

GEORGIA FORESTRY  
COMMISSION



# HISTORY OF THE GEORGIA FORESTRY COMMISSION

Forests have been important to Georgians since General Oglethorpe landed in 1733 on the shoreline of what is now Savannah. Colonial records are limited, but some valued references to forests exist. The state was then covered with forests of pines and hardwoods.

Timber was quickly recognized as a great source of revenue. The 1870 census showed that timber was already becoming a profitable industry for Georgia with the annual timber value rising from \$2.4 million to more than \$4.0 million in that decade. By 1880, Georgia ranked first in the South in total lumber production and was second only to North Carolina in number of sawmills. A 1901 Georgia Department of Agriculture Report revealed that pine timberland, which could be bought for 50 cents to \$1.50 an acre a few years before, was now selling for no less than \$4.00 to \$8.00 an acre.<sup>1</sup>

With virtually no regard for conservation, early settlers simply cleared forestlands, cultivated an area for a few years, then abandoned their fields for freshly cleared lands.<sup>2</sup> Many of these abandoned areas eventually became wooded again through natural reforestation, but there was no organized forest management effort until the American Forestry Association originated in 1875. It was organized for the "protection, propagation, and the planting of useful trees."<sup>3</sup>

Ten years later, the American Forestry Association merged with the American Forestry Congress (founded in 1882). A second merger was completed in 1888 when it joined with the Southern Forestry Congress at an Atlanta meeting.

Desire for forest protection led to the establishment of state forestry departments in every southern state. Meetings of the Southern Forestry Congress were held annually, just prior to the meetings of the General Assemblies, usually in the state with the best chance of passing forestry legislation. As a result, the Georgia Assembly passed the Forestry Act of 1921, providing for a State Board of Forestry.

The major Board responsibilities was to make recommendations to the Georgia General Assembly.<sup>4</sup> Members of this Board were: Bonnell Stone, an industrial forester with the Pfister-Vogel Lumber Company; Dr. S.W. McCallie, a State Geologist; and H.G. Spahr of Atlanta.

The Board made its report to the 1922 General Assembly in accordance with the Forestry Act of 1921. The report focused on the economic importance of forests to Georgia and potential threats posed by a lack of conservation practices. Statistics revealed less than one-twentieth of the original virgin forests of the State remained. Wood-using industries rapidly became dependent on second growth timber or lumber imported from other states.<sup>5</sup>

The report also showed declining timber harvests, the waning naval stores industry, increasing soil erosion, and rising state unemployment resulting from forest depletion.



In conclusion, the report proposed a statutory state board of forestry to be supported by state license taxes from forest industries. This bill failed to become law.

The Southern Forestry Congress then concentrated efforts on organizing a state forestry association. The Georgia Forestry Association, originally established in 1907 by Alfred Ackerman, was reorganized in 1922 and Bonnell Stone was elected president. Also, in 1922, Walker Nursery was named for the late Governor Clifford Mitchell Walker, who took office in 1922. Governor Walker was instrumental in forming the first Forestry Board for the State of Georgia.

Efforts were next focused on passage of legislation creating a Georgia Forestry Department. The bill was signed into law on August 14, 1925. The State Board of Forestry, created by the legislature, consisted of the Governor, Secretary of State, State Geologist, Director of Agricultural Extension, and five citizens appointed by the Governor with reference to geographical location. The five citizen board members represented lumber manufacturing, farming, and naval stores or timber owning interests in the state.

Duties of the new agency were to:

1. Survey Georgia forest conditions.
2. Report to the regular Legislative Session with forestry legislation recommendations.
3. Give advice, aid, assistance, and cooperation to Georgia landowners on request.
4. Promote forest culture and preservation.
5. Apply appropriate funds to:
  - a. Prevent forest fires.
  - b. Suppress forest fires.
  - c. Establish fire control independently or in cooperation with the federal government.
6. Employ a State Forester as Administrative Head, Secretary of the Board, and custodian of books and records.
7. Recommend to the Governor lands to be acquired and gifts of land to be accepted as state forests, and appoint deputy forest wardens willing to serve without compensation.<sup>6</sup>

The first organizational meeting was held in Atlanta on September 25, 1925. The second meeting was held October 15, 1925, at which Burley M. Lufburrow was offered the position of State Forester; Lufburrow received the second forestry degree from the University of Georgia School of Forestry. At the time of the offer, he was supervisor of the Alabama National Forests. However, because all designated taxes collected that year had been spent, no money was available to establish the organization. As a result, members of the board went to the First National Bank of Atlanta and, on their personal endorsements, borrowed \$1,000 from the bank.

