



# **GAME MANAGEMENT SECTION ANNUAL REPORT FY2020-2021**

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## Game Management Section Annual Report

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## A Message from the Chief

Dear GM Family: Each year this report looks back at some of your accomplishments, but it does not come close to describing all the amazing work you do each year. None of these accomplishments would be possible were it not for the contributions of every employee in the section. Each of you are an asset to the Division and the citizens of the state. Whether it is a hunter, homeowner, or hiker, you do an incredible job responding to the needs of our customers. Thank you for doing your part to help manage the public natural resources that have been entrusted to our care. The work we do to conserve, enhance, and promote Georgia's wildlife resources will leave behind a mark. However, the greatest mark we will leave is in the lives of those we serve. *"What is a person, if not the marks they leave behind."* V.E. Schwab"



**Alan Isler**

Game Management Section Chief  
Wildlife Resources Division  
Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources

1. **WRD Mission:** Conserve and promote fishing, hunting and wildlife resources through management, education, and scientific research.
2. **WRD Vision:** Conserving diverse, healthy populations of fish and wildlife while maintaining related outdoor opportunities for every generation to enjoy.
3. **Game Management Overview:** Manages one million acres of land and 125 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) for hunting, fishing, wildlife enhancement, bird watching, hiking, camping and conservation education. Game Management conducts research and surveys to monitor hunter harvests, wildlife populations and habitats. These efforts support setting regulations and other management activities as well as providing technical assistance to landowners, private organizations, and governmental agencies.

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### HUNTING

- 642,545 residents hunt in Georgia.
- Hunters spend more than 8.9 million days a year in the field.
- Hunters account for \$977 million in retail sales in Georgia, with a \$1.6 billion ripple effect each year.
- Hunting in Georgia is responsible for 23,996 jobs, \$600 million in salaries/wages/earnings, \$106 million in state and local taxes, and \$145 million in federal tax revenue.

### SHOOTING SPORTS

- More than 1.2 million people participate in recreational target shooting in Georgia.
- Shooters account for more than \$532 million in retail sales with a total economic impact of \$644 million
- Shooting provides over \$243 million in salaries.
- Shooting provides \$41 million in state and local taxes and \$58.8 million in federal taxes each year.



# Annual Report Summary

*FY 2020-2021*



*Tractor at sunrise before completing work on Perry Dove Field.*

The Game Management Section manages 1.1 million acres of land on 125 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) for hunting, wildlife enhancement, wildlife observation, hiking, camping and conservation education. This section also conducts research and surveys to monitor hunter harvests, wildlife populations and habitats. These efforts support setting regulations and other management activities as well as providing technical assistance to landowners, private organizations and other governmental agencies.



*WRD staff tagging alligator.*

The Game Management Section also includes programs such as the Private Lands Program, the Hunter Development Program, the Forest

Management Unit, the Urban Wildlife Program and statewide management programs for white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, black bears, alligators and migratory birds.

Game Management leveraged additional license revenue with federal wildlife restoration funds to increase services and technical assistance to citizens, to improve habitat and access on WMAs and to create more awareness through educational programs. In FY21, the Game Management Section worked:

To improve wildlife habitat by:

- Using prescribed fire on 67,900 acres to enhance wildlife habitat.
- Managing 8,900+ acres of wildlife openings.
- Planting 2,980+ acres of dove fields.
- Managing 5,100+ acres of wetlands.

To improve WMA access by improving and maintaining:

- 3,000 + miles of roads and firebreaks.
- 1,482 bridges, fords, and culverts.
- 942 miles of trails.
- 153 campgrounds.
- 292 parking areas.
- 2,353 gates and water control structures.

And to manage healthy wildlife populations by:

- Banding 2,900 ducks, doves and geese.
- Checking 981 black bear bait stations for black bear activity.
- Collected 1,351 samples from white-tailed deer to monitor for chronic wasting disease, which has not been detected in Georgia.
- Surveying 184+ miles of rivers, creeks, coastal areas, and reservoir shorelines monitoring American alligator populations.



## Other Notable Accomplishments

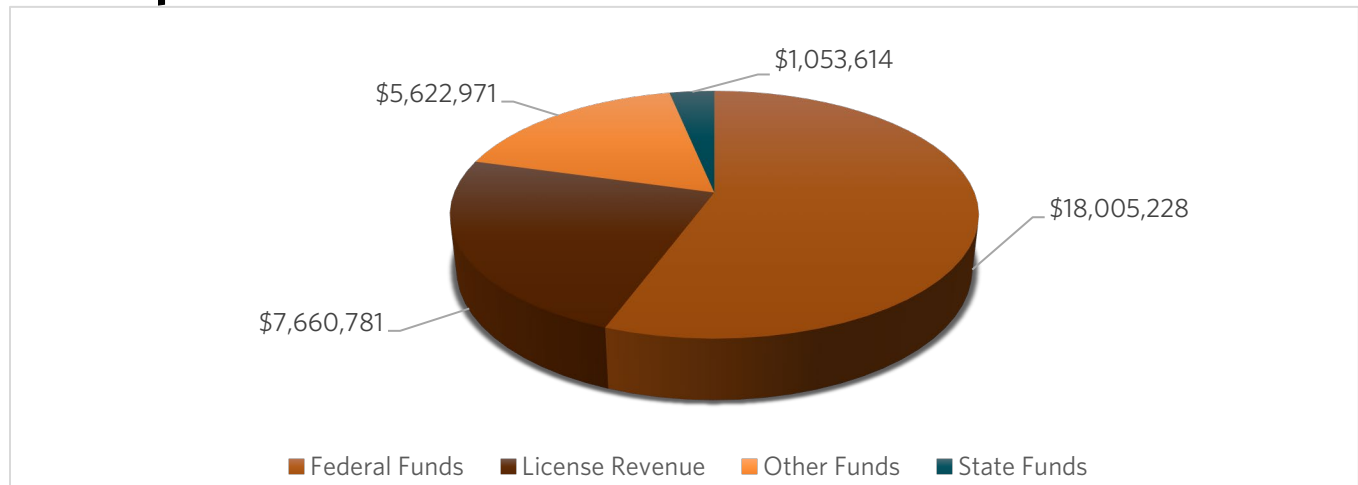
On Wildlife Management Areas:

- 67,276 hunters harvested 8,115 deer.
- 15,905 hunters harvested 1,069 turkeys.
- 67,900 acres of prescribed fire.

Customer Service Excellence:

- Private Lands Program biologists provided technical assistance to 372 new contacts and completed 194 follow-up contacts for landowners that manage over 210,000 acres in 121 counties.
- Assisted 87 contacts across 123,211 acres with site-specific deer management needs as part of the Georgia Deer Management Assistance Program.
- The Urban Wildlife Program aided 2,626 callers and provided on-site technical assistance to 800 wildlife conflicts in metro Atlanta.

## FY 21 Expenditures

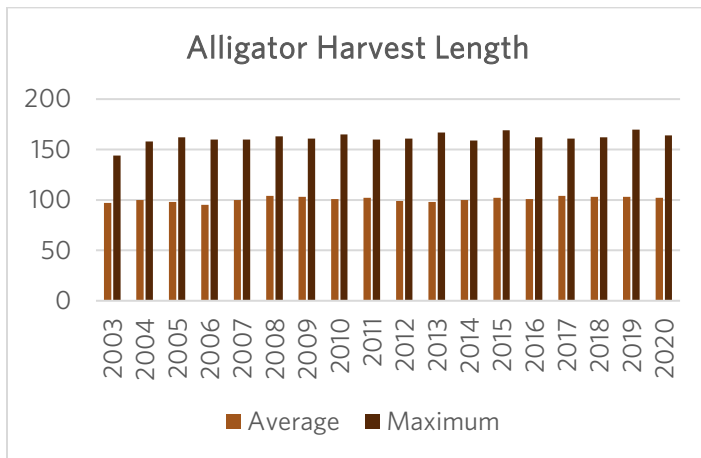


# Alligator Program Highlights

## FY 2020-2021

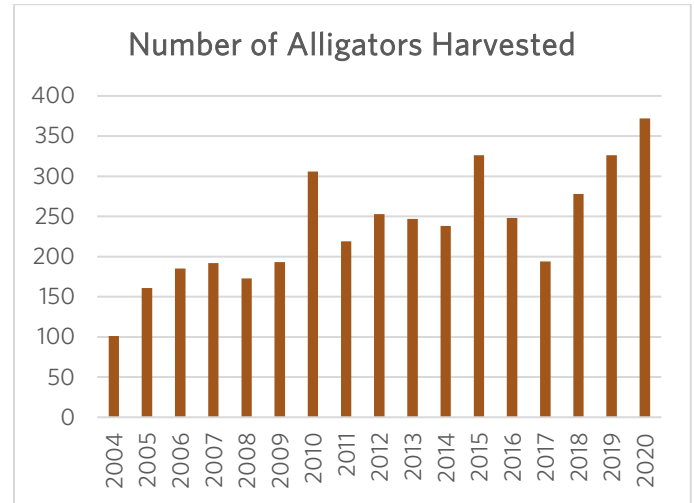
There were 1,030 alligator hunters drawn for the quota hunt. New this season, Fort Stewart was issued 30 tags and designated as a stand-alone harvest zone. This enabled base biologists to handle a draw for alligator opportunity exclusive to the base but open to the public.

Georgia alligator hunters harvested 372 alligators during the 2020 alligator hunting season. This is up slightly for the 4<sup>th</sup> straight year. The 272 successful hunters each hunted an average of 3.0 nights, and most were accompanied by 2 assistants.



*Length of alligators harvested.*

Average length of harvested alligators was 103 inches, which is very similar to the long-term average of 100 inches. The longest alligator harvested in 2020 was 164 inches, almost identical to the long-term average of 161 inches. These size metrics are very stable over the long term, suggesting that hunters are selecting for alligators in the 8-foot size or bigger category. The legal minimum is 4 feet except on Lake Walter F. George.



*Number of alligators harvested between 2004-2020.*

Reed Bingham State Park opened for limited alligator opportunity in Zone 4. The hunt was well received, and Little Ocmulgee State Park is planning their first hunt in 2021.



*Alligator hunters with successful 9-foot harvest from Reed Bingham State Park during the 2020 alligator season.*

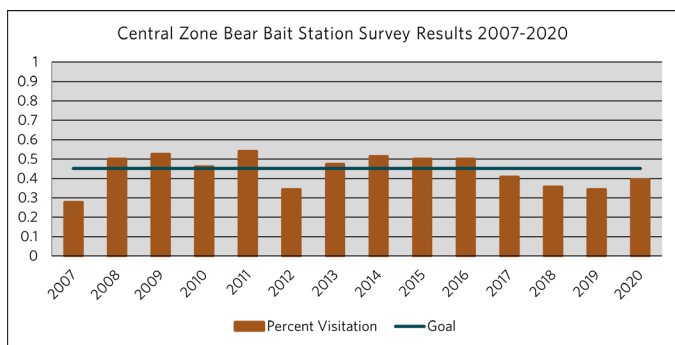
# Black Bear Program

## Annual Highlights

### FY 2020-2021

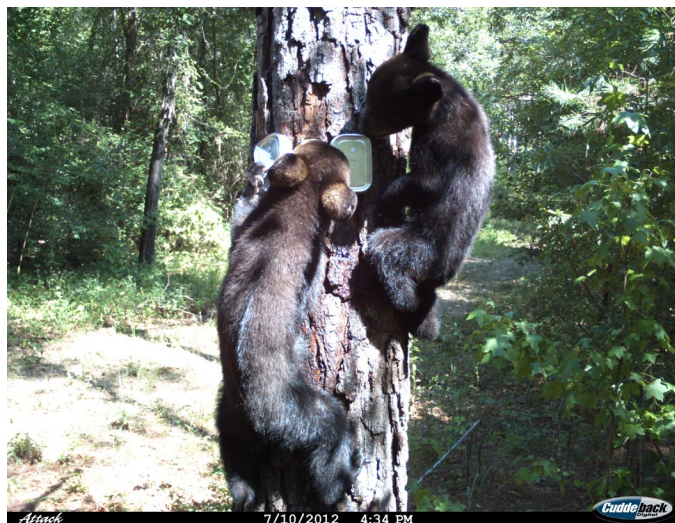
#### Central Zone Black Bear Population Monitoring

Georgia's Central Zone black bear population is monitored through a network of 180+ summer bait station survey sites.



Central Zone bear bait station survey result between 2007-2020.

