GAME MANAGEMENT SECTION
ANNUAL REPORT FY 2019-2020
A Message from the Chief

I count it a joy to be able to work and serve with the men and woman in Wildlife Resources Division. When I joined the family, your passion for the resources we have been entrusted with managing was overwhelming. Many years have passed, and I still see that same passion today. This passion is reflected when I visit programs, sections, and regions and see all the amazing projects completed each year. I know that this report highlights a fraction of those accomplishments. You do so much for the Department and the citizens of the state making it impossible to capture it all on paper. Thank you for your passion and dedication to promoting, conserving, and enhancing natural resources and serving the citizens of this great state.

1. **WRD Mission:** Conserve and promote fishing, hunting and wildlife resources through management, education and scientific research.
2. **WRD Vision:** Conserving diverse, healthy populations of fish and wildlife while maintaining related outdoor opportunities for every generation to enjoy.
3. **Game Management Overview:** Manages one million acres of land and 125 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) for hunting, fishing, wildlife enhancement, bird watching, hiking, camping and conservation education. Game Management conducts research and surveys to monitor hunter harvests, wildlife populations and habitats. These efforts support setting regulations and other management activities as well as providing technical assistance to landowners, private organizations and governmental agencies.

### HUNTING

- 642,545 residents hunt in Georgia.
- Hunters spend more than 8.9 million days a year in the field.
- Hunters account for $977 million in retail sales in Georgia, with a $1.6 billion ripple effect each year.
- Hunting in Georgia is responsible for 23,996 jobs, $600 million in salaries/wages/earnings, $106 million in state and local taxes, and $145 million in federal tax revenue.

### SHOOTING SPORTS

- More than 1.2 million people participate in recreational target shooting in Georgia.
- Shooters account for more than $532 million in retail sales with a total economic impact of $644 million.
- Shooting provides over $243 million in salaries.
- Shooting provides $41 million in state and local taxes and $58.8 million in federal taxes each year.
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The Game Management Section manages 1.1 million acres of land on 125 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) for hunting, wildlife enhancement, wildlife observation, hiking, camping and conservation education. This section also conducts research and surveys to monitor hunter harvests, wildlife populations and habitats. These efforts support setting regulations and other management activities as well as providing technical assistance to landowners, private organizations and other governmental agencies.

Management Unit, the Urban Wildlife Program and statewide management programs for white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, black bears, alligators and migratory birds.

Game Management leveraged additional license revenue with federal wildlife restoration funds to increase services and technical assistance to citizens, to improve habitat and access on WMAs and to create more awareness through educational programs. In FY 2019-20, the Game Management Section worked:

To improve wildlife habitat by:
- Using prescribed fire on 42,080 acres to enhance wildlife habitat
- Managing 7,400+ acres of wildlife openings
- Planting 3,200+ acres of dove fields
- Managing 5,100+ acres of wetlands

To improve WMA access by improving and maintaining:
- 3,000 + miles of roads and firebreaks.
- 1,482 bridges, fords, and culverts.
- 4,375 miles of trails.
- 153 campgrounds.
- 292 parking areas.
- 2,353 gates and water control structures.

And to manage healthy wildlife populations by:
- Banding 2,900 ducks, doves and geese.
- Checking 353 black bear bait stations for black bear activity.
- Collected 934 samples from white-tailed deer to monitor for chronic wasting disease, which has not been detected in Georgia.
- Surveying 149+ miles of rivers, creeks, coastal areas, and reservoir shorelines monitoring American alligator populations.
Other Notable Accomplishments

On Wildlife Management Areas:

- 38,608 hunters harvested 6,445 deer.
- 17,030 hunters harvested 1,164 turkeys.

Customer Service Excellence:

- Private Lands Program biologists wrote conservation plans for 82 new 2019-20 contracts and completed over 434 follow-up contacts encompassing 103,779 acres.
- Assisted 136 contacts across 170,043 acres with site-specific deer management needs as part of the Georgia Deer Management Assistance Program.
- The Urban Wildlife Program provided assistance to 1,350 callers and provided on-site technical assistance to 488 wildlife conflicts in metro Atlanta.

WRD Shooting Range Renovations:

- Mike Commander on Chickasawhatchee WMA: Renovations began on 200-yard rifle range, 25-yard pistol range; added office building and classroom.

