry County Clayton County Pine Mountain Rockdale County DeKalb County Roosevelt Towaliga Lamar County	Cindy P. Askew, LaFayette Sheri E. Teems, Rome Cindy P. Askew, LaFayette Sam Sharpe, Carrollton Valerie Pickard, Marietta Valerie Pickard, Marietta Julius George, Lawrenceville Shaun Ford, McDonough Shaun Ford, McDonough Jack L. Fokes, Jr., Buena Vista Julius George, Lawrenceville Julius George, Lawrenceville Kevin Keel, Newnan Carmen Westerfield, Barnesville 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, Eastanollee Russell F. Biggers, Eastanollee Forrest W. Ferguson, Hartwell Rory Richardson, Washington Craig Bevan, Louisville Carol Boss, Commerce Dennis Brooks, Madison Craig Bevan, Louisville J. Cread Brown, Augusta J. Cread Brown, Augusta Dennis B. Brooks, Madison Jose' V. Pagan, Monroe
3	Ocmulgee River Flint River Lower Chattahoochee River Middle South Georgia	Calvin Essex, Perry Vontice Jackson, Albany Richard Hosmer, Dawson Mary Leidner, Tifton
4	Alapaha Altamaha Satilla River Coastal Ogeechee River Ohooppee River Central Georgia	Harold B. Simpson, Jr., Nashville Zack Railey, Douglas Rita Barrow, Brunswick James Austin, Richmond Hill William G. Thrift, Statesboro Sidney Lanier, Swainsboro Chuck McCranie, Eastman

Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations

Area 1	Griffin	Michael Watson	Area 2	Athens	Jack Lewis
Area 3	Americus	Natasha Brown	Area 4	Waycross	David Ferrell

District Conservationists & RC&D Coordinators



Last Name	First Name	Telephone
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Austin	James	912-459-2350
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Biggers	Russell	706-886-8223
Blackburn	Austin V.	912-564-2207
Boss	Carol	706-335-7145
Brooks	Dennis	706-342-1315
Brown	Cread	706-554-5183
Brown	Jerome	770-339-6071
Cabe	Doug	706-625-7044
Cleland	Steve	229-723-3825
Collins	Marcus	229-246-8282
Essex	Calvin	478-987-2280
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Agricultural Conservation Enrollees/Seniors

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Program Highlights

In 2009 Georgia Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funded \$88,000 for the Agricultural Conservation Enrollees/Seniors (ACES) program. This program is designed to meet employers' needs for competent workers by providing access to individuals age 55 and older, and to enhance lifelong employment opportunities of experienced workers through training, job placement, education, research and advocacy. ACES is a program administered by the USDA-NRCS from a bigger program run by the National Older Worker Career Center (NOWCC), a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Arlington, VA. Georgia currently has seven ACES employees across the state.



Dilbeck, holding a survey rod, is helping the District Conservationist survey a stream crossing.

Fred Dilbeck started work for the Soil Conservation Service in April 1967 as a Soil Conservation Aide in Homer. Dilbeck worked on watershed structures as a construction inspector/engineering aide mainly in North Georgia until 1979 when he moved to the State office as a civil engineering aide on the Soil and Water River Basin Study. He worked on the Banks Habersham County flood plain management study and then continued his work as soil conservation technician in Banks County. He then moved to Montezuma in South Georgia where he helped with the Conservation Reserve Program workload and served as a Beaverdam Creek watershed specialist in Macon County.

His last assignment was with the Carnesville/Hartwell Field office until he retired in January 2006.

Dilbeck decided to return to the NRCS as an ACES employee in the Hartwell office in April of 2008 because he missed the work and his colleagues.

His familiarity with all the programs and expertise in implementing NRCS conservation practices allowed him to jump right in and help with the heavy workload. He spends his time surveying and designing practices and field inspection of ongoing technical practices. His many years of experience are still being passed on to the present NRCS employees.



ACES enhances lifelong employment opportunities of experienced workers through training, job placement, education, research and advocacy.



ACES employee Clarence Trent standing next to a water trough in a heavy use area.

Clarence Trent started his career with NRCS in 1985 as an Earth Team volunteer in Newport, Rhode Island, as a surveying assistant. Trent went on to volunteer as an Earth team volunteer in Georgetown and York, SC., and Harrisonburg, VA.

When the NRCS started the pilot project for ACES, he applied, was accepted and was assigned to work in the Rockingham County Service Center in Harrisonburg, Virginia, covering three counties in the Shenandoah Valley River Basin.

He worked as a soil conservation technician aiding the District Conservationist with all programs, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) plan mapping for conservation plans, topography, and soils. He has conducted surveys, practice installation checks and completed “As Built” drawings for designed practices. He completed all Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations for the District Conservationist and distributed copies to the Farm Service Agency and the participants.

In September 2008, Clarence was transferred to the Watkinsville Service Center as an ACES employee – where he continues to implement Farm Bill Programs. Trent continues to conduct surveys/designs, GIS mapping, HEL determinations and assist with conservation planning and contracts.



Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

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Program Highlights

The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) is a voluntary conservation initiative that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement agricultural water enhancement activities on agricultural land for the purposes of conserving surface and ground water and improving water quality. As part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), AWEP operates through contracts with producers to plan and implement conservation practices in project areas established through partnership agreements.

Under AWEP, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) enters into partnership agreements with eligible entities that want to promote ground and surface water conservation or improve water quality on agricultural lands. The Secretary of Agriculture has delegated the authority for AWEP to the NRCS Chief.



During 2009, NRCS entered into partnership agreements with two entities: the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District (Flint District), and the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC).

Through the Flint District partnership, NRCS is working to improve irrigation efficiency. A total of 263 contracts valued at \$1.9 million were awarded to farmers for the purpose of improving irrigation efficiency on 24,000 acres.

NRCS' partnership with the GSWCC will help a number of organic producers, and those making the transition to organic production, install conservation practices to include water savings. Funding for this initiative is scheduled to begin in fiscal year 2010.



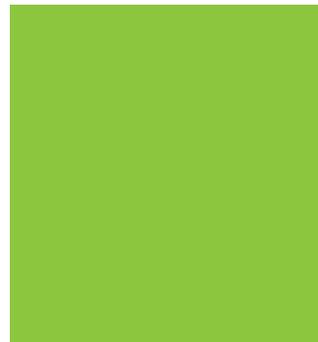
Conservation Security Program



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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 for all producers, regardless of size or type of farm operation.



The CSP came to a close during fiscal year 2008. Between 2004 and 2008, NRCS rewarded 261 participants \$22.8 million on 154,000 acres. Because contracts can last up to 10 years, this program will continue to offer payments through 2018. The 261 existing CSP contracts with Georgia producers continue to provide environmental benefits improving Georgia's soil, water and wildlife by implementing their CSP conservation plans.

Conservation tillage, cover crops, nutrient and pest management were the primary practices being utilized through the CSP. We still have farmers in this program.



Conservation Stewardship Program

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Program Highlights

Through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to eligible producers to conserve and enhance soil, water, air and related natural resources on their land. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest lands, agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe, and other private agricultural land (including cropped woodland, marshes, and agricultural land used for the production of livestock) on which resource concerns related to agricultural production could be addressed. Participation in the program is voluntary.

CSP encourages land stewards to improve their conservation performance by installing and adopting additional activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities on agricultural land and nonindustrial private forest land. The NRCS will make CSP available nationwide on a continuous application basis.



The CSP allows both agricultural producers and Non-Industrial Private Forest (NIPF) landowners to enroll. However, the two different land-user groups do not compete for funding. Georgia received an allocation of agricultural acres for applicants, and a separate allocation of forest land acres for NIPF applicants.





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Program Highlights

The purpose of the Conservation Technical Assistance is to provide technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools to help people conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. Conservation Technical Assistance provides the technical capability, including direct conservation planning, design, and implementation assistance, that helps people plan and apply conservation on the land. This assistance is provided to individuals, groups, and communities who make natural resource management decisions on private, tribal and other non-federal lands.



Laptop & printer mounted in a Mobile Field Office enables NRCS to apply technological advancements at the farm.

Conservation Technical Assistance provides the proven and consistent conservation technology and delivery infrastructure needed to achieve the benefits of a healthy and productive landscape, and has the following purposes:

- Reduce soil loss from erosion.
- Solve soil, water quality, water conservation, air quality, and agricultural waste management problems.
- Reduce potential damage caused by excess water and sedimentation or drought.
- Enhance the quality of aquatic and wildlife habitat.
- Improve the long term sustainability of all lands, including cropland, forestland, grazing lands, coastal lands, and developed and/or developing lands.
- Assist others in facilitating changes in land use as needed for natural resource protection and sustainability.

Conservation planning is a process for evaluating resource concerns on the landscape and developing alternatives to overcome the issues. It is the precursor for implementing conservation practices, with or without financial assistance. In fiscal year 2009, in Georgia, there were 2,275 conservation plans written on 278,377 acres.



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Landowners and others wanting to do business with the government can do it on-line! NRCS is one of three United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center agencies that offers online services.

To learn more, visit the web site at

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

The USDA has implemented a process for registering customers who choose to conduct electronic transactions with USDA agencies. Under this 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 identification; state driver's license; state issued identification card; U.S. passport or a military identification card.

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.

Please note that the USDA will only accept eAuthentication accounts from individuals. The USDA does not have the mechanism to issue accounts to businesses.



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

Emergency Watershed Protection Program



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Program Highlights

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



Rain runoff washed out material about three feet back from under Daugherty Gap Road in Walker County during the September 2009 flood.

In 2009, NRCS offered technical and financial assistance to 36 communities in response to flooding. In April 2009, major flooding hit south Georgia causing widespread damage. Early, Miller, Tift, and Worth Counties; as well as the Cities of Arlington, Nashville, and Valdosta requested over \$1.8 million for recovery measures associated with road-stream crossings along with other threats to life and property.

