Looking Forward at 50
Our impact in the next half-century.

GEORGIA CONSERVANCY • WINTER 2018
The Georgia Conservancy is a statewide, member-supported conservation organization. Our work for environmental advocacy, land conservation, coastal protection, sustainable growth and outdoor stewardship recognizes the connection between the environment, the economy and Georgia’s quality of life.

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cover photo by Steve Rushing
A as we enter 2018, we bring to a close the Georgia Conservancy’s Golden Anniversary. Fifty years of history has offered us all a great deal to reflect upon. While reflection offers moments of nostalgia, reminders of great conservation successes and near misses, it also reminds me that good conservation is never accidental, nor is its impact limited to a single year or decade. Good, purposeful conservation anticipates, as best as possible, future challenges and needs for our natural resources and precious places.

In each of the past two autumns, Georgians have been reminded of why good conservation matters to people and nature alike. Because of strong leadership and foresight from the 60s and 70s, Georgia’s short coastline is largely unspoiled, and while this has benefited the biodiversity of this globally unique landscape, our citizens have benefited as well. In the cases of Hurricanes Matthew and Irma, our coastal residents and our coastal businesses benefited significantly from the ability of our functioning sand dunes and salt marsh to absorb the impacts and energy of these hurricanes. To be sure, there was damage and in some parts of the coast the damage was significant, as many communities are far from recovered. But, it is true to say that it could have been much worse.

So rather than reflect for the sake of nostalgia, we reflect so that we will learn from these past successes and failures. As our population and economy grow, we have to become even more thoughtful and committed to conservation. In this issue of Panorama, we highlight a transformative collaborative effort that seeks to forward both conservation and our economy through sustainable and dedicated funding for our open lands, parks and greenspace – the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act.

During the next 50 years, we will face new and evolving challenges. In many regards, the future will be similar to our past. Our population will grow significantly and so too will the economy, both of which depend on Nature and the resources that she provides. The footprint of our cities and towns will grow to accommodate the population and economic expansion, and our land, air and water will be even more precious to all life in this state, particularly in the face of more intense weather events and sea level rise that accompany our changing climate.

The lessons from our past remind us that the decisions that we make today impact our future and the future of generations to come. For our part, the Georgia Conservancy will remain steadfast in our efforts to deliver solutions that enable Georgia to be a place where people and the environment continue to thrive.

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

for future generations

Robert Ramsay
President
rramsay@gaconservancy.org

THE GEORGIA CONSERVANCY MISSION

To protect and conserve Georgia’s natural resources through advocacy, engagement and collaboration.
Nothing that the Georgia Conservancy has accomplished in our 50 years can be solely attributed to the work of our staff, volunteers, members and board of trustees. We pride ourselves on being an organization that collaborates with a diverse range of partners - our Natural Partners - with the goal of forwarding a culture of conservation in Georgia.

Our Natural Partners are some of the Georgia Conservancy’s strongest allies in the conservation and stewardship of Georgia’s natural resources. Without the support of Natural Partners that have a stake in the environmental and economic well-being of our state, our mission would not be possible.

Learn more at: www.georgiaconservancy.org/naturalpartners
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THROUGH JANUARY 31, BECOME A GEORGIA CONSERVANCY LIVE OAK ($50) MEMBER, OR RENEW YOUR CURRENT MEMBERSHIP, AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A POST CARD SET OF OUR FIVE PRECIOUS PLACES! SEE PAGE 10!
As with any milestone, the desire to reflect upon and to assess the past is strong. Nostalgia for some, curiosity for many, will unearth stories worthy of celebration, as well as stories that beg the question, “what if”? Without losing sight of our present and future goals, the Georgia Conservancy has proudly celebrated our 50th Anniversary for the last 18 months, shining a light on the dedication of our members, supporters, and past staff and board members to protect and conserve some of our state’s most precious places, such as Cumberland Island National Seashore, the Okefenokee Wilderness, Sweetwater Creek State Park, the Cohutta Wilderness and the Flint River. These places today are iconic, both in their beauty and in the protections that they provide for our biodiverse flora and fauna. They also remind us that conservation is an unending effort – often a series of battles – and that the places that we celebrate and continue to advocate for today, could have been lost forever. Fifty years from now, we do not want to look back on today and ponder “what if?” in regard to some of our biggest conservation challenges, so right now we are working to preserve for future citizens of Georgia the next precious places of which to be proud.