New Wildlife Management Areas

Ceylon Wildlife Management Area

The Ceylon WMA consists of approximately 16,000 acres bordering nearly 12 miles of the lower Satilla River in Camden County, Georgia. Ceylon is located within five miles of Interstate 95 and offers tremendous opportunities for hunting, fishing, boating, camping, and wildlife observation. Ceylon hosts a wealth of rare species such as gopher tortoise, indigo snake, gopher frog, Bachman’s sparrow and striped newt. In addition, this tract contains significant cultural resources, with 72 known archaeological sites.

FY 20 Expenditures
Alligator Program Highlights
FY 2019–2020

Georgia alligator hunters harvested 326 alligators during the 2019 alligator hunting season. This is up slightly from the 10-year average of 264 alligators. There were 1000 alligator hunters drawn for the quota hunt. The 326 successful hunters each hunted an average of 2.74 nights.

Average length of harvested alligators was 8.7 feet (104 inches), which is very similar to the long-term average of 8.4 feet (101 inches). The longest alligator harvested in 2019 was approximately 14 feet. Alligator length is reported by the hunter, and this is the longest alligator reported since alligator hunting began. The long-term average length is 13.4 feet (161 inches).

Georgia WRD staff surveyed 148.3 miles of rivers, creeks, coastal areas, and reservoir shorelines and counted 885 alligators, for a 2020 population index of 6.0 alligators per mile. This year’s index brings the 3-year average to 5.9 alligators per mile, slightly above the alligator management plan’s goal of 5 alligators per mile for the statewide average. Annual spotlight surveys are the best method to determine alligator population trends.

Region staff reported handling 227 nuisance calls related to alligators and issued 293 alligator capture permits to agent trappers, which led to the capture of 76 alligators. Because the fiscal years ends in the middle of alligator complaint season, reported captures will increase as the summer continues.

Albany Game Management staff tag alligator.
Central Zone Black Bear Population Monitoring
Georgia’s Central Zone black bear population is monitored through a network of 180+ summer bait station survey sites (76 of which have been sampled since 2007) and the collection of data from both road-killed and harvested bears. From the Population Viability Analysis for Central Georgia and the statewide bear management plan, the most important parameter to track is annual female deaths.

![Central Zone Total Female Mortalities 2003-2019](image)

Central Zone total female bear mortalities between 2003-2019.

Bait Station survey results have been mostly stable with the exceptions being the first year of the survey (2007), 2012 the year after the greatest year of harvest (2011) and the last 3 years. The blue line on the graph below is the survey goal of 45% visitation.

![Central Zone Bear Bait Station Survey Results 2007-2019](image)

Central Zone bear bait station results between 2007-2019.

In FY 2020, one bear was harvested from the one-day, 3-county season. Harvest has averaged 9 since 2011. Seventy-nine bears have been harvested since the county-wide season started in 2011, with 56% being females. Prior to 2011, harvest was restricted to a one-day hunt or not open at all on Ocmulgee & Oaky Woods WMAs. The WMA hunts averaged <2 bears harvested/year when hunts were held.
Black Bear Program
Annual Highlights
FY 2019–2020

Northern Zone Black Bear Population Monitoring
The bear population in north Georgia remains healthy. Bait station surveys have been conducted across designated routes in north Georgia either every year or every other year since 1983. Visitation rates rose steadily from a low of 12.3% in 1983 to a high of 76.7% in 2009. The visitation rate was 62.1% in 2019. Bear bait station surveys serve as an index to population change over time and help us determine bear population trends.

Harvest opportunities abound with north Georgia bear hunters enjoying one of the longest bear seasons anywhere in North America. On private land, bear season runs concurrently with deer season beginning with archery on the second Saturday in September and concluding with firearms, which ends on the second Sunday in January. In 2019, a 9-day bear dog-hunting opportunity was added as a quota hunt on Chattahoochee and Chestatee WMAs (~50k acres total). Fifteen selected hunters were allowed to bring on up to 9 additional hunters — 10 total per party. The dog hunters were very successful with each group harvesting one or more bears during the hunt and a total of 61 bears over the 9-day period. Of the bears harvested, 12 were males and 49 were females.

