

Sixth Edition
2020



GEORGIA LANDOWNER'S GUIDE TO CONSERVATION RESOURCES

Using this Guide

Landowners should be aware that this guide is not inclusive of all programs available to conserve land. This booklet presents only fundamental aspects of select programs (ones that benefit forestry and wildlife) in a format that allows landowners to easily compare them. Many of these programs are subject to funding and legislative changes. For the most up-to-date information, we encourage landowners to contact the organization that manages the program or check <https://georgiawildlife.com/landowners>.

For simplicity, conservation programs in this guide are divided into three main sections:

- 1. Technical Assistance: Developing a Plan for Managing Your Land:** This section highlights programs that focus on developing conservation management plans to help landowners meet their objectives. These programs can include an informal or formal consultation with a biologist, forester or soil conservationist who can provide the latest information and technology for managing land.
- 2. Financial Assistance for Management Practices:** A list of select programs in Georgia that offer financial assistance to landowners for implementing certain management practices are presented in this section. These programs vary in incentive amount and type and eligible practices, but most require a commitment by the landowner to continue the practice for a period of time.
- 3. Land Conservation Incentives:** In this section, landowners are presented with some of the incentives available for voluntarily protecting their land. Incentives are typically in the form of tax relief.

Note: Most of the landowner assistance programs described in this booklet change regularly. For updates to a printed version, please see <https://georgiawildlife.com/landowners>.



Acknowledgements

For more information and resources from the Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division:

<http://georgiawildlife.com>

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<http://georgiawildlife.com/landowners>

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Table of Contents

Technical Assistance: Developing a Plan for Managing Your Land ... 5

Private Lands Program (PLP).....	5
Bobwhite Quail Initiative (BQI).....	6
Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)	7
Urban Wildlife Program	8
Forest Stewardship Program (FSP).....	8
Small Landowner Program.....	8
Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA).....	9
Quail Forever (QF)	9
Private Lands Stewardship Program.....	10
Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)	10
Forest*A*Syst Program.....	10
The Orianne Society	11
Private Landowner Associations.....	11

Financial Assistance for Management Practices..... 12

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).....	12
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	13
Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)	14
Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program (VPA HIP)	15
Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW)	16
Wildlife Incentives for Nongame and Game Species (Project Wings)	17
Section 319(h) Grant Program.....	18
Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) Cost Share Program.....	19
Invasive Plant Control Cost Share Program (IPCP).....	20
Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP).....	21

Land Conservation Incentives 22

Conservation Use Valuation Assessment (CUVA)	22
Forest Land Protection Act (FLPA)	23
Conservation Easements	24
Tax Incentives for Land Conservation	25
Working with Land Trusts.....	26
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	27

Technical Assistance: Developing a Plan for Managing Your Land

Private Lands Program (PLP)



The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Private Lands Program (PLP) assists private landowners who are interested in integrating wildlife within their land management objectives. Biologists provide free technical assistance to all Georgia landowners for game and non-game species and habitat objectives in order to promote healthy ecosystems throughout the state. Through science-based conservation planning, landowners can more effectively achieve their wildlife and natural resource goals and make sure these resources are in good condition for Georgia's future generations. Biologists are available to offer free general technical and on-site consultations to provide management recommendations and guidance on financial assistance programs.

Financial Assistance Program Guidance

PLP biologists stay up to date on current financial assistance programs and can help to guide landowners through the requirements and expectations of specific programs. Selecting the appropriate program is dependent on each landowner's management objectives and can be affected by several environmental factors. Several cost-share opportunities for forest and wildlife habitat conservation are provided through various agencies including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and others.

NRCS currently offers cost-share opportunities for financial assistance for land management practices that benefit the gopher tortoise, northern bobwhite, golden-winged warbler, and aquatic species specific to the Conasauga River in Georgia. Contact a PLP biologist to find out about programs available for wildlife habitat management in your area.

Find a Private Lands Biologist

GA DNR Private Lands Program biologists are available to provide practical and effective recommendations that restore and maintain wildlife habitats. Private Lands biologists are available to all Georgia landowners regardless of whether they are seeking financial assistance opportunities and can assist with game and non-game species management planning. Biologists are located throughout the state within local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices and can be contacted by calling the Private Lands Program office.

How to Get Started

If wildlife management is an important objective for you, contact a wildlife biologist at 229-420-1183. For more information on the GA DNR Private Lands Program and financial assistance options, please visit <https://georgiawildlife.com/privatelandsprogram>.



Left to right: Allison Colter (Wildlife Biologist 2, Bobwhite Quail Initiative), Joe Butler (Landowner), Dallas Ingram (State Quail Coordinator, Bobwhite Quail Initiative)

Bobwhite Quail Initiative (BQI)

The Bobwhite Quail Initiative (BQI) provides technical assistance for landowners who are interested in increasing quail populations through habitat restoration. BQI is part of the Private Lands Program of DNR's Wildlife Resources Division.

The bobwhite quail is the official state game bird of Georgia, yet Georgia's quail population has declined by approximately 90 percent since the mid-1960s, primarily due to loss of quality early succession habitat through changing farming practices, industrial forestry and urban/suburban sprawl. Remaining quail populations reside in isolated "islands" of habitat, making them vulnerable to collapse from disease, predation or bad weather. If a local population dies out, this isolation makes it unlikely wild quail will repopulate that area.

DNR established BQI in 1999 to reverse this trend by helping landowners improve habitat on their working farms and forests. Restoring this habitat type within row crop agriculture and forest landscapes also benefits many songbirds, pollinators, and other wildlife, improves water quality, reduces soil erosion and can economically enhance local communities by stimulating quail hunting and wildlife viewing. BQI focuses on the counties of the Upper Coastal Plain, but can provide assistance elsewhere in Georgia. Working with individual landowners, BQI seeks to create a network of private landowners voluntarily improving habitat on individual properties, connecting and expanding quality living space for quail across the landscape of Georgia.

Any private non-industrial landowner is eligible for a BQI management plan. Plans include detailed management recommendations based on the needs of the local habitat as well as the landowner's goals. In addition to technical assistance regarding habitat improvement, wildlife biologists will provide information and guidance to landowners on potential financial assistance through state, federal, and other cost share and incentives programs. BQI and Private Lands Program biologists are stationed in Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) offices to provide technical assistance for NRCS programs.

BQI is supported solely through sales and renewals of "Support Wildlife" license plate (the quail, deer and turkey designs), grants, and direct donations.

