

**STATE PLAN**

**GEORGIA'S  
FOREST STEWARDSHIP  
PROGRAM**

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## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT**

Our world is a composite of many parts. The health and prosperity of our world depends on the health and prosperity of its component parts. Each part is important, each part is unique. The vision of how each part fits into the whole is our inspiration to care for that part so that we leave a healthier, safer, and more prosperous world to the generations which follow us.

Our forest resources are one of these critical parts. The forest lands of Georgia are facing increasing threats from development pressure to new insects and diseases. Unfortunately, all too often private landowners do not understand the importance of good forest management and the complex interrelationships between the many resources of the forest. This often leads, quite unintentionally, to abuse or neglect of these valuable resources which in turn diminishes them and opens up the way for their destruction.

Stewardship management is a term which refers to the management of the whole forest, not just one component part. Through education the forest owner's understanding and practice of stewardship management could lead to tremendous, positive results in the forests of Georgia. More forest stewards would mean cleaner water, healthier and more abundant wildlife, improved aesthetics and recreational opportunities, secure, renewable supplies of forest products, and a healthier environment. With the possibilities in new markets such as bioenergy and carbon sequestration the potential uses and benefits of forests are growing. The financial returns from stewardship management are important, but the spiritual satisfaction from living up to a greater responsibility is often a major motivation for practicing forest stewardship. An increase in stewardship management in Georgia will do more than just benefit the forest environment in Georgia. Statewide problems such as forest fire prevention and control, mismanaged wildlife resources, invasive plant and pest species, protection of endangered species and habitats, degraded water quality in the state's rivers and lakes, degenerating aesthetic and recreation resources and a host of other problems will be improved and lessened as a result of increased stewardship management. Solutions to these problems benefit society as a whole and will lead to a healthier, more prosperous Georgia.

Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program is designed to educate and guide forest landowners in the complex and rewarding field of stewardship management. More active management of these lands will keep them in a productive and healthy condition for present and future owners while increasing environmental and economic benefits.

We, the undersigned members of the Stewardship Coordinating Committee, acknowledge the importance of encouraging forest landowners in Georgia to practice stewardship management on their lands. We also agree that a high level of recognition for these landowners will help them serve as good examples for others. Furthermore, we agree to coordinate the resources of our respective agencies and organizations to achieve the goals of Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program as outlined in the following plan.

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## INTRODUCTION

Georgia is blessed with an abundance of forested acres. Over ninety-two percent of Georgia's 24.8 million acres of forest land is in private ownerships. Attitudes toward this vast resource and the management of it are of great importance since these acres provide the majority of the timber used by Georgia's extensive forest industries and some of the best wildlife habitat in the state for both game and non-game animals. They also serve as the watershed for the state, provide recreational opportunities for thousands of Georgians and supply the public with an abundance of aesthetically pleasing landscapes. In short, these acres are the glue which holds our rich and diverse environment together.

The timber resources of Georgia annually fuel a \$16.1 billion industry which employs over 154,000 people. About forty five percent of the state's timberland supports pine types, forty-two percent is hardwood with the balance in mixed pine-hardwood species. New markets are emerging for Georgia's timber resources in recent years. In 2007, Range Fuels announced the building of the nation's first cellulosic ethanol plant in Soperton. This plant will use woody biomass to create ethanol. Georgia Power recently announced plans to use biomass-to-electricity plants in Clay and Heard Counties. Also in 2007 the Georgia Forestry Commission established the first carbon sequestration registry for landowners in the Southeast.

Between 1983 and 2006, Georgians have replanted nearly 8.5 million acres in trees. Approximately 1.78 trees are planted for each one that is harvested and an estimated 80,000 acres of forestland are naturally regenerated every year. Factors such as fire, insects, disease, and adverse weather certainly can contribute to an erosion of the state's timber resources but can be counteracted with improved management.