Oak mast surveys are conducted across north Georgia each year in the fall between August 20th – 31st. This information is useful for our hunters not only to increase hunter success, but also to help biologists interpret trends observed in nuisance bear behavior, harvest, and number of road-killed bears. In the mountains, oak mast was rated “fair” in the fall of 2019 with total oak rating of 2.65.

As a pilot study to help understand the impacts of the bear dog hunt on bears and to evaluate bear-dog interactions, we trapped and collared bears with GPS collars during the summer prior to the hunt on both Chattahoochee and Chestatee WMAs and also on Cohutta WMA, as a “control area.” We also placed GPS collars on hunting dogs that were used during the hunt. The data collected are complex and with a more detailed analysis will yield considerably more information. During the bear dog hunt a GPS-collared bear was harvested on the Chattahoochee WMA that appears to have encountered a GPS-collared dog during the hunt. The bear’s subsequent movements are shown in
different colors each day. Note that 4 days and 10 miles later, the bear seemed to begin to settle down again, well off the property.

Chattahoochee WMA had both the highest overall harvest (57 bears) and the highest harvest per square mile (HPSM) of any WMA with 1.45 bears harvested per square mile. Chestatee (15 bears), Cohutta (47 bears), and Dawson Forest WMA (12 bears) were slightly less but were all similar in terms of HPSM. Gilmer County had the highest overall harvest (40 bears) of any county, excluding WMA harvest.

**North Georgia Bear Conflicts**

Game Management staff in north Georgia handled calls about bears from 579 people. This required over 105 man-days spent responding to these calls and providing technical guidance and hands-on assistance. Although capturing bears is a last resort, more than 21 bears were captured and handled by Game Management staff across north Georgia to resolve complex human-bear conflicts. A total of three individuals received black bear damage kill permits for 7 commercial agricultural fields. This resulted in three bears being killed under permit.

Wildlife biologists and technicians across north Georgia conducted numerous bear education programs for wildlife watchers and homeowner groups in the mountains.

*Map shows GPS data points for a GPS collared bear and GPS collared dog during the bear-dog hunt in North Georgia.*
Southern Zone Black Bear Population Monitoring

Georgia’s Southern Zone black bear population is monitored in cooperation with Okefenokee NWR staff through a network of 173 summer bait station survey sites, and the collection of data from harvested bears at fall check stations.

Bait station surveys have been conducted across designated routes in South Georgia every year since 1994. While trending up through 2006 and tracking well with increasing harvests, bear visits to summer bait station sites have flattened in recent years in the wake of habitat changes brought about by 3 major wildfires that encompassed the entire Okefenokee Swamp and much of the surrounding private timberland. The 10-year survey goal is 36% (brown line graphed on chart below).

Harvest opportunities in South Georgia are primarily available on private lands in the 8 counties around the Okefenokee Swamp with some opportunity available to public land bear hunters on Dixon Memorial WMA. Hunting bear with dogs is a long-standing tradition in southeast Georgia and is allowed on private lands over four 3-day weekends (Thursday through Saturday) in late September/early October. This year opportunity was increased with the addition of Camden county to the 12-day firearms season. Only still hunting is allowed on Dixon Memorial WMA with open dates in archery, primitive weapons, and firearms seasons.

The FY 2020 total harvest for the 12-day, 8-county season was 149 (105 males, 44 females). Harvest has averaged 139 over the last 5 years and 122 over the last 10 years. The 10-year harvest goal is 110 (dotted line graphed).
Overview
The 2019-20 was another great deer season with 199,915 deer hunters taking 262,042 deer, slightly less than 2018-19. Harvest estimates are determined through the Game Check harvest reporting system and adjusted for reporting rates from an annual telephone survey of active deer hunters. Hunter satisfaction for the 2019-20 deer season was excellent with 90% of survey respondents rating their season as satisfactory, good, or excellent. Fawn recruitment rates were lower than expected, but discrepancies were apparent among data sources. Georgia’s new Deer Management Assisance Program (DMAP) was launched in November of 2019. This new initiative provides technical deer management guidance to hunt clubs and private landowners. Program participants receive detailed habitat and herd management plans, harvest data analysis, and assistance with camera surveys. When biologically justified from data collected on each property, some deer harvest flexibility may be prescribed to achieve management goals.

