

GEORGIA SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

est. 2018



The Georgia Sentinel Landscape is home to several of the nation's most important military installations and ranges, including Fort Benning, Fort Stewart, Hunter Army Airfield, Townsend Bombing Range, Fort Gordon, Robins Air Force Base, Marine Corps Logistics Base-Albany, Moody Air Force Base and Naval Submarine Base (NSB) Kings Bay. Together, these defense facilities support heavy armor maneuver areas, unimpeded air-to-ground ranges, live fire training facilities, low-level flight routes, and ballistic missile submarine fleets, which are a key component of the nuclear triad identified in the National Defense Strategy. The military accounts for a significant portion of the state's economy, with an annual economic impact of over \$13 billion³. The Georgia Sentinel Landscape also encompasses a high concentration of prime timber land and large swaths of longleaf pine forests. Georgia Sentinel Landscape partners are committed to strengthening military readiness by supporting agricultural communities, sustaining working forests, promoting coastal resiliency, and improving water quality.

The Gopher Tortoise Initiative

A central goal of the Georgia Sentinel Landscape partners is to conserve longleaf pine forests. Despite once blanketing the Southeast, longleaf pine forests have steadily disappeared in the region due to development, clear-cutting, and other factors. Today, only three percent of the original 90 million acres of longleaf pine remain intact. The degradation of this ecosystem threatens the gopher tortoise, an imperiled species whose burrows provide habitat for an additional 360 species. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recognized that listing the gopher tortoise under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) would impose challenges on the state's economy and

Figure 1: Georgia Sentinel Landscape Map

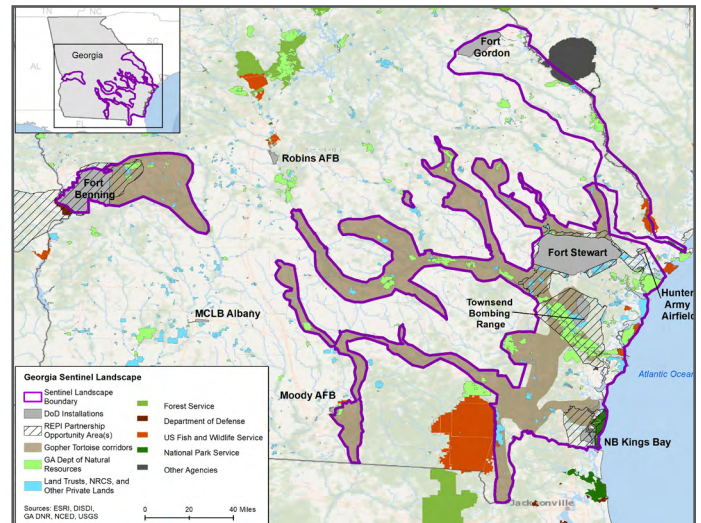






Table 1: Georgia Sentinel Landscape Footprint Details (acres)

	Total Protected Acres:¹	125,391
	Total Enrolled Acres:²	209,419
	Active Base Area:	615,290
	Total Sentinel Landscape Area:	6,318,263