Hunting and fishing are popular pastimes in Georgia enjoyed by over 1.2 million people. Overall these activities contribute \$61.5 million to the state in sales tax revenue and provide 21,000 jobs.. The overall economic benefit is approximately \$2 billion. Large game animals are of major interest to many landowners. The state deer herd is estimated at 1.2 million and bring in an estimated \$800,000 annually in hunting license fees, sporting equipment sales, food, and land leases. Management concerns for deer do not relate to increasing the herd size, rather they relate to managing existing herds to minimize damage to the forest habitat due to overpopulation. Improved deer management would provide better habitat and improved health and vigor of the herd. The Georgia Forestry Commission partners with the Quality Deer Management Association to assist landowners in implementation of quality deer management on their forestlands.

Turkey populations have risen dramatically over the last twenty years due to aggressive stocking programs by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Turkeys now number about 300,000 statewide and are present in all 159 counties. Improvements in habitat management will be the key to maintaining healthy populations in the future. The Georgia Forestry Commission partners with the National Wild Turkey Federation to educate landowners on and assist with implementation of good turkey management principles.

Small game and non-game wildlife populations are difficult to measure. These species typically thrive as the level of habitat diversity increases. This diversity, often called biodiversity, is substantially improved by stewardship management. An added benefit from biodiversity is that the overall forest community, both plant and animal is strengthened as biodiversity increases.

Many endangered species are also found in Georgia, and their proper protection can be improved through stewardship management in our state. The United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service currently lists 25 plant and 27 vertebrate species on its "List of Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species". The Georgia Department of Natural Resources lists 155 plant species on its "List of Protected Plants" and 112 vertebrate species on its "List of Protected Wildlife".

Forty local Soil and Water Conservation Districts covering Georgia guide and assist the natural resources conservation activities within the state. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provides technical assistance through these districts in applying resource management systems on private land. The NRCS also assists land users annually with tree and shrub establishment. However, due to the economic and development pressures being placed on traditional farming in Georgia, conversion of open acres and reforestation are more acceptable options than ever before. Establishment of trees can be a primary component of resource management systems to reduce soil erosion, protect water quality, and improve wildlife habitat and air quality.

The most often encountered erosion and stream sedimentation problems from woodlands occur during timber harvesting or from improper road construction. The potential for problems diminishes when landowners and harvesters are exposed to the concepts of stewardship management and the use of Best Management Practices. Stewardship management can be part of the solution because it considers the whole ownership; both farm and forest, and promote practices which solve overall problems through careful coordination of the management of the individual resources present.

The recreational resources of many of Georgia's private woodlands are grossly underutilized. The primary recreational use of woodlands in the state is wildlife observation and hunting, but many owners enjoy hiking, camping, horseback riding, and nature study in the forest as well. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Parks, Recreation, and Historic Sites Division currently manages 48 parks, 15 historic sites and other undeveloped properties totally 83,344 acres. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division oversees 89 Wildlife Management Areas, 10 Public Fishing Areas and 17 Natural Areas totaling 1,087,704 acres that are available for public recreation. Sixty-eight percent of Georgians participated in recreation in 2006 and outdoor recreation was the primary reason for seven percent of all tourist travel to Georgia in 2004 bringing in 2 million people. Improving the level and quality of forest management in the state will substantially increase recreational opportunities on private lands.

Scenic resources are enjoyed by all, and Georgia has some truly beautiful scenery for the benefit of the public. All too many acres provide limited aesthetic appeal because of poor management, however. Forest management which addresses the maintenance and improvement of our scenic resources will

not only provide benefits for the general public, but will encourage a positive public opinion of forestry in this state.

Unfortunately, these many values of the forested landscape face an ever increasing threat from development. Nationwide in the years 1992-1997, 320 acres of farmland were taken out of production every hour. During this same time period, Georgia lost more than 1 million acres of farm and forest land to development. Recent studies show 108 acres of forestland are being converted to impervious surface each day in Georgia and by 2015 it is projected that twelve counties in Georgia will experience seventy-five percent growth. The promotion and implementation of stewardship management can only help to maintain healthier and more valuable forestlands while instilling a conservation ethic among landowners.

State and federal agencies which deal with the various forest resources have long had assistance programs to educate private landowners and encourage them to better manage the specific resources they are concerned with. All too often, however, this single resource approach has led to conflicting management recommendations from the various agencies and landowners are left not knowing exactly which recommendations should be followed to improve their management. Another problem with this system is that the landowner's individual objectives are often overlooked and the advice given is slanted toward the resource professional's view of what is best for a particular resource, not what is best to help the landowner achieve specific goals.

Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program addresses these problems by providing a coordinated approach to advising landowners in their management programs. Beginning with the landowner's specific objectives, a team of experts in timber, soil and water conservation, wildlife, and aesthetics and recreation can create a detailed management plan which addressed multiple use, or stewardship management while concentrating on the landowner's particular interests as well. In order to more effectively address the state's many needs for improved resource management, the development of Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs) will improve outreach efforts to private landowners. CFAs will be developed based on local conservation values and resource needs. Consideration for forest health issues and water quality needs will help define outreach objectives. The inclusion of a diverse group of partners will be a necessity in order to leverage limited resources.

A multiple resource, multiple use management plan will be constructed for all Forest Stewardship Program enrollees by a variety of resource professionals with expertise in the management of their many forest resources. This Forest Stewardship Plan will outline a course of action which will enhance timber, wildlife, soil and water quality, recreation and aesthetics.. Substantial accomplishments will be recognized by bestowing on the landowner the coveted *Forest Steward* award and certifying his/her property as a Stewardship Forest.

## **THE STEWARDSHIP COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

The Stewardship Coordinating Committee (SCC) will coordinate Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program and will provide advice and recommendations to the State Forester concerning implementation of the Forest Legacy Program. It will also provide assistance and recommendations concerning development, implementation, monitoring and updating of Georgia's Forest Stewardship Plan.

The SCC shall be formed of representatives from the following groups:

- v Georgia Forestry Commission (State Forester, Permanent Chairman)**
- v Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division (Permanent)**
- v Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (Permanent)**
- v USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (Permanent)**
- v USDA Forest Service (Permanent)**
- v USDA Farm Service Agency (Permanent)**
- v University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service (Permanent)**
- v Forest Landowners (Permanent)**
- v University of Georgia Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources**
- v Consulting Foresters**
- v Georgia Forestry Association**
- v Local Government**
- v The Nature Conservancy**
- v Georgia Wildlife Federation**
- v National Wild Turkey Federation**
- v Quality Deer Management Association**
- v Southern Group of State Foresters**
- v Georgia Department of Natural Resources Real Estate Division**
- v The Georgia Land Trust Service Center**
- v Georgia Conservancy**
- v The Conservation Fund**
- v Association of County Commissioners of Georgia**
- v Forest Landowners Association**

## **PROGRAM ORGANIZATION**

### **STATE LEVEL**

A State Forest Stewardship Coordinator will be appointed by the State Forester and will administer and coordinate Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program. The SCC and Coordinator may be assisted as needed by appointed subcommittees. These subcommittees should be comprised of members of agencies and groups with an interest in forest stewardship, such as state and federal agencies, trade or professional associations, and environmental and conservation organizations.

### **DISTRICT LEVEL**

For purposes of implementing Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program, the state will be divided into ten districts corresponding to the Georgia Forestry Commission's administrative districts. In each district, a GFC forester will serve as District Stewardship Forester.

This District Stewardship Forester, working with the State Coordinator, will be responsible for implementing the program in that district. The District Stewardship Forester will review forest stewardship plans, review certification nominations, inspect properties for recommendation of certification, publicize the certification of forest stewards, hold landowner field days and workshops, and conduct any other activities which arise that will promote the program.

# **LANDOWNER PARTICIPATION AND RECOGNITION**

## **1. Landowner Eligibility**

Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program focuses on providing services to owners of non-industrial private forest lands (lands owned by any private individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe, or other private legal entity) not currently managing their forest land according to a resource management plan that embodies multi-resource stewardship principles. Ownerships must be at least ten acres in size with ten acres in woodlands. There is no upper limit to acreage size. Those landowners not meeting the minimum tract size criteria may petition the SCC to be included in the Program.

Non-industrial private forest lands that are managed under existing Federal, State, or private sector financial and technical assistance programs may be eligible for assistance under the Program. The landowner must agree to comply with the requirements of the Program and if forest resource management activities on such forest lands are expanded or enhanced the changes must meet the requirements of Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program.

Forest lands other than non-industrial private lands (public, forest industry, etc.) may also be enrolled in the program, but priority in providing technical assistance under the Program will remain on non-industrial private lands.