continued on next page
So, what’s in store for the next fifty years?
It’s an ambitious question, and one truly worthy of consideration as we work on a number of projects that have the potential to influence Georgia for decades to come. Since our founding in 1967, Georgia’s population has nearly tripled to 11 million. Atlanta has seen tremendous growth that has greatly increased the footprint of the metropolis. Our continued research and outreach around sea level rise along Georgia’s coast, comprehensive updates to our climate change policies, and our advocacy for improved water quality and water conservation are focus areas that we believe will tremendously benefit not only our state’s land and water, but also the quality of life for our growing population.

Growth will continue, though, and how we manage that growth through conservation must evolve. One project, in particular, has the opportunity to immediately influence and provide a blueprint for decades of strategic land conservation and sustainable growth.

Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act
For nearly 10 years, the Georgia Conservancy, along with a coalition of partners including the Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, The Conservation Fund, Park Pride and the Georgia Wildlife Federation, has actively pursued the passage of legislation that would establish a long-term dedicated source of funding for land conservation in Georgia. Known as the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act (GOSA), the benefits of House Bill 332 would have a lasting impact on Georgia.

“Currently, Georgia lacks a dedicated funding mechanism that ensures critical lands can be protected, conserved and managed,” says Georgia Conservancy Advocacy Director Leah Dixon. “The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act would provide our state with the financial resources necessary to acquire lands identified as critical in the most recent Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), better manage existing parks and wildlife management areas, and allow for local greenspace matching funds.”

The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act does not call for an additional tax. Monies would be appropriated from the existing state sales tax on outdoor recreation equipment – items as diverse as shotgun shells and hiking boots. Three-fourths of every dollar spent by outdoor enthusiasts on the products...
Currently, Georgia lacks a dedicated funding mechanism that ensures critical lands can be protected, conserved and managed...

- Georgia Conservancy Advocacy Director, Leah Dixon

they use for recreation would be set aside for land conservation and would help to ensure that our precious lands and waters will remain for current and future generations to enjoy.

Georgia’s robust outdoor industry, one of the strongest in the nation, is a signal that sustainable conservation funding is good for both the environment and the economy. It is estimated that the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act would direct as much as $40 million dollars annually for land conservation without raising taxes.

In addition to providing much needed habitat protection for the nation’s sixth most biodiverse state, dedicated conservation funding would protect and manage the lands, waters and parks where we study, recreate and relax.

How do we ensure that these dollars will be used as intended? Companion legislation, House Resolution 238, would allow for the Georgia Constitution to be amended through a ballot referendum. If passed by Georgia voters during the November 2018 general election, the fund established by GOSA would be constitutionally lock-boxed and those dollars could only be used for their intended purposes.

Land Conservation + Growth

Through polling, and as seen in recent conservation referenda in Georgia, both sides of the political aisle are viewing dedicated conservation funding as a positive step forward in the protection of our natural resources. In November 2016, with the support of the Georgia Conservancy, the conservative-leaning metro Atlanta communities of Johns Creek and Milton separately voted to increase their greenspace and conservation lands through bond referendums totaling nearly $65 million.

The Georgia Conservancy’s Sustainable Growth and Land Conservation programs have continued our support of the City of Milton’s efforts into 2017 by engaging and collaborating with city leaders to develop a detailed list of priority conservation tracts eligible for protection with the bond funds.