For more information on bobwhite quail and how to restore them, visit <https://georgiawildlife.com/bobwhite-quail>.

To get in touch with a professional wildlife biologist with the BQI program, call 229-420-1183.



BOBWHITE QUAIL INITIATIVE



Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)



DMAPs are used by most southeastern states to address site-specific deer management issues with science-based flexibility on private lands. DMAPs offer the ability to resolve deer management issues at the individual property level through data collection and analysis while maintaining simplified and less complex hunting regulations across a much larger geographic area that are responsive to hunter desires (e.g., reduced doe bag limit). This strategy protects more casually managed properties from over-harvest, while affording science-based flexibility for more intensively managed properties.

Benefits to Landowner

Management Level 1 cooperators receive general harvest and habitat recommendations along with technical guidance and data analysis. Management Level 2 cooperators receive a data collection package, personalized access to a biologist assigned to the property, aging of each deer killed, data analysis and site-specific harvest recommendations, basic boundary map with landcover, an annual visit by the assigned biologist, general habitat recommendations, and when biologically justified, antlerless harvest flexibility within the maximum statewide bag limit. Management Level 3 cooperators receive all Level 2 services, along with assistance facilitating and coordinating the formation of cooperatives; assistance with live aging bucks; written wildlife management plan; map with boundary, landcover, food plots, and forest stand delineation; and when biologically justified, harvest flexibility relating to buck-only days and antler restrictions. Management Level 4 cooperators receive all Level 2 and 3 services plus a detailed habitat and wildlife management plan, detailed maps, at least 2 site visits annually by the assigned biologist, and site-specific and criteria-specific buck harvest flexibility within the maximum statewide bag limit.

Eligibility, Terms and Costs

No acreage minimum for Level 1. There is a 250-acre minimum for Level 2, a 500-acre minimum for Level 3 and a 1,500-acre minimum for Level 4. Cooperatives of multiple adjacent lands can be used to meet acreage minimums. Eligible properties include public, private and leased. Participants may be individuals or group of individuals. Cooperators are responsible for collecting harvest data and placing cameras for deer surveys. Contracts are available beginning April 1 and ending March 31. All fees are assessed annually. There are no fees for Level 1. Start-up fees for Level 2 are \$200 with a \$100 annual administrative fee for subsequent years enrolled. Start-up fees for Level 3 are \$400 with a \$200 annual administrative fee. Level 4 start-up fees are \$1,000 with a \$500 annual administrative fee.

For More Information

Visit <https://georgiawildlife.com/dmap> or call 706-557-3350.



Urban Wildlife Program

The Wildlife Resources Division's Urban Wildlife Program (UWP) was created to help reduce human-wildlife conflict in the metro Atlanta area. The UWP coverage area consists of Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties. This Program works towards reducing and resolving human-wildlife conflict through proactive outreach and education efforts, situation-specific technical assistance to residents over the phone, and onsite response to emergencies, such as sick or injured wildlife. As more and more people move to suburban and urban environments, it will be important to reach these citizens and foster an appreciation of wildlife in these areas. Since September 2019, the UWP has provided technical assistance to over 600 residents on the phone, about half of those calls required a field response and resulted in a site visit. Experiencing human-wildlife conflict in the Atlanta area? Call 1-800-366-2661 and speak to someone about the best way to resolve the conflict.



For more information on living with wildlife: <https://GeorgiaWildlife.com/Living-With-Wildlife>

Program contact: Program Manager Kaitlin Goode, kaitlin.goode@dnr.ga.gov.

Forest Stewardship Program (FSP)

The Georgia Forestry Commission's Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) helps private landowners manage their natural resources with a written management plan that integrates and focuses their objectives of sustaining quality native timber, wildlife populations, soil and water resources, aesthetics, and recreation. Plans prescribe select conservation practices for specific areas of land. A team of professional natural resource managers with expertise in soil/water conservation, forestry and wildlife biology will tour a landowner's property with them at no charge to check forest health, discuss the landowner's objectives, plan options for the next 10 years, explain available conservation incentive programs, and point out specific areas that need attention. After follow-up fieldwork is completed, the landowner will receive a tailored plan. To apply, visit , select "Forest Management," then "Forest Stewardship." If wildlife is a primary objective, the landowner can also inquire by calling a Wildlife Resources Division professional wildlife biologist at 229-420-1183.



Small Landowner Program

The Georgia Forestry Commission's Small Landowner Program is designed to provide educational guidance and step-by-step technical support to landowners holding under 10 acres who wish to manage their timberland for sustainable timber, wildlife, soil and water resource conservation, aesthetics, and recreation. Once landowners log on to the "Small Landowner Portal," they are guided in the development of a self-directed forest management plan based upon management goals that they choose. These plans are detailed to the needs of landowner with activities and prescriptions developed by foresters and wildlife professionals to help them reach their sustainable management objectives. The results are printable for inclusion in their self-determined management plan. There is no cost, no term limit, and no cost share incentives associated with this program.



See: <http://www.gatrees.org/community-forests/management/plan-resources/>

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)



The purpose of the Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA), administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is to assist landowners in planning and implementing conservation systems that reduce erosion and upstream flooding, improve and conserve wetlands, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, and improve air quality, pasture and range condition, soil and water quality, and woodlands. NRCS assistance is provided through conservation districts to landowners who want to apply conservation practices. NRCS district conservationists can also provide technical assistance to landowners enrolled in Farm Bill programs. A customized conservation plan can be written that identifies the appropriate conservation practices most applicable to a landowner's property. Contact a local NRCS office for more information on conservation plans. You can find contact information for the office serving your county at <https://www.farmers.gov>.

Quail Forever (QF)

Farm Bill Biologists

Quail Forever (QF) is dedicated to the conservation of quail, pheasants, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public awareness, education, and land management policies and programs. With funding from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Quail Forever Chapters, and other conservation partners, QF biologists work to implement the conservation provisions of the Federal Farm Bill and other related wildlife conservation programs, such as the Bobwhite Quail Initiative.

In addition to assisting with Farm Bill implementation, QF biologists advocate for good stewardship of the land through outreach and education, hosting field days, seminars, and workshops for landowners, natural resources agencies, conservation organizations, and local community members. Many conservation practices that benefit wildlife are compatible with working lands, which include agriculture, forestry, and grazing. As partner biologists working closely with federal and state governmental agencies on the implementation of USDA conservation programs, QF biologists also serve as a liaison between program applicants and agencies, assisting with conservation planning and the application process.