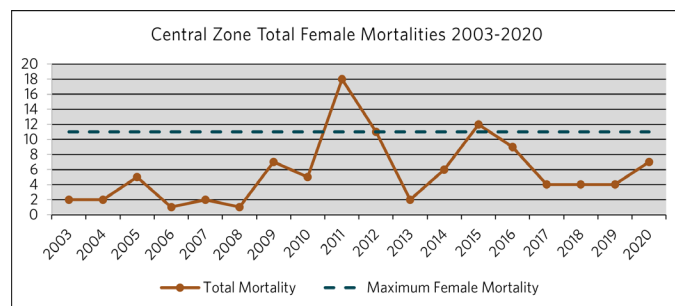
Bait station survey results have been stable over that period. The horizontal line is the survey goal of 45% visitation, meaning at least 45% of stations show evidence of bear attention.



Two black bear cubs at bait station.

The collection of biological data from road-killed and harvested bears is an important part of our monitoring efforts. According to the Population Viability Analysis for Central Georgia that was completed in 2019 by UGA and the Strategic

Management Plan for Black Bears in Georgia, the most important parameter to track in central Georgia is annual female mortalities. Using this parameter, no more than 11 dead females should be recorded annually if the population is stable.



Central Zone total female bear mortalities between 2003-2020.

In 2020, 5 bears were legally harvested from the one-day, 3-county season. Harvest has averaged 9 since 2011. Since the private lands season started in 2011, 85 bears have been taken (56% females). Prior to 2011, harvest was restricted to a one-day hunt on Ocmulgee & Oaky Woods WMAs (1989 was last year for Oaky Woods & 2010 was last year for Ocmulgee). The WMA hunts averaged <2 bears per year.



Adult black bear at bait station.



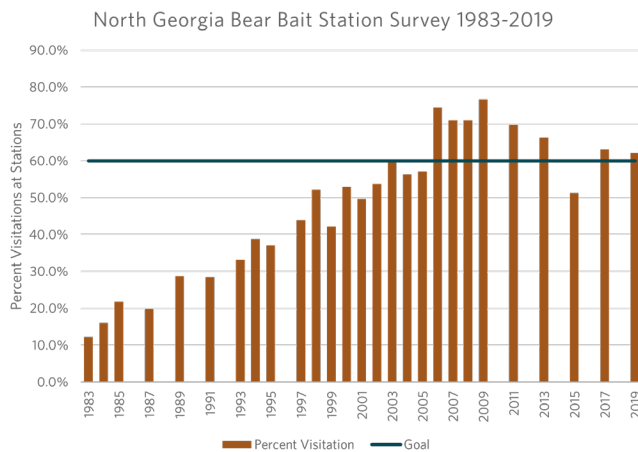
# Black Bear Program

## Annual Highlights

### FY 2020-2021

#### Northern Zone Black Bear Population Monitoring

Bait station surveys have been conducted across designated routes in north Georgia in July every year or every other year since 1983. Visitation rates rose steadily from a low of 12.3% in 1983 to a high of 76.7% in 2009. Bait stations were not conducted in north Georgia in 2020 but are scheduled for 2021. Bear bait station surveys serve as an index to population change over time and help to determine bear population trends.



North Georgia bear bait station survey result between 1983-2019.

North Georgia bear hunters enjoy one of the longest bear seasons anywhere in North America. On private land, bear season runs concurrently with deer season beginning with archery on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sat. in September and concluding with firearms season on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sun. in January. In 2020, a 9-day bear dog-hunting opportunity was offered for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year as a quota hunt on Chattahoochee and Chestatee Wildlife Management Areas (~50k acres total). Selected hunters (15) could bring up to 9 additional hunters for a total of 10 hunters per party. The dog hunters were once again very successful, harvesting 0-7 bears per party (Average: 4, Median: 5) and a total of 53 bears over the 9-day period (16 males, 37 females).

Chestatee WMA (Lumpkin Co.) had both the highest total harvest (33) and the highest harvest per square mile (0.78 bears/HPSM) of any WMA this season.

| High Bear Harvest WMAs |             |      |
|------------------------|-------------|------|
| WMA                    | # Harvested | HPSM |
| Chestatee              | 33          | 0.78 |
| Chattahoochee          | 26          | 0.66 |
| Dawson Forest          | 14          | 0.35 |
| Cohutta                | 30          | 0.2  |

Northern Zone Wildlife Management Areas with the highest bear harvest.



Radio collared black bear exiting den site.

White County had the highest overall harvest (52 bears) of any north Georgia county. Lumpkin (51), Murray (51), and Gilmer (44) counties weren't far behind.

To improve our understanding of the impacts, if any, of the new dog hunt on bears and to evaluate bear-dog interactions, for a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Game Management staff are trapping and fitting bears with GPS collars on Chattahoochee and Chestatee WMAs and on Cohutta WMA as a "control area." Staff captured 37 bears as part of this research being conducted in partnership with the University of Georgia Warnell School. GPS collars were placed on hunting dogs used during the hunt.

# Black Bear Program

## Annual Highlights

### FY 2020-2021

Bears in Georgia may enter a form of hibernation called “torpor” each winter. Staff conducted den checks on 6 collared bears denning in winter 2021. Den types excavated ground dens (4), a rock cavity, a rock outcrop (see photo above), and a hollow tree. Approximately 83% of collared females (38% of collared males) were known to have spent time in a winter den. Average litter size was 2.25 cubs/litter. Sex ratio of cubs was 7 males, 2 females.

Oak mast surveys are conducted across north Georgia each August. This information is useful to our hunters to increase hunter success, but also helps biologists interpret trends observed in nuisance bear behavior, harvest, and number of road-killed bears. In the mountains, oak mast was technically rated “fair” in the fall of 2020 (Total Oak Rating = 2.97). Although, from a practical standpoint, oak mast seemed to be abundant in 2020 and red oak acorns seemed to persist into the spring of 2021.

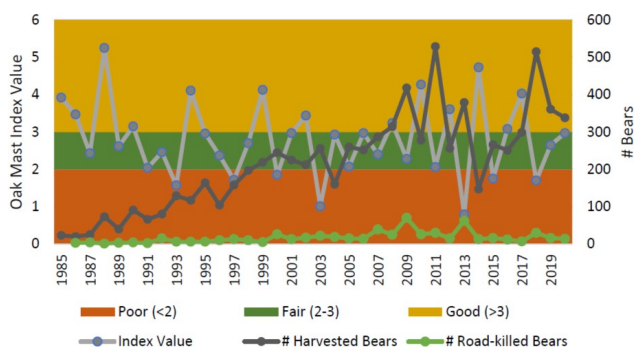
than 20 bears were captured to resolve complex human-bear conflicts.



*Bear with sarcoptic mange seen in Gordon County.*

Sarcoptic mange, which differs from the commonly seen demodectic mange, was confirmed from a black bear found dead in Gordon County, GA in January. The photo above, provided by the individual who discovered the bear carcass, was apparently taken a few weeks earlier on the same property. This represents the first and only documented case of sarcoptic mange in bears in Georgia. Sarcoptic mange in bears is more common in Virginia and Pennsylvania. Mange is not believed to cause population-level impacts on bears in the northeast, but its effect on southeastern bear populations remains unknown at this time.

North Georgia Mountains Oak Mast Survey & Mortality Data 1985-2020



*North Georgia mountains oaks mast survey and mortality results between 1985 and 2020.*

Game Management staff in north Georgia responded to over 600 calls about bears, spending more than 1,000 staff hours providing technical guidance and hands-on assistance. Although capturing bears is a last resort, more

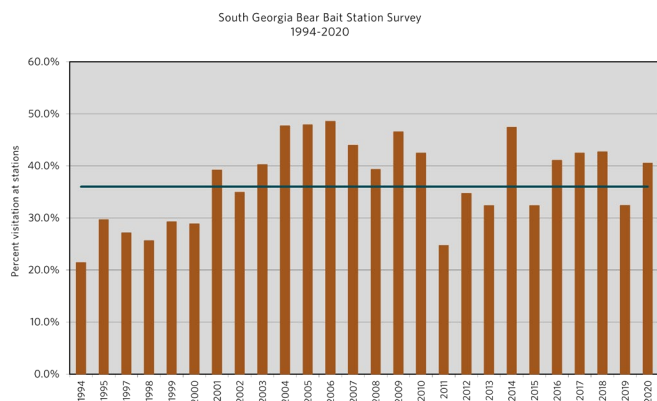
# Black Bear Program Annual Highlights

*FY 2020-2021*

## Southern Zone Black Bear Population Monitoring

Georgia's Southern Zone black bear population is monitored in cooperation with Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge staff through a network of 173 summer bait station survey sites, and the collection of data from harvested bears at fall check stations.

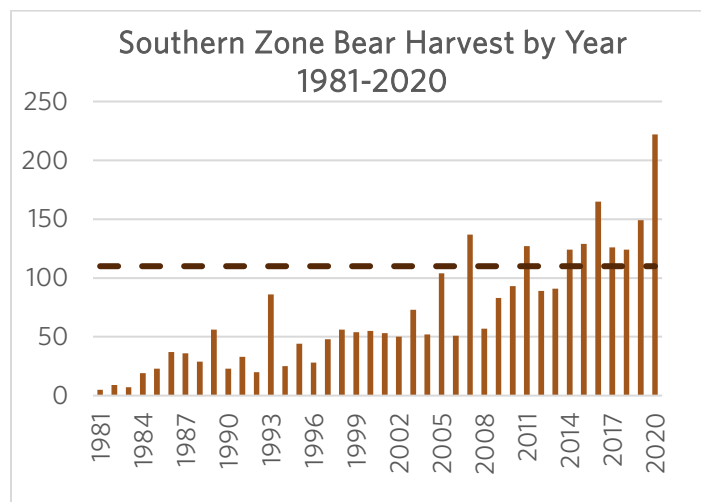
Bait station surveys have been conducted across designated routes in South Georgia every year since 1994. While trending up through 2006 and tracking well with increasing harvests, bear visits to summer bait station sites have flattened in recent years in the wake of habitat changes brought about by 3 major wildfires that encompassed the entire Okefenokee Swamp and much of the surrounding private timberland. The 10-year survey goal is 36%.



*South Georgia bear bait station survey data from 1994-2020.*

Harvest opportunities in south Georgia are primarily available on private lands in the 8 counties around the Okefenokee Swamp. Hunting bear with dogs is a long-standing tradition in southeast Georgia and is allowed on private lands over four 3-day weekends in late September/early October. Only still hunting is allowed on Dixon Memorial WMA with open dates in archery, primitive weapons, and firearms seasons. Total southern zone harvest for 2020 was 22 bears (140

male, 82 female). This represents a record harvest, shattering the previous record from 2016 with a 38% increase over the previous record. Harvest is trending up and has averaged 156 over the last 5 years and 134 during the last 10 years. The 10-year harvest goal is 110 (dotted line on graph).