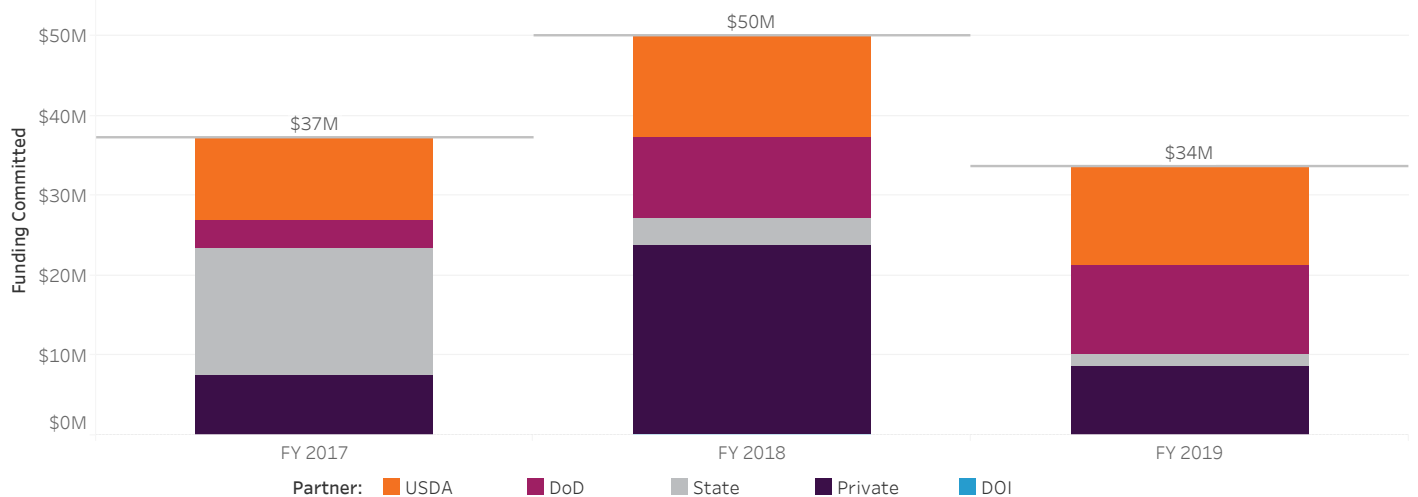
constrain military testing and training activities. In response, the agency partnered with U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural

¹ Represents total acres protected by projects administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 2017

² Represents total acres enrolled in technical assistance programs administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 2017

³ Office of Economic Adjustment: "Defense Spending By State Fiscal Year 2018": https://www.oea.gov/sites/default/files/defense-spending-rpts/FY2018-Defense-Spending-by-State-Report_0_0.pdf

Figure 2: Georgia Sentinel Landscape Total Funding by Partner



The gopher tortoise is an imperiled species in Georgia whose burrows provide habitat for an additional 360 species. Credit: Steve Friedman, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and multiple non-profits to develop the Gopher Tortoise Initiative in 2015. The goal of the initiative is to protect 65 of the 122 viable gopher tortoise populations on 100,000 acres of habitat throughout the state. If partners meet this target, scientists from The Nature Conservancy have concluded that the species will not need regulatory protection in Georgia. To date, partners have protected 54 viable gopher tortoise

populations. With most of the targeted habitat extending across the Georgia Sentinel Landscape, the partnership has become a natural vehicle through which Gopher Tortoise Initiative projects are coordinated.

