

GEORGIA SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

est. 2018



The newly designated sentinel landscape encompasses a network of nine key military installations and ranges, including Fort Benning, Fort Stewart, Townsend Bombing Range, Fort Gordon, Robins AFB, Naval Submarine Base (NSB) Kings Bay, Hunter Army Airfield, Moody AFB, and Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany. Together, these defense facilities provide heavy armor maneuver areas, unimpeded air-to-ground ranges, live-fire training facilities, and low-level flight routes to service men and women. The military accounts for a significant portion of the state's economic activity, with annual defense spending totaling roughly \$13.7 billion in FY 2017.

The Georgia Sentinel Landscape also supports a high concentration of prime timber and agricultural working lands. Interspersed amongst them are longleaf pine forests, an exceptionally diverse ecosystem that provides habitat to a suite of 29 imperiled species. Despite once extending across the Southeast, only three percent of the original 90 million acres of longleaf pine remain today.

Table 1: Georgia Sentinel Landscape Total Funding by Partner in Millions

Partner	FY 2017	FY 2018
USDA	\$10.4	\$12.5
DoD	\$3.5	\$10.1
State	\$15.8	\$3.4
Private	\$7.6	\$24.0
DOI	\$0.0	\$0.1

The degradation of the longleaf pine threatens the gopher tortoise, an imperiled species whose burrows provide habitat for an additional 360 species. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources recognized that listing the gopher tortoise under the ESA would impose economic challenges on the state and

Figure 1: Georgia Sentinel Landscape Boundary

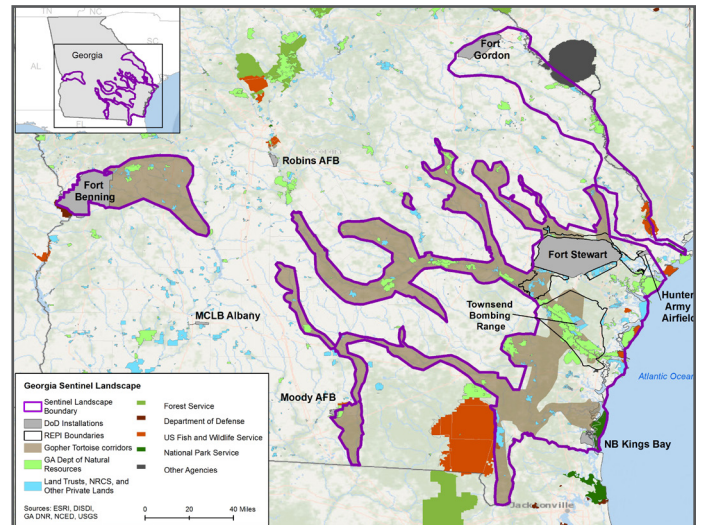


Table 2: Georgia Sentinel Landscape Footprint Details (acres)

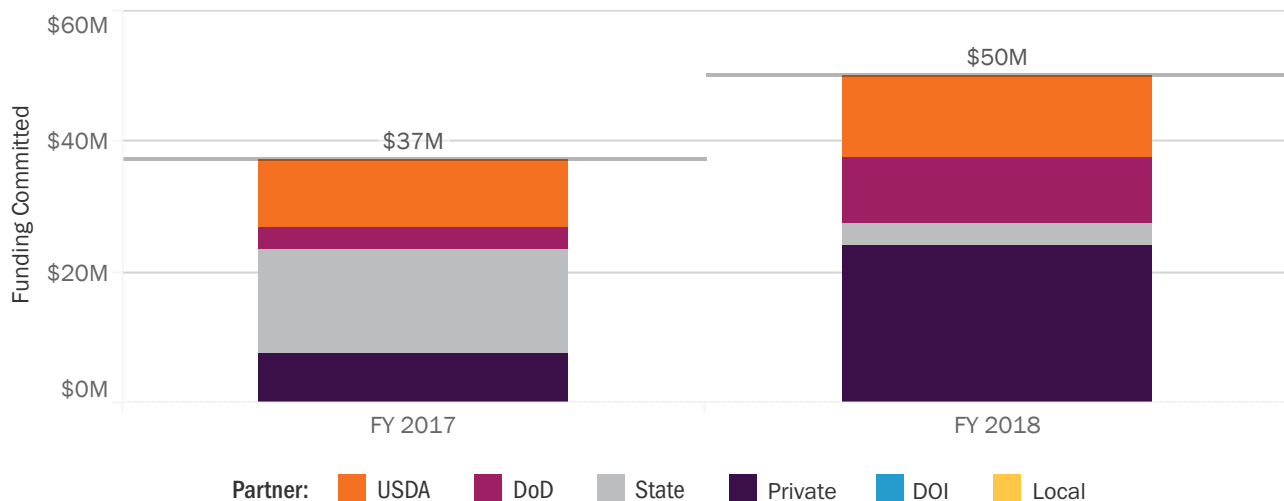
Total Protected Acres: ²⁰		79,566.2
Total Enrolled Acres: ²¹		171,794.4
Active Base Area:	Robins AFB	6,730.4
	Fort Benning	169,943.3
	Fort Stewart	279,671.9
	Townsend Bombing Range	33,834.0
	NSB Kings Bay	17,566.9
	Total	615,290.5
Total Sentinel Landscape Area:		6,318,263.0