Communities in metro Atlanta are recognizing the importance of greenspace and maintaining and conserving land and water resources, not only for the health of their citizens, but also for growing a viable economy by attracting and retaining a workforce along with community-minded businesses.

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To celebrate our 50th Anniversary, the Georgia Conservancy has selected five Precious Places that tell the story of Georgia’s incredible natural areas and the men and women who dedicated their lives to protect them. During the course of 2017, we shared our conservation story and encouraged people to share with the rest of world what makes these places great today.

Through December 31, become a Georgia Conservancy Live Oak ($50) member, or renew your current membership, and you will receive a post card set of our five Precious Places.

Thank you to Gentleman Design for creating this beautiful commemorative artwork!
Through December 31, become a Georgia Conservancy Live Oak ($50) member, or renew your current membership, and you will receive a postcard set of our five Precious Places!
Through DECEMBER 31, become a Georgia Conservancy Live Oak ($50) member, or renew your current membership, and you will receive a postcard set of our five Precious Places!
“It’s a win-win,” says Georgia Conservancy Senior Director of Sustainable Growth Katherine Moore. “Georgia is going to continue to grow, but that doesn’t mean that we have to sacrifice critical acres to development. Cities and towns across Georgia have found value in the revitalization of historic town centers, the repurposing of existing facilities, the redevelopment or restoration of brownfields, and maintaining undeveloped lands for conservation and passive recreation. Understanding that our natural assets can also become economic assets through conservation has been a revelation for many communities in our state. The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act and the overwhelming turnout by voters in North Fulton support this notion.” (Learn more about the current work of our Sustainable Growth program on page 20)

The Economic Benefits of Conservation

The economic benefits of conservation and the need for conservation funding through mechanisms such as GOSA are beginning to be understood and valued, not only in our urban and suburban communities, but in the rural reaches of our state as well.

The listing of the red-cockaded woodpecker as an endangered species in the early 1970s provided a number of protections that helped the population of this rather unusual bird slowly rebound across the Southeast. However, due to a number of federal restrictions, the economic effects of such a listing can be tremendous for residents and businesses who derive their income from the land. When extending federal protection to additional species is proposed, backlash from nearby communities can be expected, along with the potential erosion of political support.

In a prolonged effort to head off such concerns, the Georgia Conservancy and a coalition of partners in the public, private and nonprofit sectors are working to conserve a minimum of 100,000 acres of critical gopher tortoise habitat before a federal endangered species listing for Georgia’s state reptile becomes necessary.

Keystone Species: Gopher Tortoise

Like the red-cockaded woodpecker, the gopher tortoise is a keystone species, meaning that other plants and animals within the same ecosystem are in some way dependent on this species for survival. The gopher tortoise's burrows, which are largely
found in the once-vast longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem, provide habitat for the striped newt, indigo snake, flatwoods salamander, gopher frog, southern hognose snake, eastern diamond-backed rattlesnake, and many more. Conserving and restoring thousands acres of this south Georgia ecosystem, through voluntary conservation easements on both private and public lands, as well as through the creation of state wildlife management areas, is not only vital for the recovery of the gopher tortoise, but also in the protection of dozens of other species.

The Georgia Conservancy and our partners in the Gopher Tortoise Initiative intend to leverage the dollars which could be potentially dedicated through the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act to acquire additional matching funds from federal and philanthropic sources. To date, more than $78 million has been pledged to the effort to conserve, restore and protect the lands needed for the gopher tortoise to thrive and for industry to avoid the economic hit that an endangered species listing could bring.

“Among our most important efforts in our 50 years,” says Georgia Conservancy President Robert Ramsay, “is our current collaboration to champion the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act, as the passage of this bill and subsequent referendum will have the potential to literally affect the landscape of Georgia for generations.”

In areas urban, suburban and rural, from the mountain through the coastal plain, millions of Georgians would reap the positive benefits of long-term, dedicated conservation funding for years to come. The precious places of tomorrow are being saved today.

