

James E. Tillman, Sr.  
State Conservationist  
706-546-2272  
james.tillman@ga.usda.gov  
www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov

## Who We Are

Inspired by a shared vision of agriculture as a valued component of the landscape, NRCS works in partnership with farmers, ranchers and many others to improve, restore and protect the Nation's natural resources.

Side-by-side with these partners, we work to sustain and improve the quality of our soil, water, air and wildlife habitat, and we develop conservation plans that work for the land and for farmers and ranchers. Farm Bill programs help with the cost of putting conservation on the ground, which benefits the farm, the watershed and the community. Conservation easement programs, also in the Farm Bill, help to protect the agricultural and natural resource value of the land over the longterm.

With our help, Georgia is balancing economic goals with a high quality environment—ensuring productive lands to supply food, fiber, forest and energy products for the Nation and the world.



Longleaf pine habitat is ideal for the gopher tortoise -- a protected species in Georgia, the red-cockaded woodpecker -- an endangered species, northern bobwhite quail, deer and other wildlife.

## Giving Wildlife a Chance: Longleaf Pine Initiative

Longleaf pines encourage the growth of a grassy understory that includes as many as 300 different species of ground cover plants per acre and approximately 60 percent of the amphibian and reptile species found in the Southeast. These plants promote wildlife habitat for the gopher tortoise, red-cockaded woodpecker and northern bobwhite quail.

Another aspect of the longleaf pine that makes it successful for wildlife habitats is its tolerance to prescribed burning a year after it's been planted. Unlike loblolly pines, the longleaf and the vegetation in its understory thrive from these burns.

In 2011, we entered into 360 contracts for approximately 21,658 acres of Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) restoration totaling more than \$5.9 million. With our dedicated staff, we estimate over 50,000 acres of new longleaf pine acres would be achievable over a 3-year period. (Totals for 2010 and 2011 are 396 contracts totaling more than \$6.6 million.)

- There is a tremendous amount of interest in this program due to the desire to improve wildlife habitat.
- Restoring the native longleaf pine is just one example of how Georgia is leading the nation in pioneering and implementing new conservation initiatives.
- To accomplish the increased workload, NRCS has partnered with other agencies and organizations to provide technical assistance.

## Keeping Pollution and Sediments out of Rivers and Streams

Keeping Georgia's rivers and streams free from agricultural waste and sediments.

Poultry is Georgia's No. 1 commodity product, comprising nearly 41% of the total farm gate value for the state. In addition, horses, beef and dairy are among the top 10 agricultural commodities with many fields and pastures located adjacent to rivers and streams. In 2010, NRCS assisted 130 poultry cooperators with the construction of waste management facilities and dead bird composters at a cost of \$2.5 million. Four hundred and thirty-four livestock participants utilized \$1.55 million to install heavy use areas. Heavy use areas provide protected water sources and, when combined with fencing, keep livestock out of streams. Heavy use areas are designed to NRCS standards and specifications which assist in encouraging the animals to drink and then move away from the area--thereby reducing soil erosion.



Providing an alternative to drinking out of the river, heavy use areas are designed to water large quantities of animals without causing soil erosion and degradation of water quality.

## Reducing Agricultural Water Withdrawal

Saving Water With High Tech Irrigation

Georgia is the largest agricultural state east of the Mississippi River with a farm gate value of \$11.9 billion. Coupled with a burgeoning population, the demand for fresh, clean water is increasingly competitive. Georgia NRCS, in partnership with the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District, The Nature Conservancy and the University of Georgia, have pioneered the use of high-tech irrigation techniques to reduce water use—with amazing results. Through our Partnerships, we are yielding impressive results, conserving in a dry year an average of 15 billion gallons of water annually – a quantity equal to the annual water use of a city the size of Augusta, Georgia. The 2009, 2010 and 2011 Agricultural Water Enhancement Program has offset adoption costs by over \$3.5 million via nearly 400 contracts. To date, our work has impacted more than 200,000 acres of irrigated land in Georgia.



Variable rate irrigation (VRI) is a cutting-edge, precision agriculture system being implemented in Georgia to reduce agriculture water use by delivering only the water necessary to grow a crop.

## Protecting Life and Property with Watershed Rehabilitation

Rehabilitating Aging Dams to Protect Current Use

Since 1953, 357 project dams have been built in Georgia. Currently, 189 of these dams are classified as "high hazard," indicating that a potential loss of life could occur if the dam were to fail. Preliminary estimates indicate that \$120 million will be needed to upgrade these structures and ensure compliance with current dam safety regulations.

Since 2002, NRCS-Georgia has secured \$16 million under the Watershed Rehabilitation Program to upgrade 11 watershed dams. Additionally, 55 dams have been analyzed to determine the extent of downstream hazards.



An aerial shot near Lawrenceville showing development since a watershed dam was constructed.