During September 2009, an epic flood hit the Atlanta Metropolitan Area, as well as other parts of Georgia. Over \$500 million in damages occurred in 23 counties. To date, 29 communities have requested NRCS technical and financial assistance in response to this disaster. The communities include: Cobb, Douglas, Fulton, and Gwinnett Counties; as well as the Cities of Atlanta, Austell, Berkley Lake, Duluth, John's Creek Milton, Mountain Park, Roswell, Sandy Springs, Stone Mountain, Trion, and Warner Robbins.

Local units of government have requested NRCS assistance under the agency's EWP Program to remove debris from rivers, streams, and creeks to protect life and property. They also requested help in stabilizing streambanks at bridges, culverts, other road crossings, and utilities to prevent further damage of public infrastructure.



Emergency Watershed Protection Program - Floodplain Easement Program

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Program Highlights

Section 382 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, Public Law 104-127, amended the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) to provide for the purchase of floodplain easements as an emergency measure. Since 1996, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has purchased floodplain easements on lands that qualify for EWP assistance. Floodplain easements restore, protect, maintain and enhance the functions of the floodplain; conserve natural values including fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flood water retention, ground water recharge and open space; reduce long-term federal disaster assistance; and safeguard lives and property from floods, drought and the products of erosion.

NRCS may purchase EWP easements on any floodplain lands that have been impaired within the last twelve months or that have a history of repeated flooding (i.e., flooded at least two times during the past 10 years).



Hay field in Gordon County that is within a flood plain.

During a two week sign-up period in April 2009, NRCS received 98 applications totaling \$107 million for the Floodplain Easement Program, third highest amount requested in the country. The popularity of this program nationally surpassed all expectations as landowners across the country requested over \$1.5 billion. Competition for this program is keen, so only 5 applicants in Georgia were funded to restore 563 acres back to its original floodplain condition for some \$3.5 million. Landowners accepted into the program will restore floodplains to natural vegetation through tree planting, and protect this area with use exclusion (fencing).

Environmental Quality Incentives Program



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.*

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In 2009, 1,129 farmers benefited from \$14.8 million in Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds. These producers enrolled over 96,000 acres in the program. Livestock producers received over 60 percent of the EQIP dollars, with cattle operators utilizing \$8.9 million in financial assistance to improve Georgia's water quality.

These livestock producers will implement grazing plans that include rotational grazing, alternative watering facilities, fencing and heavy use areas along with improve pasture plantings.

Water conservation continues to be a primary resource concern in South Georgia as producers sign up to retrofit 286 center pivot irrigation systems from high pressure to low pressure systems, while following an irrigation water management plan. This will reduce water usage by over 20 percent.



Heavy use area (HUA) built to keep cattle out of the mud and helps in keeping the cattle healthier. EQIP was used to build this HUA.



Greenview Farms Continue Conservation Efforts

Located in Wayne County outside of Screven is a family farm that has been operating since 1860. “Great-grandfather’s farm started out at 765 acres.

“The farm has 1,100 acres of timberland, 1,000 acres in row crops and 700 in pasture,” according to Jonny Harris, president of Greenview Farms, Inc.

Using the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), fences, heavy use areas, and watering facilities are being installed to help with the cattle and water quality. “We’re trying to fence those areas off at about two miles a year. We are trying to improve the water quality, the land and the high pressure areas; it’s a continuing process,” said Harris.

Harris likes the flexibility of EQIP. It allows him to do a conservation project through the NRCS or on his own. “It comes with a certain amount of flexibility on how you can manage things,” said Harris.

Harris has seen the benefits of EQIP and will continue to see the benefits in the future. “We were able to go to strip tillage farming. Every year we realize more and more benefits from that practice.”

Harris added, “the cross fencing, the management of the pastures, the rotation, keeping the cattle out of the streams and getting the fresh water, the herds health, the timberland -- they have assisted us in burns (prescribed burns).”



A cornfield where conservation tillage was used to improve the soil quality and keep moisture in the soil.

He went on to say, “It has been beneficial in so many ways that it would take a while to describe them all. There are benefits that we won’t realize right now or don’t realize we’ve got and there will be some more coming up in the years to come as long as we follow these practices.”

Greenview Farms is so embedded with conservation that it won the Governor’s Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Award in 2007. This year it’s a finalist in the 2009 National Cattlemen Association Environmental Stewardship Award to be announced in February 2010.

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 ranchland 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 land-owners. 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 2009, NRCS worked with partners in Oconee and Carroll County to close on two easements for over 300 acres. These easements utilized funding from FRPP along with a match from the Georgia Land Conservation Program. Since this program began in 2002, NRCS, through various partnerships, has protected over 2,900 acres in permanent easements at a value of over \$9 million. NRCS has contributed \$4.2 million for this purpose during this period.



Cattle grazing in one of the pastures on Wiley Farm. Homestead is in the background.

Landowner Adds His Land to The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

Dale Wiley, a third generation farmer and the owner and operator of Wiley Farm, placed 50 acres of his land into FRPP.

