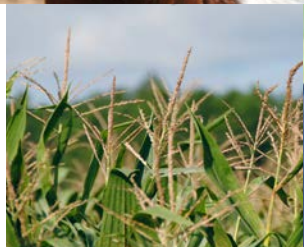


ing people help the land



*“If we take care of the land,
it will take care of us”*
— First NRCS Chief Hugh Hammond Bennett



the land • he



Helping People Help the Land

2012 STATE STORY

Athens, Georgia
December 2012



Mission

Celebrating More than 75 Years of Helping People Help the Land

For more than 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 2012 to develop 2,323 conservation plans on 282,211 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

Chris Groskreutz, Acting

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State Resource Conservationist

Maryann Trent

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Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

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Assistant State Conservationist for Operations

Tansel Hudson

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State Conservation Engineer

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State Soil Scientist/NRI Team Leader

Steve Lawrence

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State Administrative Officer

Sharon Gipson

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*Complete directory available
online at
www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov

Georgia NRCS Administrative Areas

Area 1 - Griffin

Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - *Michael Watson*

Phone: 770 227-1026 Fax: 770 227-1511

E-mail: michael.watson@ga.usda.gov

Area 2 - Athens

Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - *Jack Lewis*

Phone: 706 546-2039 Fax: 706 546-2253

E-mail: jack.lewis@ga.usda.gov

Area 3 - Americus

Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - *Floyd Hooker*

Phone: 229 924-0544 Fax: 229 924-0013

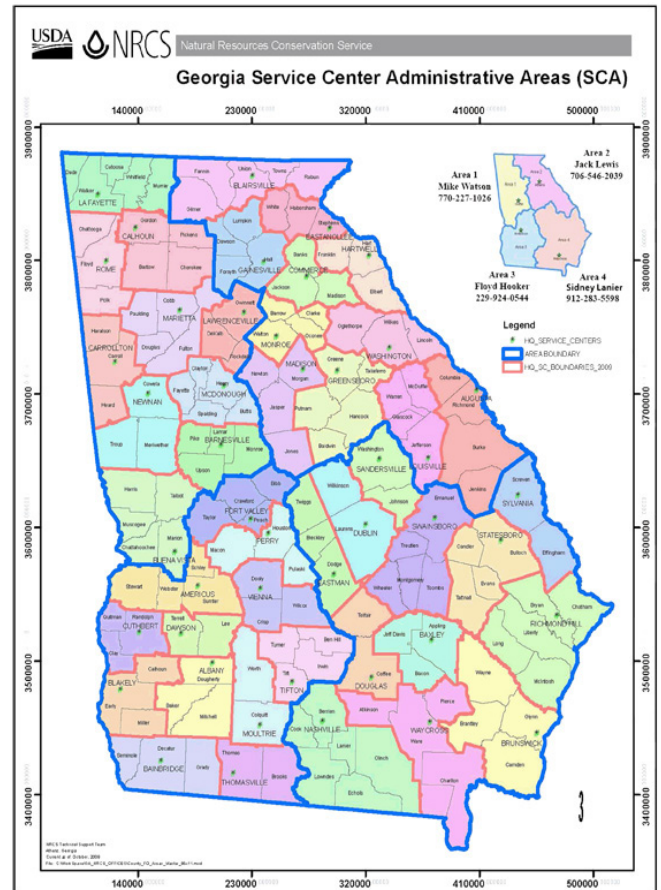
E-mail: floyd.hooker@ga.usda.gov

Area 4 - Waycross

Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - *Sidney Lanier*

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Designated District Conservationists

Area	Soil and Water Conservation District	NRCS District Conservationist
1	Catoosa County	Cindy P. Askew, LaFayette
	Coosa River	Sheri E. Teems, Rome
	Limestone Valley	Cindy P. Askew, LaFayette
	West Georgia	Cindy Haygood, Carrollton
	Fulton County	Valerie Pickard, Marietta
	Cobb County	Valerie Pickard, Marietta
	Gwinnett County	Jerome Brown, Lawrenceville
	Henry County	Shaun Ford, McDonough
	Clayton County	Shaun Ford, McDonough
	Pine Mountain	Jack L. Fokes, Jr., Buena Vista
	Rockdale County	Jerome Brown, Lawrenceville
	DeKalb County	Jerome Brown, Lawrenceville
	Roosevelt	Rory Richardson, Newnan
	Towaliga	Carmen Westerfield, Barnesville
Lamar County	Carmen Westerfield, Barnesville	
2	Blue Ridge Mountain	Douglas Towery, Blairsville
	Hall County	George Belflower, Gainesville
	Stephens County	Russell F. Biggers, Eastanollee
	Upper Chattahoochee River	Russell F. Biggers, Eastanollee
	Broad River	Scotty Palmer, Hartwell
	Lincoln County	Vacant, Washington
	McDuffie County	J. Cread Brown (Acting), Louisville
	Oconee River	Carol Boss, Commerce
	Piedmont	Dennis Brooks, Madison
	Warren County	J. Cread Brown (Acting), Louisville
	Brier Creek	J. Cread Brown, Augusta
	Columbia County	J. Cread Brown, Augusta
	Upper Ocmulgee River	Dennis B. Brooks, Madison
	Walton County	Jose' V. Pagan, Monroe
3	Ocmulgee River	Calvin Essex, Perry
	Flint River	Marcus Collins (Acting), Albany
	Lower Chattahoochee River	Richard Hosmer, Dawson
	Middle South Georgia	Hal Dorsey, Tifton
4	Alapaha	Stan Moore, Nashville
	Altamaha	Zack Railey, Douglas
	Satilla River	Rita Barrow, Brunswick
	Coastal	Vacant, Richmond Hill
	Ogeechee River	Vacant, Statesboro
	Ohoopsee River	Vontice Jackson, Swainsboro
	Central Georgia	Chuck McCranie, Eastman

Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations

Area 1	Griffin	Michael Watson	Area 2	Athens	Jack Lewis
Area 3	Americus	Floyd Hooker	Area 4	Waycross	Sidney Lanier

District Conservationists



Last Name	First Name	Telephone
Askew	Cindy	706-638-2207
Barrow	Rita	912-265-8092
Belflower	George (Buddy)	770-536-6981
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	770-963-9288
Cabe	Doug	706-629-2582
Collins	Marcus	229-246-8282
Essex	Calvin	478-987-2280
Hall	Graylen	229-268-4131
Haygood	Cindy	770-832-8942
Hosmer	Richard	229-995-5811
Jackson	Vontice	478-237-8037
Jameson	Gregg	912-367-4368
Jones	Ray	478-956-6490
Long	Paul	229-985-5399
McCranie	Charles V.	478-374-8140
Moore	Stan	912-367-7679
Oliver	Harold E.	912-459-2070
Pagan	Jose	770-267-1359
Palmer	Scotty	706-376-5451
Parker	Britt S.	478-275-0425
Pickard	Valerie	770-792-0594
Railey	Zack	912-384-4811
Reese	Karen	229-732-3001
Richardson	Rory	770-251-4283

Last Name	First Name	Telephone
Teems	Sheri	706-291-5651
Towery	Doug	706-291-5651
Westerfield	Carmen	770-358-3223
Yancey	Frank	229-924-4056

Agricultural Conservation Experienced Services

Program Manager: RD Crawley
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Program Description

To date, Georgia Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has allocated nearly \$1,376,256 into the Agricultural Conservation Experienced Services (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..

2012 Highlights

Georgia currently has 11 ACES employees working throughout the state. The state is divided into four areas.

Each area has at least two ACES positions. However, Georgia is in the process of adding six additional positions through September 2013.

These new positions will be located in the following field offices; Blakely, Waynesboro, Sylvania, Eastman, Louisville and Quitman. Georgia NRCS has expended nearly \$953,601 into the ACES program to date. ACES has greatly benefited Georgia NRCS with the implementation of conservation practices and data input.

ACES Spotlight

Fred Dilbeck assists the Hartwell, GA Field Office (FO) of the NRCS in many various ways.

Fred uses his past experience as a Soil Conservation Technician with the NRCS to complete the annual Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) report; assist with the design and installation of conservation practices in the Beaverdam 319 Watershed Project; follow up with participants to get their conservation program contracts back on schedule; and manage the progress of conservation practices while they are under construction and then assists with the check-out survey.

The Hartwell FO is fortunate to have Fred Dilbeck as a team member. He truly is an asset in helping to conserve our natural resources.



Dilbeck, an ACES employee, provides on farm technical assistance.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

Program Manager: Aquanda Jones
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Program Description

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.



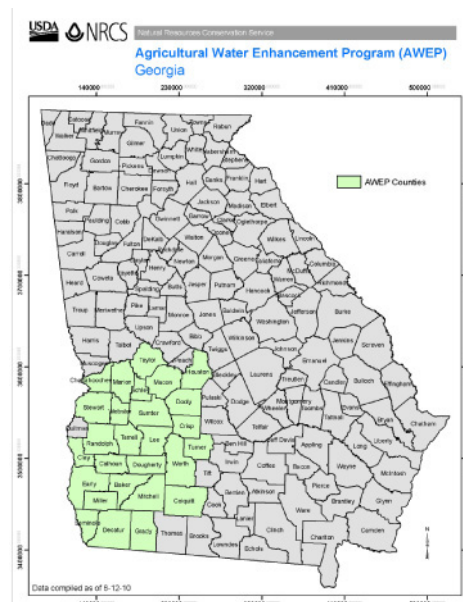
This irrigation system is managed by a moisture monitor funded under AWEP.