constrain the military's ability to conduct critical training and testing activities. In response, the agency partnered with the DoD, NRCS, USFWS, other state agencies, and multiple NGOs to develop the Gopher Tortoise Initiative in 2015. The goal of

²⁰ Represents total acres protected through projects administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 2017.

²¹ Represents total acres enrolled in state and federal conservation programs since FY 2017.

Figure 2: Georgia Sentinel Landscape Total Funding by Partner



A baby gopher tortoise walks through grasses found in the longleaf ecosystem. (Photo by: Randy Browning, USFWS)

the initiative is to protect 65 of the 122 viable gopher tortoise populations on 100,000 acres throughout the state. To date, the partners have permanently protected 49 viable populations, two of which occurred since the sentinel landscape's designation.

The Gopher Tortoise Initiative complements a similar project that operates within the Georgia Sentinel Landscape's geographic footprint, the DoD Gopher Tortoise Conservation Crediting Strategy. Under the Strategy, the DoD voluntarily preserves off-base gopher tortoise habitat to generate 'conservation credits' that it can use to compensate for impacts to the longleaf pine

ecosystem and other critical gopher tortoise habitat on military installations if the species were to be listed under the ESA²². The strategy is predicated on the belief that proactive conservation is a cost-effective, long-term solution to the military's habitat-related training challenges. The Army's decision to pursue credits for the gopher tortoise at Fort Benning will ensure that the installation has the regulatory predictability it needs to carry out its national defense mission for the foreseeable future.

In addition to restoring gopher tortoise populations, the Georgia Sentinel Landscape partners are also actively working to implement prescribed fire on private properties. Fire is an important agent of renewal in longleaf pine forests, and when introduced effectively it can reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, protect air quality, and improve species' habitats. To increase awareness and implementation of prescribed fire, the Georgia Sentinel Landscape partners established the Chattahoochee Fall Line Prescribed Fire Cooperative, which leverages funding from The Nature Conservancy, USFWS, NRCS, NFWF, and local utility companies to increase prescribed fire on properties surrounding Fort Benning. Since its inception, the cooperative has served over 500 private landowners. And in 2018 alone, the cooperative conducted 52 prescribed burns on 5,400 acres and provided prescribed fire training for 100 members of the public.

²² 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.

Table 3: Georgia Sentinel Landscape's Goals and Progress

Goal	Progress
Goal #1 Protect at least 65 viable gopher tortoise populations and thereby alleviate environmental training restrictions on military installations and ranges	Through efforts undertaken by two innovative partnerships—the Gopher Tortoise Initiative and the Gopher Tortoise Crediting Strategy—sentinel landscape partners have protected 49 gopher tortoise populations to date.
Goal #2 Protect critical testing and training activities at Fort Benning, Fort Stewart, Townsend Bombing Range, Fort Gordon, Robins AFB, and NSB Kings Bay	Sentinel landscape partners have used funding acquired through the DoD REPI Program to permanently protect 26,216 acres around the six installations.
Goal #3 Protect water quality in the Savannah River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ The Savannah River Clean Water Fund is using a tool called the Watershed Management Priority Index to detail land cover, soil, and elevation of the river. This tool will enable sentinel landscape partners to identify the areas of the river that require water quality maintenance. ★ Landowner outreach to encourage sound stewardship in these priority areas is ongoing.
Goal #4 Improve the health of local ecosystems by increasing the amount of prescribed fire in the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Sentinel landscape partners established an interagency burn team that conducted prescribed burns on private lands surrounding Fort Benning. ★ The burn team has conducted 52 prescribed burns on 5,400 acres to date. The burn team has also hosted prescribed fire training events for nearly 100 citizens.



The distance between individual longleaf pines in the forest allows the sun to nourish a biologically rich understory. Research indicates longleaf pine trees are the southern pine best suited for a changing climate with more intense storms, longer droughts, and increased risk of beetle infestation. (Photo by: Randy Browning, USFWS)