

GEORGIA



## Warnell's Women Landowner Workshop

Sharon Swagger, August 22, 2022, Athens, GA

1

## Sharon's Background



2

## The Toolbox for Land Conservation

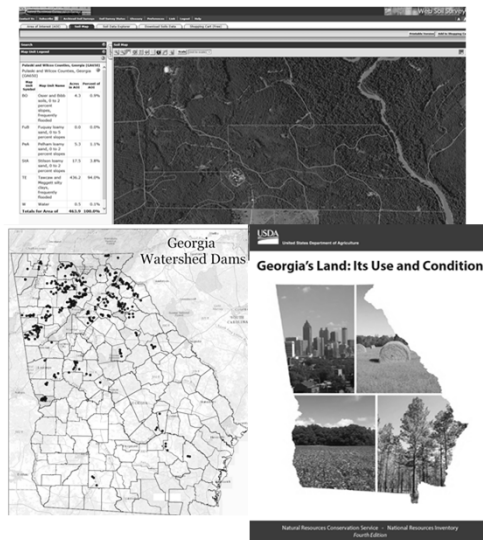
- **Conservation/Management Plans**
- **Policies / Laws**
- **Silviculture revenues**
  - Timber Harvesting
  - Straw Raking
  - Silvopasture
- **Carbon Sequestration Credits**
- **Hunting Leases**
- **Wetland Mitigation Banks**
- **Recreation (bird watching, photography)**
- **Outdoor venue lease**
- **And Conservation Programs**



3

## NRCS CONSERVATION (besides programs!)

- **Soils:**
  - Web Soil Survey
  - Soil Health
- **Conservation Technical Assistance**
- **Landscape Scale Conservation**
  - Wildlife/Forestry/Plant Health/Energy
- **Design and Engineering**
- **Water:**
  - Supply/Management/Quality
  - Watershed/Dams
  - Wetlands



4

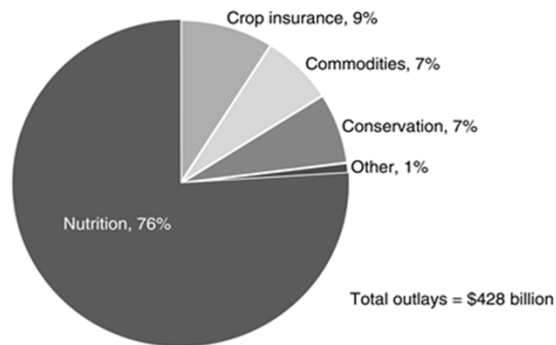
## FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

- The Farm Bill is one of the MOST IMPORTANT federal policies affecting conservation and wildlife habitat, with **12 iterations since 1965. Currently in 2018 Farm Bill.**
- Single LARGEST SOURCE OF FUNDING for conservation on private lands.
- **Programs are directed towards soil, water, & wildlife conservation on farmlands & forests... including wetlands.**
- Makes it possible for farmers, ranchers, and foresters to help restore and maintain natural resources



5

Projected outlays under the 2018 Farm Act, 2019-2023



**7% OF \$428 BILLION**

- **\$29.96 Billion for Conservation**
- **Over 5 Years**
- **\$6 Billion per year**

Sources: USDA, Economic Research Service calculations based on Congressional Budget Office estimates.

6

## CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

- Working Lands Programs (EQIP)
- Stewardship Programs (CSP)
- Private Lands Protection Programs (Easements)
- Land Retirement Programs (CRP)



7

## General Program Eligibility

- **USDA Records Established with FSA**
  - Farm Number
  - Tract Number
- **AD-1026 (Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Certification)**
- **CCC-931 (Payment Eligibility Average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Certification)**
- **CCC-902 – Farm/Operating Business Plan**
- **Same for ALL programs**

8

## Program Applications

- **Continuous sign-up process**
- **Ranking cut-off dates set each year**
- **Land AND Participant must be eligible**
- **Competitively Ranked to measure resource needs & environmental benefits gained**
  - Not all applications are funded; may be deferred
  - Can always re-submit application



9

## WORKING LANDS PROGRAM



10

## Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

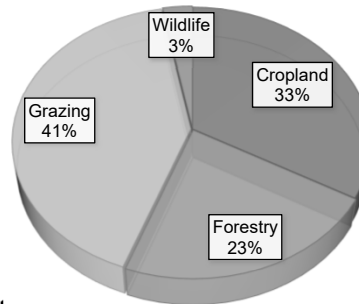
- Provides financial and technical assistance to producers to address natural resource concerns
- Delivers environmental benefits:
  - improved water and air quality
  - conserved ground and surface water
  - reduced soil erosion and sedimentation
  - improved or created wildlife habitat.