2012 Highlights

To date, approximately \$1.3 million has been obligated to cover 199 contracts on a total of 17,756 acres. AWEP 2012 funding provided financial assistance for conservation practices including: the low pressure drop nozzle retrofit with end-gun shutoff, remote soil moisture monitoring, sod based rotation and variable rate irrigation.

The AWEP grant helps provide financial assistance to fund agricultural water conservation projects in the Lower Flint River Basin.

The counties eligible for funding include: Baker, Calhoun, Chattahoochee, Clay, Colquitt, Crisp, Dooly, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Houston, Lee, Macon, Marion, Miller, Mitchell, Randolph, Schley, Seminole, Stewart, Sumter, Terrell, Taylor, Turner, Webster and Worth.



Conservation Innovation Grants

Program Manager: Tansel Hudson
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Program Description

The Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) is a voluntary program intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production.

These projects may be watershed-based, regional, or statewide in scope. State, tribal, and local governmental entities, non-governmental organizations, and individuals may apply.

Selection will be based on the criteria established in the request for proposals notice, and selected applicants may receive grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. Applicants must provide non-Federal funding for at least 50 percent of the project cost. Up to 50 percent (25 percent of the total project cost) of the applicant's match may be from in-kind contributions. The remainder must be cash.

2012 Highlights

Georgia was among two multi-state projects for CIG. The first involved North Carolina State University, Georgia and nine other states. The group worked to coordinate and advance phosphorous management in the South by ensuring that most southern phosphorous assessment tools have been tested based on guidance in the 2011 NRCS 590 standard and compared to water quality data. The project is funded by a \$472,962 grant.

A second effort involved working with the University of Arkansas and 19 other states to develop a database of existing plot and watershed scale sites with more than three years of water quality measurement (flow and phosphorous concentration) and sufficient land management information to populate phosphorous indices and predictive models approved under the 590 standard. This project received \$57,924.



Conservation Innovation Grants are also responsible for helping landowners get solar power in pastures to provide water for livestock.

Conservation Stewardship Program



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Program Description

Through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), NRCS provides technical and financial 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, non-industrial private forest lands, and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe. It also includes 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.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, more than \$6.9 million was allocated to CSP resulting in a total of 475 contracts designated for the program. Across the state, an estimated 250,490 acres were enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program. Soil, water, air and related natural resources will be conserved and enhanced on these properties.

CSP Spotlight

What do a banker, an insurance entrepreneur and row crop farmer have in common? If you ask the Shaws, they will simply say ‘olives’ and CSP. Brothers, Jason and Sam, started farming olives with their cousin Kevin Shaw in 2009. They wanted to re-introduce the Southeastern United States to olive farming.

“Olives are cutting edge in the Eastern part of the United States,” Kevin said. Georgia Olive Farms operation consists of 60 acres of olive trees that are irrigated by a drip irrigation system. The Shaws use the Super High Density (SHD) method of farming olives where over 600 trees are planted per acre in a hedgerow shape so they can be mechanically harvested. ***Continues on next page.***



Jason (left), Kevin (right) and Sam Shaw operate Georgia Olive Farms.



Conservation Stewardship Program

continued

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CSP Spotlight *continued*

Like any other farming operation, it takes new techniques and practices to continue making improvements. A 2012 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract will allow the Shaws an opportunity to continue their conservation efforts on 33 acres of the olive farm and 963 acres of row crop farmland.

The Shaws will use plant tissue sampling to determine nutrient needs in the soil by studying leaves on the trees and row crops for deficiencies. Other practices covered under the contract include controlled traffic methods and retrofitting the irrigation system with drift reducing nozzles. Kevin said, "It [CSP] opened up an avenue for getting support to continue what we were doing."



CSP will allow the Shaws to determine nutrient needs in their olive orchards.



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Program Description

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.

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.*

2012 Highlights

In 2012, NRCS Georgia developed 2,323 conservation plans on 282,071 acres.



Landowner Ronnie Lee inspects corn with NRCS District Conservationist Rich Hosmer.



Retired District Conservationist Mary Leidner helps Ellen Kitchens, a goat breeder, review a contract.



E-Government

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Landowners and others wanting to do business with the government can do it online! 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 Description

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.