The farm is located outside of the community of Jersey in southern Walton County. The 175-acre farm is primarily a cattle and hay production farm.

“If other farmers are interested in doing the same thing I have done just remember, it’s not about making a lot of money or getting public recognition. It’s a long and difficult process. But, if you really love your land and farm, it’s the best feeling in the world when it’s complete. I told my wife when this was complete I could go to my grave with a smile on my face! There is one lesson I have learned in my life - friends, family, neighbors and people will let you down but, if you show respect and take care of your farm or land, it will never fail you!” said Wiley.



Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

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Program Highlights

NRCS in cooperation with 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 financial assistance demonstration projects, area- and state-wide conferences, development and distribution of grazing management resources, and funding of innovative research and land management projects. Several years ago, the University of Georgia Extension estimated the seasonal forage production area on private land in the state at 4.3 million acres, with an annual value of approximately \$254 million, making forages a major economic crop for Georgia.



In 2009, grassland conservationists stationed in Carrollton and Washington assisted the NRCS Field Office personnel and landowners throughout the state in developing conservation grazing plans which helped livestock producers determine proper stocking rates, seasonal forage availability, and approaches for reducing dependence on stored forage.

In addition, NRCS grazing specialists participated in field days and county farmer meetings where they had the opportunity to educate stakeholders concerning soil, forage, and livestock management that improves both resource conditions and the farm bottom-line.



Beef cattle grazing native warm season grasses.

This year, GGLCC embarked on a new project with the objective of educating livestock producers about adjustments they can make to their farms that could improve efficiency and reduce costs. Central to the project is the establishment of model farms to be used for field days and workshops. Through minor changes to the system on the model farms, neighbors will be able to show neighbors how they not only increase the number of days they can graze, but also create the potential for environmental benefits.

Funds made available to NRCS through Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) will be used on the model farms to cost-share with owners for making the improvements.

The Coastal Plain Grazing System Demonstration Project entered its second year at the Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center in Americus.

A herd of 22–25 beef cows have been residents of the system since March 2008.

Activities this past year included stockpiling a bermudagrass and a tall fescue pasture, dividing paddocks to increase stocking density and improve utilization and planting winter annuals that are somewhat novel for the Coastal Plain – forage turnips and chicory.

A successful producer-targeted field day that highlighted the past year's results was held in June.



Grasslands Reserve Program

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Program Highlights

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary conservation program that emphasizes support for working grazing operations, enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity and protection of grassland under threat of conversion to other uses.

Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding, subject to certain restrictions during nesting seasons of bird species that are in significant decline or are protected under Federal or State law. A grazing management plan is required for participants.



GRP allows for conservation easements and for rental contracts. In 2009, 46 acres in Oconee County were placed into a permanent easement for \$237,000. On the rental contract side, NRCS entered into 17 contracts for 2,500 acres across six counties in north Georgia.



Healthy Forest Reserve Program



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Program Highlights

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) is a voluntary program established for the purpose of restoring and enhancing forest ecosystems to: 1) promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species, 2) improve biodiversity; and 3) enhance carbon sequestration. Program implementation has been delegated to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.



Sample of a prescribed burn. A forester starts a fireline during a prescribed burn at the Rum Creek Wildlife Reserve in Morgan County.



In 2009, HFRP was implemented in the 26-county fall line of the Sand Hill area of Georgia. We received 33 applications for over 11,000 acres.

Ranking was completed on all applications and appraisals done on the top 6 applications with funding for approximately 1,000 acres.

The proposed restoration will be longleaf pine planting, controlling hardwoods in existing longleaf pine stands and prescribe burning.



National Resources Inventory

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Program Highlights

The National Resources Inventory (NRI) is a statistical survey of land use and resource condition on nonfederal lands in the United States. It is designed to be consistent over the whole nation and over time.

NRI is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) tool to provide Congress and the Nation with natural resources information - especially concerning the nation's farmland. Since the early 1980's, resource data has been gathered on a random sample of 160-acre land units.

Three points within those units are studied more intensively. As of 2005, this work is divided between three national Remote Sensing Laboratories and local field offices. Field office personnel in Georgia surveyed 2,099 of these points on two separate occasions in 2009. Crews from Grazing Lands and Soils also participated in a pilot project of the NRI On-Site Grazing Lands Study - doing on-site visits and intensive vegetative characterizations.

Resource information available in NRI includes:

Crop year 1997 - Land Use in broad categories of Cropland, Pastureland, Forestland, Urban Land, Transportation, Federal Land, and Permanent Water. In addition to the broad categories, land use can be further subdivided into approximately 200 finer categories of crop types, forest types and other types of land use. Resource condition is mainly erosion estimates. In current NRI work, a transition from the Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE) to the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE II) is a major emphasis. Wetland loss and gain is another of NRI's data points.

Crop year 2003 - Broad Land Use, Erosion and Wetlands on the national level (no sub-state estimates available). This data showed 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.

Conservation Effects Assessment Program (CEAP) - this initiative to correlate NRI data with Agricultural Research Service (ARS) study watersheds began with the 2002 Farm Bill.