*Southern zone bear harvest data by year from 1981-2020.*



*Adult black bear harvested from southern zone.*

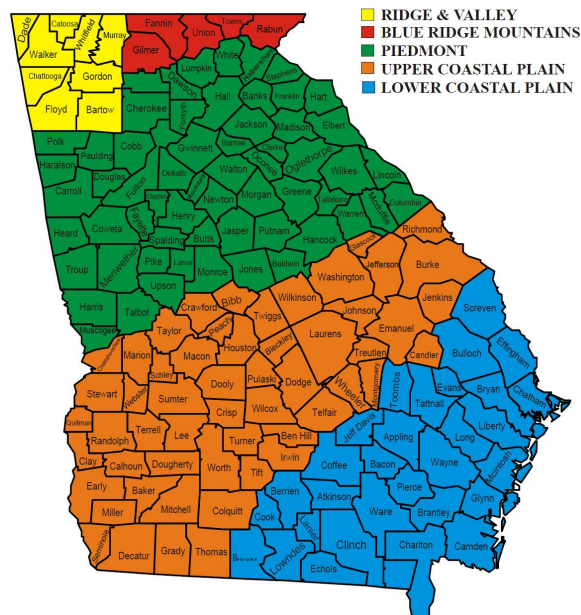


# Deer Program Highlights

## FY 2020-2021

### Overview

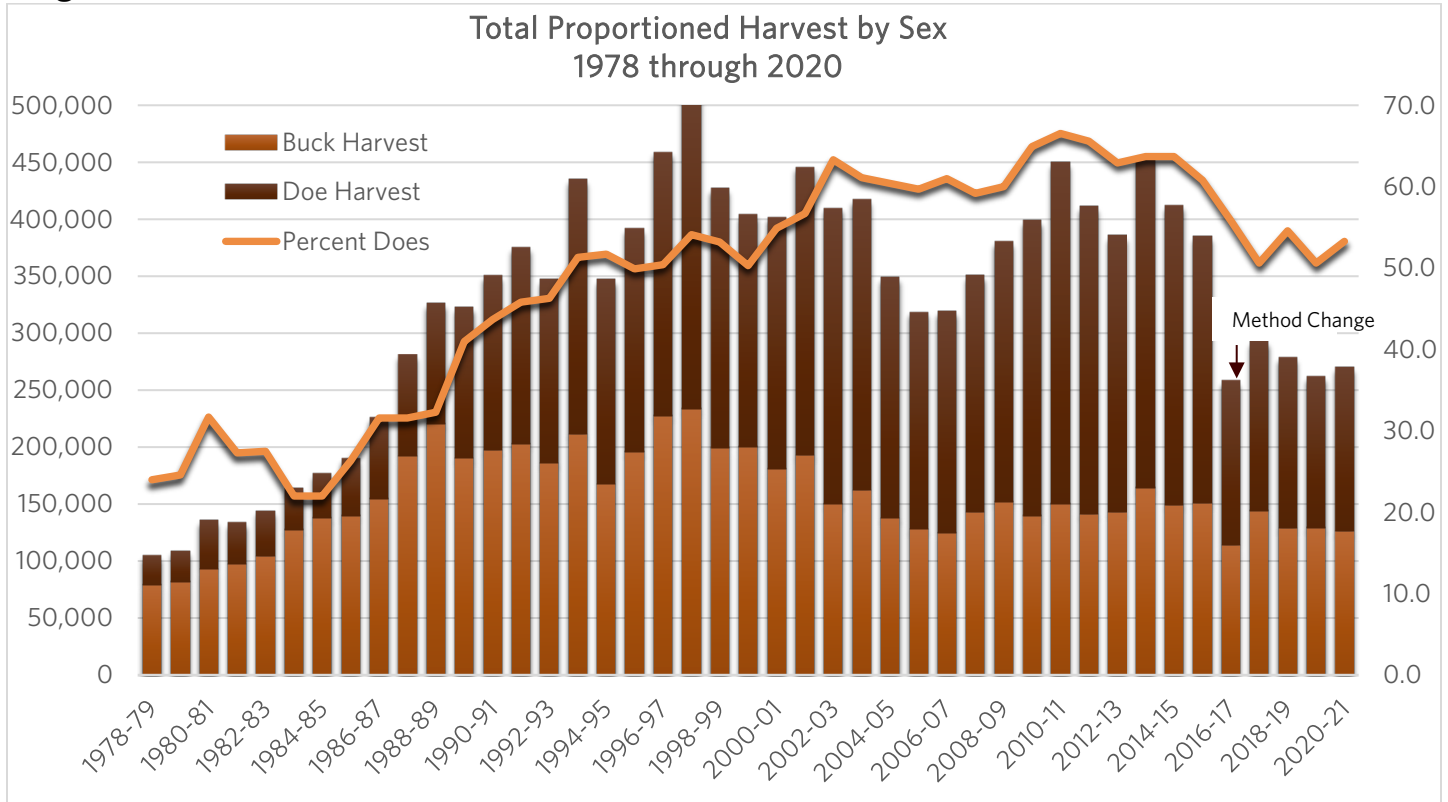
The 2020-21 deer season was excellent with 209,154 deer hunters taking 270,272 deer, slightly more than 2019-20. Harvest estimates are determined through the Game Check harvest reporting system and adjusted for reporting rates from an annual telephone survey of active deer hunters. Hunter satisfaction for the 2020-21 deer season was excellent with 91% of survey respondents rating their season as satisfactory, good, or excellent. Fawn recruitment rates increased from last year, but were still lower than the previous 5-year average. Georgia's new Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) is progressing well with 87 cooperators managing over 120,000 acres of land. Program participants receive detailed habitat and herd management plans, harvest data analysis, and assistance with camera surveys.



### 2020-21 Deer Harvest Summary

| Physiographic Region |      | Archery | Muzzleloader | Firearm |
|----------------------|------|---------|--------------|---------|
| Blue Ridge Mountain  | Buck | 427     | 67           | 2,454   |
|                      | Doe  | 833     | 114          | 428     |
| Ridge and Valley     | Buck | 1,167   | 149          | 9,784   |
|                      | Doe  | 2,011   | 195          | 6,934   |
| Piedmont             | Buck | 8,864   | 1,008        | 44,483  |
|                      | Doe  | 14,604  | 1,514        | 41,955  |
| Upper Coastal Plain  | Buck | 2,857   | 669          | 36,715  |
|                      | Doe  | 6,152   | 1,041        | 46,636  |
| Lower Coastal Plain  | Buck | 1,495   | 476          | 15,549  |
|                      | Doe  | 2,765   | 457          | 18,318  |
| Total                |      | 41,175  | 5,691        | 223,255 |
| Statewide Total      |      |         |              | 270,121 |

## Long-term Harvest



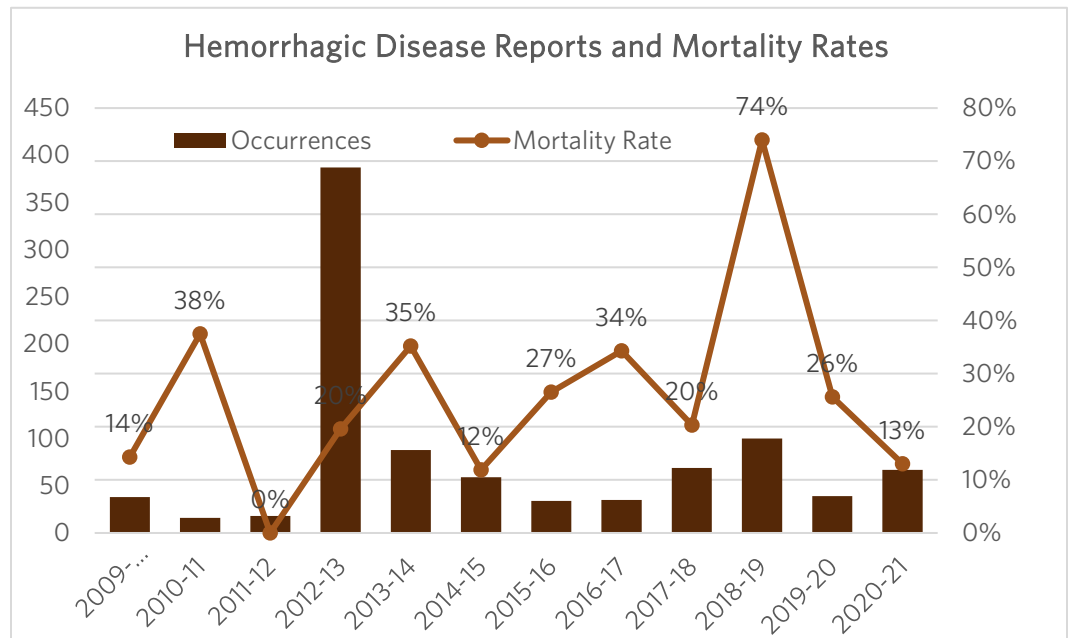
Total proportioned harvest of deer by sex between 1978-2020.

## Disease

Georgia is fortunate to have a strong herd immunity to hemorrhagic disease, so outbreaks capable of causing regional population declines are rare. 2020 had a typical number of occurrences and typical mortality rate.

Chronic Wasting Disease has not been found in Georgia to date, however recent discoveries in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee have increased our level of concern. WRD

biologists are continually monitoring the population and adapt our disease surveillance strategy whenever new scientific information becomes available. WRD staff collected 1,357 samples in 2020-21.



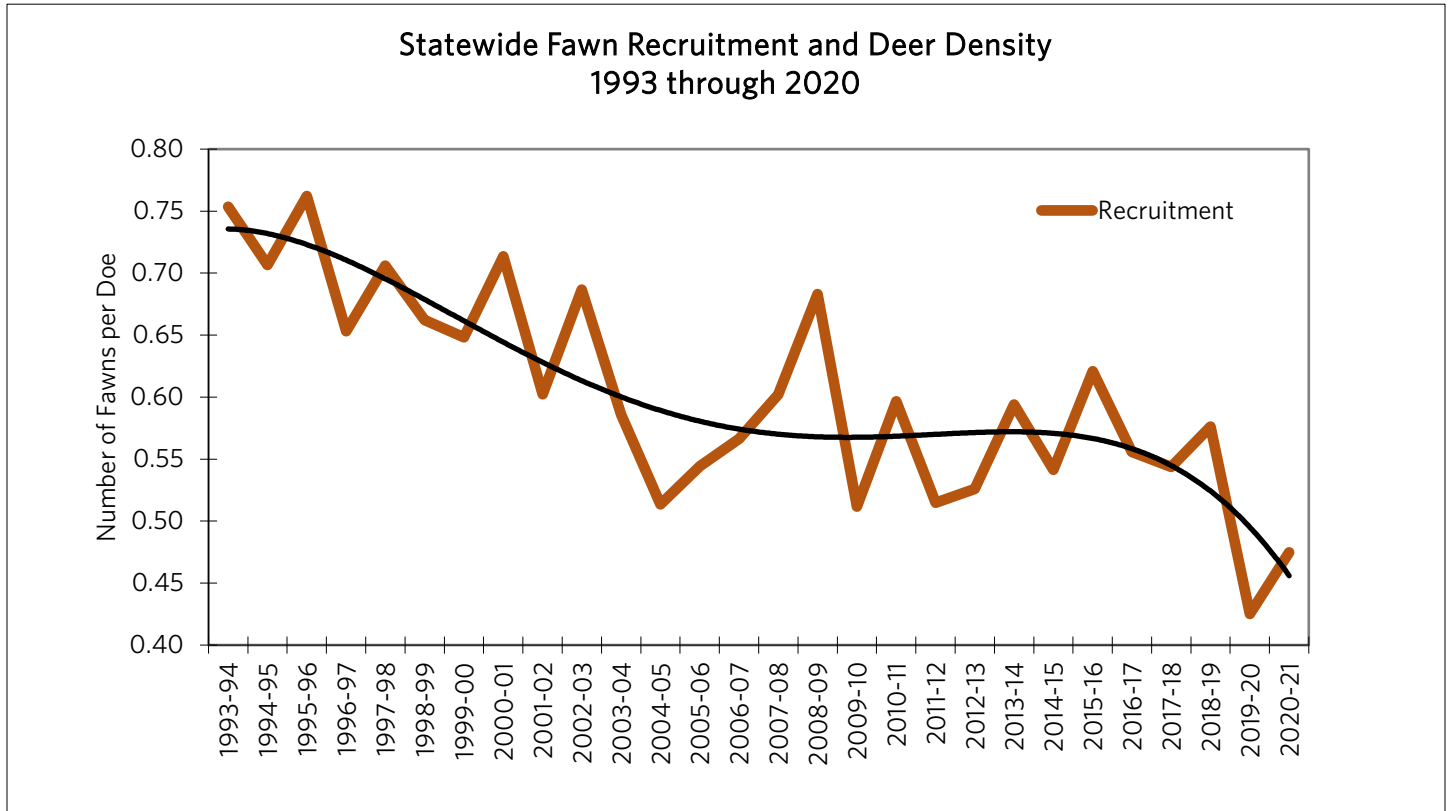
Total hemorrhagic disease reports and mortality rates between 2009-2021.

# Deer Program Highlights

## FY 2020-2021

### Fawn Recruitment

Fawn recruitment is the ratio of fawns per adult doe that survive to deer season, which is one of the most important measures of productivity of the deer population. Fawn recruitment has been relatively stable over the last decade except for the last 2 years. WRD biologists will continue to closely monitor fawn recruitment and other metrics for assessing herd reproduction.



*Statewide fawn recruitment and deer density between 1993-2020.*

As a result of significant declines in the deer population on the Chattahoochee National Forest and associated WMAs, a fawn mortality study was launched in 2017. Over the course of the project 70 fawns were captured, radio-collared, and monitored for mortality. Fawn survival probability was determined to be 16.8% (very low) and predation by coyotes and bears was the leading cause of death. The next phase of this study may include some experimental deer stocking and predator reduction.