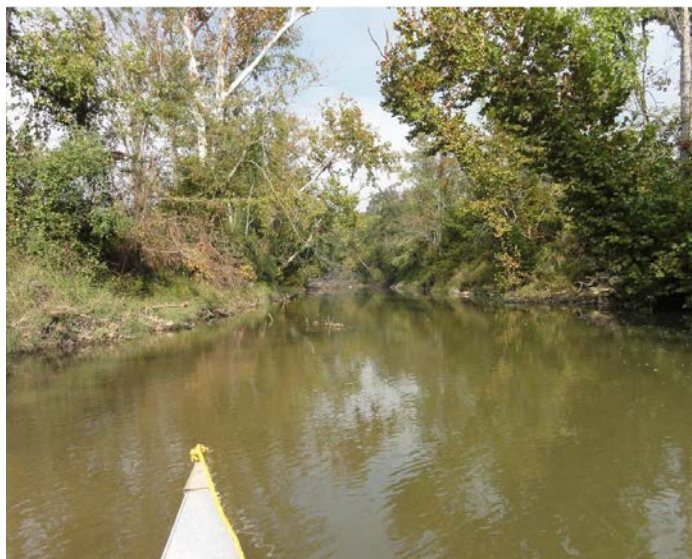
2012 Highlights

This year \$416,000 of EWP funds were obligated to restore 63 project sites in eight communities resulting from damages associated with tornadoes in the spring of 2011. Work consisted primarily of debris removal.

In addition work on two large EWP sites damaged by floods in 2009 was completed this year. One site was streambank stabilization in an impoverished section of the City of Valdosta and the other was repair to the auxiliary spillway of a floodwater retarding dam.



Before: Chickamauga Creek clean-up site in Calhoun County.



After: Chickamauga Creek site where EWP work was completed.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

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Program Description

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides technical, educational and financial assistance to eligible farmers and ranchers to address soil, water and related natural resource concerns on their lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.

The program provides assistance to farmers and ranchers in complying with Federal, State, and Tribal environmental laws and encourages environmental enhancement. The purposes of the program are achieved through the implementation of a conservation plan which includes structural, vegetative, and land management practices on eligible land.

Cost-share payments may be made to implement one or more eligible structural or vegetative practices, such as animal waste management facilities, terraces, filter strips, tree planting and permanent wildlife habitat. Incentive payments can be made to implement one or more land management practices, such as residue management, upland wildlife habitat management and grazing land management.



Clinton Trice's farm benefited when EQIP helped him purchase a new drip-irrigation system.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, Georgia obligated 1,890 EQIP contracts for a sum of \$25,750,594 in financial assistance. The majority of contracts covered the resource concerns of forestry, air quality, water quality and quantity, soil erosion, plant condition, domestic animals, and energy. Through the technical assistance of NRCS field staff and conservation partners in Georgia and the local work group process facilitated by the conservation districts, EQIP assistance was extended to 152 of the 159 counties in Georgia yielding a 96% statewide participation in EQIP for 2012.

EQIP Spotlight

Clinton Trice decided to try his luck at growing pecans after a rough couple of years running a cattle operation. "Mother Nature is kind but sometimes she can be sort of unkind; especially when you're not getting the water you need." Trice explained.

He soon learned that operating a pecan orchard could also be challenging. That's when he decided to visit his local USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office.

After applying for financial and technical assistance provided through (EQIP), Trice was able to make improvements to his water situation on more than 16 acres of pecan orchard. As part of an Irrigation Water Management Plan, a micro-irrigation system has helped Trice keep his orchards healthy.

Trice is also in the process of completing an EQIP contract that includes constructing a hoop house to extend his growing season and planting conservation cover crop. He will plant clover which is known to improve soil nutrition and health of pecan orchards.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program



Longleaf Pine Initiative

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Program Description

Longleaf pine forests once encompassed more than 90 million acres of the North American landscape. Today, only three percent, or 3.4 million acres, remain and, yet, Longleaf pine forests represent some of the world's most biologically diverse ecosystems. The Longleaf pine ecosystem provides critical habitat for 29 threatened and endangered species.

The Longleaf Pine Initiative began when an interdepartmental Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among USDA, the Department of Interior and the Department of Defense identified the longleaf pine ecosystem as a priority resource concern.

As part of the initiative, NRCS and its conservation partners in nine states are helping private landowners improve the sustainability and profitability of Longleaf pine forest ecosystems.

The following important conservation practices improve the forests' health: forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, restoration and management of rare or declining habitats, and tree/shrub establishment. NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs provide landowners technical and financial assistance.

States involved in the initiative include Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, 95 contracts were approved under the Longleaf Pine Initiative in Georgia for \$1,475,359. There were 3,601.60 acres planned and 405.2 acres were certified for the Longleaf Pine Initiative.



The longleaf pine tree pictured above is roughly one year old.



Longleaf pine seedlings.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Organic Initiative

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Program Description

Organic Initiative funding is provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a voluntary conservation program administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. The 2008 Farm Bill provided for assistance specifically for organic farm operations and those converting to organic production.

Eligible producers include those certified through USDA's National Organic Program, those transitioning to certified organic production, and those who meet organic standards but are exempt from certification because their gross annual organic sales are less than \$5,000.

The program provides up to \$20,000 per year per person or legal entity, with a maximum total of \$80,000 over six years.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, 43 organic operations were approved for EQIP contracts under the Organic Initiative. NRCS Georgia obligated \$791,600 for those contracts.



Squash grown by an organic farmer in Screven County.