QF biologists also work with local QF chapters to help put more habitat on public lands for the enjoyment of local communities. Visit www.quailforever.org to locate your local biologist for assistance or to connect with your local QF chapter. You may also contact the Bobwhite Quail Initiative office at 229-420-1183 to be put in contact with your nearest QF biologist.

Precision Agriculture and Conservation Specialist

The role of the QF Precision Agriculture and Conservation Specialist is to evaluate crop profitability relative to soil type and health, water usage and overall input costs helping achieve sustainability goals. Sustainability goals in general often include multi-focus mechanisms including Economic, Ecological, Educational and Social/Cultural.

QF helps producers focus on Return on Investments (ROI) in a sub-field view using Precision Agriculture data layering technology. When there are areas in a production field where yields are low, we can help address this through working with a farm's crop consultant or precision technology manager to initiate agronomy solutions or transfer that area into higher profitability by cutting production cost and enrolling in quail habitat management strategies. These practices will not only create quail habitat but also improve profitability, soil conservation, water conservation, soil carbon building and decrease inputs. This partnership effort, which is called Precision Partnership for Working Lands," includes Cotton Incorporated, American Society of Agronomy, Quail Forever and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Its goal is to enhance quail populations and keep productive lands in production. You can reach Chaz Holt at 406-425-3039 or cholt@quailforever.org.



Private Lands Stewardship Program



The primary objective of the Georgia Wildlife Federation (GWF) Private Lands Stewardship Program is to provide at no cost land management technical assistance to help landowners in Georgia achieve wildlife habitat enhancement and forest management objectives. Due to the ecological and wildlife habitat benefits associated with longleaf pine restoration, we will emphasize assistance for properties that are within the historic range of longleaf pine in Georgia. Given the importance of active management in developing and maintaining quality wildlife habitat, the GWF Biologist will perform one-on-one site visits with landowners to assess land condition and landowner objectives and then develop a detailed management plan that may include (but will not be limited to):

- Establishing new forest stands (emphasizing longleaf pine).
- Prescribed fire planning.
- Identification of plants valuable for wildlife and methods for promotion.
- Identification of problematic and invasive plants and methods for control.
- General silvicultural suggestions for stand enhancement that will benefit wildlife.
- Provision of resources for financial assistance programs for management and conservation practices.

For more information on longleaf pine restoration and enhancing wildlife habitat on your property, visit www.gwf.org or contact: Evan A. Wheeler at 770-787-7887 or evan@gwf.org.

Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)



This is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) program for landowners who have federally listed wildlife species on their property or habitat that would likely support these species. Because the Endangered Species Act prohibits activities that would be harmful to listed species, the way landowners use their property may be affected. As a compromise, Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) can be developed that allow landowners to conduct activities that might be detrimental to listed species if the landowners have an approved plan for mitigating those impacts. HCPs are highly variable and reflect a landowner's interests, the needs of the species and the recommendations of the USFWS. HCPs can be written for one or several species, can be valid for short or long periods, and can be designed for very small or very large areas. For more information: <https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/hcp-overview.html>.

Forest*A*Syst Program

The Forest*A*Syst program is a web-based tool managed by the Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health and the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources at the University of Georgia. This website is designed to help forest landowners articulate their management objectives in a written plan and foster a working relationship with a natural resource professional who can provide guidance and technical assistance. Forest*A*Syst introduces the concept of managing a forest for timber production, wildlife, water quality, recreation and aesthetics. For more information about the Forest*A*Syst program visit www.forestasyst.org or call 706-542-7412.



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Forest*A*Syst

The Orianne Society

The Orianne Society is a 501 (c) 3 organization based out of Tiger, Ga., that focuses its efforts to conserve critical ecosystems for imperiled reptiles and amphibians using science, applied conservation, and education. We have three focal initiatives within the organization: Longleaf Savannas Initiative, Appalachian Highland Initiative, and the Great Northern Forests Initiative.



The Longleaf Savannas Initiative works to conserve and restore the longleaf pine ecosystem through restoration, land protection, research, inventory, monitoring, and education/outreach. The longleaf pine ecosystem supports 170 species of reptiles and amphibians, many of which are considered to be “iconic” species that have declined due to the reduction and degradation of this once vast ecosystem. The Orianne Society’s focal “iconic” species are the gopher tortoise, the eastern indigo snake and the spotted turtle. In order to conserve these species, we work closely with private landowners and other partners to counter population declines.

Private Lands Program

The Orianne Society’s Private Lands Program is based at the Orianne Indigo Snake Preserve in Telfair County, Ga. We work with conservation-minded landowners throughout the Altamaha River Corridor to conserve the three focal species previously listed. We target landowners who have gopher tortoises and/or eastern indigo snakes on their properties and have an interest in conserving these species. We also work with landowners who have an extensive amount of mature longleaf pine. The goal is to help landowners implement and restore prescribed fire back onto the landscape. We mainly work in Telfair, Wheeler, Ben Hill, Irwin, Montgomery, Toombs, Tattnall, Long, Candler, Emanuel, Coffee, Appling and Wayne counties.

For more information, contact Brannon Knight, Director of Longleaf Savannas Initiative, at 229-315-1700. Also visit www.orianne.org.



Private Landowner Associations

- West Georgia Woodlands Association: <https://westgawoodlands.weebly.com>
- West Central GA Forest Landowners Association: <https://www.facebook.com/WCGFLA>
- Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners (GOAL): <https://goalpartners.org>
- Green-Morgan Forest Landowners Association: <https://www.gmfla.org>
- Georgia Forestry Association (statewide): <https://gfagrow.org>

Financial Assistance for Management Practices

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)



The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a Farm Service Agency (FSA) voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead devoted to conservation benefits.

CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. CRP protects more than 20 million acres of American topsoil from erosion and is designed to safeguard the nation's natural resources. By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, CRP protects groundwater; helps improve the condition of lakes, rivers, ponds and streams; and is a major contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

Benefits to Landowner

Landowners may receive annual rental payments and cost-share and technical assistance for eligible conservation practices through partnering agencies. Annual rental payments vary based on the agricultural rental value of the land and additional incentive payments may be paid after contracts are approved and eligible practices installed. An annual maintenance fee is also provided to the landowner.

Costs to Landowner

CRP provides a 50 percent cost-share reimbursement; thus, landowners may pay at least half of the costs of establishing the approved conservation practices.

Term

Participants enroll in CRP contracts for 10 to 15 years with potential for renewal.