To learn more about the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act and how you can become an advocate for long-term, dedicated conservation funding, please visit: www.georgiaoutdoorstewardship.org

Weekly Legislative Update

To stay informed on this issue, along with other state policies we will be following in the 2018 Legislative Session, please sign up to receive our weekly legislative update, online at www.georgiaconservancy.org/advocacy

Photos

Upper left: Willowin plantation by Georgia Conservancy
Above: Indigo snake by Georgia Conservancy
Around 25 years ago, the state’s oldest and most respected conservation organization took a look in the mirror and understood one thing very clearly: they were getting older. And not only were they getting older, a new generation of Georgians was growing up, in a hurry.

Originally founded as the Green Peaches, the Georgia Conservancy’s new young professionals group was seen as the next standard bearers of the conservation movement in Georgia. Unsurprisingly, that has proven to be true, for indeed Generation Green alumni find themselves to be just that - today’s leading voices in conservation and sustainability. In fact, last February at our annual Next South Sustainability Career Conference, Generation Green alum sat on a panel to talk with college students and recent graduates seeking careers in sustainability and resiliency, relaying to them the ever-increasing importance of their work within all industries. We look forward to welcoming them back again to this year’s conference.

As the Georgia Conservancy looks at their next 50 years through a strategic lens, so does Generation Green. In many ways, Generation Green has grown into a more structured and professional organization than it has been in the past. Over the last year, we have revised our bylaws, increased the size and scope of our board, collected and analyzed data about our audience, and homed in on our core mission. We even drafted a new mission statement:

*Generation Green leads innovating programming that connects new and diverse audiences to the Georgia Conservancy’s mission and fosters the growth of young environmental leaders across Georgia.*

In crafting this statement, our board considered not only what we were doing, but what we hoped to be doing as an organization. We sought to continue hosting fresh and interesting events like our quarterly lecture series Green Eggs and Ham, and to grow the next generation of environmental leaders through career-focused initiatives like the Next South Conference. But we also realized in order to truly help create a Georgia where both people and the environment thrive, we would have to renew our resolve to reach out to all Georgians, not just those we have traditionally connected with. Diversity, equity and inclusion have become buzz words in today’s society. Here at Generation Green, we seek to live and breathe those words into action and into everything that we do. We hope that you will join us.

Want to learn more? Visit www.georgiaconservancy.org/gengreen
Offshore Drilling in Georgia

Our comments to the Federal Bureau of Offshore Energy Management Regarding The Oil and Gas Leasing Program

The Georgia Conservancy appreciates this opportunity to submit information and comment on the Oil and Gas Leasing Program for the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) in the Atlantic Ocean off Georgia’s coast. As noted in the Federal Register announcement for this program (82 Fed. Register 126, July 2, 2017), the last such lease program that affected the Georgia Coast was in 1983. The Georgia Conservancy had a major role in opposing leasing for offshore drilling then, and we have an even heightened level of concern now, 34 years later.

Our issues with the oil and gas leases center primarily on the numerous ways it would damage critical ecosystems and disrupt the lives and economy of our coastal residents. There are more than 40 years of sound science that need to be considered in this round of Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) assessments. It is critical that the federal review process not be hurried for the sake of an energy independence policy wrought by a change in Presidential administration.

Our Coastal Policy states that the Georgia Conservancy envisions a healthy resilient and diverse coastal ecosystem that can endure natural and human disturbances, continue to perform its functions, and support self-sustaining populations of native fish, birds, wildlife and plants.

The comments and questions in this letter should be considered specific to the Georgia Coast, which is part of the South Atlantic Planning Area. The Georgia Conservancy stands with other environmental organizations to call into question if South Atlantic Area leases are even justified and to question the hurried manner being used to reconsider the OCS Oil and Gas Leasing program when a previous administration excluded this area less than two years ago.