Long Term Data

Total Proportioned Harvest by Sex
1978 through 2018

- Doe Harvest
- Buck Harvest

Method Change
Disease
Georgia is fortunate to have a strong herd immunity to hemorrhagic disease, so outbreaks capable of causing regional population declines are rare. 2019 had a normal number of occurrences and normal mortality rate.

Chronic Wasting Disease has not been found in Georgia to date, however recent discoveries in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee have increased our level of concern. We are continually monitoring the population and adapt our disease surveillance strategy whenever new scientific information becomes available. WRD staff collected 934 samples in 2019-20.
Fawn Recruitment
Fawn recruitment is the ratio of fawns per adult doe that survive to deer season, which is one of the most important measures of productivity of the deer population. Fawn recruitment has been relatively stable over the last decade except for the 2019-20 deer season. This unusual dip was not reflected in the harvest ratios of button bucks to does in either Game Check or the harvest survey and warrants further investigation.

Research
As a result of significant declines in the deer population on the Chattahoochee National Forest and associated WMAs, a fawn mortality study was launched in 2017. During the 2019 capture season, only 20% of radio-collared fawns survived and 56% of the mortalities were attributed to predation. Using mortality investigation and DNA testing, most mortalities were attributed to coyotes followed by black bears.

Baited trail camera surveys have been used to estimate local deer population abundance and population demographics for the last couple of decades. However, the methods lacked rigorous testing for much of that time and new literature has shown biases associated with baited surveys. To improve survey accuracy and eliminate complications with bait on WMAs, a new passive survey was developed.

The new method will be tested on WMAs across the state in 2019 and 2020 for final adjustment and will likely be available to the public for use in Fall 2020 through DMAP.

Both projects are a collaborative effort between the Wildlife Resources Division and the University of Georgia.
Deer Management Assistance Program
Georgia’s DMAP is administered by 3 experienced wildlife biologists under guidance of the State Deer Biologist. Since the launch of the program in November 2019, DMAP biologists have provided technical guidance to 136 customers with a total impacted land area of 170,043 acres. Of those, 56 customers have enrolled their private property or hunting club in DMAP with a total 84,385 acres in the program. There are 4 different levels of the program to accommodate a wide range of acreages. Georgia’s DMAP provides assistance to everyone regardless of property size.

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*Acresage minimums only apply to harvest flexibility, any size property can receive the other services of the level they choose.

Number of DMAP Properties by Acreage
Each year the Forest Management Unit (FMU) implements wildlife habitat management projects across the state. The establishment and regeneration of forest stands, managing for healthy forests and trees of desirable species and the harvest of timber for the betterment of wildlife habitat while recognizing the economic impact of the timber resource are the main objectives for FMU. This year timber revenue was generated on 13 different WMAs and on 1 State Park. There were approximately 4,385 acres thinned and 1,671 acres of regeneration harvest conducted this year. The average total value of timber removed per acre was $1,393. A total of 179,510 tons of timber was harvested.

The first half of the fiscal year was business as usual. The second half of the year proved to be a challenge with over twenty inches of rain in three months and a pandemic greatly altering wood mill operations. FMU met the timber revenue goal due to staff pulling together and overcoming these obstacles. The unit is staffed with a great group of foresters who work tirelessly each year.

*Chart showing timber revenue history from 2000 – 2020.*
Forest Management Unit Annual Highlights FY 2019–2020

- Generated over of $3.6 Million in timber revenue.
- Reforested 1,576 acres with a total of 886,700 seedlings planted at a cost of $327 per acre.
- Conducted 1,642 acres of seedling survival checks.
- Prescribed-burned 3,929 acres.
- Completed 258 prescribed burn evaluations.
- Completed the second phase of the statewide timber inventory process.
- Accomplished timber revenue projects on 38 WMAs. The first harvest schedule will be published in the first quarter of FY 2021.
- Spent $136,244 on road construction for timber extraction on eight different WMAs.
- Drove 120,517 miles. (This is equal to 4.83 trips around the earth.)
- Attended 87 hours of continuing education classes.

*Chart showing number of sales and acres sold from 2011 – 2020.*

*Burn at UGA Research Plot on Oconee WMA.*
**National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP)**
NASP continues to be a strong program in Georgia’s physical education and agricultural education classes. Tournaments are very popular among schools and numbers continue to increase. During the 2019-2020 school year, 5,221 archers competed at 39 District NASP tournaments held at various schools throughout the state. There were 3 regional qualifiers and 740 archers participated in the state championship.