Full-time personnel of the Department consisted of the State Forester, Director of Management, Director of Education, and two secretaries. Total area placed under protection was 980,000 acres; a total of 34 fires was recorded on the protected area.

Office space and funds were difficult to acquire. The State Forester's office was eventually donated by the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce; the office remained there for one year until the Commissioner of Agriculture provided space in the State Capitol Building. Due to lack of funds, the State Forester worked for eight months before he received a paycheck.<sup>7</sup>

In 1926, the state appropriated \$13,402 and the federal government, through the Clark-McNary Act of 1924, granted \$4,185.15. The Clark-McNary Act amended the Week Law of 1911, which encouraged the



states to enter into cooperative forest-fire protection agreements with the U.S. Forest Service. Records of 1929 showed 29 states cooperating.

With limited funds available from the federal government, it was necessary to secure assistance from private landowners. As a result, timber protection organizations (TPOs) were started. A TPO is an organized group of timberland owners representing 10,000 acres or more that is eligible for state financial aid.<sup>8</sup>

TPO members paid forest fire insurance of two and a half to three cents an acre per year; this fund paid patrolmen, whose duties were to prevent and suppress forest fires. There were 14 TPOs in 1926; by 1933, there were 87 throughout the state covering some 7,000,000 acres.

During 1927 and 1928, the Department expanded to include eight personnel and four field offices. The Department concentrated on education and fire prevention information.

The total 1927 budget was \$34,053.67, with \$19,991.60 granted by the Federal Government under section two of the Clarke-McNary Act. In 1928, the Department was granted \$43,946.64 under sections two and four of the Clarke-McNary Act for a total of \$69,532.80.

Also, the University of Georgia School of Forestry and the State Department of Forestry initiated a cooperative nursery agreement. The first year of production was 1929; 400,000 seedlings were grown and sold.

The Department underwent major changes in 1931. Governor Richard B. Russell either abolished or merged the existing 117 state departments to create only 17. The State Board of Forestry became a division within the Department of Forestry and Geological Development.

A six-member commission was in charge of the new Department. Five members of the State Board of Forestry were named Commission members; the sixth was named by the Governor for knowledge of the state's mineral and natural resources. B.M. Lufburrow remained State Forester. The Governor now had the power to appoint the State Forester. Also, money from the federal fund was appropriated for agency operation.

Total income in 1931 was \$103,600.42. In 1932, funds were drastically reduced and forestry receipts were cut to \$69,938.88. Despite budget cuts, an important project was established that had a great influence on the future of forestry. The State of Georgia, in 1931, was granted a \$20,000 annual appropriation to what is now called the Herty Foundation.

The late Dr. Charles H. Herty discovered that southern pine could be used in the manufacture of newsprint. For many years, it was believed that southern pines produced too much oleoresin to be used for production of white paper. Dr. Herty, however, contended gum content of southern pine was comparable to red spruce, which was commonly used in that capacity. Studies proved that southern pine does not produce large quantities of gum in a normal, healthy state; gum is produced when the tree is wounded, and then only to cover the wound.

Dr. Herty further proved that all species of pine in the South are suitable for manufacture of newsprint; Georgia was currently importing newsprint from Europe. The discovery that Georgia's forests could supply enough newspaper for the entire country eased an economic burden. By 1927, Herty's cup-and-gutter system, or some variation or improvement of it, was ubiquitous. Second-growth longleaf and slash pine in Georgia and Florida, again the center of industry, supplied 78 percent of America's naval stores



production. The total United States' output earned more than fifty million dollars a year. Continued research included the study of pine fiber and production of high quality products at low cost.<sup>9</sup>

The Herty Foundation is a continuation of the Savannah Pulp and Paper Laboratory founded in 1929. Additional funds were obtained elsewhere and operations actually began in 1932 under the direction of Dr. Herty.