Kohlrabi, which is a type of cabbage, grown naturally on an Oglethorpe County farm.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program



High Tunnel Initiative

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Program Description

Under this pilot study, NRCS funded up to two high-tunnels per applicant with a maximum size of 2,178 sq. ft. The applicant agrees to maintain the structure and a record system for three years. High tunnels, sometimes known as hoop houses, help small farmers by extending their growing season allowing them to generate income as the temperature gets colder in the fall and winter.

They are used year-round in warmer parts of the country, providing steady incomes to farmers—a significant advantage to owners of small farms, limited-resource farmers and organic producers. Made of ribs of plastic or metal pipe covered with a layer of plastic sheeting, high tunnels are easy to build, maintain and move. NRCS is studying whether the use of high tunnels leads to conservation of natural resources.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, 104 high tunnels were approved and funded at a cost of \$674,420.

A high tunnel differs from a greenhouse in several ways. Crops must be planted in the ground in a high tunnel and they cannot be artificially heated. The 3-year pilot study will evaluate the natural resource benefits of high tunnels. A greenhouse differs from a high tunnel in that crops can be raised above the ground.

EQIP Spotlight

Todd Lister is no stranger to hard work and believes that the best teacher is experience. That mindset has helped the carpenter transition into an organic farmer in just a few short years.

Over the years, Lister has built Veribest Farm from the ground up to include certified naturally grown produce and flowers that he sells at local farmers markets. He also provides his products directly to local restaurants.

“Right now, I’m working with spinach, kale, lettuce, beets, carrots, eggplants, peppers, flowers, and basil for its flowers.”

A 2010 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract helped Lister construct a hoop house on his 5 acre farm. ***Continues on next page.***



High tunnel located in Lexington, Georgia.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

High Tunnel Initiative continued

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EQIP Spotlight *continued*

Hoop houses, also referred to as seasonal high tunnels, allow farmers like Lister to extend their growing seasons during colder months. Hoop houses also help farmers by improving plant quality, soil quality, reducing nutrient and pesticide transportation and reducing energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce.

That local source of produce is very important to the sustainability of the Athens Farmers Market where Lister sells much of his produce. Because of the hoop houses, he and other growers are able to sell fresh vegetables like tomatoes up until mid-December. In previous seasons, that type of produce would have been gone much sooner.

“EQIP and NRCS have been a huge help to us,” Lister said.



Todd Lister inspects carrots grown in his high tunnel.



Lister and others with high tunnels are able to sell produce longer at their local farmers markets.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program



Pigweed Initiative

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Program Description

The pilot project is being funded via the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and is targeted to cotton farmers in the southern part of the state.

Participants worked with NRCS to design a conservation plan and agree to implement several practices that will assist with the control of the glyphosate-resistant pigweed.

General Criteria:

- 1. Participants must meet the regular EQIP eligibility requirements.*
- 2. Individuals, groups of landowners or non-government organizations are eligible but must have evidence of control or ownership of land.*
- 3. Payment rate will be up to \$75.00 per acre for two years.*
- 4. The contracts are for three years with a minimum of 100.0 acres of cropland owned and a maximum of \$13,000 per contract.*

2012 Highlights

In 2012, NRCS funded 439 contracts and obligated \$699,137.



Fighting pigweed like that shown above is a challenge for cotton farmers.

Farm & Ranch Lands Protection Program

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Program Description

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and rangeland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA partners with State, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners.

USDA provides up to 50 percent of the fair market value for the conservation easement.

The program provides matching funds to State, Tribal, or local governmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements or other interests in land.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, there was one FRPP contract funded for \$175,000 on 45 acres through the USDA.

The contract was approved for a cattle operation in Oconee County. The landowners agreed to place 45 acres, pasture land and forested areas, into the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

An additional five FRPP contracts were funded through the Oconee County Board of Commissioners. These contracts encompass more than 400 acres.



The land pictured above is enrolled in FRPP for a total of 45 acres in Oconee County.

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Program Description

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.



This portion of the GRP easement includes tall fescue and clover.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, \$16,558 funded four rental contracts on a total of 175 acres. Three of the contracts were for 10 years and one contract was for 15 years.



Nearly 175 acres on Braswell Farm are enrolled in GRP in Jackson County.



Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

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Program Description

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.



Beef cattle grazing native warm season grasses.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, Georgia NRCS received \$326,000 through GLCI for providing technical assistance on grazing lands. GLCI funds have again, in 2012, funded technical assistance from grazing land specialist positions, and provided funding for grazing lands technical assistance provided by NRCS conservationists and technicians in Field Offices.

GGLCC has maintained its relationship with demonstration farms from prior years and still has ongoing projects related particularly to multi-species grazing and stockpiling of forages. Additional demonstrations have been established in the state to demonstrate management, and grazing value of red clover, hairy vetch, forage radishes, and forage turnips.