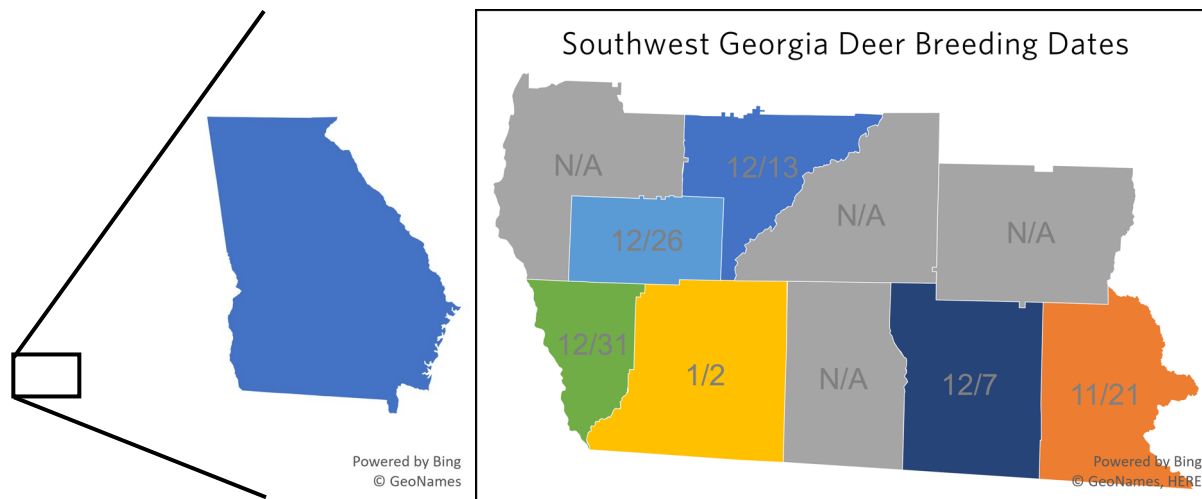


*Fawn bedded down.*



### Research

Deep southwest Georgia is locally known for having one of the latest peak rut periods in the state, however the sample size of conception dates is inadequate to pinpoint peak times. WRD biologists began working with private landowners in February 2020 to collect fetal conception dates in a 10-county area in the southwestern corner of the state. To date, landowner cooperators have collected 150 deer on the project. The preliminary results shown below may change as sample size increases.

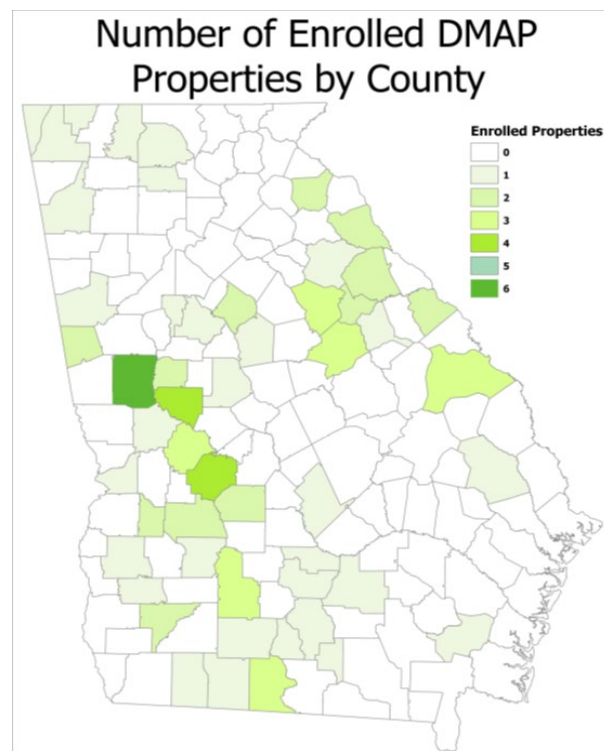


Average peak breeding dates for white-tailed deer by county in southwest Georgia, 2019-2021. Data for counties with a sample size <5 are not included.

### Deer Management Assistance Program

Since the launch of the program in November of 2019, DMAP biologists have provided technical guidance to 200 customers with a total impacted land area of 231,000 acres. Of those, 87 customers have enrolled their private property or hunting club in DMAP with a total 123,211 acres in the program. There are 4 different levels of the program to accommodate a wide range of acreages. Georgia's DMAP was designed to help everyone regardless of property size.

A recent law change granted more antlerless deer harvest flexibility to DMAP biologists as they develop harvest prescriptions for cooperators.



# Forest Management Unit

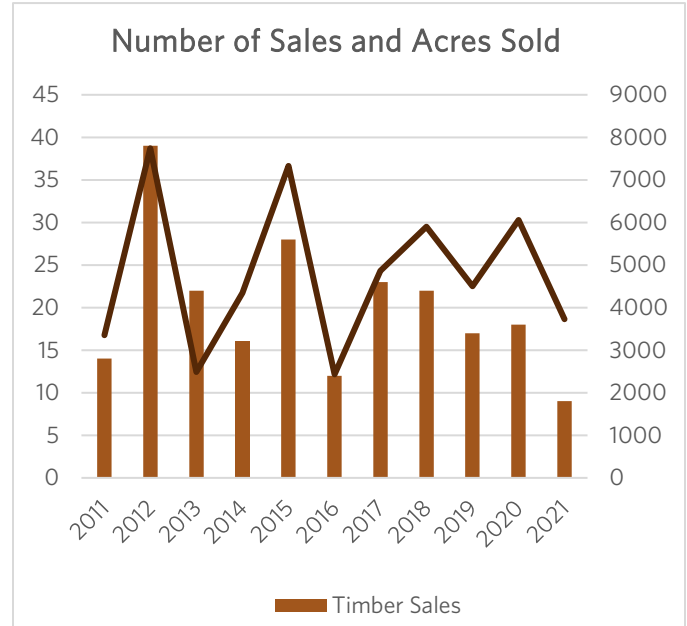
## Annual Highlights

*FY 2020-2021*

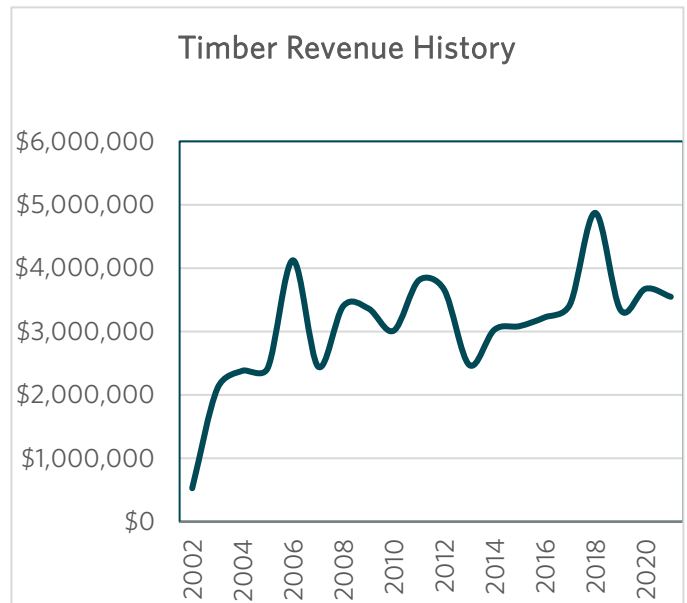
The goal for the Forest Management Unit (FMU) is to conduct silvicultural activities to create or enhance wildlife habitat. This year harvests were completed on 9 Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and one State Park. There were approximately 3,169 acres thinned, 805 acres of regeneration harvest, and 501 acres salvaged due to damage from insects and storm damage conducted in fiscal year 2020-2021. The average value per acre was \$792.75 with an average value per ton of \$14.56. A total of 243,695 tons were harvested this fiscal year for a total of \$3,547,578.81.



Forester 4 Michael Staton cruising timber.



Number of timber sales and timber sold between 2011-2021.



Timber revenue totals between 2002-2020.



# Forest Management Unit Accomplishments

## FY 2020-2021

### FY 2020-2021 Accomplishments:

- Inventoried 50 WMAs and produced a first run harvest scheduler. This process will continue to improve as more WMAs are inventoried.
- Conducted 35 miles of roadwork totaling \$102,059.
- Installed gates and bridges on 5 WMAs totaling \$78,243.
- Reforested 746 acres.
- Conducted 1,031 acres of seedling survival checks.
- Marked 4,545 acres for sales.
- Prescribed burned 6,163 acres.
- Completed 236 prescribed burn evaluations.
- Completed 47 hours of continuing education.

### Special Recognition

The FMU Foresters and Technician were awarded the WRD Group Achievement Award this year. This group is well deserving for their dedication to wildlife habitat and hardwood improvement across the state.



Before (top) and after (bottom) pictures of habitat management work at Hart County WMA.



Log mats to protect road and meet Best Management Practices (BMPs).



Dual purpose road built at Ocmulgee PFA.

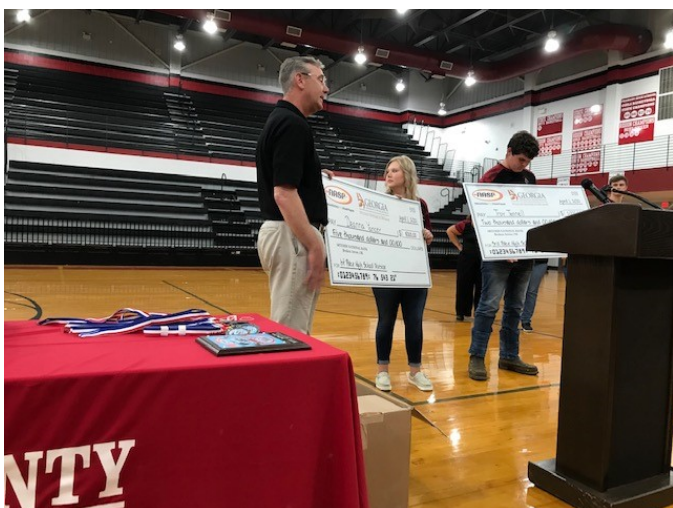


# Hunter Development Program Annual Highlights

*FY 2020-2021*

## National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP)

NASP continues to be a strong program in Georgia's physical education and agricultural education classes. This year's tournament season presented extra challenges because of Covid-19 restrictions and protocols implemented at the state and local school district levels.



*WRD Director Ted Will presents NASP winners with scholarship checks.*

Despite Covid restrictions, during the 2020-2021 school year, 4,362 archers competed at 31 District tournaments held at local schools throughout the state between October and January. Qualification for the State Championship was based on scores achieved at the District tournaments.

The 2021 Georgia NASP State Championship was held virtually at NASP schools throughout the state. Seven hundred thirty-six archers representing 35 schools participated in the State Championship.

## Hunt and Learns

The Hunter Development Program (HDP) partnered with Region 5 Game Management and conducted an adult turkey Hunt and Learn located on the Chattahoochee Fall Line WMA: Hilliard Plantation Tract. During this Hunt and Learn the

participants enjoyed an education packed weekend with in-classroom instructions covering Turkey 101, gun safety and fit, shotgun patterning, and habitat management. Participants also received in-depth training on the differences in turkey calls and how to use them properly from the experienced guides. In the afternoon, participants enjoyed fishing in the beautiful lake on-site and time on the range working on their shotgun, rifle, and archery skills. Best of all, the entire group spent time sitting around a late afternoon campfire sharing hunting stories.



*Adult turkey Hunt and Learn participants at Chattahoochee Fall Line WMA: Hilliard Plantation Tract.*

## Mike Commander Shooting Range

The Mike Commander Shooting Range reopened in March after a complete renovation. The range offers opportunities for different types of shooters including a: 25-yard pistol range, 200-yard rifle range, 7 position static archery range that extends from 10-50 yards, 4 position archery tower that ranges from 20-50 yards for bowhunting enthusiasts, and a 3D archery trail with 20 different target positions to expand bow hunting skills. The range also offers a classroom that seats 40 participants reserved for hunter education classes, organizational programs, and training, and much more.

# Hunter Development Program Annual Highlights

*FY 2020-2021*



*The newly renovated Mike Commander Shooting Range.*

## **Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP)**

Despite the Challenges of COVID-19, over 600 students participated this season in the 2020-2021 SCTP. Five hundred students shot in the GA State meet.

HDP has nine certification courses across the state for SCTP coaches scheduled through the Scholastic Shooting Sports Foundation. So far this year we have trained and certified 13 new SCTP coaches.