Perhaps as a direct consequence of a 1928 Forestry Fair held in Waycross, the first fire observation tower was erected on the Ware Hotel in Waycross, and another was erected on top of a city water supply tank in another town. The Forestry Fair was such a success that a second one was scheduled for Valdosta and held in 1929.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had a vital role in stimulating interest in forestry from 1933 to 1934. During these years, Georgia established more CCC camps for forestry than any other state in the South. The CCC stimulated interest in TPOs, since the federal government favored them when locating camps in the region; this was because states were required to guarantee continued maintenance of CCC work done on private lands.

Another development that had great impact on Georgia forests was the 1933 use of radio in preventing, detecting, and suppressing fires.<sup>10</sup> Radio use, which proved to be highly effective in fighting fires, increased rapidly.

The first large-scale forestry survey, conducted by I.F. Elledge in the mid-1930s, showed that Georgia had a far greater volume of 123 million cords of pine growing stock - in comparison to Alabama (91 million cords), Louisiana (53 million cords), and Mississippi (57 million cords). The survey also revealed Georgia's pine increment-drain ratio as the only favorable ratio in the mid-South area.<sup>11</sup>

The Georgia Forestry Association, at its annual 1935 meeting, took the first step toward defining those who burn the woods as "arsonists." The Association passed a resolution for "stern treatment of those caught burning the woods."<sup>12</sup> Convincing law enforcement representatives to regard forest destruction as a crime was a slow process. The resolution passed was a bit optimistic, but the process had to be started at some point.

Despite district forestry offices being reduced from eight to four, and a total 1936 budget of only \$91,000, forestry in Georgia continued to grow by leaps and bounds. In the negative situation of lowered funds and manpower, the Division of Forestry increased seedling production to 5 million per year, published a monthly bulletin, assisted TPOs in expansion, promoted exhibits, and maintained and expanded the park system. Elmer Dyal was State Forester. Frank Heyward, Jr., and later, Don Weddell were State Foresters in 1937.

Following another restructuring of the state departments, the Department of Natural Resources was created on March 5, 1937. This Department was made up of four divisions: Forestry; Wildlife; Mines, Mining and Geology; and State Parks, Historical Sites, and Monuments. The Director of the Division of Forestry was appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. It was specified that the Director be a graduate of the University of Georgia School of Forestry or some other recognized school of forestry.

The Georgia Division of Forestry estimated in 1938 that losses due to forest fires cost the state \$5,000,000 to \$8,000,000 annually. Approximately \$155,000 was spent that year in an effort to protect the state's forests. Also in 1938, the federal government leased the Waycross State Forest to the State of Georgia.



The Hitchiti Experimental Forest in Jones County, Georgia, is the site of the Brender Demonstration Forest, a cooperative effort by the U.S. Forest Service Southern Research Station and the Georgia Forestry Commission since 1938 to demonstrate forest management.

In 1939, the General Assembly passed a constitutional amendment authorizing counties to levy a tax to pay for conservation of natural resources and protection of forestlands. This allowed counties to take part in organized fire control. The electorate approved this amendment in 1940. Counties paid 60 percent, with State and federal governments paying 40 percent.

As a result, the forestry agency was able, for the first time, to concentrate on only a few officials in each county instead of a relatively large number of individual landowners.

W.C. Hammerle was the State Forester from 1939 to 1940. Walter Dyal was State Forester from 1941 to 1942.

Further changes in state departments brought about the demise of the Department of Natural Resources in 1943. A Division of Conservation was created under the control and management of the Governor. There were three departments within the new division: Forestry; Mines/Mining and Geology; and State Parks, Historical Sites, and Monuments. The Director of the Department of Forestry was to be appointed by the Governor, with Senate consent. The Director's term was four years, running concurrently with the Governor's term.

J.M. Tinker was State Forester from 1943 to 1947.

The Legislature, in 1943, passed a law that made setting fire to the woods a felony crime; minimum punishment was a one year prison sentence. By 1944, the number of TPOs had decreased to seven, while county protection units increased to 27. Total acreage under protection was 6,227,519. State appropriations were \$125,000 and federal grants totaled \$126,651.77.

In June 1945, an experiment was conducted to test the feasibility of fire detection by airplane. Air patrols flew over five counties and trucks equipped with radio receivers were stationed in Jones, Bibb, Baldwin, Wilkinson, and Twiggs Counties. Due to lack of equipment, communications were only one-way.

