



# The Value of Conservation Easements in Georgia

*"For me, ..., land conservation is a top priority....My vision is to preserve our state, to keep Georgia's resources healthy and beautiful....Together, we will continue to preserve our state, to keep it one we can be proud to pass on to our grandchildren."*

~Governor Sonny Perdue

## Overview of the Value of Conservation Easements

Intact forestlands supply timber products, wildlife habitat, soil and watershed protection, aesthetics, and recreational opportunities. However, as these areas are fragmented and disappear, so do the irreplaceable benefits they provide.

The question becomes how to prevent the loss of these benefits. While the state does hold land, public acquisition is simply too expensive. Not to mention maintaining these lands in private ownership is critical to cost-effective long-term stewardship and management. The donated conservation easement, then, is the most logical legal tool to secure long-term conservation in Georgia.

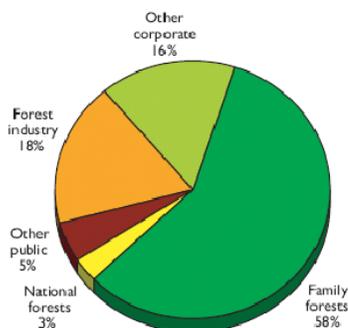


### The THREAT:

- Nationwide in the years 1992-1997, 320 acres of farmland were taken out of production every hour (Sauer 2002). During this same time period, Georgia lost more than one million acres of farm and forest lands to development (NRCS 2000).
- In Georgia 108 acres of forestland are converted to impervious surface daily (UGA NARSAL).
- If current development patterns continue in Atlanta, 200,000 acres of tree cover or virtually all of the intact forests remaining will be lost by 2020 (Sauer 2002).

**The POTENTIAL:** Private landowners own the bulk of the forestland in Georgia. Conservation easements allow for these landowners to retain their private property and for the property to remain on county tax digests while ensuring the permanent protection of Georgia's natural resources. The Georgia Forestry Commission's Forest Stewardship Program is actively involved with management on over 1.5 million acres, working with 6,000 landowners.

Ownership of Timberland



Georgia Forest Inventory and Analysis Fact Sheet 2004

### The VALUES:

- Tourism & Recreation – Outdoor recreation was the primary reason for 7% of all tourist travel to Georgia in 2004 – drawing nearly 2 million people (Travel Industry Association of America 2004).
- Water Quality & Quantity – Trees in metropolitan areas in the U.S. contribute \$400 billion/year in storm-water retention. Swamps, wetlands, and floodplains provide \$11,240-\$89,740/acre per year in disturbance avoidance, water supply, water filtration and waste treatment benefits. (Sauer 2002)
- Increased Property Value – Homes within 1500ft of the Sandy Creek Park in Athens-Clarke County sold for \$5,330 to \$8,757 more than homes farther away. This increased property valuation resulted in higher property tax income for county government, providing \$43,490 more per year. In Atlanta, homes with trees are 5-20% higher in cost than those without (Madsen, et al 2006).
- Avoiding Development Costs – For each \$1 in expenditures, residential properties return a revenue of \$0.87 while farm and forest lands return a revenue of \$2.70 (Dorfman 2006).
- Air Quality – In Atlanta forested areas are responsible for removing approximately 19 million pounds of air pollutants each year; this is worth about \$47 million annually (Sauer 2002).
- Carbon Sequestration – Canadian forests have carbon sequestration benefits valued at \$865-\$1,018/acre per year (Sauer 2002). In 2006, the U.S. carbon market was valued at \$91 million and 36% of voluntary carbon offsets were generated through forestry activities.
- Hunting & Fishing – In Georgia, these activities generate \$61.5 million in sales tax revenue annually, are enjoyed by over 1.2 million people, support 21,000 jobs, and have an overall economic benefit of \$2 billion.

**The CONCLUSION:** The need for conservation of Georgia's natural resources has never been more apparent. Significant long-term protection can be achieved in a cost-effective manner through the use of conservation easements in a public-private partnership. The Georgia Forestry Commission has a responsibility to provide private landowners with the necessary tools to manage their lands well and therefore is well positioned to further the State's conservation efforts.