Several very interesting publications have been released through this program. Releases in 2009 are:

- Wetlands: Assessing Wetland Restoration and Creation Practices Implemented under U.S. Department of Agriculture Conservation Programs in the Southeastern Coastal Plain, October 31, 2009 (PDF; 0.1 MB)
- Wildlife: National Evaluation of Wildlife Benefits of CRP practice CP33 (Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds) October 2009 (PDF; 3.1 MB)
- Wildlife: Analysis of Missouri Wetlands Reserve Program Easement Monitoring Data. May 2009 (PDF; 2.5 MB)
- Wildlife: Conservation Reserve Program Bird Monitoring and Evaluation Plan 2007 Annual Report, May 2009 (PDF; 3.1 MB)
- Wetlands: CEAP Wetlands Assessment in California's Central Valley: Progress Report, March 31, 2009 (PDF; 0.4 MB)
- Wildlife: The CRP Enhances Landscape-level Grassland Bird Species Richness, CEAP Conservation Insight, January 2009 (PDF; 0.2 MB)
- Overview: Enhancing conservation on agricultural landscapes: A new direction for the Conservation Effects Assessment Project, Journal of Soil and Water Conservation, 63:6, pp. 198A-203A. November 2008 (PDF; 0.6 MB)
- Overview: The first five years of the Conservation Effects Assessment Project, Journal of Soil and Water Conservation, 63:6, pp. 185A-197A. November 2008 (PDF; 1.9 MB)
- Watersheds: CEAP Watershed Studies are highlighted in CEAP Special Issue of the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation, November 2008
- Wetlands: Background summaries for the Wetlands Component Collaborative Studies, CEAP Backgrounders, November 2008

A complete library of CEAP publications since 2002 and all the data listed here can be found at the NRI website: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/>



Plant Materials Program

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Program Highlights

The Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center (PMC) is a branch of the USDA-NRCS. 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. Its 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.



Malcome Kirkland, agronomist with the PMC in Americus and Lee Davis, Dooley County farmer, discuss using native warm season grasses in cattle rotation systems.

The PMC worked with 11 different studies and eight Field Plantings in Alabama and Georgia in the past year. Some of the highlights are as follows;

- Increasing a promising line of big bluestem for possible future use as forage and or biofuel.
- A cattle rotation study was continued with Dennis Chessman, grazing specialist, NRCS Athens, to demonstrate a year round cattle grazing system and silvopasture establishment.
- Assisted Dr. Brad Morris PhD in Agronomy, legumes researcher with USDA-Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Griffin, in studying legumes for future pharmaceutical use.
- A Bobwhite restoration study was conducted between Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the NRCS Biologists in Alabama and Georgia on ten acres of land at the PMC. Wildlife biologists have evaluated the study for wildlife use and benefit.



A field of AU Sunup Crimson Clover at the PMC.

- The PMC is working on a release with South Carolina called Penn Center switchgrass for use along South Carolina coastal area between high marsh and maritime forest. Seeds from sweetgrass population on Sapelo Island, GA was collected and planted at the PMC to help support basket making industry along coast.
- Four field days were hosted covering Conservation Practice-36, wildlife, prescribed burn and grazing systems training for NRCS landowners and others.
- PMC staff participated in ecological site descriptions in Georgia flatwoods with Regional team to describe the understory and overstory of longleaf pine communities.
- PMC had a total of 20 presentations and or training events, produced 11 technical documents, and a new plant release

called Au Sunup crimson clover with Auburn University.

- A new study with Tropic Sun Hemp was conducted to determine dry matter production for green manure and nitrogen production in crop lands.
- The PMC is working on nature trail plant identification for Hawkinsville, GA with University of Georgia, Pine Country Resource Conservation and Development Council and Pulaski County, GA.



Prescribed burn in native warm season grass



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Program Highlights

Over 40 years ago, Congress established a unique program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture that empowered rural people to help themselves. The USDA focus was to assist local people by providing tools and technical support to stabilize and grow their own communities, while protecting and developing natural resources. To carry out the Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) concept, diverse groups of local volunteers (The RC&D Council) are brought together in a unique partnership to find solutions to their problems. Local people are best able to determine local needs, and create local solutions for their Community. The focus on the local direction and control has made RC&D one of the most successful rural development programs of the Federal Government.

During 2009, RC&D Councils created 35 businesses for the state of Georgia. They completed 11 watershed or area-wide plans, totaling over 47,000 acres. It is also estimated that RC&D Councils implemented 265 projects totaling over \$14 million in assistance during the year.

This year, Georgia's 11 RC&D Councils are implementing Area Plans for their respective jurisdictions. Area Plans are guideposts to direct Council activities. To complete an Area Plan, each Council solicited public input about resource and economic needs from individuals and organizations within their Council Area.