Demonstrations related to the use of temporary electric fence for grazing management have also been expanded. GGLCC, NRCS, and Auburn University have also partnered to expand the use of the NutBal System. NutBal is a forage testing system that allows producers to monitor the nutrient concentration in animal diets.

Grazing Land Specialists conducted multiple producer education programs on forage, pasture and livestock management throughout the state highlighted by the “Fundamentals of Grazing Management Workshops” that were held in early 2012. In total over 700 producers were reached by Grazing Land Specialists via seventeen educational events

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Program Description

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 segments, with three intensively studied points within those segments. As data is collected for each crop year, approximately 71,500 segments are utilized.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, NRCS collected NRI data describing conditions in 2009 and 2010 for the whole nation. Georgia personnel collected crop history and erosion estimations for about 2,000 points. Field office local knowledge provided the key to an accurate estimation of natural resource conditions around the nation.

Georgia personnel also began participating in on-site data collection for a Soil Monitoring Network. This information will be used for long-term monitoring of soil resources to support USDA farm policy assessment. This is a collaborative effort between NRCS and Colorado State University. We appreciate ten private landowners allowing access to their fields for these on-site measurements.

In addition, Georgia began a pilot study of direct measurements of forage yields. This Forage Yield Inventory Pilot is intended to provide yield curves and on-farm yield estimates in support of development of Forage Suitability Groups. Forage suitability groups are groupings of soil types producing similar yields and having similar management and conservation needs. Four private landowners allowed small plots of their pastures to be excluded from grazing with fence. Samples of the forage inside the fence were collected and weighed once a month.

NRI results are available at ~5 year intervals from 1982 through 2007 for all 50 states and our territories. A few highlights for Georgia of the data:

Crop year 2007 – Forestland continues to be the dominant land-use in Georgia with 22 million acres of Georgia's 34.6 million acres of non-federal land devoted to it. According to Figure 1, 2007 was the first NRI estimate that showed Georgia with more developed land (4.6 million acres) than cropland (4.0 million acres). ***Continues on next page.***

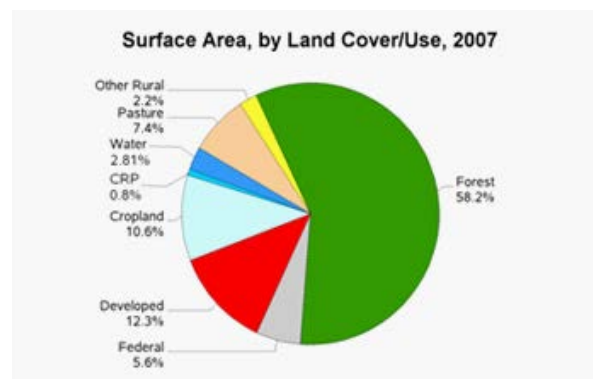


Figure 1



National Resource Inventory

continued

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2012 Highlights *continued*

Georgia's cropland has steadily declined from a high of 6.6 million in 1982. (Figure 2).

Resources Conservation Act Data Viewer: NRCS has compiled NRI data, conservation expenditure and National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) data into one convenient location. This effort was accomplished in fulfilling the reporting requirements of the Resource Conservation Act.

This tool is located on the internet at: <https://web-review.scegov.usda.gov/soils/survey/rca/viewer/>.

Conservation Effects Assessment Program (CEAP) – this initiative to correlate NRI data with Agricultural Research Service (ARS) study watersheds began with the 2002 Farm Bill. A complete library of CEAP publications since 2002 can be found at the NRI website: www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/.

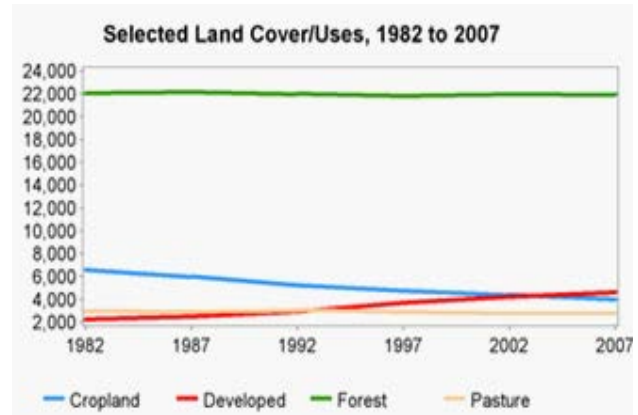


Figure 2



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Program Description

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 in Southwestern Georgia and is approximately 40 miles North of Albany.

Areas served by the center 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.