More focused outreach will be implemented for landowners falling in designated priority focus areas. These areas currently are identified as the Blue Ridge, Ridge and Valley, Fall Line, large River Bottom Lands, Atlantic Coastal Plain, and the East Gulf Coastal Plain focus areas.

## **2. Landowner Enrollment**

The consulting foresters, wildlife biologists and/or GFC foresters will respond to interested landowners by meeting with the landowners and/or their representatives (consulting and industry foresters) and discussing the concept of stewardship forestry, including the many benefits stewardship management provides to the individual, society in general, and the world as a whole.

Those landowners interested in pursuing stewardship management of their property will be enrolled in Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program. Once enrolled, the landowner will be asked to specify a primary and a secondary management objective such as timber production, wildlife management, soil and water conservation, recreation, aesthetics or equal emphasis on all of these objectives. Funds for stewardship plan development are available on a limited basis as appropriated by Congress. If funds are not available at the time a landowner expresses interest in getting a plan, the landowner can still be enrolled in the program and have a plan developed if an acceptable arrangement can be made with a

qualified plan writer. There is no guarantee that funds will be available at a later date, and the responsibility is solely on the individual landowner.

### **3. Forest Stewardship Plan**

Once a landowner selects primary and secondary management objectives, the consulting forester, wildlife biologist, or GFC forester will direct the development of a Forest Stewardship Plan which addresses the landowner's objectives, provides recommendations for multiple resource management and meets the standards of the program (see *Standards for Forest Stewardship Plans, 2007* in the Appendix).

If the primary author of the plan is a resource professional other than an employee of one of the cooperating government agencies, then the District Stewardship Forester will work closely with that professional to insure that the standards for Forest Stewardship Plans are thoroughly understood by the professional, including the interaction of landowner objectives with plan content. The final plan will be reviewed by the District Stewardship Forester, an approved wildlife biologist and, when called for, a representative of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Their signatures are necessary to approve the plan.

If the plan is to be written by resource professionals from the cooperating government agencies then the District Stewardship Forester will obtain copies, if available, of any management or conservation plans already written for the property in question. In the event that no written management plan exists, or if existing plans fail to address the basic requirements of stewardship management, he will coordinate the development of a new forest stewardship plan, working closely with field personnel from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Game and Fish Division, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service and others with an interest and expertise in stewardship management. The same standards and certification requirements will be followed for these plans. The District Stewardship Forester will ensure that the plan is well reviewed with the landowner with special emphasis given to how the landowner implements the plan's recommendations. Cooperating agency personnel will be notified and should try to participate in this plan review. The plan should include an exhaustive list of sources of assistance available in the various aspects of multiple use management.

The State Forest Stewardship Coordinator will direct an audit of both consultant and GFC forester written plans annually. The number of plans reviewed will be determined based on a statistically accurate sample size that will ensure fairness. Each tract audited will be evaluated for implementation of the plans recommendations. The District Stewardship Forester will be available to participate in the auditing process. Certified Forest Stewards will be audited at this time as well. The audit will include review of the plans, site visits, and interviews with landowners enrolled in the program. This effort is reflected in the annual PMAS report made to the Forest service each year.

#### **4. Maintaining Landowner Contact**

Landowner contact will be maintained through a variety of methods. All landowners signed up for the Forest Stewardship Program are automatically enrolled in the GROWS (Georgia Recognizes Our Woodland Stewards) program. With this membership comes opportunities for continuing education through field days, landowner workshops, magazine subscriptions, issue targeted mailers, landowner conferences, and access to the GROWS website. Also, through the implementation of evaluations and renewal plans personal contact will be made with landowners whose plans are ten years old or older by GFC foresters as well as consultants. By maintaining personal contact, opportunities for continued landowner assistance will be enhanced. When landowner accomplishments under their plan reach a suitable level, a nomination for *Forest Steward* designation would be appropriate.

#### **5. Nominations for *Forest Steward* Designation**

Nominations for *Forest Steward* designation may come from any source and should be forwarded to the District Stewardship Forester. Nominations should be written and should include the landowner's name, address, telephone number, and a brief description of all lands owned by that individual (including county and size). Also included will be the nominator's name, address, telephone number, and professional affiliation, if applicable. The District Stewardship Forester will actively solicit nominations from other resource professionals in cooperating agencies as well as consultants, industry foresters, and others.