11

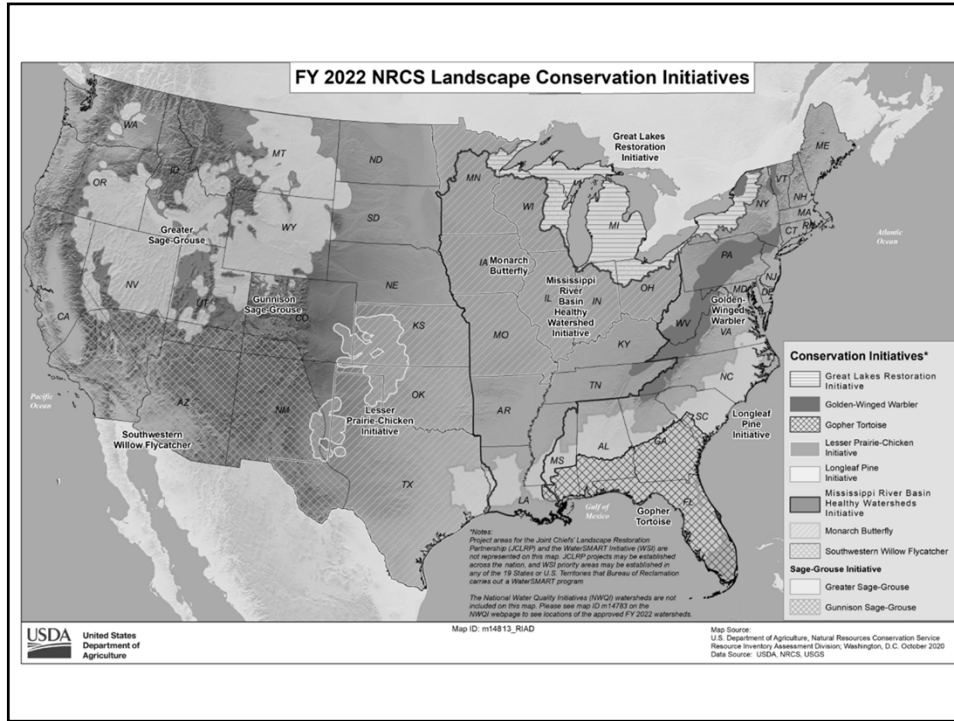
## Practices: Forestry

- Early Successional Habitat
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Forest Trails and Landings
- Prescribed Burning
- Silvopasture Establishment
- Tree and Shrub Establishment
- Tree and Shrub Site Preparation
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management