Over 1,200 individuals supported the process by offering suggestions on how the

quality of life can be improved within their respective area. As a result, Georgia's eleven RC&D Councils have identified over 600 new projects to pursue between 2008 and 2013. Examples of projects Councils will be pursuing include, but are not limited to:

- Water Quality Improvement Projects
- Wildlife Enhancement Projects
- Energy Conservation Projects
- Economic Development Projects
- Water Supply Projects
- Conservation Education Assistance
- History and Tourism Projects, and
- Philanthropic Assistance

The diversity of RC&D is unmatched by any other organization. As 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations, RC&D Councils enjoy the support of a full-time federal employee, along with additional program resources from the federal government. At the same time, RC&D Councils enjoy flexibility to provide local assistance in many ways beyond the ability of all units of government.



RC&D Councils in Georgia

Central Savannah River

501 N. Main St., Wrens,
Georgia 30833
(706) 706 547-4045
Fax: (706) 547-7606

Chestatee-Chattahoochee

170 Scoggins Drive, Demorest,
Georgia 30535
(706) 894-1591
Fax: (706) 894-1597

Coastal Georgia

185 Richard Davis Dr., Ste 204
Richmond Hill, GA 31324
(912) 459-2070
Fax: (912) 459-2071

Golden Triangle

822-R Jesse Johnson Street Blakely, Georgia
39823
(229) 723-3841
Fax: (229) 723-3842
www.enhancinggeorgia.org

Limestone Valley

125 Red Bud Road, N.E. Suite 7
Calhoun, Georgia 30701
(706) 625-7044
Fax: (706) 625-9943

Oconee River

1291 Greensboro Highway
Watkinsville, Georgia 30677
(706) 769-7922
Fax: (706) 769-3184

Pine Country

105 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
Soperton, Georgia 30457
(912) 529-6652
Fax: (912) 529-6000

Rolling Hills RC&D Council, Inc.

512 Main Street
Cedartown, GA 30125
(770) 749-0444
Fax: (770) 749-9444
www.rollinghillsrcd.org

Seven Rivers

239 N.E. Park Avenue, Suite E
Baxley, Georgia 31513
(912) 367-7679
Fax: (912) 367-1184

Two Rivers

100 Ridley Avenue
LaGrange, Georgia 30240
(706) 885-0101
Fax: (706) 885-0103
www.tworiversrcd.org

Upper Ocmulgee River

750 S. Perry Street, Suite 212
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30045
(770) 339-6071
(678) 442-1329



Georgia's 11 Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils Achieves The Circle of Diamonds Designation

All of Georgia's 11 Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils achieved the 2009 Circle of Diamonds Designation from the National Resource Conservation and Development Council Board of Directors.

This announcement was made during the National Association of RC&D Councils national conference this past June in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

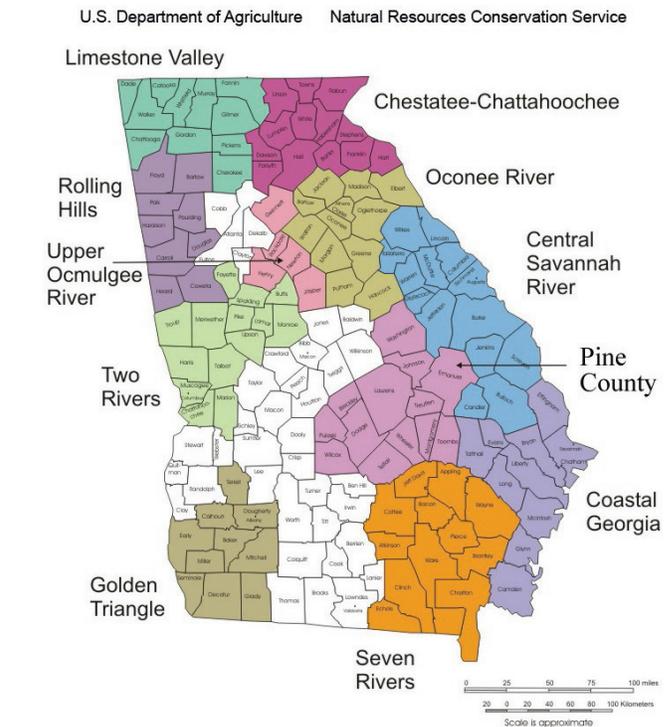
"This exemplary designation shows the level of professionalism and hard work that the RC&D Councils in Georgia have exhibited. I again commend them for their commitment to the farmers and landowners in their communities and across this state," said Georgia's State Conservationist, James E. Tillman, Sr.

RC&D Councils play an important role in the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources.

They work to improve the general level of economic activity and to enhance the environment and standard of living in the local communities.

They provide a system of rural development to encourage the best use of our natural resources and improve the quality of life.

"The members in the Circle of Diamonds reflect work provided by the RC&D program to



the citizens of Georgia. The fine professionals and volunteers involved in the RC&D program have benefited farmers, landowners, and communities, both urban and rural.

This reflects the excellent working relations we have with our partners and the State Office of the NRCS. My sincere congratulations to all involved," said Jeanette Jamieson, president of the Georgia RC&D Council.

