NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

2003 Georgia Annual Report

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Dear Georgians,
I am pleased to present to you this report on private lands conservation in the state of Georgia. The past year was an exciting one for conservation of our natural resources. New farm bill programs helped spread conservation to many new customers for the first time.

Increased funding in EQIP afforded the opportunity to address agricultural water issues in South Georgia. Producers received cost-share incentives to improve the efficiency of their pivot irrigation systems and to develop Irrigation Water Management Plans. The Technical Service Provider effort enabled Georgia to expand its partnership. This resulted in increased technical assistance on our private lands.

The conservation partnership plays a critically important role and is essential in the successful implementation of Georgia's conservation programs. Members include the Georgia Association of Conservation Districts, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission, Georgia Department of Agriculture and many other local, state, and federal agencies.

This annual report highlights the successes of the conservation partnership, but none of the work could be done without the voluntary commitment of Georgia's private lands citizens. They are the ones who take the first step in protecting our lands and waters for future generations. Without their willingness to take care of the soil and water they manage, our environment would gradually deteriorate.

I commend the conservation partnership and the citizens of Georgia for their accomplishments and commitment in ensuring that future generations enjoy a quality environment.

Leonard Jordan
State Conservationist

NRCS Mission
To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment

NRCS Vision
A productive nation in harmony with a quality environment

Program Summary

This annual report covers one fiscal year, from Oct. 1, 2002 to Sept. 30, 2003.

Conservation Outlook in Georgia

Georgia has over 28 million acres of agricultural land, with 4.6 million acres in cropland, 2.8 million acres in grasslands, and 21.2 million acres in forest. The major crops grown are cotton, soybeans, peanuts, corn, wheat, tobacco, grain sorghum, and vegetables. The most extensive agricultural erosion problems occur on cropland, with over 3 million acres requiring some form of conservation treatment. About 440,900 of these acres are considered to be highly erodible.

Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program

FY-2003 was Georgia's second year to utilize FRPP funds in protecting Georgia farms. The program provides matching funds to State, Tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to purchase conservation easements or other interests in land.

Three landowners were able to participate this year, protecting 342 acres in Walker and Oconee Counties. A total of $1.1 million in FRPP funds were obligated. One of the protected farms belongs to the McCartys of Walker County.

Jim and Teresa McCarty's Chickamauga farm has been in the family since 1832. "My mama and my grandmama picked cotton on that farm," McCarty said.

At the turn of the century, the family stopped growing cotton and turned to vegetables that they sold in trucks--"truck farming" as Jim McCarty calls it. Today, the farm is home to between 35 and 100 head of cattle.

Through the years, tough times have occurred. "There were times we didn't think we'd hang in there and keep it," Jim said. The McCarty's live in a two-story, 10-room farmhouse built in 1880. The house is solid after all these years--a feat Jim attributes to the wood being soaked in linseed oil. It cost $2,400 to build at that time.

The McCarty Homestead
Built in 1880, this 2-story farmhouse is the current residence of Jim and Teresa McCarty. Jim attributes its livability to the fact that the wood was treated with linseed oil that caused the wood to "petrify instead of rot."

In recent years, the expansion of the city of Chickamauga has created a serious threat. Half a dozen subdivisions now surround the property. "There just aren't any farms around here," said Jim.

That's why when the Georgia Land Trust, together with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, told him about the new Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program, he signed up right away.

"By putting it in the Georgia Land Trust, it enables my children and my children's children to keep it." Jim said.

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E-Government

Landowners and others wanting to do business with the government can now do it online. The United States Department of Agriculture implemented a new electronic process October 21, 2003.

A customer can now register for access to eGov applications by visiting *http://www.eauth.egov.usda.gov* When registered, the customer will need to visit their local service center and have their identity verified by presenting one of four forms of id; State Drivers License; State issued identification card; US passport or a Military ID.

The service center staff will then be able to activate the account and provide the customer will access to many current and future eGov applications.

Technical Service Providers

2003 was the beginning of the new Technical Service Provider program in Georgia. In support of this undertaking, a new web-based self-certification was introduced and 54 private consultants became Technical Service Providers.

Fifty-six Georgia producers were selected and funded to utilize the program. Some 28,000 acres will receive technical assistance from Technical Service Providers for a period of three years.

Twelve Soil and Water Conservation Districts partnered with NRCS using the Technical Service Provider Program. This resulted in additional staff being added to District Offices to assist in program delivery for the 2003 Farm Bill. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division employed a biologist through the program.

Conservation Security Program

This new conservation program seeks to reward farmers that are practicing sound resource management on their farms for the benefits these efforts provide by improving soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources throughout the state.

Participants will contract to carry out a 5-year conservation plan that identifies the conservation practice(s) they will implement each year of the contract. An annual per acre CSP payment will be made based on the cash rent value of the land plus the cost of maintaining the conservation practices. A draft rule has been released for public comment.

Yellow River #14 Structure
This Gwinnett County structure was completed in 2003.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Georgia wrote 720 contracts totalling over $10 million in cost-share dollars this year. Special efforts were made to assist livestock producers in addressing their animal waste problems. More than 60 percent of EQIP funds were directed to livestock problems.