The experiment lasted six weeks and was termed a success. Forty-three fires were detected and suppressed - with an average time of fourteen minutes from plane report to truck arrival on the fire scene. Air patrol was expanded on the basis of this experiment. Counties not under organized protection were offered the opportunity of establishing suppression unit radio receivers - at their own risk. Many counties and large landowners accepted this offer.

In 1947, a new State Forester, A. Ray Shirley, was appointed. The demand for tree seedlings increased among the state's landowners. The two established nursery operations had the capacity to supply only 20 million of the 34 million seedlings ordered. Pressure on the Legislature resulted in the granting of \$72,000 for a new nursery, although the regular state appropriation of \$125,000 was not expanded. By 1948, 32.5 million seedlings were produced by the three nurseries as the demand continued to increase.

In 1949, Ray Shirley resigned from his position.

H. Guyton DeLoach was appointed State Forester in 1949 and retired in 1960.



County protection units had increased to 43 by 1948, with 8,591,246 acres under organized protection. Unit efficiency was improved by installation of a more comprehensive radio system. This was the first year, in many years, that the state appropriated more money for agency operation than was obtained through federal grants.

The year 1949 brought more changes to forestry in Georgia. The Georgia Forestry Commission was created by the Legislature to replace the Department of Forestry. This change resulted from efforts to remove the power of appointing the State Forester from the Governor. There had been several State Foresters since 1936, and many felt the need for more stability.

According to legislation, the Commission was to appoint a Director, and determine details concerning tenure, compensation, powers, and duties.

Commission members were to be named by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate. The Commission was to be composed of five members: three owners of 50 acres or more of forestland within the state, and two manufacturers of forest products. The legislation creating the Commission specifically states that the Governor may not be a member of the Commission.

Initial appointments were staggered for terms of three, four, five, six, and seven years. Subsequent appointments for seven years were to be made from the term expiration date of the Commissioner to be replaced. There was to be the election of a Commission Chairman. Any member missing more than three meetings - without just cause and/or leave of absence from the Chairman - was to be dismissed and his office declared vacant.

The Director of the Commission, selected by the Commissioners with advice and consent of the Governor, was to act as Commission Executive Secretary and Administrative Officer.

The Director was empowered to act with full power of the Commission when it was not in session, except when expressed approval of the Commission was required.

The Commission, according to legislation, was also required to submit annual reports of its activities and statewide conditions of the forestlands in the state, and to make legislative recommendations for protection, reforestation, and management. Also passed by the 1949 General Assembly was the Georgia Forest Fire Protection Act. This Act designated procedure and authority for statewide fire control in cooperation with counties and divided the state into protection units. Each unit was to have a unit forestry board, composed of five members appointed by the Commission. All appointees were required to be forestland owners or representatives of such. Terms were staggered from one to five years in original appointments, and for five-year terms upon expiration of the initial term. Board duties included assisting efficient performance of Act provisions and in conducting protection unit programs.<sup>13</sup>

The Act also states that the Commission must present a plan for forest fire protection at the end of each fiscal year. Commission agents were given the right to go on any land to suppress, control, or prevent forest fires without being liable for trespassing.

State appropriations were increased by the 1949 Legislature. The Commission had been appropriated only \$173,350 for 1949, but \$890,000 was appropriated in 1950.

In 1949, Morgan Nursery was dedicated to the memory of G. Phillip Morgan, a member of the Georgia Forestry Commission when it was organized in 1949. Morgan was the first elected Commission Chairman



and remained Chairman until his death. He has been called the "father" of Georgia's current forestry program.

Also, in 1950, the Georgia Forest Fire Protection Act of 1949 was amended after the Commission considered the state appropriation for statewide fire protection to be inadequate. In accordance with this amendment, any county may levy a tax to provide adequate funds for this purpose. The 1953 Legislature created a separate state forestry agency; the Georgia Forest Research Council was founded to investigate, publicize, and coordinate research of forestry that would benefit industry, state governments, or the federal government.

The Research Council received funds from regular state appropriations and its seven members served staggered nine-year terms. The Council did not employ an internal research staff, but coordinated external research sources.