2012 Highlights

The PMC worked with 10 different studies and seven field plantings in Alabama and Georgia

Accomplishments Include:

- Conducted 7 technology transfer presentations
- Produced 8 technical and 4 non-technical documents. Release Brochures on Union purpletop grass, AU Sunup crimson clover, AU Early Cover hairy vetch, Flageo marshhay cordgrass, and Dove proso millet were written
- Continued bobwhite quail restoration study
- Continued replicated pollinator study to determine herbicide uses in pollinator planting
- Continued switchgrass growth study for agronomists and grazing specialists
- In cooperation with Jim Lathem, produced new Wetland Plant Identification compact disc entitled Georgia Wetland Plants Version 4.0



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



A field of AU Sunup Crimson Clover at the PMC.

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Program Description

The Soil Survey Program was established by the Agriculture Appropriation Act of 1896 and is guided by executive orders and Secretary's memoranda.

Subsequent legislation (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.

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 both 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).

2012 Highlights

The soil mapping phase of the soil survey program has been completed for Georgia. During 2012, soil survey work focused on field data collection and database development to complete our final surveys for publication. The soil survey of Dade and Walker Counties was completed and digitized, and the completed product was made publically available as a Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) Database product through the Soil Data Mart and the Web Soil Survey.

The Web Soil Survey is an interactive, web-based delivery system for soil survey products that includes maps and data. The Web Soil Survey resides at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/>. Soil surveys have now been completed and made available for all but nine of Georgia's counties. Field data collection was completed on all of these remaining counties during 2012. The soil correlation process was completed for five of these counties, preparing them for SSURGO certification early in 2013. **Continues on next page.**



The soil pictured above is located in the Piedmont region of Georgia.

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2012 Highlights

During 2012, soil survey offices in Georgia where initial soil survey work has been completed began a comprehensive multi-year project of evaluating and updating existing soils data. The process has been named Soil Data Join Recorrelation and is designed to improve quality, consistency, and completeness of the data, both within individual survey areas and also across county and state lines.

Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs) are part of an emerging system to address relationships and interactions between soils and vegetative communities and their responses to disturbances and management.

During 2012, an ESD for use in the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods Major Land Resource Area (MLRA 153A) was approved. This was the first ESD to be approved in the eastern U. S. The ecological site was approved as Loamy Rise, Moderately Wet. Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina ESD and soil survey staff began work on ecological site development in the Carolina and Georgia Sand Hills Major Land Resource Area (MLRA 137) in 2012.

This MLRA occurs in all three states, and the goal is to develop ESDs for the entire region. This multi-state approach provides an opportunity for valuable collaboration among NRCS staff. As more ESDs are drafted in the eastern U.S., they will serve as conservation planning tools.



Soil Scientist Stephon Thomas demonstrates how to sample soil types in the field.



Technical Service Providers

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Program Description

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.

2012 Highlights

Georgia obligated funds through TSP agreements and through the Agricultural Conservation Enrollees/Seniors (ACES) Program in 2012.

Over \$35,000 was spent on Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) in FY 12.

Agreements were developed with counties, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission. With these agreements, valuable assistance is provided to NRCS field offices to assist staff in conservation practice installation funded through the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Looking ahead to FY 13, the following CAPs will be offered; Pollinator Habitat Enhancement-146, Transition from Irrigated to Dryland Farming and Ranching-134, Forest Management Plan-106, Comprehensive Nutrient Management-102, Nutrient Management-104, Integrated Pest Mgt-114, Irrigated Water Mgt-118, Ag Energy Mgt Headquarters-122, Ag Energy Mgt Landscape-124, Drainage Water Mgt-130, Organic Transition-138, Fish and Wildlife Mgt-142, Integrated Pest Mgt Herbicide Resistance Weed-154, Grazing Mgt-110.

Watershed Rehabilitation Program



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Program Description

The Watershed Rehabilitation 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.



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

2012 Program Highlights

This year work was completed on rehabilitation of 4 watershed dams using ARRA funds. The projects are located in Barrow, Jackson and Madison Counties. The total cost for the rehabilitation work, including design and construction was \$5,518,254.35. The costs were split, 65% NRCS and 35% Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC). Work completed included:

- Marbury Creek 22 in Barrow County–Widened auxiliary spillway and flattened front and back slopes of dam.

- Little Sandy Trail 1 in Madison County – Widened auxiliary spillway, raised top of dam, and modified riser structure.

- Sandy Creek 15 in Jackson County – Installed 180’ wide reinforced concrete labyrinth weir, raised top of dam and closed existing vegetated spillway.