12


12



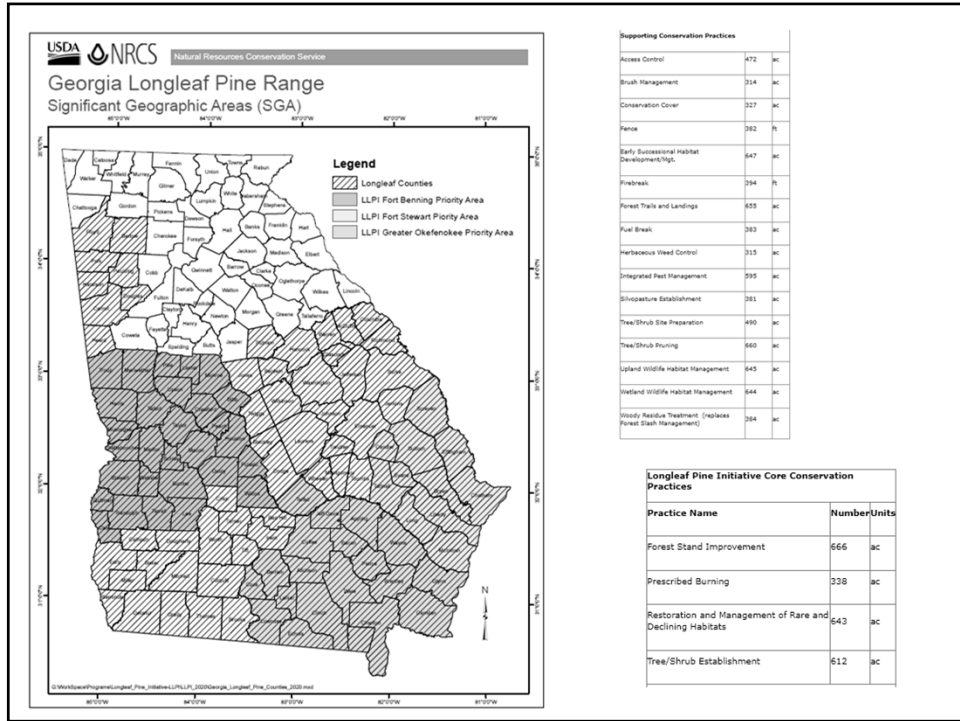
13

## EQIP: Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI)

- Provides private landowners assistance to improve forest health/enhance wildlife habitat in the longleaf pine forest landscape
- Improves critical wildlife habitat, as well as the health, sustainability and profitability of privately owned forests.



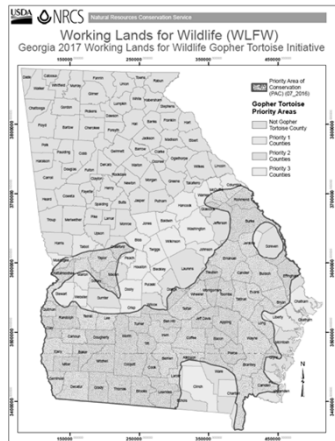
14



15

## EQIP: Working Lands For Wildlife Program

**Gopher Tortoise:**  
Works to combat the decline of the Gopher Tortoise in Georgia



16



# STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



17

## Conservation STEWARDSHIP Program (CSP)

### Overview

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

FROM 2014-2016,  
**\$3 BILLION**  
WAS INVESTED IN NEW & EXISTING  
CONSERVATION PRACTICES.  
GENERATING  
**\$3 BILLION**  
IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.  
SUPPORTING  
**42,800 JOBS**  
**CSP**

18

# How does CSP work?

Stewardship of Working Land Program: Most of the agriculture producers that are approved to participate in CSP have already been implementing conservation practices on their land. CSP steps in and offers enhancements for those practices.



TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

19

## United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

### Conservation Stewardship Program for Forestland Managers

**Have you ever looked across your land and thought about some operational management goals you would like to take to the next level? Maybe we can help.**

No one knows more about your land than you do, and no one knows more about conservation than we do. Together we can develop a plan tailored to your operation and your goals to help you increase productivity and protect the value of your land.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers an opportunity for forestland managers to enhance their agricultural operations while adopting conservation activities that can improve crop quality, improve soil health, and improve water quality. CSP can help you plan and implement conservation practices and enhancements that address natural resource concerns on your operation.

**What's New?**

Forestland managers continue to benefit from all the CSP has to offer. There are a number of enhancements for forest production. Examples of enhancement options available to forestland managers include prescribed burning, precision pesticide application and wildlife habitat management.

The new CSP provides adaptive management options to better respond to market and weather conditions, allowing participants to choose enhancements, or bundles of enhancements, that best fit their unique circumstances.

**Is CSP for You?**

CSP helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. Whether you are looking to improve tree stands, suppress weeds, or develop wildlife habitat, we can custom design a CSP plan to help you meet those goals. We can help you schedule timely planting of pollinator plants, implement grazing management to improve wildlife or develop forest riparian areas. If you are already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, chances are CSP can help you find new ways to meet your goals. CSP contracts are for five years, with the option to renew for another five years.

**Types of Assistance**

NRCS provides free technical assistance to agricultural producers. To participate in CSP and receive financial assistance, producers must control or own the land and be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements, and have current farm records with USDA Farm Service Agency. Learn more at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill).