From the middle 1950's to the 1980's, the U.S. Forest Service Southeast Experiment Station in Macon had a cooperative agreement with Georgia Forestry Commission Reforestation to develop breeding and testing procedures, seed orchard management protocols, and improved loblolly and slash genotypes.

The Georgia Forestry Commission initiated a Tree Improvement Program in 1954. Authorized by the State Legislature, the Forestry Commission joined other southern states in forming the Southeastern Forest Fire Compact to render mutual aid in case of disaster-scale fires. Also, in 1954, Page Memorial Nursery was named for the late Matthew Warren Page, a Seminole County Ranger who lost his life in performance of his duty during September of 1954.

In 1954 the Mule Trail fire burned 18,730 acres in Waycross, Georgia. In 1955, 100,000 acres were burned in Fargo, Georgia.

In 1955 the Waycross State Forest was deeded to Georgia, and renamed the Dixon Memorial State Forest in 1974.

In 1955 a comprehensive revision of Georgia's forestry laws was initiated. Prior to 1955, lawmaking and repealing of laws had been haphazard, making it virtually impossible to determine which laws were in effect.

The Act of 1955 was declared to supersede all previous laws, except with stated exceptions. This clarified which laws were repealed, as the Act of 1955 cited each law to be repealed.

Funds were also increased in 1955. The state contributed almost \$1.8 million to the total \$3.4 million budget.

In 1956, the Georgia Forestry Commission and Georgia Forest Research Council moved state headquarters from Atlanta to Macon. Since then, both agencies developed the Georgia Forestry Center which served as state headquarters for the Georgia Forestry Commission, Georgia Forest Research Council, and Macon Research Center of the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station of the U.S. Forest Service.

Success of fire protection in Georgia was emphasized in 1957 when - for the first time - a privately organized forest insurance company accepted applications for timber insurance. Coverage was as high as \$50 an acre and policies were only issued in counties under Commission protection. Georgia was



honored when America's billionth pine seedling of 1956-1957 was planted at the Georgia Forestry Center. This was an exceptional tribute to the Commission.

Weather forecasting services were started by the Commission in 1958. The services were sponsored by the Commission, the Weather Bureau, the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station of the U.S. Forest Service, and the Georgia Forest Research Council.

Also in 1958, the G. Phillip Morgan Tree Seedling Nursery was constructed at Byron and Federal Soil Bank funds were granted for construction of Walker Tree Seedling Nursery in Tattnall County.

In 1959, the Commission, Georgia Forest Research Council, and U.S. Forest Service built one of the nation's finest seed testing laboratories at the Georgia Forestry Center. The Georgia Forest Research Council constructed the Herty Foundation Laboratory in Savannah.

Also, in 1959, the State Forest Fire Emergency Committee was abolished. This Committee was originally created by the 1949 Georgia Forest Fire Protection Act; its functions were transferred to the Governor. Ray Shirley returned as Director in 1960. There were 148 counties covering 21,494,602 acres under organized fire protection in 1960. Seventeen combined forestry units covered 34 counties.

The Forestry Commission completed a 14-month Southern Pine Beetle Control Program in 1964. This program affected 34 counties in middle and north Georgia at a cost of over \$1,125,000. Funds were provided by state and federal governments.

In 1964, Georgia was the first state to produce improved tree seedlings. This crop of 600,000 seedlings was the first of the improved type ever available to landowners. It was also in 1964 that all permanent Forestry Commission personnel were placed under the State Merit System.

The next year, 1965, the Commission recorded its most outstanding fire control record. Less than one-tenth of one percent of all protected areas (20,644 acres) burned. The average size fire was confined to only 3.73 acres. There were 23,676,500 forest acres under protection.

The most vital forestry legislation in many years was passed in 1967. The Legislature passed an act providing uniform payment by counties for forest fire protection; cost was four cents per acre for privately owned forestland. This was important because it placed all forestland on an equal basis of county participation for State assistance.

Also, organized fire protection was expanded. All 159 Georgia counties were signed up for protection with 24,066,400 acres of State and private forestland under protection.