Eligibility/Limitations

Landowners are eligible if the land is owned or operated for at least 12 months, has recently been planted in an agricultural commodity (for the 2018 Farm Bill this is defined as at least four of six years from 2012 through 2017) and is physically and legally capable of being planted. Other eligible acres can be considered if they are in a national or state CRP Conservation Priority Area or have highly erodible soils. For certain conservation practices, marginal pastureland may also be considered. FSA uses the following factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered: 1) Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from cover on contract acres; 2) Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching; 3) On-farm benefits from reduced erosion; 4) Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period; 5) Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion; and 6) Cost.

Eligible Practices

CRP practices most beneficial to wildlife include hardwood and longleaf pine planting, thinning of already established CRP pine stands, prescribed burning, native grass planting, permanent wildlife habitat establishment, riparian buffers, field borders, filter strips, and wildlife opening establishment.

For More Information

Sign-up dates vary by conservation practice. For more information contact your local FSA office. Find it at <https://www.farmers.gov> or visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-program>.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)



The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a Farm Bill program that provides financial and technical assistance promoting conservation and improvement of natural resources on private lands. CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional practices (i.e., enhancements or bundles). CSP provides opportunities both to recognize excellent stewards and implement new conservation practices.

Benefits to Landowner

CSP provides participants with an annual payment for installing new conservation enhancements and maintaining existing practices.

Costs to Landowner

CSP is an annual payment program, therefore there are no costs outside of installation and maintenance of the conservation practices. However, landowners self-certify their completed practices and therefore are responsible for completing appropriate job sheets, forms and documentation for the practice(s), as well as photo-documenting practice implementation.

Term

Contracts are for five years and may be renewed an additional five years. Re-enrollments must continue to meet the conservation objectives of the original contract and implement additional conservation practices. Landowners must renew in the first half of the fifth year on their first 5-year contract.

Eligibility/Limitations

CSP is available on private agricultural lands, as well as non-industrial private forestlands. For all contracts, CSP payments to a person or legal entity may not exceed \$200,000 over the term of the initial contract period, except joint operations where the limit is \$400,000.

Eligible Practices

Applications in Georgia are ranked based on priority natural resource concerns: water quality, water quantity, soil quality, soil erosion, air quality, wildlife habitat, degraded plant conditions, and energy. Eligible practices include forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, tree planting, riparian buffers, forest openings, pollinator habitat and many more agriculture and forest management practices.

For More Information

Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office. Contact information and location can be found at <https://www.farmers.gov>.



Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)



This Farm Bill program provides financial and technical assistance to landowners concerning management practices to protect soil, water, forest and wildlife resources. Historically, animal waste systems, cropland resource management systems and grazing land resource management systems have been soil and water resource focuses in Georgia. For forest and wildlife resource concerns, conservation practices that promote the recovery of rare species have priority.

Benefits to Landowner

Landowners receive technical assistance to reduce impacts to the environment and may receive financial cost-share assistance to cover up to 75 percent of the costs of implementing conservation practices and up to 90 percent for high priority practices. For beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, or limited resource farmers, EQIP may cover up to 90 percent of the cost of implementing conservation practices.

Costs to Landowner

Typically, landowners are responsible for paying the difference in the cost-share, ranging from 25 to 50 percent out of pocket, for implementing conservation practices. In most cases, the landowner pays the full cost to implement the practices and is then reimbursed the cost-share amount. For beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, or limited resource farmers, advance payments of at least 50 percent may be available.

Term

The minimum contract is one year; the maximum is 10 years.

Eligibility/Limitations

Agricultural producers and owners of non-industrial private forestland are eligible to apply for EQIP. An adjusted gross income limit of \$900,000 a year applies. The maximum payment an individual or entity can receive is \$450,000 over six years.

Eligible Practices

EQIP practices most beneficial for wildlife include prescribed burning, forest stand improvement (e.g., pine thinning), brush management, invasive plant control, forest road improvements, livestock stream crossing installation, field borders, longleaf site preparation and planting, hedgerows, and early successional habitat creation. Other traditional practices include fencing out streams and wetlands, filter strips, silvo-pasture, conservation tillage, and many more.

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Gopher Tortoise

This Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) program provides technical and financial assistance to voluntarily implement conservation practices to improve gopher tortoise habitat, while allowing landowners to manage their property as working lands. WLFW, a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is designed to combat decline of specific species to hopefully prevent them from being listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. In Georgia, that species is primarily the gopher tortoise. Eligible properties must have gopher tortoises present or a minimum of 50 percent soil types designated as appropriate gopher tortoise habitat. WLFW eligible conservation practices include prescribed burning, longleaf pine establishment, forest stand improvement (thinning), brush management and others.

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Bobwhite Quail/Pine Savanna

This Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) program provides technical and financial assistance to voluntarily implement conservation practices to improve bobwhite quail habitat, while allowing landowners to manage their property as working lands. Pine savanna habitats are characterized by open canopy forests with diverse grass-forb-shrub groundcover that is maintained with frequent disturbance, mainly fire. Restoring this habitat type across the pine savanna landscape benefits quail and numerous songbirds, rabbits, wild turkey, and deer, as well as several at-risk species. WLFW eligible conservation practices include early successional habitat development/management, restoration and management of rare and declining habitats, upland wildlife habitat management, prescribed burning, forest stand improvement (thinning), brush management, herbaceous weed control, conservation cover, field borders, filter strips, firebreaks, hedgerow planting, tree/shrub pruning, and prescribed grazing.

Longleaf Pine Initiative

EQIP also has several funding pools for special initiatives, including cost-share for planting and enhancing longleaf pine forests within their historical range in Georgia. Practices include restoration and management of rare and declining habitats, forest stand improvement, tree and shrub site preparation, tree and shrub establishment, brush management, firebreak installation, prescribed burning, and others. A forest management plan must be developed and implemented for properties to be eligible.

For More Information

Applications for the EQIP program are available through local NRCS offices (call for sign-up dates). Contact information and location of the service center for your county can be found at <https://www.farmers.gov>. Visit www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov for more details.

Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program (VPA HIP)



This Farm Bill program provides financial assistance to state and tribal governments to expand the amount of public access lands in their associated states or regions. Governments apply for competitive grants, which are then used to provide financial incentives to landowners to create new or expand existing public access on their lands. If available, funding can also be used to improve wildlife habitat quality on lands enrolled within the program.