**The Next Step**

To learn more about CSP opportunities, producers should contact their local USDA service center and set up an appointment with NRCS staff. A Local Service Center Directory is available online at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov). Then click "Contact Us." You can also visit our CSP page online at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp).

### Conservation Stewardship Program for Forestland Managers

CSP Enhancements to assist Forestland Managers (This is not an exhaustive list.)

Agroforestry Crops	Pest Management	Wildlife	Livestock
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prescribed Burning</li> <li>Nutrient Management</li> <li>Forest Stand Improvement</li> <li>Convert Loblolly and Slash Pine Plantations to Longleaf Pine</li> <li>Crop Time Management for Mast Production</li> <li>Forest Soil Quality Improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrated Pest Management</li> <li>Biological Suppression of Brush, Weeds and Invasive Species</li> <li>Precision Pesticide Application</li> <li>Pollinator Habitat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upland Wildlife Habitat Management</li> <li>Pollinator and Beneficial Insect Habitat</li> <li>Riparian Forest Buffer</li> <li>Tree Planting for Wildlife Food and Cover</li> <li>Pine Straw Raking for Wildlife Habitat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage Livestock Access to Water</li> <li>Grazing Management to Improve Wildlife Habitat</li> <li>Rotation of Supplement and Feeding Areas</li> <li>Grazing Management Monitoring Activities</li> </ul>

**FAQ** frequently asked questions

**How can I find out if I am eligible?**  
The best way to determine eligibility is to contact your local field office. You must meet Adjuvanted Greenhouse Gas (AGG) requirements and have a Farm Tax Identifier with FSA. Land already enrolled in some USDA Farm Bill programs, such as CSP and some assessment programs, may not be eligible.

**Is there a minimum number of acres needed to be enrolled?**  
No, but entire operation must be enrolled.

**Is there a minimum contract payment?**  
Yes, \$1,000 annually.

**What are "resource concerns?"**  
NRCS conservation specialists conduct resource inventories on agricultural land to evaluate natural resources including soil, water, air, plant, and animal resource bases to determine their condition. If there

**Is a source or threat to that resource that can result in what we refer to as a resource concern. Examples of resource concerns are erosion, degraded water quality, and plant health.**

**What are "enhancements?"**  
Enhancements are management activities that go above and beyond the minimum practice requirements helping the producer achieve a higher level of operation.

**What are "bundles?"**  
Bundles are suites of conservation enhancements designed to address

**multiple resource concerns. Bundle options are offered at a higher payment rate.**

**Do I have options to pick the enhancements that are best suited for my operation?**  
Yes. The variety of CSP practices that are offered give you a lot of freedom to select enhancements that help you meet your management goals.

**What are "bundles?"**  
Bundles are suites of conservation enhancements designed to address

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

20

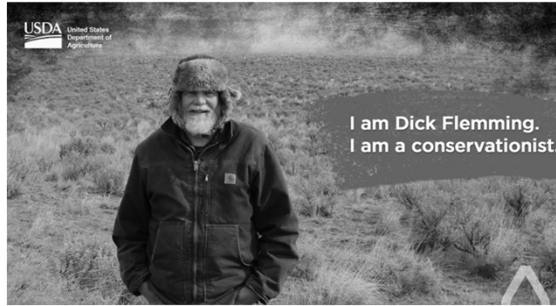
10

## CSP Contracts



Contract are for ~5 years and the payments are based on two components:

- Payments to ***maintain the existing conservation*** based on the operation type and number of resource concerns that are meeting the stewardship level at the time of application
- payments to ***implement additional conservation*** activities.



TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

21

## LAND RETIREMENT Programs



22

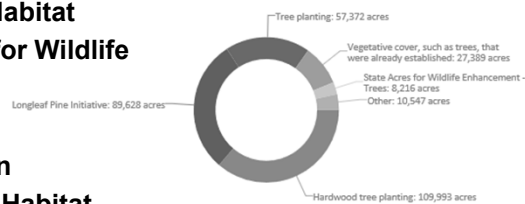
## Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

- FSA funded program – yearly rental payment
- NRCS provides technical assistance and practice certification
- Land retirement program – remove **environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality**

23

## CRP – THE PRACTICES

- CP2 – Establishment of NWSG
- CP3 – Tree Planting (Conifer/HW)
- CP4 – Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- CP9 – Shallow Water Area for Wildlife
- CP12 – Wildlife Food Plot
- CP22 – Riparian Buffer
- CP23 – Wetland Restoration
- CP25 – Rare and Declining Habitat
- CP31 - Bottomland Timber
- CP36 - LL Pine Establish
- CP37 - Duck Nesting Habitat
- CP38 - State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)



24



25



26

## Land Protection via Conservation Easements

- Think of property ownership as a “bundle of rights”
- Easements are individual “sticks” in that bundle



27

## Conservation Easements

- A conservation easement is a LEGAL agreement between landowner and third party to protect specific conservation values of land (a few of those sticks!!)
- Typically involves elimination of development rights (building, subdivision, mining), and puts restrictions on future uses

28

28

## Conservation Easements

- Allows landowner to retain property and continued use (recreation, agriculture)
- Public access is not required
- Property can still be bought and sold, but easement remains with property in perpetuity



29

29

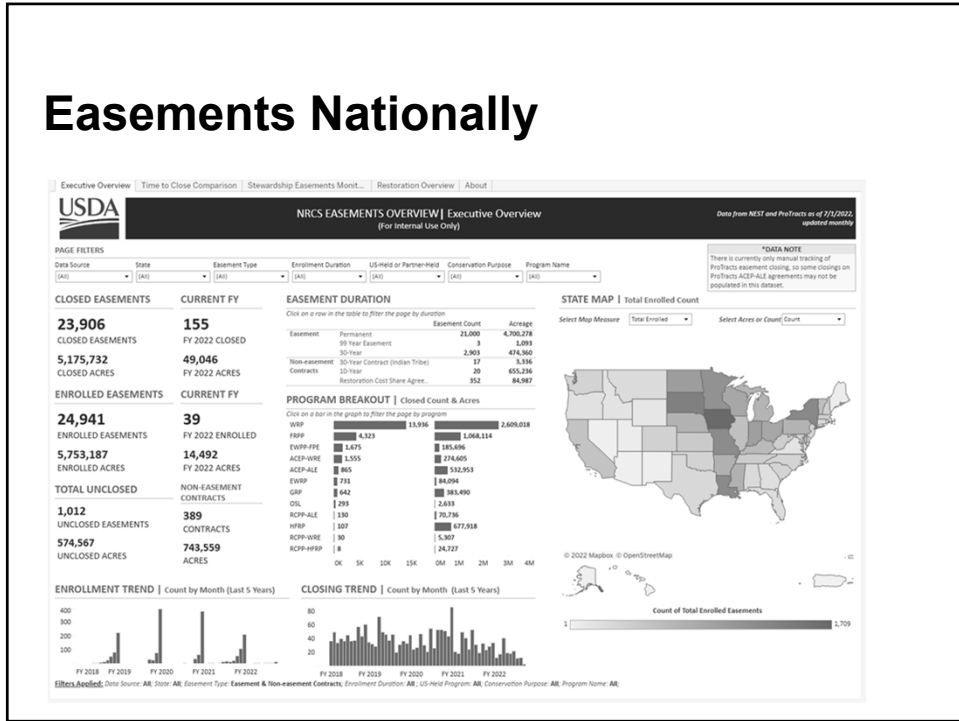
## Easement Programs Offered by NRCS

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
  - Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE)
  - Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)
- **Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP)**
- **Emergency Watershed Protection Program Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE)**
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Programs**
  - Covered Programs (WRE, ALE, HFRP)
  - US-held easements, Entity-held easements