The Rural Fire Defense Program (RFD) was initiated in 1968. With steady migration of city dwellers to rural areas, the Commission felt there was a need to expand service. The Forestry Commission, under this program, was called upon to operate in areas where local services lacked capabilities to answer calls outside corporate limits. Equipment was provided by state and federal governments through loaning excess and surplus materials. This gave communities without organized fire departments an opportunity to provide fire suppression. Forest fires immediately decreased 20 percent and the amount of acreage lost was reduced 58 percent.

The Georgia Forestry Commission received approximately 4,365 acres of land from the Department of Public Health in 1969. A 1,000-acre superior tree orchard was developed and used as a testing area for



genetically improved trees; improved tree seedlings were produced rapidly. By 1971, the number of seedlings produced reached 86.6 million.

The next year, 1972, brought an increase in Rural Fire Defense coverage, with 127 counties and 269 departments. Further expansion of the Rural Fire Defense Program budget resulted in 140 counties under protection with 563 station locations.

In 1973, the Commission assisted the U.S. Forest Service in the Georgia Forest Resource Inventory; the results, compared to 1961, revealed Georgia's forestry advancements. There was more timber on less acreage, yearly average growth rate was nine-tenths of a cord per acre, and there was a 34 percent reduction in unproductive forest area. Tree growth exceeded removal by 55 percent and forests covered 68 percent of the state.

In 1974, a forest insect and disease control bill was signed into law by Governor Jimmy Carter, establishing an ongoing program of protection, detection, and education with appropriate control measures.

Use of wood as an energy source was highlighted in 1978 and 1979. Studies of waste wood as an energy source were conducted, wood gasification systems were investigated, and wood waste surveys were conducted. These studies were made possible by a \$500,000 appropriation from the Legislature. In 1982, numerous industries, institutions, and homes were converted to wood energy.

John W. Mixon was named Commission Director in 1983. He came with the Commission as a forest technician in 1961, with service in the Waycross and Rome Districts. He left the agency in 1963 to work with a forest industry, but returned two years later to head the Commission's newly established Urban Forestry Program - a program that gained national attention. Mixon accelerated wood energy promotions by conducting demonstrations at public schools, prisons, hospitals, and other institutions to show how wood materials could replace expensive fuels. In recent years, wood-fired systems have been installed across the state as a result of his effort. This period also included great Commission progress in public relations with brochures, feature films, and radio and TV programs being produced. In 1985, a record number of trees were planted in a single season, with landowners and industry planting 433,000 acres in pines.

The next year brought good news for conservation. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was initiated in 1986. This federally funded reforestation drive gave Georgia an edge over every state in the nation in tree acreage committed to conservation. Georgia's share of CRP acres to be planted represented 28 percent of the national tree acreage total.

The Flint River Nursery was established in 1987 to meet the growing demand for tree seedlings. This nursery was designed to produce 50 million seedlings. When combined with seedlings produced at other nurseries, approximately 200 million seedlings would be available to Georgia landowners for the next planting season. In 1988, the Georgia Legislature passed an addition to the Forest Fire Act requiring a permit be issued by the Georgia Forestry Commission for outdoor burning. Until this addition to the Act was passed, landowners had to only notify the Commission of their intention to burn. The Georgia Forestry Commission began issuing permit numbers for outdoor burning in July of 1988.

In 1989, there was another historical footnote added to the Georgia Forestry Commission in the form of a museum. The entire building was constructed out of Georgia forest products. Logs were cut from the Commission's forest in Baldwin County. Commission employees from throughout the state built the cabin. Carpentry, wiring, and museum exhibits were donated by landowners, corporations, and the U.S. Forest



Service. On August 17, 1997, the museum was officially dedicated and designated the Howard E. Bennett Forestry Museum named after the former *Georgia Forestry* magazine editor and publications manager.

The first quarterly RFD Advisory Council meeting was held on March 29, 1991 at the Georgia Forestry Commission Headquarters in Macon. The Council's purpose is to provide assistance and leadership in development of current and long-range goals for Georgia fire protection programs. The Council's membership is comprised of individuals and agencies involved in rural fire protection. Council members include: RFD Program Coordinator, Chief of Forest Protection, one fire department representative from each GFC district, and various state agencies (Georgia Fire Academy, Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs, Georgia Firefighters Standards & Training Council, Georgia State Firefighters Association, and the State Fire Marshal's Office).