Benefits to Landowner

Funds from this grant will be used to annually lease up to 50,000 acres of additional forest and agricultural lands and 850 acres of additional dove fields in the State of Georgia in the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Public Access Program. For landowners enrolled in the program, funding may be available to receive incentives for performing conservation practices. Landowners also receive landowner liability protection under Georgia law for hunting and other recreation use on enrolled lands, wildlife technical assistance from state biologists, and flexibility in setting access dates and use types within the agreement.

Costs to Landowner

There are no associated costs to landowners to enroll their lands in this program.

Term

Contracts can vary in time length and can include multiple years subject to grant funds availability. State or tribal governments may submit grant proposals to NRCS every 3 years or as program funding is available.

Eligibility/Limitations

Only State and Tribal governments can apply for financial assistance with NRCS. Landowners must have full ownership and control over lands which they wish to enroll.



Eligible Conservation Practices

Enrolled lands may be eligible for assistance implementing NRCS conservation practices that improve wildlife habitat such as prescribed burning, thinning pine trees and planting of perennial native vegetation or annual vegetation for dove fields. Conservation practices and funding are determined based on land needs, public access type and funds availability.

For More Information

Contact Kevin Lowrey kevin.lowrey@dnr.ga.gov to discuss eligibility.

For more information, visit: <https://georgiawildlife.com/VPA-HIP> or <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/farmbill/?cid=stelprdb1242739>.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW)



This U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) program encourages private landowners to restore and enhance ecosystems to improve habitat for fish and wildlife. Priorities for funding in Georgia include longleaf pine habitat restoration; riparian and stream habitat restoration; and threatened, endangered, and at-risk species habitat restoration.

Benefits to Landowner

Landowners obtain technical assistance for appropriate management and stewardship of priority resources and financial support to implement restoration activities. Landowners may receive up to 100 percent of the costs of implementing wildlife habitat restoration activities.

Costs to Landowner

The landowner or other partner is usually asked to cover half the cost of habitat restoration. However, this ratio is flexible, and USFWS can elect to pay all costs.

Term

Landowners agree to maintain management practices/restored habitats for at least 10 years. Some projects may require a longer-term agreement.

Eligibility/Limitations

Any private landowner is eligible. There are no restrictions on project size. Eligible projects are wide-ranging and include farms, pastures and forestry sites. USFWS gives special consideration to projects that: 1) are on permanently protected private lands; 2) are identified as high priority by state fish and wildlife agencies or other partners; 3) are near permanently protected areas including national wildlife refuges, military lands, state-owned wildlife management areas, etc.; 4) reduce habitat fragmentation; 5) conserve or restore natural communities which the state Natural Heritage Programs have designated as globally or nationally imperiled; and 6) are self-sustaining systems that are not dependent on artificial structures.

USFWS prioritizes projects that: 1) have longer duration agreements, 2) involve greater non-USFWS partnerships or cost sharing; and 3) are considered the most cost effective.

Eligible Practices

Project examples include stream restoration and livestock exclusion, and upland native vegetation restoration—which can include longleaf pine planting and establishment of native ground cover.

For More Information

Contact the nearest USFWS office: www.fws.gov/georgia.

Wildlife Incentives for Nongame and Game Species (Project Wings)

Project WINGS is a rights-of-way management campaign funded by Georgia Power, Georgia Transmission Corporation, the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia and Atlanta Gas Light Resources. The program is designed to improve wildlife habitat along gas and electrical transmission lines by establishing healthy wildlife habitat while ensuring that tall or woody vegetation does not encroach on utility rights-of-way, potentially damaging power and gas lines.

Participant Benefits

This incentives program provides cash grants and professional wildlife management advice to convert woody growth to preferred wildlife habitat along electrical or gas transmission rights-of-way.

Participant Responsibilities

Participants pay for the initial costs of implementing management practices and are reimbursed up to the dollar amount awarded, but not to exceed \$2,250 per utility. Participants are not required to provide receipts for work, but must contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service once the work is completed. Grants are usually paid within 60 days following the completion of work as certified by Natural Resources Conservation Service staff.

Term

Participants must maintain the practices for three years. Former WINGS acreage can be re-enrolled, provided the original contract was completed and three years have passed since its completion. This re-enrollment is referred to as the “in three years, out three years rule.”

Eligibility/Limitations

Landowners, leaseholders, hunting clubs, wildlife organizations, government entities and others committed to managing rights-of-way for wildlife may apply for a grant. Applications can only be accepted by NRCS from May 15 through July 15 of each year. Payment rates are a flat \$75 per acre per year per utility for each of the three years. Participants can either implement the management practices themselves or hire someone to do the work.

Eligible Practices

Eligible wildlife management practices include mowing with fallow disking, annual plantings and permanent plantings. Herbicide applications and mowing without disking are not eligible practices.



For More Information

Call 706-885-0101 or visit

<http://tworiversrcd.org/wings>. See the WINGS brochure on the website for an NRCS office list by county.

Section 319(h) Grant Program



The Section 319(h) Grant Program is a water quality improvement cost-share program made possible by Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division annually conducts a competitive process to select eligible projects for funding that best support the Georgia Nonpoint Source Management Program. Georgia EPD awards 319(h) funding to partner organizations such as state agencies, state colleges and universities, regional commissions, resource conservation and development councils, and local governments to offer cost-share opportunities to prevent and control nonpoint source pollution within specific watersheds throughout the state. More information on the grant is available online at:

<https://epd.georgia.gov/outreach/grants/section-319h-georgias-nonpoint-source-implementation-grant>

Benefits to Landowner

Landowners receive technical assistance and funds to install best management practices that reduce pollution and result in measurable water quality improvements. Financial cost-share assistance typically covers 60 percent of the costs of implementing the selected management practices.

Costs to Landowner

Landowners are typically responsible for 40 percent cost-share of the management practices installed.

Term

Terms vary by partner and project, but each grant award must be completed within three years. Landowners are expected to ensure maintenance during the expected lifespan of the practice and in accordance with commonly accepted standards, usually between five and ten years.

Eligibility/Limitations

Funding is available to landowners through partner organizations implementing projects in designated watersheds.

Eligible Practices

Depending on the goals of each partner and project, 319(h) funds can be used to develop nutrient management plans, conduct farm assessments, and install best management practices (BMPs) that will reduce water quality degradation. Potential practices include installation of livestock stream crossings, stream buffers, fencing, filter strips, stack houses, winter feeders, composters, heavy use areas, water troughs, and more.

For More Information

Visit <http://epd.georgia.gov> or call 404-651-8532 for more information.

Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) Cost Share Program



Eligibility

This program is administered by the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) with U.S. Forest Service funds. Non-industrial forest landowners are eligible, which includes any private individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe or other native group, or other private legal entity, excluding corporations whose stocks are publicly traded or legal entities principally engaged in the processing or manufacturing of wood products. The minimum practice size is 10 acres.

Eligible Practices

The primary focus is on pine beetle prevention practices such as non-commercial thinning, pine release and prescribed burning in stands dominated by loblolly and shortleaf pines. Occasionally, funding is provided for reforestation that would include site preparation practices and hardwood or pine planting (longleaf, loblolly, slash, shortleaf and white pines). During periods of higher southern pine beetle activity, a portion of funds is directed toward pine beetle suppression activities. The practices funded depend on the funding year and the amount of funds received.

Pay Rate

The per-acre pay rate is based on 40 percent of the average cost of the practice. Pay rates cannot exceed 75 percent of the documented, actual cost.

Term

A period of 10 years unless practice is so noted on the program's Resource Practice Plan.

Application Process

Contact a local GFC Forester to apply: www.gfc.state.ga.us/about-us/contact-us/county-units/index.cfm. Applications are received as long as funding is available.

For More Information

<http://www.gatrees.org/forest-management/forest-health/pine-bark-beetles/spb-cost-share-program/index.cfm>

Information on other Georgia Forestry Commission programs is at <http://www.gatrees.org>.



Invasive Plant Control Cost Share Program (IPCP)



Eligibility

Non-industrial forest landowners, which means any private individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe or other native group, or other private legal entity, excluding corporations whose stocks are publicly traded or legal entities principally engaged in the processing or manufacturing of wood products. There is a minimum practice size of three acres, and the landowner must own a minimum of 10 acres of forest land.

Eligible Practices

Herbicide control of privet species, Japanese climbing fern, Chinese tallowtree, chinaberry, and callery pear.

Pay Rate

Program pays a flat rate of \$60 per acre.

Term

No contract period but the landowner has a set period of time to perform the work.

Application Process

This program is administered by GFC using funds provided by the USFS. Contact your local GFC Forester at gatrees.org/about-us/contact-us/county-units/index.cfm to apply. Applications will be received as long as funding is available.

For More Information

<http://gatrees.org/forest-management/private-forest-management/landowner-programs/other-landowner-programs>

Information on other GFC programs is at <http://www.gatrees.org>.



Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)



Eligibility

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers this program, and the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) provides technical service. County FSA committees determine land eligibility using on-site damage inspections that assess the type and extent of damage. To be eligible for this program, non-industrial forest land must:

- Have existing tree cover (or had tree cover immediately before the natural disaster occurred and is suitable for growing trees); and,
- Be owned by a nonindustrial private individual, group, association, corporation or other private legal entity that has definitive decision-making authority over the land.

In addition, the natural disaster must have resulted in damage that if untreated would impair or endanger the natural resources on the land and materially affect future use of the land.

Forestry Practices Covered

Practices necessary to restore forests either through natural or artificial regeneration. This would include practices such as mechanical clearing, herbicide applications, seedlings and planting.

Pay Rate

Participants may receive financial assistance of up to 75 percent of the cost to implement approved emergency forest restoration practices.

Contract Length

Ten years.

Application Process

Contact FSA at a local USDA Service Center regarding sign-up periods:

<https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

For More Information

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/emergency-forest-restoration/index>



Land Conservation Incentives

Conservation Use Valuation Assessment (CUVA)

Certain properties, including agricultural lands, forestlands and environmentally sensitive areas, may be eligible for reduced property tax assessments through conservation use valuation. These properties are assessed according to a combination of soil type, productivity and use. This typically results in a significant reduction of property taxes.

Benefits to Landowner

Landowners receive a reduced ad valorem tax assessment for their property.

Costs to Landowner

There are no direct costs to the landowner for entering a CUVA covenant for forested lands or agricultural lands. There may be costs, however, for landowners entering a CUVA covenant for environmentally sensitive land, because of the specific regulations for certification. There are significant penalties for landowners who break the covenant before the end of the 10-year period. Owners who break their conservation use covenant must pay back to the taxing authorities up to twice the savings they received over the life of the covenant up to the point it was breached. If the property is sold during the covenant period, the new landowner must agree to continue the covenant or be responsible for penalties and taxes due if the covenant is breached under their ownership.

Term

Landowners must promise to maintain their lands in the designated use (agriculture, forestry or environmentally sensitive) for 10 years. Landowners can re-enroll after 10 years if they wish to remain in CUVA.

Eligibility

Each county tax assessor's office is charged with administering the program. Generally, there is no minimum acreage requirement; however, owners of fewer than 10 acres must provide written documentation giving evidence of qualification. No more than 2,000 acres can be enrolled in CUVA by any one non-industrial, private landowner. Foreign citizens and foreign corporations are not eligible to enroll. The land must be kept in its qualifying use and cannot be used for any non-agricultural commercial business.

Landowner Initiation

Contact the local county tax assessor's office (<http://gaassessors.com>) for applications and enrollment information. Applications for conservation use assessment must be filed with the county board of tax assessors on or before the last day for filing ad valorem tax returns in the county (usually April 1).

For more specifics on CUVA, see the Georgia Department of Revenue's web page at <http://dor.georgia.gov/conservation-use-assessment-information>.

Forest Land Protection Act (FLPA)

Large tracts of privately or corporately owned forestlands may be eligible for reduced property tax assessments through this conservation use tax program. The Forest Land Protection Act (FLPA), passed in 2008, established another class of conservation use valuation for large working forests. These properties are assessed according to soil type, productivity and use similar to the formula used for CUVA properties.

Benefits to Landowner

Landowners receive a reduced ad valorem tax assessment for property enrolled in FLPA. There are significant penalties for landowners who break the covenant before the end of the 15-year period on all covenants that began prior to 2019. Owners who breach their FLPA covenant must pay back to the taxing authorities up to two times the savings they received. If the property is sold during the covenant period, the new landowner must agree to continue the covenant or be responsible for penalties.

Costs to Landowner

There are no direct costs to the landowner for entering a FLPA covenant.

Term

Landowners must promise to maintain their lands in a qualified use for 10 years if applying in 2020 or later. Landowners can re-apply after the original 15-year covenant expires if they wish to remain in the FLPA program. Any purchase of existing covenant property that started in 2009-2018 will run its original 15 years. Any new covenant application or renewal of an expired covenant will be for a period of 10 years.