# Conservation Technical

**Assistance (CTA)** *is simply about helping people help the land. NRCS has used CTA successfully for more than 75 years to reach out to American farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners and managers.*

*America's farmers and ranchers invest in conservation with help from CTA to care for the more than 70 percent of our land, water and other natural resources that are in their hands. In FY2011 Georgia received \$12.4 million in CTA funds.*

*NRCS employees work with customers to identify natural resource problems, inventory resources, develop conservation alternatives and help individual farmers, ranchers, Tribes, local governments and urban landowners with their conservation decisions. This prepares the way for using Farm Bill and other conservation funding.*

## Financial Assistance for Working Lands:

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

**(EQIP)**—promotes agricultural production, forest management and environmental quality as compatible goals.

### **Agricultural Water Enhancement Program**

**(AWEP)**—promotes water conservation and quality through partnered efforts.

**Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**—improves wildlife habitat on private agricultural, forest and Tribal lands.

### **Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)**

— encourages agricultural producers to address water management, water quality, and erosion control by incorporating conservation into their farming operations.

## Conservation Easements:

### **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program**

**(FRPP)**—helps keep farm and ranch land in agriculture.

### **Wetlands Reserve Program**

**(WRP)**—restores wetlands and wetland habitat on marginal agricultural land

### **Grassland Reserve Program**

**(GRP)**—restores and protects grassland, rangeland and pastureland, and helps maintain viable ranching operations.

## Stewardship:

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**—encourages long-term comprehensive conservation by maintaining and improving existing conservation measures.

## Watershed and Community -Wide Programs:

### **Watershed Rehabilitation Program**

—with NRCS assistance, local communities have constructed over 11,000 dams in 47 states since 1948. Many of these dams are nearing the end of their 50-year design life. Rehabilitation of these dams is needed to address critical public health and safety issues in these communities.

### **Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)**

—undertakes emergency measures in watersheds where there are imminent threats to life and property resulting from fire, flood and other natural disasters.

### USDA StrikeForce Initiative: Helping Impoverished Communities and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers

Recognizing that 90 percent of all persistent poverty counties are in rural parts of the country, the USDA has deployed a cross-agency “StrikeForce Initiative” to better serve persistent poverty communities and underserved farmers by coordinating activities among all agencies and leveraging expertise through collaboration with Community-Based Organizations.

Using existing authorities and programs, cooperative agreements, grant agreements and 2501 Program resources, USDA more strategically utilizes community based partners to educate and implement service plans, while establishing appropriate accountability mechanisms to help gauge results, measure efficacy of efforts and adjust to improve success.

The goal is to provide assistance to communities within the region on loan application procedures and grant application best practices. StrikeForce offers technical expertise on the USDA’s Rural Development, Farm Service Agency and NRCS’s programs, regulations and criteria, as well as alerting the communities, and educating them on new programs. As a result of these efforts, the persistent poverty communities should receive additional financial assistance from USDA programs.

Georgia is one of three states, along with Arkansas and Mississippi, in this pilot program.



John Lowe is happy with his new irrigation system. He used to water his trees by hand three times a week.

### Pioneering New Initiatives

When the oil spill in the Gulf threatened the habitats of millions of migrating and over wintering birds and waterfowl, NRCS responded with the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative--helping enhance habitat along the migratory pathway.

Georgia had a total of four contracts and obligated \$214,990 in funds. Work on the contracts continued into 2011.



A crop field in southwest Georgia converted back to a wetland.

### That Pesky Pigweed

Palmer Amaranth, more commonly known as Pigweed is wreaking havoc throughout the south--and in particular upon Georgia’s cotton industry. One plant can release hundreds of thousands of seeds and it is herbicide resistant.

NRCS funded 12 contracts at a cost of \$155,338. The three-year-pilot project will study whether heavy cover crops and alternate chemical regimes can successfully control the pest.



Palmer Amaranth, more commonly known as pigweed.

In 2011, Georgia helped 3,951 farmers and landowners install many different practices - resource practices such as: heavy use area protection, used to keep sediment and nutrients from washing into creeks and ponds, polluting the water supply. Fence management is a practice that may be applied to any area where livestock or wildlife control is needed. Pest management is a practice use to control pests using a combination of chemical, biological, cultural or habitat manipulation, and use of resistant plant varieties. Cover crop may be used to help control erosion, add fertility and organic material to the soil, improve soil tilth, and increase infiltration and aeration of the soil. Tank or trough watering facility helps provide access to drinking water for livestock or wildlife in order to meet daily water requirements and improve animal distribution. Finally, the irrigation water management practice effectively uses available irrigation water in managing and controlling the moisture environment of crops and other vegetation.

### 2011 Farm Bill Program Funding\*

NRCS Program	Dollars Obligated	Number of Contracts/ Ease- ments
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)	\$1.3 million	151
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	\$10 million	413
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	\$14.4 million	1,054
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)	\$791,000	3
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	\$516,000	4
Healthy Forest Reserve Program	\$1.2 million	2
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	\$9.3 million	20
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	\$6.4 million	412

\*Financial Assistance (FA) is provided directly to producers. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding is used for professional planning and expertise to help carry out conservation activities. For GRP easements, the NRCS and the Farm Service Agency financial assistance dollars are combined. Data source: Foundation Financial Information System Status of Funds Report October 2011, revised.