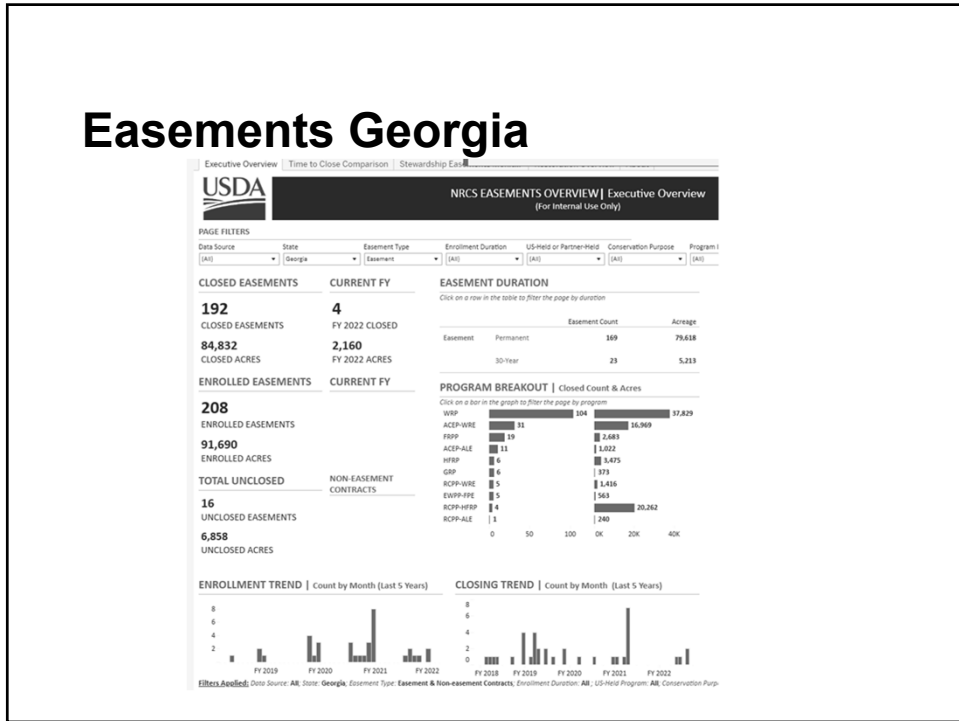
30

# Easements Nationally



31

# Easements Georgia



32



## Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP)



33

## Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

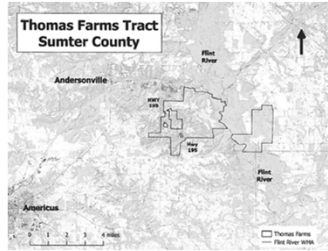
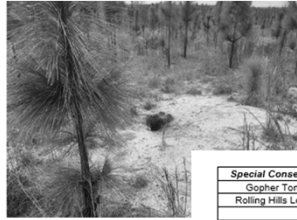
**2014 Farm Bill** – RCPP WRE, RCPP ALE, RCPP HFRP

**2018 Farm Bill** – US-held easements, Entity-held easements



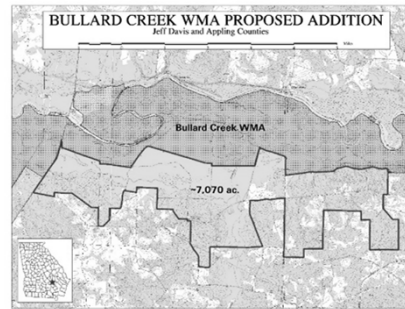
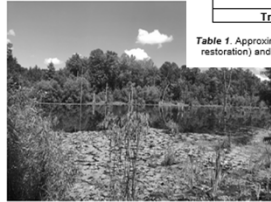
34

# RCPP examples



Special Conservation Area	Total (Acres)
Gopher Tortoise SCA	1,905
Rolling Hills Longleaf SCA	1,538
<b>Total</b>	<b>3443</b>
Openings/Log Decks	78
Non-SCA woodlands	776
ponds	22.2
roads/ROWs	42.8
<b>Tract Total</b>	<b>4360</b>

Table 1. Approximate acreages of SCAs (after conversion and restoration) and other land uses at Lanahsee Creek Tract