## **New Staff**

Kristen Nienstedt joined the Hunter Development Program as a Hunting and Shooting Education Specialist. She will be located at the Riverbend WMA office. Kristen recently graduated from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College with a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education.



*New Hunting and Shooting Education Specialist Kristen Nienstedt.*



*SCTP coaches attending a certification course.*



# Migratory Bird Program Accomplishments

## FY 2020-2021

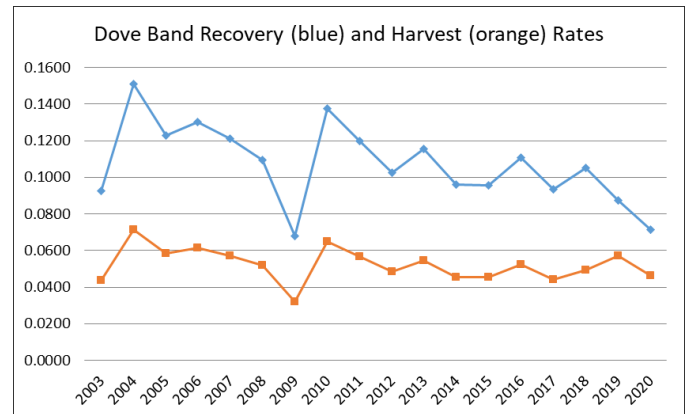
### In FY 20-21, WRD's Migratory Bird Program:

- Captured and banded 342 Wood Ducks. These data are included with Atlantic Flyway data to set federal hunting regulation frameworks.

- Captured and banded 1,857 Mourning Doves. These data allow us to estimate the annual band recovery and harvest rates. Fortunately, harvest rates have remained stable for the last decade.



Adult male Wood Duck (top) and juvenile female Wood Duck (bottom).



Dove band recovery and harvest rates between 2003 and 2020.



Biologists band an American Woodcock.

- Issued 73 permits to allow landowners to manage nuisance problems caused by Canada Geese.
- The water control structure at the Blanton Creek waterfowl impoundment is almost completed. The crew will wrap up a few remaining items this summer. The completion of this project will allow staff to adjust the water on 50 acres of wetlands.

- Captured and banded 48 American Woodcock, including 11 with satellite transmitters in partnership with a larger multi-state research project.
- The migratory game bird and alligator projects leader, Greg Balkcom, retired at the end of March.



# Private Lands Program

## Annual Highlights

### FY 2020-2021

The Private Lands Program (PLP) and Bobwhite Quail Initiative (BQI) continued to get back to full strength in 2021. Erin Cork and Tony Kroeger joined the team in July and Jesse Kamps joined in February. In addition, Forrest Marchington migrated north to increase assistance to landowners in northeast Georgia. PLP and BQI have also increased assistance to private landowners through a partnership with Quail Forever (QF). In the past year they have hired 3 new biologists (Miranda Gulsby, Jennifer Ward and Autumn Patterson), an outreach coordinator (Hanna Hodges) and a Precision Ag Specialist (Chaz Holt). This partnership helped the Division hire Henry Brewer as a part time technician to help with bird, habitat, and predator surveys on the quail focal areas.

5,500 acres enrolled in EQIP. Contracts include 2,000 acres of prescribed burning and 1,400 acres of timber stand improvement practices among others to improve habitat for quail within the BQI Focal Landscapes.



*Dallas Ingram presented the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative's Fire Bird Conservation Award to Burner Bob.*



*Miller County where Mary Nieminen worked with WCS and NRCS staff to develop a plan to restore upland portions of flatwood salamander habitat using EQIP funds.*

PLP biologists have assisted landowners in securing 53 Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) contracts through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Contracts will improve 8,182 acres for wildlife. Practices include 7,558 acres of prescribed burning, 1,689 acres of forest stand improvement, and 12,410 feet of new hedgerows.

The BQI program signed 23 new cooperator contracts with landowners to further enhance

Increased use of precision agriculture technology has given us a new avenue for pinpointing where unproductive farmland could be converted to wildlife habitat. In partnership with Quail Forever, PLP and BQI began a pilot project in Baker, Calhoun, and Decatur Counties. QF's Precision Agriculture Specialist was able to show a farmer that he was losing about \$500/acre farming 40 acres of marginal land. Using BQI tag funds, staff are working with this landowner and others to increase farm profits by converting these areas to quail habitat.

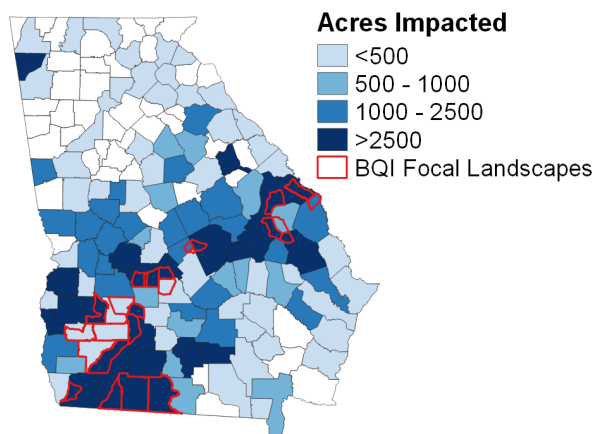
BQI was able to assist Golden Triangle Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) with the purchase a burn trailer for landowners in Southwest Georgia. The trailer contains equipment like drip torches, backpack blowers, signage, and hand tools that a landowner can borrow to get more acres burned. There will be more of these coming online across the state in FY 22 and PLP and BQI look forward to working with local RC&Ds to promote these valuable resources for landowners.

# Private Lands Program Annual Highlights

*FY 2020-2021*

## Other Accomplishments in FY 2020-2021:

- Despite Covid-19 restrictions staff still participated in 28 outreach events reaching over 1,000 people. Topics included quail, pollinators, frogs, plants and prescribed fire, and the audiences ranged from elementary students to conservation professionals.
- Conducted Fall Covey Counts on 9 WMAs, 1 private property and Oconee National Forest; thanks to the help of over 20 DNR staff, 3 QF staff and 57 volunteers.
- Spring counts were completed on 32 WMAs (up from 23 in FY 2020), one private property and Oconee National Forest; thanks to the help from 19 DNR staff 12 Volunteers and 3 QF staff.



## FY 2021 Technical Assistance Summary

|              | Properties | Acres          | Counties   |
|--------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| New          | 372        | 126,906        |            |
| Follow-up    | 194        | 84,053         |            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>566</b> | <b>210,959</b> | <b>121</b> |

## Special Recognition

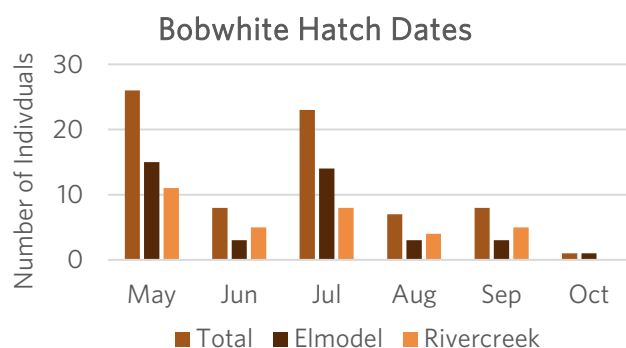
Diana McGrath led the effort with other program and QF staff to host four youth quail hunting events on private properties in Twiggs, Emanuel, Turner, and Bleckley Counties. The PLP and BQI programs greatly appreciate the landowner's willingness to share their time, property, and passion for quail.



*Youth Quail Hunt organized by Diana McGrath in Bleckley County.*

Mary Nieminen worked on over 30 EQIP contracts that will provide funding to improve wildlife habitat on over 3,500 acres in 6 counties in southwest Georgia.

Diana McGrath and Tony Kroeger were immensely helpful in organizing and training staff for a project that banded 53 quail at Elmodel and 47 at River Creek WMA. Banding already produced some interesting information on hatch dates and we hope to learn more from the band return data.



*Bobwhite hatch dates on two southwest Georgia WMAs between May and October 2020.*

Allison Colter presented a management plan to Oconee National Forest as part of a multiyear project to improve management on their Quail Focal Area. Allison has done a great job of considering multiple objectives for the Forest Service and we look forward to seeing another great hunting opportunity on public land.



# Sapelo Island NERR

## Annual Highlights

### FY 2020-2021

#### Overview

Due to COVID impacts, the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve's (SINERR) educational programming, public tours and group tours were put on hold in spring 2020. They restarted in June (teacher workshops), July (public & group tours) and August (school group visits).

The Research Program hosted a few researchers periodically, where that could be done safely. The Stewardship Program continued to do project planning and coordination work with colleagues and contractors remotely. SINERR received two large grants totaling \$565K for renovation of the Nature Trail. Staff worked with consultants to develop a concept plan for expanding and renovating the Visitors Center. The Island Manager Fred Hay also completed a major "make-over" of the Sapelo Lighthouse site, including refurbishing the tower, adding a large new picnic pavilion, a short new trail and replacing the boardwalk to the steel tower site.



*The Sapelo Island Lighthouse.*

#### Administration

- Submitted the draft Management Plan for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) review in February 2021.
- The first Communications Plan for SINERR is in development with assistance from a consultant.

This cooperative effort of both NOAA and GA DNR-WRD will help align both agencies basic communications strategies and methods with existing communications and outreach efforts.

- Storage rooms in the Long Tabby and Education Building have been renovated into new offices.

#### Partnerships

- Sapelo Island Manager replaced the Sapelo Lighthouse nature trail boardwalk thanks to \$175K in funding from NOAA.
- The Reserve has been working to implement a Georgia Sea Grant State Fellow and an Internship in partnership with the on-island nonprofit, Sapelo Island Cultural & Revitalization Society (SICARS).



*The new Sapelo Lighthouse nature trail boardwalk.*

#### Research

- The first NERRS Davidson Fellow, Sydney Williams, began fieldwork on Sapelo.
- Developed a new Estuarine Fish Monitoring Cooperative and began trawl sampling in spring yielding 58 species and 12,000+ fish to date.
- Began vegetation monitoring of the Sentinel Site using drone as part of a multi-Reserve project.



# Sapelo Island NERR

## Accomplishments

### FY 2020-2021

- Installed two Sediment Elevation Tables (SETs) at the Sentinel Site and continued to monitor revegetation of tidal marsh upstream of bridge.



*Staff trawl sampling as part of the new Estuarine Fishing Monitoring Cooperative.*

- Replaced exterior panels and windows on the marsh side, painted handrails on steps and ramp, and upgraded audio and visual projection equipment.



*Sapelo Island Visitor's center.*

### Education

- Conducted several online lectures and coordinated with local teachers on the *Seeds to Shoreline* project.
- Held two Teachers on the Estuary (TOTE) professional development workshops.
- Created New outdoor exhibits on Storm Surge and SETs.
- Adam represented WRD on Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Team for Golden Ray disaster.
- Assisted the University of Georgia Marine Institute (UGAMI) with student programs, maintained the Nature Trail, and helped with Estuarine Fish Monitoring Coop trawl surveys.

### Visitors Center

- Sapelo Island visitor numbers are way down due to COVID, but the Visitors Center remained open for occasional guests to enjoy the exhibits and displays.
- Developed a grant proposal with DNR Engineering and Construction totaling roughly \$1 million for an expansion and the renovation of exhibits and displays. The proposal will be submitted in early 2022.

### Stewardship

- Worked with DNR Engineering and Construction to receive bids on the planned major renovation of the Nature Trail. The work will be funded by a \$300K grant from NOAA and \$265K grant from the Recreational Trails Program.
- Made solid progress on design and implementation plans for repairing the Ashantilly Living Shoreline.
- Re-started on-island projects with *Friends of Sapelo* volunteers at the nature trail, Sapelo Lighthouse, and native gardens at Long Tabby.
- Suzanne served on the NERR's national Strategic Committee as the Stewardship representative.