In 1992, the Legislature passed the Prescribed Burning Act defining prescribed burning as an important forest management tool and stating Georgia landowners have a right to conduct prescribed burning on their forestlands. This Act also allowed the Georgia Forestry Commission to begin a Prescribed Fire Management Certification Program to certify practitioners. By 1998, 1,100 prescribed burn managers were certified in Georgia.

John Mixon retired in 1995 and David Westmoreland was appointed Director. Westmoreland began his career in 1962 fighting wildfire with a tractor-plow in Crisp County. He assumed leadership of the Georgia Forestry Commission on August 1 and became Georgia's eleventh State Forester. Westmoreland was appointed to the position by the Commission's Board, with approval given by Governor Zell Miller. David Westmoreland retired in 1997 with 35 years of service.

On February 21, 1997, Georgia made the Guinness World Book of Records for "The Most Trees Planted at a Single Time and Place." Georgia planted 14,000 native pine seedlings in less than four hours. The record surpassed efforts made by New Zealand in 1996 with 5,500 trees.

Since approximately 1998, the Georgia Forestry Commission has worked with U.S. Forest Service Region 8 to advance their 'oak enrichment planting' strategy.

In 1997, J. Fred Allen, who began his career in the Newnan District in 1972, was named Director of the Georgia Forestry Commission. Allen became Chief of the Commission's Forest Research Department in 1983, succeeding John Mixon. The Commission received the National Award for Energy Innovation by the U.S. Department of Energy during Allen's leadership of forest research. In 1995, he was named Deputy Director, succeeding David Westmoreland.

Following the retirement of Allen as Director in 2003, Deputy Director William R. "Bob" Lazenby served as interim Director until the appointment of Kenneth C. Stewart, Jr., as Director in 2004. With a career spanning several decades in the private sector, Stewart brought new energy and a new way of doing business into the GFC. He initiated the change in agency logo from the decades-old "red shield" to the new, multiple-resource logo in use today. Stewart remained as Director until December 2006.

In January 2007 Robert Farris was named as interim Director. Shortly afterwards, Farris led agency resources in fighting the largest wildfire in Georgia's history. During the late spring and early summer of 2007, the Georgia Bay Complex burned 441,705 acres and destroyed 9 homes. Approximately 3,300 people from 44 states responded to the emergency, which destroyed \$58,000,000 in timber resources. Farris was appointed Director of the Georgia Forestry Commission in August 2008.



Following Farris' retirement in 2018, Chuck Williams was named Director. Williams' experience as an economist, state representative and private forest landowner brought a new perspective to the agency.

Forestry in Georgia has made great advancements since the establishment of a State Board of Forestry in 1921. Healthy and sustainable forests are vital to the state's environmental and economic welfare. The Georgia Forestry Commission stands solid in its accomplishments and looks toward a bright future in serving Georgia.

Note: 2008 Annual Report information (for comparison to GFC origin): 687 employees; \$37,290,677 state funds; \$56,115,265 total funds (state, federal, and other)

- 
1. Pikel, James Jr., *A History of Georgia Forestry* (University of Georgia: 1966), pg. 10
  2. Division of Forestry of the Department of Natural Resources, *Georgia's Forest and Their Development* (Atlanta: 1937), pg.4
  3. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Impact of Forestry Association Forest Productivity in the South* (1988), pg. 1
  4. State Department of Forestry, *First Biennial Report* (Atlanta: 1926), pg. 8
  5. Report of the Georgia State Board of Forestry to the Georgia General Assembly of 1922, pg. 6
  6. State Department of Forestry, *First Biennial Report* (Atlanta: 1926), pg. 27
  7. Pikel, James Jr., *A History of Georgia Forestry* (University Of Georgia: 1966), pg. 19
  8. State Department of Forestry, *First Biennial Report* (Atlanta: 1926), pg. 27
  9. Division of Forestry of the Department of Natural Resources, *Georgia's Forests and Their Development* (Atlanta: 1937), pg. 37
  10. Pikel, James, Jr., *A History of Georgia Forestry* (University of Georgia: 1966), pg. 29
  11. Ibid, pg. 32
  12. Ibid, pg. 31
  13. L.A. Hargreaves, *The History of Forestry as a Unit of State Government in Georgia*, pg. 12