The Circle of Diamonds program is designed to honor RC&D Councils by highlighting their exemplary actions in their own community, and to give recognition to those councils for the good work they do in their local communities.

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Program Highlights

The Soil Survey Program is authorized under law and regulation, and guided by executive order and secretary's memoranda. The Agriculture Appropriation Act of 1896 established the soil survey, and subsequent laws (1903, 1928, and 1935) clarified the purpose. In 1966, Congress expanded the scope and further clarified the intent of the Soil Survey Program in Public Law 89 560, known as the Soil Survey for Resource Planning and Development Act. This law, now codified under the Public Health and Welfare 42 USC, provides detailed expectations for the soil survey program and is the principal basis for the soil survey mission.



The authorities define the mission of the Soil Survey Program. Taken together, the authorities direct the Secretary of Agriculture to:

- 1. make an inventory of the soil resources of the United States;*
- 2. keep the soil survey relevant to ever-changing needs;*
- 3. interpret the information and make it available in a useful form; and*
- 4. promote the soil survey and provide technical assistance in its use for a wide range of community planning and resource development issues related to non-farm and farm uses.*

The soil survey program of the United States is a cooperative effort conducted by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other Federal agencies in collaboration with states and other entities. Leadership for the Federal part of the National Cooperative Soil Survey is delegated to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service by the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment (7 CFR 2.61).



The NRCS will complete the initial inventory of all the soils in Georgia in 2011. After the initial inventory is completed, the Georgia Cooperative Soil Survey will begin to focus toward the three remaining core mission functions mentioned above.

Nationally, efforts have already begun within the Soil Survey Division to redirect its focus toward continually improving soil survey information to meet ever-changing needs for new data and analysis, delivering soil survey analysis and data in more useful forms to a more diverse clientele, promoting soil survey, and providing technical assistance in its use. The focus will be to deliver the soil survey on a Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) basis.

To achieve this mission, the NRCS has begun to restructure the soil survey program that focuses on initial mapping to a program that will focus on updating and maintenance of the soil inventory gathered over the past five decades.



In FY 2009, the Georgia Cooperative soil survey published new or updated soil surveys for Crawford and Taylor Counties; completed field work in Paulding County and posted the SSURGO (Soil Survey Geographic Database) for Webster County and Stewart County Soil Surveys.

All digitized soil surveys are available to the public through the web soil survey, an interactive, web-based delivery system.

Soil survey reports and soil data downloads are available at <http://www.soildatamart.nrcs.usda.gov/>.

More information can be found at

<http://www.soils.usda.gov/>.



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Program Highlights

The Technical Service Provider (TSP) 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.



In fiscal year 2009, NRCS obligated \$320,400 in the TSP program throughout Georgia. These funds were disbursed to 17 counties for use in the Agricultural Conservation Enrollees/Seniors (ACES) program, National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTFF) agreement, and the Flint River SWCD for implementation of Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) contracts. Through these obligated funds, hundreds of conservation practices have been installed while providing field offices a significant saving of time to address workload needs.

This program assisted in the installation of practices such as cover crop, critical area planting, fence, hedgerow planting, irrigation water management, nutrient management, pasture and hayland planting, prescribe grazing, residue management, riparian forest buffer, heavy use area, well, pipeline, tank and trough and stream crossing.

Individuals may apply to NRCS to become a Technical Service Provider. Additional information about this process and credential requirements may be found online at <http://techreg.usda.gov/>.

The TSP program has played a significant role in Georgia by providing an additional avenue for NRCS to help people help the land.

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Program Highlights

The Watershed Program helps sponsoring organizations in the development of a plan on watersheds 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.



A lake formed by a watershed dam



In 2009, NRCS in Georgia provided technical assistance to nine communities with technical watershed planning.

Community needs for water supply projects have become the most common resource concern generating request for assistance from NRCS.

Other community scale resource concerns addressed this year include water quality degradation, agricultural irrigation deficiencies, and excessive erosion.

Five watershed, or area-wide, plans were processed during the year for local communities including Banks County, Dawson County, Hancock County, Oglethorpe County, and Paulding County for water supply.



Watershed Rehabilitation Program



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Program Highlights

The Watershed Program helps sponsoring organizations in the development of a plan on watersheds 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.

Since 1953, 357 project dams have been built in Georgia. Currently, 189 of these are “High Hazard,” 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 legislation.

NRCS project dams annually provide \$21 million of benefits to local communities by providing flood protection, water based recreation, municipal water supply, and other water uses. Property values for land associated with these floodwater retarding structures have also increased. Homes and property adjacent to one of these reservoirs averages 25% higher than home and property without such amenities.

One of the major issues involved with aging dams is the safety and health of an estimated 17,000 people downstream from the



Rehabilitation of the Marbury Creek -22 dam will prevent flooding.

dams. Many dams were originally built in rural areas to protect agricultural lands; but homes, business, and roads have now been built downstream thereby increasing the impacts if they were to fail. Congress passed legislation in 2000 that authorized NRCS to provide financial and technical assistance for rehabilitation of dams that were originally constructed under NRCS water resource programs.