35

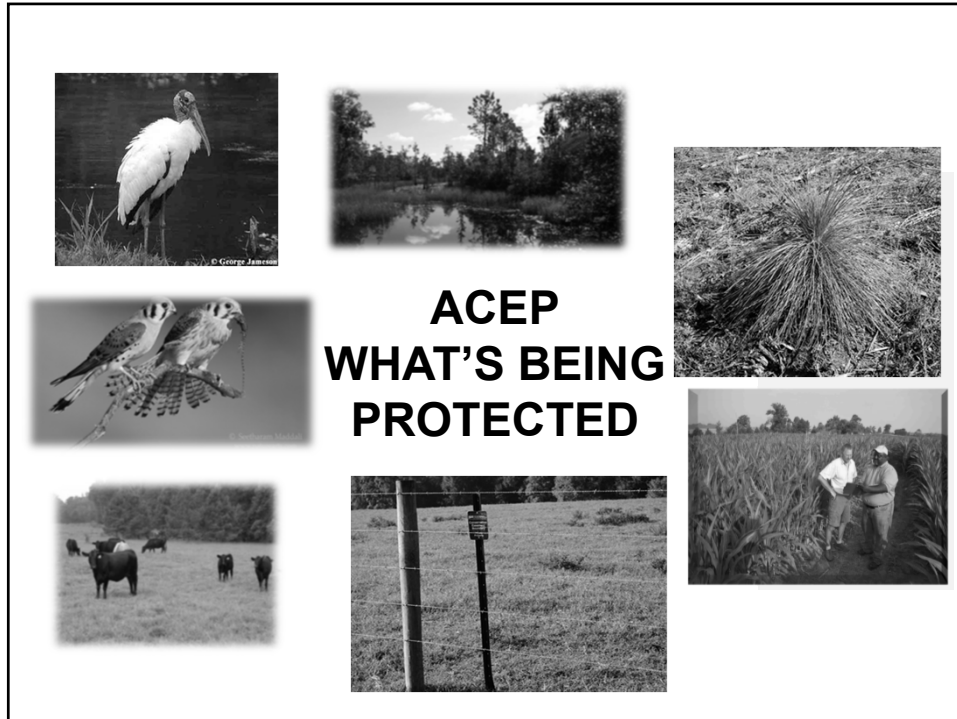
## ACEP: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

ACEP provides financial and technical assistance through conservation easements to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits.

- **Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)**
  - NRCS provides matching funds to eligible entities to purchase easements on working farmland
- **Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE)**
  - NRCS purchases easements directly from landowners to restore, protect and enhance wetlands and associated lands



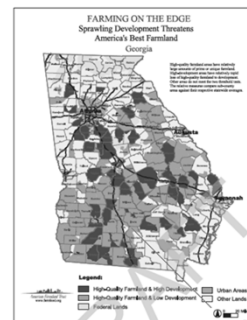
36



37

## ACEP - ALE

- Partnership program where NRCS partners with **ELIGIBLE ENTITIES** such as Land Trusts to purchase permanent conservation easements.
- NRCS provides matching funds to eligible entities
- **Farmers do not directly apply, only eligible entities**



38

38

## ACEP ALE Land Eligibility

- Protect against the conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses
- Privately owned agricultural land (can change type of ag use)
- 50% Prime/Statewide Important soils
- In areas of the state with high development pressure with local ag markets



39

## ACEP WRE

Restore, protect, and enhance wetlands on eligible private or Tribal lands while maximizing wildlife habitat benefits.



40

40

# WRE Objectives

**To protect, restore, and enhance the functions and values of wetland ecosystems to attain:**

- Habitat for migratory birds/wetland-dependent wildlife
- Protection and improvement of water quality
- Protection and enhancement of open space/aesthetics
- Carbon sequestration
- Protection of native flora and fauna

41

# WRE Land Eligibility

- Privately owned land that maximizes wildlife benefits and wetland functions and values
- Former/degraded wetlands used for production of food and fiber, where the hydrology has been **significantly** degraded or modified but can be **substantially** restored.
  - Farmed wetland or prior converted wetland
  - DEGRADED FORESTED WETLANDS (in Georgia)
- ***Adjacent Lands that will contribute significantly to the wetland functions and values or the practical administration of the enrolled areas, on a one acre of wetland to one acre of adjacent land ratio.***

42

42

## **WRE Business Process**

- **Application**
  - **Ranking**
  - **Title work/Environmental Due Diligence/Valuation**
  - **Selection for Funding**
  - **National HQ oversight**
  - **Offer**
  - **Boundary Survey/Restoration planning**
  - **OGC oversight**
  - **Closing**
- 18-24 month process from application**