*Friends of Sapelo volunteer assisting with native gardens project.*

# Urban Wildlife Program

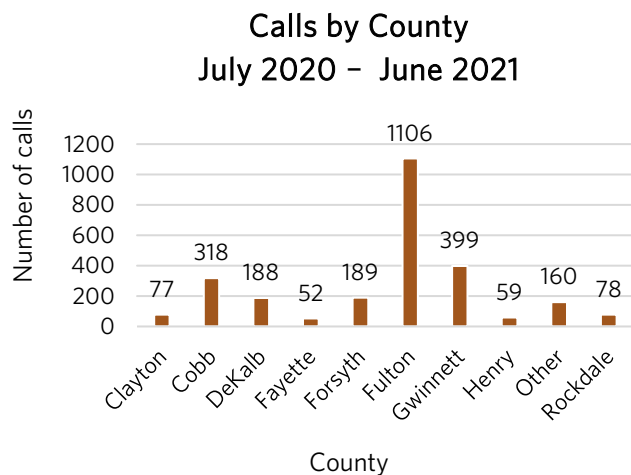
## Annual Highlights

### FY 2020-2021

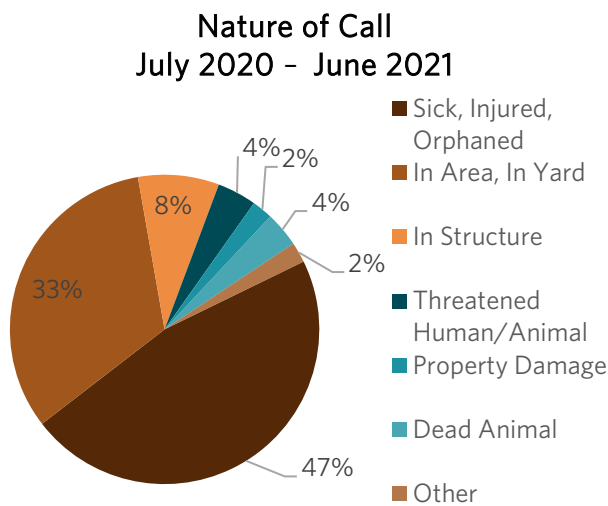
The Game Management Section's Urban Wildlife Program (UWP) continues to provide human-wildlife conflict assistance to the residents of Metro-Atlanta (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties). During this fiscal year, the UWP nearly doubled the amount of technical assistance provided technical assistance to customers, from 1,329 in FY19 - 20 to 2,626 in FY20 - 21.

In addition to response efforts, the UWP also provided over 40 outreach and education opportunities, including presenting to students at UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, Statewide Park Managers Meeting, Atlanta Neighborhood Planning Unit-P's Monthly Meeting and as an invited speaker at The Wildlife Society's Urban Wildlife Conference.

As part of an effort to increase and maintain urban hunting opportunities, the UWP and other WRD staff members met with the City of Marietta, Consolidated Government of Columbus, City of Peachtree Corners, and City of Dunwoody to discuss archery hunting in city limits. The UWP also joined the Cobb County Hunting Advisory Committee. The UWP hosted two "Community Deer Management Workshops" in Buford and Alpharetta that included presentations from the Deer Management Assistance Program and wildlife Services.



Number of calls by county between July 2020 and June 2021 (n=2,626).



Nature of calls by county between July 2020 and June 2021 (n=2,626).



UWP Program Manager Kaitlin Goode presents at a Community Deer Management Workshop.

Partnering with University of Georgia (UGA) Warnell Professor, Dr. Michel Kohl, the UWP created the Urban Wildlife Working Group in Metro-Atlanta comprised of key stakeholders in urban wildlife conservation, including the Georgia Wildlife Federation, Georgia Audubon Society, Fernbank, and Chattahoochee Nature Center. The UWP Working Group has met four times over this fiscal year and has plans to expand the Group to include



# Urban Wildlife Program

## Accomplishments

### FY 2020-2021

invitations to the Riverkeepers, Trout Unlimited, Zoo Atlanta and Georgia Aquarium. In addition to leading the Urban Wildlife Working Group, the UWP is also taking part in the Atlanta Animal Welfare Professional's monthly meeting. This group is comprised of different animal control agencies across the Metro-Atlanta area and designed to share information about domestic and wild animals.

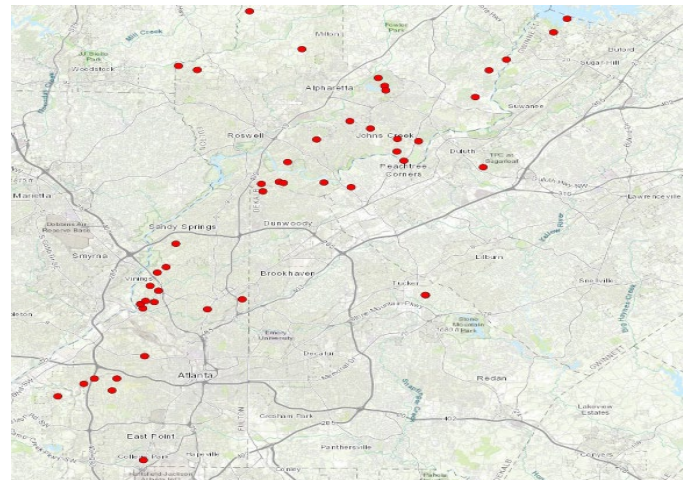
The UWP worked with the Public Affairs Program to do the Division's first "social media takeover". Social Media manager, Denise Shepard, rode along with the UWP for a week highlighting the different calls the Program responded to. The social media takeover was very well received and created five different videos plus additional content that can be used for later messaging.

The UWP is currently collaborating with the UGA Deer Lab on an immobilization research project comparing current chemical immobilization drugs and techniques to a new immobilization drug and new techniques. UGA Deer Lab has conducted three of the eight treatments so far. The final five treatments will take place in the fall with preliminary results available shortly afterward.



*UWP assists UGA Deer Lab with an immobilization drug project.*

Another new research project was initiated by the UWP this fiscal year looking at locations of deer injured on fences. Deer-fence injuries is one of the UWP's top calls, particularly in the fall. Plotting the call locations showed a pattern of most being located along the Chattahoochee River. UWP Technicians went to these locations and collected data about fence type and height. Of the 59 locations of deer injured on fences, 85% of the fences were wrought iron fences.



*Map of deer vs. fence injury locations.*

The UWP assists in disease monitoring through the collection of carcass or samples and submission to Southeastern Wildlife Disease Cooperative. This disease monitoring includes Chronic Wasting Disease, Rabbit Hemorrhagic disease, Sarcoptic Mange, *Echinococcus*, and tick surveillance.

Establishing and maintaining relationships with local first responders and animal control agencies is one of the UWP primary goals. During the last fiscal year, the UWP met with Animal Control agencies from Fulton, Forsyth, Fayette, and DeKalb. The UWP also began offering Wildlife Conflict Response training opportunities to first responders. The UWP also worked with Marietta Police Department to capture and relocate a bear from the city limits of Marietta.



# Wild Turkey Program Annual Highlights

*FY 2020-2021*

## In FY2021, WRD's Wild Turkey Program:

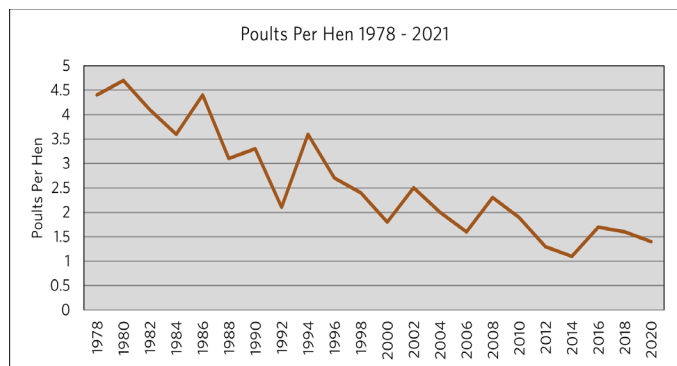
- Continued and expanded long-term monitoring of turkey populations statewide, through production and harvest surveys.
- Initiated a public education campaign to inform hunters of wild turkey declines in Georgia and the need for turkey regulation changes, resulting in the Board of Natural Resources' approval of several statewide regulation changes.
- Supported turkey research in the Georgia Piedmont.

## Population and Harvest Monitoring

### Production Survey

The Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) has been monitoring wild turkey poult production statewide since 1978. As part of this monitoring, DNR personnel and volunteers record all turkeys seen with or without poults, during June, July, and August. Average observed poults per hen are calculated for each year and compared with the long-term data set as an index of turkey population health.

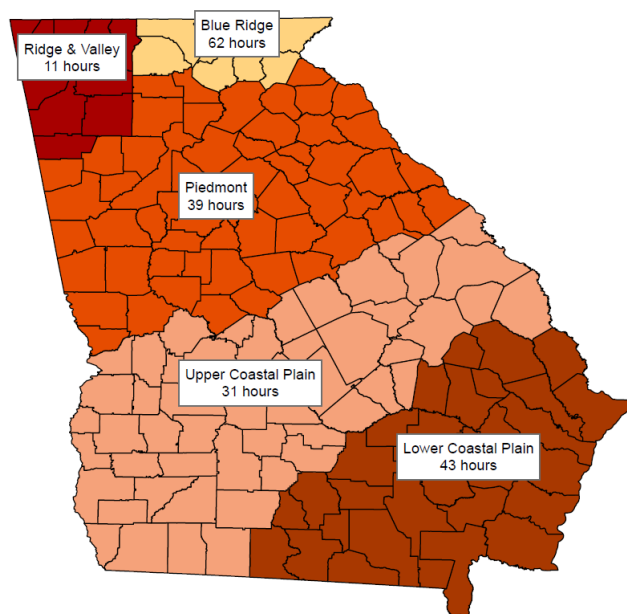
Poults per hen values have decreased markedly since the survey began in 1978. In 2020, an average of 1.4 poults per hen were observed, which is slightly below the 5-year average of 1.46 poults per hen.



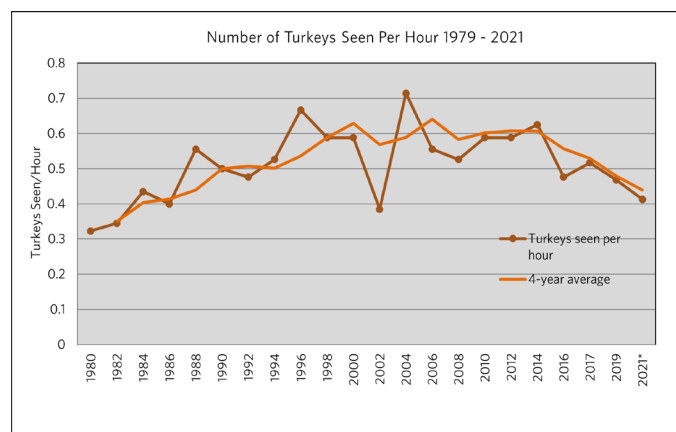
Average poults per hen observed in Georgia 1978-2020.

### Avid Hunter Survey

The spring turkey population is indexed through cooperators reporting their daily hunting statistics throughout the turkey hunting season. Two metrics calculated include hours it takes to harvest a turkey (a measure of hunter effort), and gobblers heard per hour (an index of the male turkey population). Statewide, it took an average of 32 hours to harvest a turkey in 2021, slightly down from 33 hours in 2020. *Note: Data presented are preliminary, as not all survey results have been received for the 2021 season.*



Hours to harvest a turkey by physiographic region, 2021.



Gobblers heard per hour 1979-2021. (\*Preliminary data)

# Wild Turkey Program

## Accomplishments

### FY 2020-2021

#### Regulation Changes

In response to turkey population declines and hunter feedback, the turkey program initiated an educational campaign and eventually proposed statewide changes to the spring turkey season dates and bag limits. These regulation changes were approved by the Board of Natural Resources in May. The changes on private and public lands are intended to lower adult male mortality and reduce disruption to breeding by limiting the removal of gobblers during the weeks leading up to peak incubation by hens.

| Statewide Turkey Regulations  | Public Land Turkey Regulations*  |
|---|--|
| Season runs 1 <sup>st</sup> Saturday after March 26 – May 15 (opener delayed by one week) | Season runs 2 <sup>nd</sup> Saturday in April to May 15  |
| Season bag limit reduced to 2 gobblers  | Statewide season and daily bag limits and limit of 1 gobbler per area (WMA, VPA, National Forest, other federal lands) |
| Daily bag limit of 1 gobbler implemented  |  |

\*(WMAs, VPAs, National Forest)

#### Gobbler Banding

Winter 2021 was the second year of banding gobblers on WMAs to estimate spring harvest rates using band recovery data. The effort was expanded to 8 WMAs, up from 4 in 2020. In total, 74 males were banded, and 33% of those bands were recovered. Recovery rate of bandings is defined as the number of banded birds that are reported harvested in the hunting season immediately following the banding of the bird. While small sample sizes limit the interpretation of banding data, preliminary data suggest that harvest rates for several WMAs may

be above the 30% threshold considered sustainable for a turkey population.

| WMA           | Banded Males Harvested |           |           | 2020 recovery rate | 2021 recovery rate |
|---------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|
|               | 2020                   | 2021      | Total     |                    |                    |
| Ceylon        | 3                      | 2         | 5         | 60%                | 50%                |
| Dawson Forest | 3                      | 3         | 6         | 50%                |                    |
| Di-Lane       | 0                      | 1         | 1         | 0%                 | 100%               |
| Yuchi         | 1                      | 4         | 5         | 13%                | 0%                 |
| Blanton Creek | 0                      | 4         | 4         |                    | 80%                |
| Bullard Creek | 0                      | 11        | 11        |                    | 34%                |
| Coosawattee   | 0                      | 4         | 4         |                    | 50%                |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>7</b>               | <b>29</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>33%</b>         | <b>55%</b>         |



The gobbler banding effort would not have been possible without the tremendous commitment of time and effort from region staff.