This was Georgia's first year in assisting producers with water conservation efforts in the southern part of the state. 65 producers received cost-share assistance to retrofit irrigation systems from high pressure to low pressure. This included the development of an Irrigation Water Management Plan for producers to follow. The 2003 EQIP program also provided assistance to 6 limited resource producers to address resource concerns on their farms.

National Resources Inventory

In 2003, 1587 Primary Sample Units (PSUs) were inventoried by Georgia NRCS employees. Current-year, low-altitude photography is the basis for all NRI remote-sensing activities.

Data is electronically recorded and transmitted to the Statistical Laboratory at Iowa State University (ISU). At ISU, data from the nation is reviewed, edited and stored. NRCS utilizes its Online Analysis System program to analyze NRI data based on a variety of factors selected by the user.

The program contains data for survey years 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997. Data can be viewed at the national, regional, state and sub-state levels. Georgia NRCS established a centralized NRI data collection site in Athens in 2003. A full-time staff will collect data for the state and expand the utilization of the NRI data.

Watershed Program

Georgia has 146 dams that are classified as "high hazard," meaning that there is a potential loss of life if they fail. About $85 million will be needed to upgrade these structures to protect downstream populations and ensure compliance with current dam safety legislation.

NRCS project dams annually provide $17 million in benefits to local communities by providing flood protection, water-based recreation, municipal water supply, and other water uses.

To date, Georgia has received $4.7 million in construction cost-share funds to help communities with rehabilitating aging flood control dams this past year. The money will be used to upgrade dams in the Yellow River Resource Conservation & Development Project Area located in Gwinnett County. The federal dollars will cover 65 percent of the construction cost-share funds and the local sponsors will provide the remaining 35 percent.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

The NRCS and the Georgia Grazing Lands Conservation Coalition (GGLCC) continue to encourage forage and livestock producers to adopt practices that promote the efficient use of their grazing land resources, while conserving soil and protecting water quality.

The GGLCC practice demonstration project, which is funded with the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) congressional earmark, is a producer developed cost-share program designed to demonstrate innovative practices on existing forage and livestock operations.

Several producers involved in the project applied practices well beyond the allowed funding; demonstrating that a little seed money encourages producers to address many farm-related resource concerns. To date, $929,000 of Georgia's GLCI Congressional Earmark has been used for practice demonstration on producer farms.

Plant Materials

In 2003, the Jimmy Carter PMC released 'Highlander' Eastern Gamagrass and 'Kinchafoonee' Virginia Wildrye native grasses for the Southeast.

Iuka eastern gamagrass is the best adapted variety commercially available for the Southeast. Evaluation plantings in Georgia, such as the demonstration planting at Fort Valley State University, show good seedling vigor and growth the first year of establishment.

Soil Survey

In Georgia, 129 counties have published soil surveys; 12 counties have completed soil surveys that are in the process of being published; 10 are presently being surveyed and 3 counties have been updated.

In FY-2003, 455,271 acres were surveyed for a cumulative total of 35,741,465 acres, or 94 percent of the state. NRCS soil scientists have updated 2,408,374 of Georgia's 35 million acres. During the year, the team digitized 10 soil survey areas for SSURGO (Soil Survey Geographic Database). There are now 31 soil survey areas (52 counties) with a SSURGO database.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Georgia has 12,000 acres enrolled in WRP at a cost of $2.2 million. Ten new projects were funded in 2003, adding 1,950 new acres to the program.

These sites were in Jenkins, Seminole, Decatur, Clay, Mitchell, Baker, Candler, Atkinson, and Bryan Counties. While the average size restoration was smaller in acreage, there was more diversity in the sites. Three sites are located along rivers, three in upland depressions and three adjacent to existing WRP sites.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

Georgia received $265,000 in WHIP funds for this year. 16 individual and 11 special projects were approved for funding. Prescribed burning, riparian buffers and native grass plantings were the primary wildlife practices funded. The 11 special projects were received from 10 Georgia SWCD's and one RC&D area.

River Basin Program

In 2003, over 425 individuals and organizations were assisted through the River Basin Program. NRCS also assisted clients and partners in the preparation and submission of grant applications totaling $1,734,013 for conservation activities throughout the state.

Floodplain management studies provide information and assistance to local and state entities so they can implement programs for reducing existing and potential flood damages. Eleven floodplain management studies have been completed to date. A floodplain management study for Banks County is currently underway.

RC&D

The RC&D Council Program in Georgia consists of 11 Council areas comprising 127 of Georgia's 159 counties. RC&D programs provide assistance to the people in their Council areas by helping them plan and implement projects in their communities that will make their communities better places to live and work.

The governing bodies of the Councils are made up of volunteers from within the Council areas.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service provides technical and administrative support through NRCS personnel including a full-time coordinator.

Solar Powered Weather Stations

Limestone Valley RC&D Council received a $21,000 grant from the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority to purchase solar-powered weather stations for school systems in an 11-county service area.

The stations are designed to measure eight real-time weather parameters and are beneficial in providing hands-on meteorological and science learning experiences for students.

Regional Enhanced 911 System Comes to Tattnall, Long, and McIntosh Counties

Coastal Georgia RC&D has begun preparation on the $500,000 *OneGeorgia* Grant, which would pay 100% of all the E911 for all startup equipment and services for a regional enhanced 911 (E911) system for Tattnall, McIntosh and Long Counties.

Only 3 other regional projects reached this point and all 3 were funded. This will be the first led by an RC&D Council.