Naval Station Kings Bay wins REPI Challenge

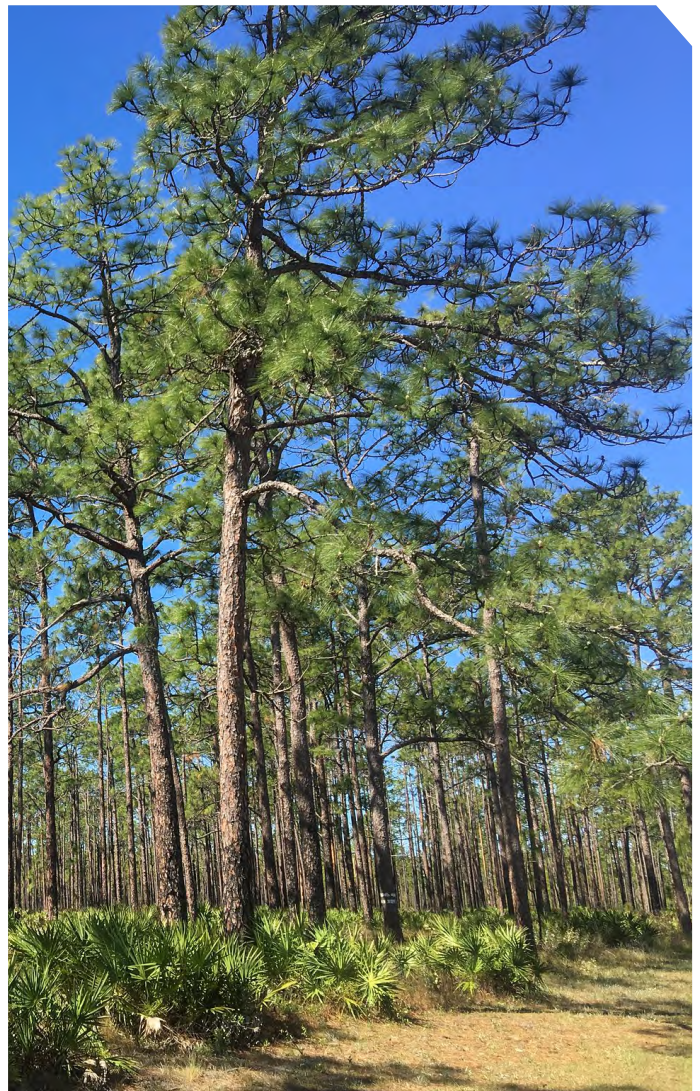
This year, the U.S. Navy, Georgia DNR, the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, USFWS, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and multiple philanthropic organizations won a competitive grant to protect Cabin Bluff, which will increase mission sustainability for NSB Kings Bay in three ways. First, the project will reduce the risk of incompatible development around the base. At 11,000-acres, Cabin Bluff is the largest undeveloped, unprotected property on Georgia's coastline. Its proximity to major highways and population centers made the property an attractive plot for development. Prior to acquisition, the parcel was zoned for 10,000 homes and 1 million square feet of commercial space. Permanently protecting Cabin Bluff will, therefore, prevent development that would complicate the installation's ability to deploy nuclear submarines into the Atlantic Theatre. Second, the project will increase NSB Kings Bay's resilience to climate change impacts by ensuring that the installation has access to a healthy shoreline. Waterfront properties such as Cabin Bluff encompass tidal marshes that defend against erosion by absorbing storm surge, flooding, and rising sea levels. Lastly, the project will reduce the likelihood that training restrictions triggered by the ESA will encumber NSB Kings Bay's mission. Cabin Bluff is home to 20 distinct habitat types, including longleaf pine forests that support viable gopher

⁴ The credits apply if the gopher tortoise were to be listed under the ESA in its eastern range. USFWS has already listed the gopher tortoise under the ESA in parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

tortoise populations. With proper restoration, this property can contribute to existing efforts made by DoD to ensure that the species can thrive without regulatory protection. The Cabin Bluff project demonstrates the advantages of strengthening national defense with the conservation of critical landscapes.

Hilliard Plantation Opens for Public Use

In 2019, Georgia Sentinel Landscape partners opened the Hilliard Plantation for public use. Extending 8,100 acres across Marion County and Talbot County, the property lies within the Chattahoochee Fall Line Wildlife Management Area. This region of Georgia was previously thought of as a part of the state with limited recreation options. Now, the Hilliard Plantation will provide residents with exceptional hiking, fishing, hunting, and camping opportunities. The project also has ecological benefits. The Hilliard Plantation is replete with fire-managed longleaf pine, which provides habitat to the gopher tortoise, red cockaded woodpecker, southern hognose snake, and other imperiled species. The project's diverse funding sources reflect the myriad benefits that it provides to the region. State agencies, the Knobloch Family Foundation, USFWS, USFS, the Georgia Forestry Commission, Capital One, the World Wildlife Foundation, and the DoD REPI Program contributed resources to this effort.



As part of the Gopher Tortoise Initiative, sentinel landscape partners work to protect longleaf pine forests, which provide important habitat to many imperiled species. Credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Randy Browning