#### **6. Reviewing Landowner Accomplishments**

Upon receiving a nomination for *Forest Steward* evaluation, the District Stewardship Forester will verify landowner eligibility and schedule an inspection. When feasible, an inspection should include as many resource professional cooperators as possible, and must include the District Stewardship Forester and a member from the government agency related to the landowner's primary objective.

The inspection will be conducted to determine whether or not the landowner has followed the recommendations given in the Forest Stewardship Plan and in so doing, has achieved the level of management deemed appropriate for recognition. This level of management is defined by the *Guidelines for Forest Steward Designation, 2007* which are included in the Appendix. These guidelines are just that-guidelines. No one set of guidelines could possibly be established which could define outstanding stewardship management on all tracts. Exceptions to these guidelines will occur, and it will be a responsibility of the District Stewardship Forester to note, report, and justify these.

## **7. Recommendation for Certification**

When the inspection is complete, the District Stewardship Forester will forward his/her comments to the appropriate wildlife biologist and USDA National Resource Conservation Service representative. These individuals will have 60 days to provide comment or object to the landowner being certified.

## **8. Certification/Recertification**

If no objection is received by the District Stewardship Forester from the approved wildlife biologist or the representative from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service within the 60 day period, the landowner will be automatically certified as a *Forest Steward* based on planned management achievements.

Properties certified as Stewardship Forests will be inspected for recertification at least every ten years. Certified properties found not to be up to program standards can also be decertified at any time.

## **9. Presentation of Award and Sign**

The State Coordinator will provide for each certified landowner a handsome personalized plaque and one Stewardship Forest sign for display on the property. These items will be passed on to the District Stewardship Forester for presentation to the landowner. In every instance, the District Stewardship Forester will conduct a brief presentation ceremony for the *Forest Steward*. Inspection team members and nominators will be notified and urged to attend. When possible, the presentation should be made publicly (such as at regular civic club meetings, church gatherings, or county meetings) and should be well publicized both before and after the fact.

## **STEWARDSHIP EDUCATION**

The State Coordinator and the SCC will develop a continuing education program to provide landowners with multiple resource information to assist them in meeting their objectives through improved management of their resources. This program will include:

- **Participation in GROWS (Georgia Recognizes Our Woodland Stewards) a landowners organization dedicated to managing their forest lands with a stewardship ethic.**
- **Participation in multiple forest landowner field days per year.**
- **Publication of informational manuals, brochures, and pamphlets.**
- **Development of Power Point Presentations to be used at speaking engagements.**
- **Distribution of promotional materials to increase public awareness of the stewardship concept and Georgia's program.**
- **Publication of Forest Stewardship articles and news in a number of media outlets.**
- **Development of table top displays for use at various meetings and conferences.**
- **Seek favorable coverage of the program in major newspapers in the state in an effort to reach those landowners unfamiliar with the program who might not be practicing active management of their woodlands.**
- **Working with the Georgia Forestry Commission's Outreach Coordinator to improve service to the underserved forest landowners.**
- **Develop new outreach opportunities through partnerships with federal agencies, other state agencies, local governments, and non-governmental organizations.**

## **GOALS**

### **GEORGIA FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM**

The program will seek to maximize the number of non-industrial private landowners who practice stewardship management on their forest land in Georgia.

#### *PROGRAM GOALS:*

- **Maximize landowner exposure to the stewardship concept of forest management.**
- **Provide that 75% of new Forest Stewardship Plans written annually fall within one of the priority focus areas.**
- **Have a goal that 20% of all expired Forest Stewardship Plans be renewed annually**
- **Evaluate 1,000 Forest Stewardship landowners for possible certification by 2013**

# **APPENDIX**

**STANDARDS FOR FOREST STEWARDSHIP PLANS, 2007**

**GUIDELINES FOR *FOREST STEWARD* DESIGNATION, 2007**

**STEWARDSHIP COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEMBERS, 2008**

**Forest Stewardship National Standards & Guidelines, 2006**