

# GEORGIA



**Thirty-five million acres** of wetland forests provide valuable ecosystem services for people living in the US South, including:

- Protection from extreme events
- Recreation, tourism, and aesthetics
- Water filtration and waste treatment
- Food and pollination
- Climate regulation
- Raw materials.

**Wetland forest ecosystem services are worth more than \$500 billion per year.** But wetland forests are constantly under siege by external forces, including urban expansion, invasive species, increased demand for timber, conversion to intensively managed plantations or

agriculture, pollution, sea-level rise, and the changing climate. Over the next 30 years, how will we protect the valuable services our Southern wetland forests provide? What can we gain if we do the right thing? And what do we stand to lose if we do not invest in our forests?

We investigated how the value of wetland forests in the US South would increase if we protected more land, extended natural riparian buffers, and managed forests more responsibly. Here are the best facts from Georgia.

### **Georgia's Wetland Forests Are Worth \$67.3 Billion**

- Worth could increase up to \$2.8 billion by investing in conservation
- Wetland Forest Gem: Okefenokee Swamp, a 438,000 acre swamp that straddles the Georgia-Florida line
- Georgia has 4.4 million acres of wetland forest, including 492 named swamps and 5,647 named streams in the state<sup>1</sup>

### **Protection From Extreme Events: Georgia's Wetland Forests Provide \$20.1 Billion**

- Value in protection from extreme events and water flow regulation could increase up to \$740 million by investing in conservation
- Two flood events amassing over a billion dollars in damages since 1980<sup>2</sup>
- Between 1851 and 2004, 20 hurricanes and 3 major hurricanes (categories 3-5) made landfall on the Georgia coastline<sup>3</sup>

### **Aesthetics, Tourism, and Recreation: Georgia's Wetland Forests Provide \$16.9 Billion**

- Value in aesthetics and recreation could increase up to \$860 million by investing in conservation
- Georgia had 60 million visitors in 2011, which contributed \$61.1 billion in visitor spending and supported 439,000 tourism jobs<sup>4-6</sup>
- Over 40% of Georgia residents participated in wildlife-related recreation, spending \$4.6 billion in 2011<sup>7</sup>

### **Water Supply and Waste Treatment: Georgia's Wetland Forests Provide \$15.5 Billion**

- Value in water supply and waste treatment could increase up to \$640 million by investing in conservation
- More than sixty percent of Georgia residents rely on public sewer systems. Many public facilities rely on natural infrastructure to reduce costs of waste and water treatment<sup>8</sup>
- Nearly twenty percent of Georgia residents rely on private water sources like wells. Residents rely on forests to naturally filter pollutants from their water supply<sup>8</sup>

### **Food and Pollination: Georgia's Wetland Forests Provide \$9.8 Billion**

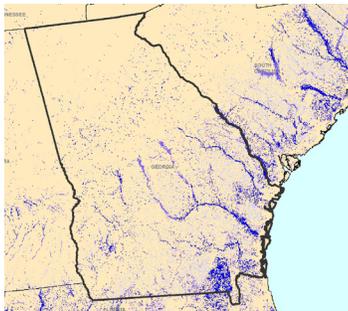
- Value in food and pollination could increase up to \$390 million by investing in conservation
- Georgia wetland forests provide habitat for pollinators of agricultural crops
- Nearly a million residents in Georgia hunt or fish<sup>7</sup>
- In 2016, hunters purchased over 300,000 deer hunting licenses<sup>9</sup>
- In 2016, hunters harvested over 200,000 ducks and geese within Georgia<sup>10</sup>

## Regulating Services: Georgia's Wetland Forests Provide \$4.82 Billion

- Value in climate regulation, air quality, soil formation, and erosion control could increase up to \$107 million by investing in conservation
- There are an estimated 258 million megagrams of carbon stored in the state's wetland forests, and continual carbon storage reduces the worst impacts of climate change

## Raw Materials: Georgia's Wetland Forests Provide \$122 Million

- In 2011, there were 151 forest product mills (e.g., pulp and timber) employing 13,470 people in the state<sup>11</sup>
- Wetland forests currently provide raw materials worth \$122 million in value, this could increase to \$179 million by investing in conservation



There are 258,278,000 megagrams of carbon stored in Georgia wetland forests.



Georgia has 4.4 million acres of protected wetland forest (green), with an additional 1,030,000 acres of wetland forest proposed (purple) to be protected.

## REFERENCES

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