# Region 1 Annual Highlights

## FY 2020-2021

Turkey hunting opportunities continued to remain strong in Region 1 in FY 2021. This season 5,594 hunters signed in on Region 1 WMA's and VPA's. They harvested 354 birds accounting for 33% of the total statewide WMA harvest. Out of the top 10 DNR properties for total harvest, 5 are in region 1. This includes Paulding Forest which saw a total harvest of 68 making it the highest harvest WMA in the state. Cohutta WMA tied for second with 43.



*Before and after photo of mulching work on Joe Kurz WMA.*

Many of the habitat management projects completed throughout the year are beneficial for turkeys. We completed multiple mulching projects which will have direct benefits for turkeys.



*Mulching work on J.L. Lester WMA.*



*Road improvements on Otting WMA allowed fisheries staff to resume stocking trout in this section of East Fork Little River.*

We continue to strive to find ways to collaborate with internal and external partners. Within the past year we were proud to work with State Parks, Fisheries Management, Wildlife Conservation, Law Enforcement, the Urban Wildlife Program, U.S. Forest Service, Wildlife Services, the Army Corp of Engineers, local governments, Trout Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy just to name a few.



*Assisting Fisheries Management with the installation of fish attractors on West Point Lake.*



# Region 1 Accomplishments

## FY 2020-2021

In FY20-21, Region 1:

- Burned 13,230 acres on 15 different DNR properties. This year was the best in memory for prescribed burning. Fire effects have been great, and staff hope to achieve similar acreage totals in future years.
- Planted and cultivated 456 acres of dove fields providing opportunity for dove hunters.
- Spread 2,658 tons of gravel improving access on 11 DNR managed properties.
- Handled a wide variety of nuisance calls including some interesting situations.



*The jug was successfully removed from this bears head.*



*Prescribed burn on Rich Mountain WMA*



*Loading gravel on Crockford-Pigeon Mountain WMA.*

### Special Recognition

- Bob Andrews was promoted to Wildlife Tech 2. Jessica Dowdy was promoted to Admin Support 1. Jake Melton was promoted from a day laborer to Wildlife Tech 1.
- Wildlife Tech 3 Patrick Goble reached the 20 years of service benchmark.
- Region 1 added several new employees including: Wildlife Tech 1 Walker Shortnacy, Day laborer Anthony Cooper, and hourly clerical worker Debbie Hill.



*Youth Dove hunt participants at J.L. Lester WMA.*



# Region 2 Annual Highlights

## FY 2020-2021

Overall, Region 2 had a successful fall and early WMA deer hunting season, but worth special mention is the record year at Dawson Forest WMA (DFWMA). DFWMA is a quality buck hunt requiring bucks to have at least four points on one side of the antler. Even with this restriction, DFWMA deer hunters harvested a very impressive 99 bucks.



*One of 99 quality bucks harvested from Dawson Forest WMA during the 2020-2021 hunting season.*

One of the reasons why DFWMA and other Region 2 WMA's support healthy wildlife populations is the Region's thriving planted wildlife opening program. In parts of northeast Georgia, especially on National Forest lands where timber management is lacking, planted wildlife openings serve an important role in the provision of food and cover.



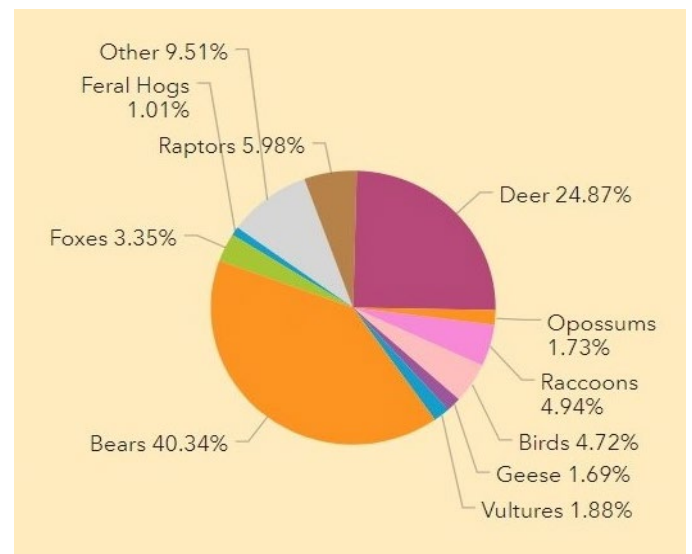
*Planted Region 2 WMA Wildlife Opening.*

Region 2 again hosted the dog-bear quota hunt, run concurrently on Chestatee and Chattahoochee WMAs in late September and early October. It was another productive hunt; 53 bears were harvested and there was no reported law enforcement nor hunt administration problems.



*Successful dog-bear hunters at Chestatee WMA.*

Region 2 has a high human population – just under 3 million people live in its 22 counties – and experiences a high volume of wildlife conflict calls. Region 2 associates spent over 2,100 hours on 1,600 contacts with the public. Bear complaints consume the largest portion of staff time.



*Distribution of wildlife conflict complaint staff time by species. Bears dominate Region 2 staff time.*



# Region 2 Accomplishments

## FY 2020-2021

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on in-person educational programming, Wildlife Interpretative Specialist, Kathy Church, still was able to reach a wide audience. The Smithgall Woods Regional Education Center remarkably provided 349 programs for 9,180 participants.

Kathy also turned her attention to producing videos to reach a larger audience with her programming. She and support staff produced 25 online videos that have garnered 25,708 views with reach of least 50,785 end users. Two of her videos were featured on the WRD YouTube series, "Talking Nature Tuesday" and 4 videos were featured on "Georgia Farm Monitor". Kathy Church's video on prescribed burning was widely praised for its content and quality, even being featured by the U.S. Forest Service's Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.



*A screenshot from Kathy Church's "Talking Nature Tuesday" prescribed burning video.*

Buck Shoals WMA continues to be a place where special memories are made for youth and their families. Region 2 staff manage this WMA especially for youth and family-oriented activities such as Youth Turkey and Deer hunts and Family Fishing Events.

Region staff completed over 400 miles of WMA road enhancements, including an emergency culvert repair at Dawson Forest WMA caused a heavy rainfall event last fall.



*A Buck Shoals WMA youth turkey hunter with a mature gobble and a happy young angler with his first catfish catch at one of the Family Fishing Events.*



*WMA staff repair a road culvert.*

### Special Recognition

Wildlife Technician IV, David Reed, was recognized by his Game Management Section for his excellent customer service skills and was awarded the 2020 Customer Service Award.

Wildlife Technician II, Trent Blalock, was awarded the Game Management Section Wildlife Technician of the Year award.



# Region 3 Annual Highlights

FY 2020-2021

Region 3 saw another increase in overall WMA users this past year. It was especially noticed with a 7% increase in the number of deer hunters this past year. The region also saw an increase in non-traditional users including campers, hikers, and bird watchers outside of hunting seasons.

Overall harvest was down for both deer and turkey this past year. There were increases in turkey harvest at Oaky Woods, Rum Creek and Yuchi WMAs. Yuchi WMA was our best area for turkeys with hunters harvesting 31 turkeys this year. Several WMAs had both an increase in hunter participation and an increase in deer harvest, especially on our smaller WMAs (<1,000 acres).



*Woodcock with radio transmitter.*

This was Georgia's second year of involvement in the multi-state research project on American Woodcock migration and habitat use ([www.woodcockmigration.org](http://www.woodcockmigration.org)). In 2020, Game Management staff banded 63 woodcocks, of which 11 had satellite transmitters attached. One bird that was captured and transmitted at Clybel WMA on January 27, 2020, migrated to New Brunswick, Canada, where it stayed until its battery died in October. The same woodcock migrated back to Clybel and was taken by a hunter this past season. So far in 2021, Game Management staff have banded 48 woodcocks. One bird migrated northwest to Minnesota and another traveled up near L'Anse-des-Quinze-Collets, Quebec. This

migration study will show where and how woodcock migrate, what stopover habitats they use, how far they travel with each step, and even what altitude they fly on their way back to the breeding grounds. So far this season, the average longest distance between any two locations was 337 miles, up from 328 miles in 2020. The average first major movement from the trap site was 211 miles down from 239 miles in 2020.



*Mourning dove after banding.*

This past fiscal year, region staff banded 41% of all doves banded for the Division with a total of 595. Wildlife Technician Supervisor Bobby Lord led the effort by banding 249 birds. Staff also banded 136 wood ducks and 126 geese.

There was catastrophic failure on a waterfowl impoundment in Region 3. A rusted out drainage pipe at Fishing Creek WMA's waterfowl impoundments failed and undermined the holding pond dam. The dam was cleared of trees and two water control structures were replaced along with the drainage pipes. An overflow pipe topped with a trash rack was installed along with an emergency spillway to prevent any overflow of the dam.

# Region 3 Accomplishments

*FY 2020-2021*

In FY20-21, Region 3:

- Handled over 1,800 requests for technical assistance with 95% of those being conflict wildlife calls. Most of those calls came from Columbia and Richmond Counties in the metro Augusta area.
- Participated in Hunt and Learn programs, Teacher Workshops, and other informational and educational programs in schools across the region.
- Collected county level white-tailed deer data and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) samples.
- Prescribed burned 12,161 acres this year exceeding the annual regional average of ~9,000 acres.
- Improved 3,000 acres by seasonally disking, mowing, and/or herbiciding overgrown vegetation in fields, field borders and timber stands that prescribed fire did not control.
- Created 100 acres of small clearcuts within thinned pine stands to provide enhanced brood-rearing habitat for bobwhite quail and wild turkeys.
- Stumped 28 acres of brood fields to utilize winter disking to maintain these openings in optimal vegetation to provide the cover and forage.
- Maintained and/or planted over 3,000 acres in food plots & openings 700 acres of dove fields.

|                         | Needed | Collected |
|-------------------------|--------|-----------|
| <b>CWD Samples</b>      | 290    | 318       |
| <b>County buck data</b> | 224    | 315       |
| <b>County doe data</b>  | 224    | 283       |

*CWD and County Deer data.*



*Prescribed burn at Clybel WMA.*

## Special Recognition

Andy Mays won the NWTF Wildlife Technician of the year award for all his outstanding work improving the early successional habitat on Clybel Wildlife Management Area.

Wildlife Technicians Jerome Hay and Clifton Rushton were promoted to Wildlife Technician III, and Bobby Lord was promoted to Wildlife Technician Supervisor.

Senior Wildlife Biologist I.B. Parnell received his 20 years of Faithful Service Award and Administrative Assistant, Rachelle Rivers received her 15 years of Faithful Service Award. Wildlife Technician Jerome Hay and Jacob Reese received 5 years of Faithful Service Awards.



*Seasonal disking at Di-Lane WMA.*



# Region 4 Annual Highlights

## FY 2020-2021

Region 4 recreation lands increased by 502 acres this year with the addition of 2 new properties enrolled in the USDA NRCS Voluntary Public Access (VPA) program. Scotland Road and Cedar Grove VPAs in Laurens County were made available by owners Andrew and Faye Chappell. The areas opened in December 2020 for archery deer and small game hunting.



*New Cedar Grove VPA area sign.*

Local staff and other DNR volunteers started a new project this year on Bullard Creek WMA as part of a statewide effort to estimate hunting season impacts on male wild turkeys. Thirty-two turkeys were captured using cannon nets and banded, the highest number on any site in the state.



*Staff repacking cannon net after successful turkey capture.*

Hunters reported harvesting 11 banded birds (34%), indicating an intense harvest under current regulations.