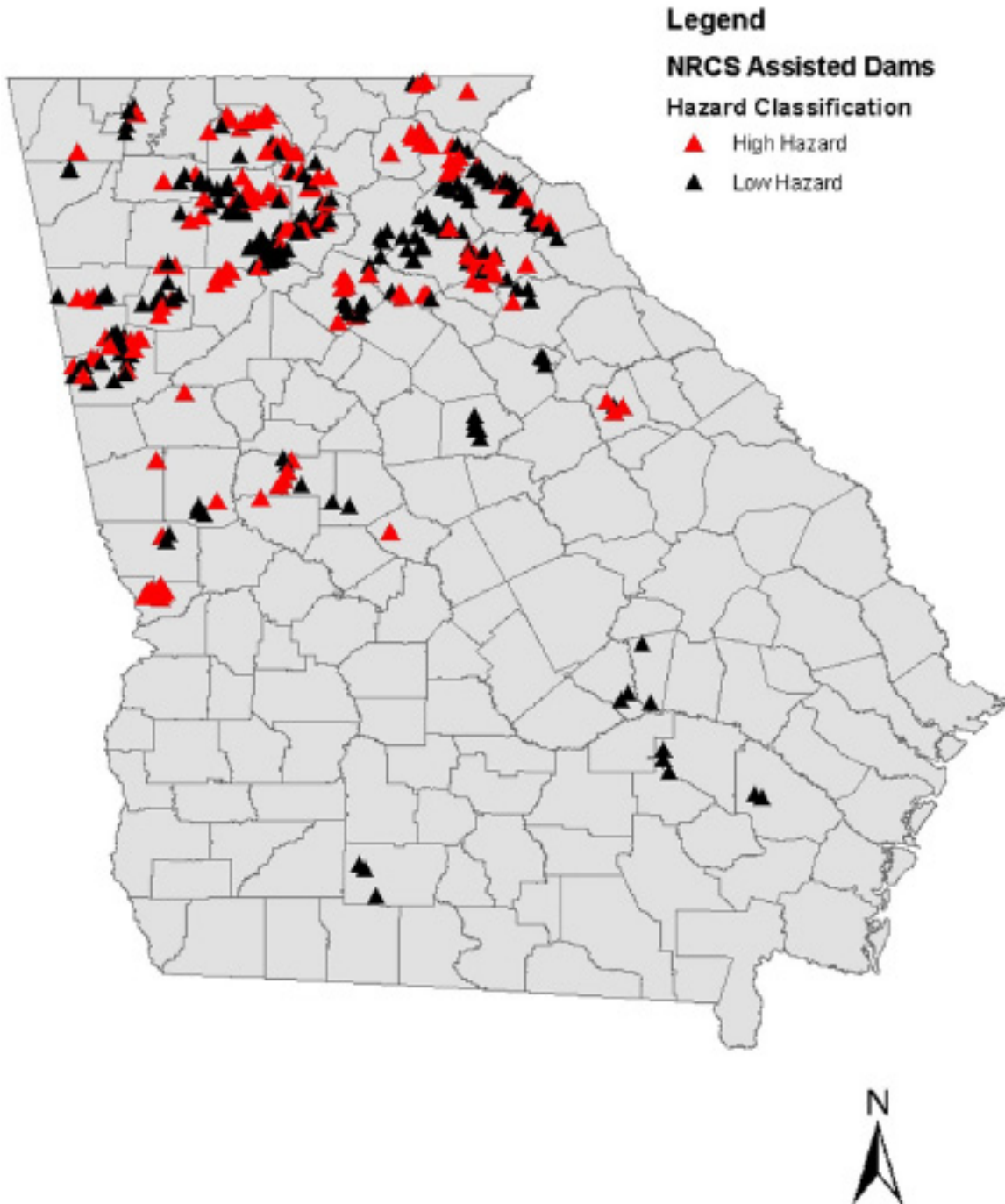
- South River 4 in Madison County – Installed 54’ wide reinforced concrete labyrinth weir, raised top of dam, repaired existing riser and closed existing vegetated spillway.



Watershed Rehabilitation Program

continued

NRCS Historically Assisted Dams



Wetlands Reserve Program

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Program Description

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.

2012 Highlights

In 2012, 20 new contracts were approved for WRP to restore 8,055 acres of private lands. Roughly \$11.7 million were obligated for those contracts.

One of the largest projects for the fiscal year involved Arabia Bay, which was covered under the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program.

This project covered five contracts for 5,350 acres. The project cost an estimated \$8 million in federal funds.



The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) will allow NRCS to work with a group of landowners to restore Arabia Bay, pictured above, to its natural hydrology.



Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

Working Lands for Wildlife

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Program Description

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.

WHIP is a voluntary program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land.

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) is a new partnership between NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to combat the decline of seven specific wildlife species whose decline can be reversed and will benefit other species with similar habitat needs.

2012 Highlights

The gopher tortoise is considered a keystone species, and an indicator of longleaf pine ecosystem health. Its burrows provide vital habitat and shelter for many endangered species.

In addition, gopher tortoise serves as vector for seed dispersal, helping to maintain biological diversity.

More than 80 percent of gopher tortoise habitat is in private or corporate ownership. Georgia NRCS has awarded Working Lands for Wildlife participants 215 contracts for \$5,752,589 on 44,433 acres for 2012..



The gopher tortoise is a keystone species that will benefit from WLFW efforts.