Eligibility

Eligible tracts must be used for subsistence or commercial production of trees, timber or other wood and wood fiber products. The value of any residences on the property is excluded. Properties must be a minimum of 200 acres per covenant and 100 acres per parcel, but, unlike CUVA, there is no maximum acreage cap. Eligible landowners need not be U.S. citizens and can be individuals or any entity registered to do business in Georgia. Multiple parcels under same ownership no longer must be contiguous if applying for FLPA.

Landowner Initiation

Each county tax assessor's office is charged with administering the program. Contact the local county tax assessor's office (<http://gaassessors.com>) for applications and enrollment information. Applications for FLPA assessment must be filed with the county board of tax assessors on or before the last day for filing ad valorem tax appeals in the county.

For more specifics on FLPA, see the Georgia Department of Revenue's web page at <http://dor.georgia.gov/forest-land-protection-act-valuation>.



Conservation Easements

A conservation easement (CE) is a binding legal contract between a landowner and a qualified entity (“easement holder”) that ensures the conservation values on a piece of property are maintained. Easement holders include local, state or federal agencies, as well as nonprofit conservation organizations typically referred to as land trusts. The protected property remains in private ownership and can be bought or sold, but easement restrictions stay with the property. Conservation easements are typically granted in perpetuity meaning that the property is permanently protected by the easement terms. The easement holder is responsible for monitoring and enforcing the easement terms. Specific terms in a conservation easement are variable and are negotiated between landowners and the easement holder based on the conservation values to be protected. Examples of rights typically extinguished by a CE include subdivision, future development, mining, billboards, utilities, and significant change of natural features. However, a CE often allows continued agricultural or forestry use and the construction of additional structures if they are compatible with the conservation purposes. A CE is a flexible tool used to protect natural resources and to help keep land in its current condition for future generations.

Benefits to Landowner

A donation of a permanent conservation easement is eligible for significant federal and state income tax incentives. It may also reduce the landowner’s property taxes by reducing the assessed value of the land. Landowners may ask for a re-assessment by their local tax assessor after completing a conservation easement.

Costs to Landowner

The main cost to the landowner is the lost development potential and resulting profit. Easements typically diminish the market value of the land based on the amount of reserved rights, location, and property size. Landowners are responsible for “due diligence” costs typically associated with any land transaction (attorney and accountant fees, surveys, etc.) and must pay for a qualified appraisal of the easement value to receive tax incentives. In addition, landowners may be asked to provide the easement holder with a stewardship endowment to help ensure the conservation organization has the means to monitor and defend the easement in perpetuity.

Eligibility

Any landowner, private or corporate, may place an easement on their property. There is no minimum or maximum size requirement, but eligible lands must meet conservation purposes as defined by the IRS to qualify as a charitable gift and receive federal tax incentives. To receive the state income tax credit, the land must be certified for conservation purposes as defined by Georgia DNR. See Tax Incentives for Land Conservation on the following page for more details.

Landowner Initiation

The first step in donating a conservation easement is finding a qualified organization or government agency willing to hold the easement. Information on land trusts operating in Georgia can be found in the section below *Working With Land Trusts*.



Tax Incentives for Land Conservation

Several tax benefits are associated with conservation easement donations. To be eligible for federal and state income tax reductions, the easement must be permanent, donated to a qualifying organization, and meet conservation purposes requirements. An appraisal (at the landowner's expense) is needed to establish the donation value to receive income tax benefits. Consulting a tax professional or attorney for advice specific to a landowner's financial situation is strongly recommended before donating. Federal Farm Bill programs that pay landowners for permanent conservation easements are not eligible for these tax incentives.

Georgia Conservation Tax Credit

Georgia provides a state income tax credit for the permanent protection of conservation land. The credit is worth up to 25 percent of the value of the donated property or easement and is capped at \$250,000 for individuals and \$500,000 for corporations and partnerships. Any unused credit can be used over the next 10 years. The credit is available for the fee-simple donation of permanently protected property or the donation of a permanent conservation easement on property made after January 1, 2006. Donations must be made to a land trust accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission <http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org> or to a state or local governmental agency. Bargain sales of property or easements below fair market value also qualify. After making a qualifying donation, the landowner must submit an application to DNR for certification along with a \$5,000 nonrefundable fee.

A certification letter by GA DNR and an appraisal review by the State Properties Commission (<https://gspc.georgia.gov/services/state-conservation-easement-qualified-donation-appraisal-reviews>) are required to receive the credit. Information on the Georgia Conservation Tax Credit can be found at <https://gadnr.org/GCTCP> or by calling 706-557-3225.

Georgia Tax Credit Transferability

In 2011 the Georgia General Assembly passed legislation that allows any awarded tax credit to be sold or transferred to another Georgia taxpayer. The Georgia Department of Revenue allows transfer of any unused portion of the tax credit within the 10-year period the credit is valid. If a landowner has donated a conservation easement in the last 10 years and has not used all the tax credit, the landowner may transfer the unused portion. If a landowner would like to sell the tax credit, consulting a tax professional is recommended.

Federal Income Tax Benefits

The IRS recognizes conservation easement donations as charitable contributions; thus, landowners can receive significant federal income tax deductions for donating property or conservation easements. The Land Trust Alliance provides detailed information on seeking these benefits: <https://www.landtrustalliance.org/topics/taxes/income-tax-incentives-land-conservation>.

Estate Taxes

Conservation easements can be an important estate-planning tool that can help keep land in a family's control by lowering the amount of estate taxes due from heirs. A landowner may be able to exclude from the taxable estate up to 40 percent of the value of land under an easement. There is another estate tax exclusion of up to \$500,000 for donated easements. Tax codes frequently change, so consult a tax professional about current incentives.

Working with Land Trusts

What Is a Land Trust?

A land trust is a nonprofit organization that actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting direct land transactions. Such organizations often have “land trust” as part of their name (e.g., Oconee River Land Trust) or they may be known as a “conservancy” (e.g., Madison Morgan Conservancy). Still others, functioning as a land trust in addition to other mission functions, do so under a variety of titles (e.g., Georgia Wildlife Federation).

Finding a Suitable Land Trust Partner

Landowners seeking to permanently conserve their land while continuing to own, manage and use it in traditional ways, do so with a conservation easement that is held by a land trust. Thus, finding an appropriate land trust to partner with is an important early step in the land conservation process. See: <https://www.findalandtrust.org>.