*Allen Smith and Jim Gillis releasing banded gobbler.*

Region 4 and HDP Shooting Sports staff, TNC manager Chuck Martin, and volunteers held a first ever Hunt and Learn workshop in October hunting squirrels with dogs on Moody Forest WMA. Attendees drove from all over Georgia and thoroughly enjoyed their day.



*Greg Nelms with hunter at Moody Forest WMA Hunt and Learn workshop.*

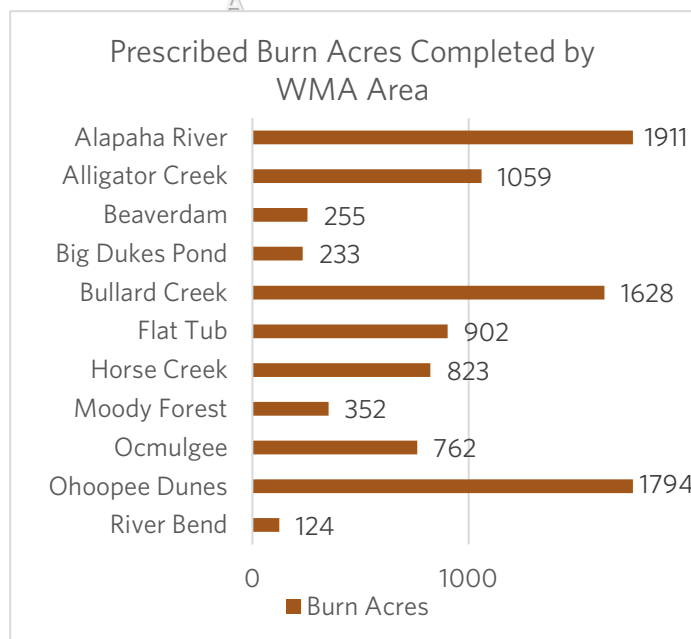


# Region 4 Accomplishments

FY 2020-2021

In FY20-21, Region 4:

- Prescribed burned 9,843 acres on WMAs, setting a new region record for burn acres.
- Installed 252 miles of firebreaks on WMAs to provide control of prescribed burns and protect unburned areas.
- Mowed, graded, rocked, and maintained 349 miles of roads and trails for public access to WMAs.
- Checked and maintained 340 wood duck nest boxes in Regions 4 and 6.
- Harvested 1,199 deer and 186 turkeys (hunter success 13% and 8%, respectively) on 115,053 acres of WMA land.
- Answered 552 requests for nuisance wildlife abatement including 353 deer crop damage permits.
- Answered 189 requests for agency assistance and wildlife management technical assistance.
- Made 43 contacts for diseased and/or injured wildlife.
- Spent 21.5 hours on media requests and wildlife education programs.
- Completed 127 miles of survey lines in Regions 4 and 6 to gauge alligator, black bear, and quail population trends.
- Collected 172 CWD deer samples from processors, road kills, and Big Buck contests and 278 deer data samples from processors.
- Managed 636 acres of dove fields for public access.
- Managed 262 wetland acres for waterfowl through water level control and herbicide application.
- Planted, disked, or otherwise manipulated 316 acres of food plots to provide forage and cover for wildlife.
- Improved and repaired WMA infrastructure including the addition of deer skinning racks at Alapaha River, Ocmulgee, and Tuckahoe WMAs, and a major repair of a washed-out main entrance road at Alapaha River.



Number of completed prescribed burn acres in Region 4 in FY2020-21 by WMA.

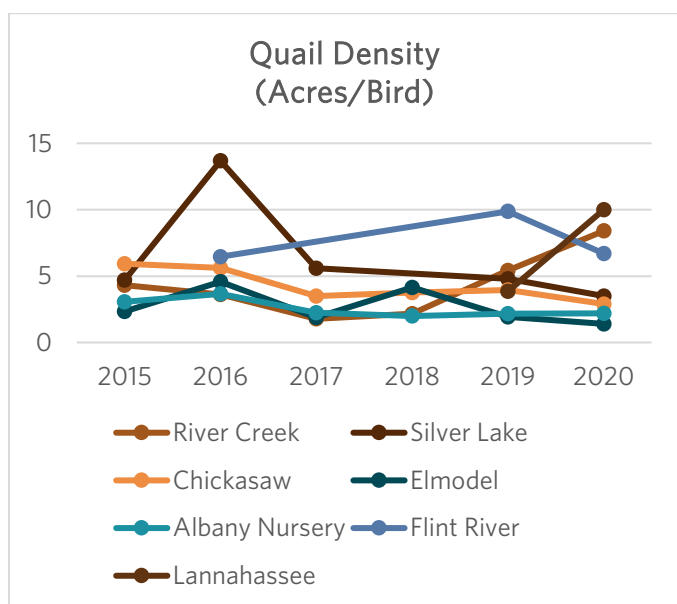


Washed out road entrance Alapaha River WMA. (Top)  
Road after repairs. (Bottom)

# Region 5 Annual Highlights

## FY 2020-2021

Bobwhite quail continue to be the focal species in Region 5. Quail densities numbers were lower on River Creek and Lanahassee WMAs and were slightly improved or unchanged on the other WMAs that were surveyed. Albany Nursery has remained at or near the 2.0 acres per bird target since 2017, Elmodel has also been at or slightly below that target since 2017 except for 2018 due to Hurricane Michael.

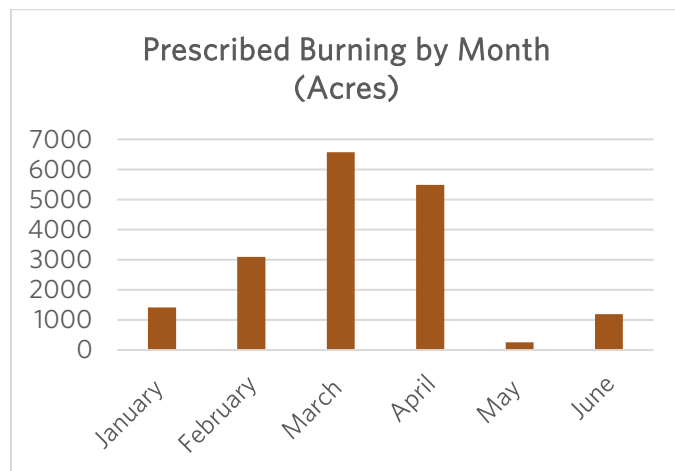


Quail densities on Region 5 WMAs in FY2020 - 21.

The Region set a record of 18,023 acres of prescribed burning in FY 21, an increase of 2,019 acres from FY 20. The dormant and growing season burns were completed through the combined efforts of Region 5 Game Management (GM) Staff, Wildlife Conservation Section (WCS) staff and The Nature Conservancy staff on area WMAs.



Prescribed burning on WMAs in Region 5.



Acres of prescribed burning on WMAs in Region 5.

WCS and GM staff have released 44 gopher tortoise hatchlings in FY21 on Lanahassee WMA. The eggs were from a sand mine operation near Jesup, hatched at the UGA Lab in Brunswick and reared at the USFWS National Fish Hatchery in Warm Springs. The release sites are starter burrows constructed during releases two years ago.



Juvenile gopher release on Lanahassee WMA

Region staff made a concentrated effort to collect CWD samples and obtain deer cooler data for the state deer population modeling project. The Region achieved 100% of the 305 CWD samples, 100% of the 248 deer cooler buck samples and 92% of the 248 deer cooler doe samples.



# Region 5 Accomplishments

*FY 2020-2021*

In FY20-21, Region 5:

- Increased the number of managed dove field from 573 acres in FY 20 to 703 acres in FY21.
- Delivered and spread 3600 tons of rock.
- Constructed a new pole barn at Mayhaw WMA and replaced metal roofs on two barns at River Creek WMA.
- Poured a large concrete slab in front of the storage building at the Region 5 Office.
- Installed a chain link fence compound around the pole barns at Mayhaw WMA and Doerun Pitcherplant Bog WMA.
- Handled 1,733 contacts for technical guidance. Of those calls, 1,304 were nuisance wildlife related calls with deer accounting for over 55% of all calls followed by alligators at 13%. Nuisance gator trappers are not as available as they were in the past putting this burden on staff.
- Trapped over 620 geese, banding over 520 of them in in three days in late June.

## Special Recognition

Owen Jenkins received the Wildlife Manager of the Year Award from the Southwest Georgia Sportsman Club for his habitat work on Lanahassee WMA. Wildlife Technician Jake Rogers was promoted to Wildlife Technician 2. Wildlife Technician 4 Brian Vickery received his 20 years of Faithful Service Award, Administrative Assistant 3 Christy Batchelor received her 10 years of Faithful Service Award, Wildlife Technicians John Zapf and J. T. Thornton received their 5 years of Faithful Service Awards.

## In Remembrance

Mr. Bob Tosh, Groundskeeper 1 at the Albany Region Office, passed after a brief illness on September 27, 2020, at the age of 90. He started his career with DNR after retirement at the age of 65 in 1995 and took care of the building and staff at the Region Office for 25 years. He is survived by his wife, a son and daughter, three grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren. He is also missed by his DNR family.



Road surfacing project. (Top) The new pole barn and fence on Mayhaw WMA. (Bottom)



Groundskeeper Bob Tosh will be greatly missed.



# Region 6 Annual Highlights

## FY 2020-2021

The Coastal Region is proud to have achieved significant progress in the opening of Ceylon Wildlife Management Area in Camden County. This recently opened 16,000 acre property has experienced some major changes in the past two years, with work including the transition of plantation loblolly stands being converted to longleaf pine, understory habitat improvements across the majority of the forested stands, reintroduction of prescribed fire in the old growth pine savannahs and extensive road repairs and enhancements which greatly improved access.



*Successful hunters during the first public deer season on Ceylon Wildlife Management Area, Camden County.*

During the open archery season and three quota firearms hunts on Ceylon WMA, hunters reported harvest of 101 whitetail deer, 25 of them being quality bucks. Outside of the hunting season, staff worked to rehabilitate many of the long abandoned and overgrown wildlife openings on the property. The newly built check station, skinning rack and primitive campground improvements have been welcomed enhancements to the new property.



*This successful hunter was proud to check in her first bear, harvested during the South Georgia bear season.*

Following the state-wide region realignments, Region 6 is happy to serve the bear hunting communities that surround the Okefenokee Swamp. Efforts continue to coordinate the summer bear survey routes for the South Georgia population and operate seasonal check stations in Fargo, Folkston and Waycross for hunters to check in after their successful hunts.



*Contractors installing a new water control structure and bulkhead on Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area.*

Progress continues to be made on the storm damage repairs on Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area. Work on Champney Island was completed this spring, with current work on Rhett's Island and Sapelo Island scheduled to be completed in early fall, ahead of the opening of waterfowl hunting season.



# Region 6 Accomplishments

## FY 2020-2021

In FY20-21, Region 6:

- Conducted safe and successful quota hunts on Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area, Ossabaw Island and Sapelo Island with reduced hunter numbers due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- Continued to successfully host quota deer-dog hunting opportunities on Dixon Memorial, Paulk's Pasture, Sansavilla and Townsend WMAs.
- Continued to promote youth recruitment with Youth Hunts on multiple WMAs.
- Provided dove hunting opportunities on 223 acres of managed fields.
- Completed the Strategic Plans for Richmond Hill Wildlife Management Area and the Lower Altamaha River Corridor Lands.
- Improved deer and small game hunting opportunities with the management of 1,037 acres of wildlife openings and food plots.
- Improved forest health and wildlife habitat with the application of prescribed fire on 9,353 acres of Wildlife Management Area and partner lands.
- Completed white-tail deer Chronic Wasting Disease sampling across 19 counties.
- Removed more than 1,500 feral hogs from WMA lands for rare species and habitat protection.



Waterfowlers struggled with low bird numbers this season, but some still enjoyed successful hunts on the Altamaha WMA.



Improving opportunities for handicapped hunters has been a goal, with improved handicap access roads and even an accessible hunting blind on Richmond Hill WMA.



Dove hunting opportunity continues to be a priority and rewarding task, as seen in this Richmond Hill WMA field.



Prescribed burning on Ossabaw Island WMA.





## Acknowledgments

This annual report was developed and updated by Game Management and Public Affairs staff of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division. We thank the many individuals who helped compile and review the information provided.

Download a version with the latest updates: <https://georgiawildlife.com/about/what-we-do>

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Together, with your commitment to conservation, we can protect Georgia's incredible natural resources for generations to come.

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

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

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

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