43

## **WRE requires restoration**

- **Wetland restoration = the rehabilitation, to the extent practicable, of degraded or lost habitat in such a manner that:**
  - The original vegetative plant community and hydrology are reestablished; or
  - A community different from what likely existed prior to degradation of the site is established (max 30%.) This allows NRCS to conduct restoration activities that provide valuable wildlife habitat and wetland functions in locations where it is impossible to restore the original community.
- **Hydrology restoration will reestablish the conditions that existed prior to manipulation to the extent practicable.**

44

44

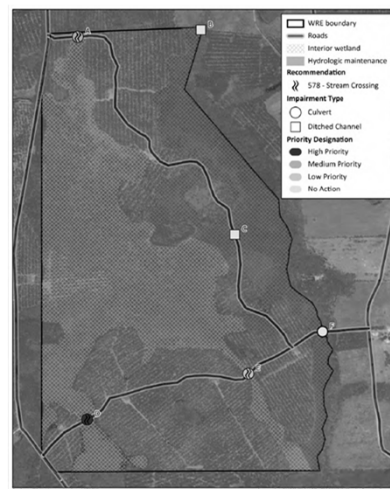
## TYPES OF RESTORATION

- **STRUCTURAL RESTORATION:** If alterations have diminished hydrology, such as timing, duration, depth or extent of inundation, implement structural measures to establish hydrologic conditions that mimic pre-disturbance conditions.
- **VEGETATIVE RESTORATION:** if needed, on wetland acres to include tree planting (cypress, hardwoods) or native hydrophytic vegetation mixes.

45

## EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

- **Aquatic Organism Passage/Rock Ford Crossings:** removal of fill placed in flow areas of wetlands (i.e. roads with culverts or other impediments to flow)
- **Fill Removal:** Removal of fill from former temporary or seasonal wetland depressions
- **Ditch Plugs:** plugging of ditches draining wetlands
- **Micro/macro topography:** to restore natural topography (mostly used in conjunction with plugs)



46

## ACEP WRE Restoration – Forested Landscape

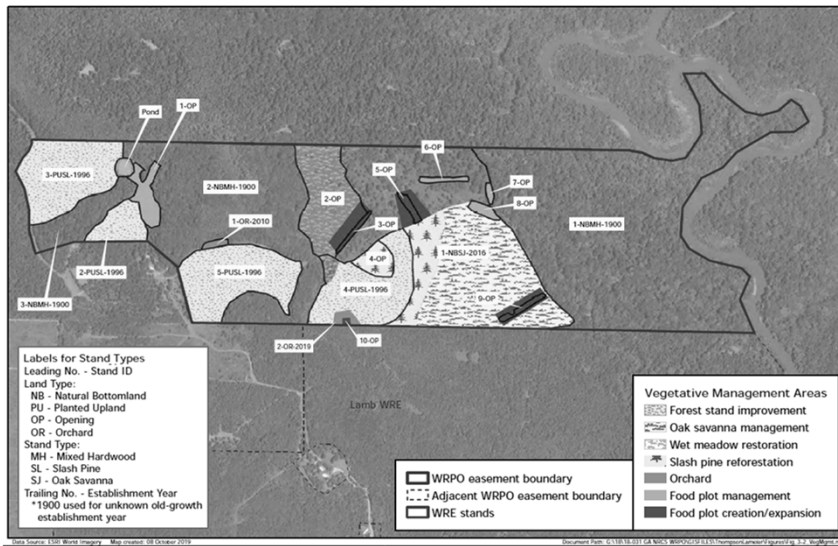
Forest Road impeding flow in wetland. Remove fill from road and put in a rock/ford crossing. Encourages flow between the hydric acres on each side



47

47

## WRE Vegetation Restoration



48



## What about T and E Species?

When special-status species (state or federally listed) or unique, rare, or declining habitats types are part of the enrolled land, an appropriate extent of restoration will target suitable habitat for identified species or restore the identified habitat.



49

*"A true  
conservationist is  
a man who knows  
that the world is  
not given by  
his fathers, but  
borrowed from his  
children."*

*- john james audubon*



50



51