Former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, a cabinet-level member of the Obama Administration, announced on November 11, 2016 that the 2017-2022 OCS leasing plan would not include the Atlantic, in large part because BOEM data from the 2016 finding showed that more than 70 percent of the recoverable oil was included in the already-approved lease program.

We specifically request that Section 18 of the OCS Lands Act provide a detailed analysis of oil well disaster scenarios and the cumulative impacts related to spills and long term effects on Georgia’s salt marshes. Georgia’s extensive estuaries comprise one third of the East Coast’s remaining salt marshes, and they play a critical role in maintaining our shrimp and fish populations. Further compounding the issue, Georgia’s coast is home to various endangered marine species. These include the North Atlantic right whale (NARW), one of the most endangered whales in the world, with only about 500 remaining. The Georgia Conservancy has a long history of advocating for the protection of the NARW, Georgia’s official marine mammal.

In 1975, the Georgia Conservancy became an active stakeholder when we started to follow plans to develop domestic oil production on Georgia’s coast. In May
1976, the Georgia Conservancy began working with what would become the Coastal Zone Management program, created to bring together government, petroleum industry, and environmental representatives to consider the onshore impact of offshore oil and gas development. Then as now, the Georgia Conservancy realizes such oil drilling off our coast would bring demands on public services, oil spills and health hazards, as well as jobs and economic profit. If these leases are approved, there will be a major question looming for our coastal communities as they struggle to deal with our disrupted tourism and seafood industries.

Since the 1970s, a host of partner organizations working collaboratively has greatly advanced our understanding of the unique coastal ecology of Georgia’s offshore, marshes and critical nearshore habitats. These organizations have included the Georgia Department of Natural Resources’ Coastal Resource Division, the University of Georgia Skidaway Institute, the Georgia Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Grays Reef National Marine Sanctuary and Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve. During this time, the population of Georgia’s coastal region has more than doubled. Given the unique conditions of Georgia’s coast with only four of the 14 barrier islands being inhabited, any offshore oil and gas piping or support infrastructure will be located in populated areas (barrier island or mainland) or in conserved critical maritime coastal habitat.

We ask that the next step of this BOEM Oil and Gas Leasing Program, the development of the Draft Proposed Program (DPP), include a detailed consideration and balanced assessment of ecological, hazardous and economic impacts based on a compilation of comprehensive data sets which address Georgia-specific features of our nearshore and coastal environments. Our federal agencies and elected officials need to recognize that Georgia has done a remarkable job protecting our coastal assets for the benefit of our citizens, and that the largest functioning marsh estuary on the East Coast should not be jeopardized by this leasing program.

In closing, the Georgia Conservancy does not believe that allowing oil and gas drilling in Georgia’s offshore waters is in the best interests of our state or nation. The risks far outweigh the reward. We appreciate the opportunity to voice our concerns in hopes that science and economic data will be used to show that it does not make sense to lease areas off the Georgia coast for oil and natural gas drilling.

To learn more, please visit www.georgiaconservancy.org/coast
On October 12, at our annual gala, ecoBenefête, we celebrated Governor Nathan Deal, who was honored with our Distinguished Conservationist Award for his legacy work in conservation. We are working with the Governor’s Office on the passage of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act in the 2018 Legislative Session.

Additionally, we honored Georgia Conservancy’s Executive Assistant Lisa Patrick with an award for her lifetime of service to the mission of the Georgia Conservancy.

Photos by William Brawley
In 2017, as a continuation of many years of work focusing on smaller communities in Georgia, the Georgia Conservancy’s *Blueprints for Successful Communities* is partnering with Canvas Planning Group and Village Green Consulting to complete a plan for revitalizing beautiful downtown Hogansville in Troup County.

Our plans will include implementable, actionable items reflective of the market capabilities for this small Georgia town. This walkable downtown, in proximity to several nearby natural resources and only 40 minutes south of Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, allows us the opportunity to develop opportunities for continual investment in a sustainable small-scale urban landscape.