Since 2002, NRCS-Georgia has secured \$11 million under this program to upgrade six watershed dams. Additionally, 44 dams have been, or are being, analyzed to determine the extent of downstream hazards. Emergency Action Plans are being developed on all of these dams to help protect Georgia residents living below these structures.



Watershed Rehabilitation Program

continued

NRCS Assisted Dams

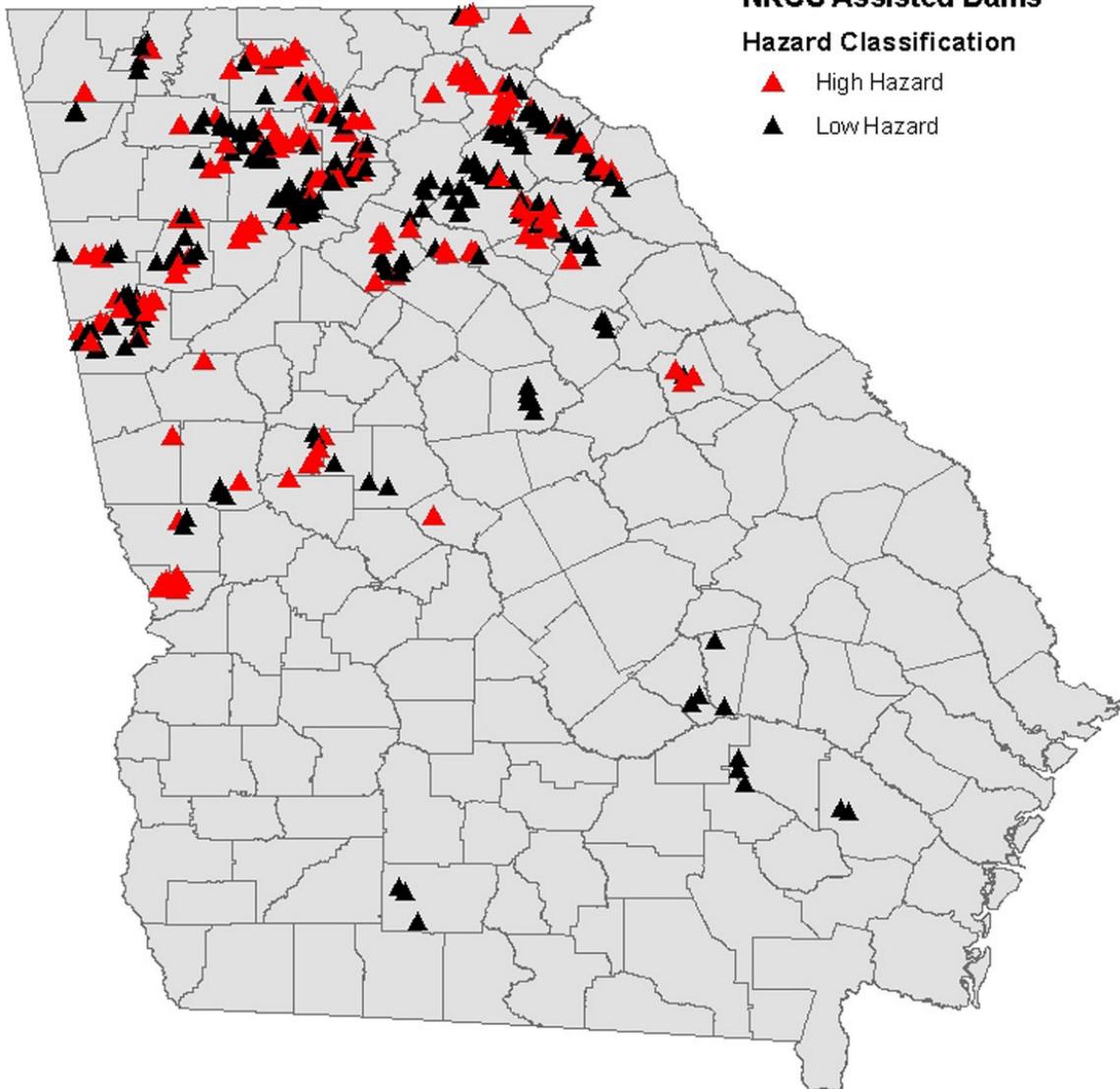


Legend

NRCS Assisted Dams

Hazard Classification

-  High Hazard
-  Low Hazard



Wetland Reserve Program



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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.

In 2009, 11 new easements equalling 2,248 acres were enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program.

An additional 375 acres were restored in existing WRP easements.

Restoration included tree planting, cattle exclusion and the construction of ditch plugs that restores the hydrology in wetlands that were drained years ago.



Grady pond in Clay County was drained years ago. Through WRP, the landowner plugged the ditch and created the wetland.



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.

Georgia received \$1.1 million in Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) funds this year. With this funding, 123 contracts were approved in 59 counties covering over 7,700 acres.

Tree and Shrub plantings, prescribed burning and early successional habitat management continue to be the primary practices being used to improve Georgia's wildlife on private lands.