Qualified Organizations for the State of Georgia Conservation Tax Credit

All conservation donations completed after January 1, 2014, must be in favor of Georgia local governments, Georgia state agencies, federal government agencies, or accredited land trusts to be eligible for the Georgia Conservation Tax Credit. Donations to non-accredited land trusts completed before January 1, 2014, may still qualify for the tax credit.

Accredited land trusts have earned national certification through the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). For more information on LTA accreditation and a full list of accredited land trusts that may receive tax credit-eligible conservation donations, visit

<http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/storage/downloads/AccreditedLandTrusts.pdf>.

Other land trusts operating in Georgia can be found at <https://www.georgiaconservancy.org/aglt>.



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)



The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. The program is comprised of two components; Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) and Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE).

Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)

NRCS assists Indian tribes, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations to protect working agricultural and ranch lands and limit conversion of those lands to non-agricultural use. NRCS provides funds to eligible entities to purchase easements. Applications for the ALE component are only accepted from eligible entities (land trusts, local governments, etc.) partnering to conserve agricultural lands. This is a matching program that can provide up to 50 percent of the costs to buy a permanent conservation easement that can be matched with funds from a local sponsor, government agency or conservation group. NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for buying Agricultural Land Easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land. In the case of working farms, the program helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture while also protecting grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including rangeland, pastureland and shrubland.

Benefits to Society

Agricultural Land Easements protect the long-term viability of the nation's food and fiber supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. Lands protected by these easements provide additional public benefits, including environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat and protection of open space.

Benefits to Landowner

Landowners are paid for placing an ALE conservation easement on their property. The conservation easement restricts the farm from being developed and helps farmers stay in business by providing a financial boost. The owner continues to own and work the land, but the easement ensures it will never be developed.

Costs to Landowner

There are few costs to the landowner except for any costs associated with legal and financial counsel and due diligence. If seeking income tax benefits, landowners must pay for a different appraisal than what is needed for the program.

Term

All Agricultural Land Easements must be permanent and remain with the property in perpetuity.

Eligibility

Eligible lands include cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and non-industrial private forest land that has prime, unique or statewide important soils, or meets a state or local priority. NRCS will prioritize applications that protect agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land and those that maximize the protection of contiguous acres devoted to agricultural use.

To be considered for the program, lands must satisfy the following criteria: 1) is of sufficient size (minimum of 10 acres) and has properly configured boundaries; 2) contain at least 50 percent prime agricultural soils or soils of statewide importance; 3) have a minimum of one-third of the offered acreage in cropland or pasture; 4) have a pending offer with the easement buyer; 5) be privately owned; 6) be covered by a conservation plan for highly erodible lands; 7) be large enough to sustain agricultural production; 8) be accessible to markets; and, 9) be surrounded by parcels that can support long-term agricultural production. Forest land may not exceed two-thirds of the offered acreage.

To enroll land for ALE, NRCS enters into cooperative agreements with eligible partners only. Each easement is required to have an ALE plan for any highly-erodible cropland to promote the long-term viability of these areas.

Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE)

WREs are implemented to restore, protect, and enhance the function and value of wetlands ecosystems on eligible private or Tribal lands while maximizing wildlife habitat benefits. NRCS purchases easements directly from landowners to restore, protect and enhance wetlands and associated lands that have been degraded by farming or draining. Improving water quality, wildlife habitat and reducing soil erosion are accomplished through financial assistance agreements. To ensure the protection of these wetlands, conservation easements that restrict certain uses are placed on the property. Up to 50 percent of associated lands can include upland habitat adjacent to wetlands.

Benefits to Society

Wetland Reserve Easements provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity, and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and limited recreational activities.

Benefits to Landowner

Landowners can receive financial and technical assistance for restoring and protecting wetland values and functions, NRCS pays all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office, including recording fees, charges for abstracts, survey and appraisal fees, and title insurance. As with all easements, the landowner retains ownership of the land.

Costs to Landowner

Landowners receive financial assistance and restoration activities implemented on the property. However, the costs of establishing any compatible uses, such as food plots, are the responsibility of the landowner. The landowner still retains ownership, controls access and is responsible for paying taxes.

Term

NRCS may enroll eligible land through:

Permanent Easements

- Permanent easements are conservation easements in perpetuity
- NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement
- NRCS pays 75 to 100 percent of the restoration costs

30-year Easements

- 30-year easements expire after 30 years
- NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement
- NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs

NRCS continues to assist landowners after a site has been restored by reviewing restoration measures, providing basic biological and engineering advice, and clarifying the technical and administrative aspects of the easement.

Eligibility/Limitations

Lands eligible for WREs include farmed or converted wetlands that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored. NRCS will prioritize applications based on the easement's potential of hydrological restoration and potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

To enroll land through wetland reserve easements, NRCS enters into a purchase agreement with eligible private landowners or Indian tribes that includes the right for NRCS to develop and implement a wetland reserve plan of operations. This plan identifies the manner in which the easement land is restored, protected, and enhanced to ensure the protection of the wetland's functions and values.

To be considered for the program, lands must satisfy the following criteria: 1) landowners must have owned the property for two years or more to be eligible; 2) the land must be restorable; 3) consist of hydric soils; and 4) contain wetlands that have been or are currently farmed or degraded. Riparian areas and limited adjacent uplands may also be eligible.

There is no federal limitation on the number of acres that can be offered for the program, but the state may impose limitations. Landowners continue to control access to the land and may lease it for non-commercial recreational activities (e.g., hunting or fishing). At any time, landowners can request that additional activities be considered if they are compatible with the protection and enhancement of the wetland (e.g., haying, grazing, timber harvest, etc.).

For More Information

Contact your local USDA Service Center or visit the NRCS website, www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ga/programs/easements/acep.

Contact information and location of the service center for your county can be found at <https://www.farmers.gov>.



Show Your Support



new!



In our state there is a critical connection between car ownership and wildlife conservation—a car's back bumper.

That's because sales and renewals of Georgia's wildlife license plates provide vital support for conserving rare species such as bald eagles, restoring bobwhite quail, and enhancing trout fisheries.

In fact, these tags are the number one source of non-federal funds for Georgia Department of Natural Resources programs that are dedicated to nongame wildlife and bobwhite quail, and wholly depend on donations, not state funds.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife 2011 Survey showed that there are over 2.4 million wildlife watchers, 1 million+ resident anglers and 642,545 hunters in Georgia. Bottom line: Wildlife is important to Georgians! Let's show our support!