The project was initiated in August 2017 and is currently still in the inventory stage. We will create planning, urban design, and land conservation recommendations to assist this community in repositioning itself in light of modern economic challenges and opportunities.

Parallel to this downtown focus, Georgia Conservancy is working independently with the City on redevelopment plans for Hogansville’s main corridors. This effort will align with the downtown focus to create a comprehensive redevelopment vision for the community and is generously funded by the Callaway Foundation.

Learn more at www.planhogansville.com
In 2016, Georgia Conservancy was approached by leadership of LaGrange’s Calumet Village neighborhood with the request to assist in a community revitalization vision as one part of a multi-phased effort to support neighborhood residents and stabilize the community. Generous support by the Callaway Foundation, Inc. allowed Georgia Conservancy to accept the invitation and a planning process was developed. The process, developed in concert with leadership of the Calumet Village Neighborhood Association, included public meetings, citizen surveys, coordination with the City, and urban design exercises to identify a community-supported future vision for a revitalized Calumet Village neighborhood.

The recommendations of this community planning process aim to address neighborhood stabilization; strengthen community resources of identify, pride, and political prominence; and guides quality future redevelopment (both in housing, commercial properties and recreational amenities) in keeping with the historic scale and character of this historic textile mill village. The recommendations include both project ideas and policy needs - small scale, low or no-cost actions that volunteer and neighborhood groups can undertake, as well as large-scale projects requiring significant investment from the City of LaGrange or private entities. It is this combination of efforts, through deliberate, thoughtful leadership of the neighborhood and City which will result in the revitalized Calumet envisioned by the Blueprints planning process participants.

To learn more or download the final report, please visit www.gaconservancy.org/blueprints/calumet

Below: Calumet Blueprints report excerpt
Fear of missing out on a great time? Become a Georgia Conservancy supporter to receive notification of trip releases and Georgia Conservancy updates!

www.georgiaconservancy.org/trips

Our expanded 2018 schedule offers Heartland Rivers of Georgia Paddle Series trips, Georgia Bucket List Adventures, and Service Weekends in every corner of the state, as well as Metro Atlanta Day Trips and REI Adventure Series outings. From Cloudland Canyon to Cumberland Island, the Georgia Conservancy introduces explorers to Georgia’s greatest natural treasures, offering exciting and educational experiences and creating lifelong advocates for our land and water.

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<th>Trip Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cumberland Island Service Weekend</td>
<td>Jan 12-14</td>
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<td>Sweetwater Creek Day Hike</td>
<td>Jan 27</td>
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<td>Satilla River Paddle</td>
<td>Feb 23-25</td>
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<td>Sweetwater Bike &amp; Brew with REI</td>
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<td>Blood Mountain Day Hike</td>
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<td>Stone Mountain Paddle Fest with REI</td>
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<td>Lower Flint River Paddle at Rocky Bend</td>
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<td>Women’s Unicoi Campout with REI &amp; Trees Atlanta</td>
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<td>Conasauga Snorkel and Mulberry Gap Inn Adventure</td>
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<td>Lower Etowah River Day Paddle</td>
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<td>Women’s Beginner Fly Fishing Clinic with Robert Ramsey</td>
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<td>Cloudland Canyon Adventure Weekend</td>
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Thank you for helping make Georgia a place where people and the environment thrive.

**SUSTAINABLE GROWTH**

Good Urbanism Classes total more than 1,600 students.

**LAND CONSERVATION**

12,500 acres conserved by LCI program and partners in five counties.

**COASTAL GEORGIA**

5 hurricane clean-ups.

Post-hurricane Matthew work completed on Cumberland Island, Fort McAllister, Ossabaw Island, Skidaway Island State Park and the UGA Marine Extension on Skidaway Island.

**STEWARDSHIP TRIPS**

1,879 people taken outside on 63 days.

**ADVOCACY**

Monitored more than 50 pieces of legislation that could impact Georgia’s natural resources.

Thank you for helping make Georgia a place where people and the environment thrive.