**Hunt and Learn Program**
The Hunt and Learn Program provides an opportunity for participants to learn how to hunt. Various species of game animals are offered at different hunts, including deer, dove, squirrel and turkey.

The Hunt and Learn Program had one less event than FY 19, due to COVID19, but more participants than the previous year. FY 20 ended with 11 events and 80 participants compared to 12 events and 68 participants in FY 19.

**Shooting Range Renovations**
Fiscal Year 2020 proved to be very busy with range renovations on WRD’s staffed shooting ranges. Mike Commander in Albany began renovations late in the year. This range will have a 200-yard rifle range, a 25-yard pistol range and multiple archery ranges for our customers to enjoy. All range renovations use Pittman-Robertson dollars and funds from the license revenue increase.
In FY 19-20, WRD’s Migratory Bird Program:
- Captured and banded 63 American Woodcock, including 11 with satellite transmitters in partnership with a larger multi-state research project.
- Captured and banded 660 Canada Geese.
- Captured and banded 590 Wood Ducks.

- Maintained 885 Wood Duck nest boxes out of 1,985 total boxes across the state that produced an estimated 8,087 ducklings.
-Handled 154 technical guidance contacts for Canada Geese.
- Issued 57 permits to allow landowners to manage nuisance problems caused by Canada Geese.

- Captured and banded 1652 Mourning Doves.
- Conducted a mail survey of 325 golf courses: 87% had geese with an average flock size of 47 geese.
- Monitored expansion of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks into 71 Georgia counties.
- Counted 61 Mottled Ducks and 89 Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in the Altamaha WMA summer aerial survey.
- Began a project to replace the water control structure at the Blanton Creek waterfowl impoundment to improve management of 50 acres of wetlands.
- Managed 14,558 acres of wetlands on 31 impoundments across the state.
- Planted 3,004 acres on 55 dove fields across the state for hunting opportunity.
This year, the Private Lands Program (PLP) was marked by a lot of new beginnings. We started the year with a new biologist Allison Colter, new administrative assistant Lori Downs and a new program manager Brad Alexander. Soon after the new year, new biologists Mary Nieminen and Diana McGrath joined the team. In November, Noah McCoard moved on to a position with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) where we look forward to working with him to continue to improve wildlife habitat on private lands. We are excited to have Erin Cork and Tony Kroeger joining the team at the beginning of FY 2021!

We also finalized a new agreement with Quail Forever (QF) to increase private lands conservation efforts in Georgia. Through a partnership with WRD, NRCS and QF was able to hire 3 new biologists that will provide wildlife habitat technical assistance to landowners.

These NRCS programs provide financial assistance to landowners to improve habitat through such practices as prescribed burning and tree thinning. In the past 4 years, the WLFW - Bobwhite program has provided $800,000 dollars to improve 12,000 acres of quail habitat. The WLFW - Gopher Tortoise program has provided roughly $7.4 million dollars to improve over 51,000 acres of habitat for gopher tortoise and other pine savanna species. We look forward to seeing what opportunities these programs provide with a new round of contracts due to be signed during the summer of 2020.

Due to delays with NRCS contracts, we did not sign any new Bobwhite Quail Initiative contracts this year. We continued to provide technical assistance and do compliance checks on the contracts signed that are still active. Since 2016, this program has provided $117,639 in incentives to improve the

Prescribed burn on private land.

QF biologist Noah Smith on a site visit with BQI biologist Allison Coulter (taking picture) providing onsite technical assistance to a private landowner.
success of NRCS contracts that produce high quality habitat for quail in our BQI focal areas. We have also begun two new partnerships with Georgia Forestry Commission that will provide funding to landowners and develop landowner cooperatives to give landowners the tools they need to improve pine savanna habitat on their properties.

Our primary focus continues to be providing technical assistance to landowners across the state on a variety of topics including bobwhites, turkeys, deer, hellbenders, golden-winged warblers, native grazing, pollinators, field and stream buffers and prescribed burning.

Other accomplishments in FY2020:
- Provided technical assistance to 637 people who manage a collective 168,186 acres.
- Wrote 82 new plans for 34,150 acres and followed up with 434 people who manage 69,629 acres.
- Participated in 44 outreach events reaching over 4,100 people including a BQI field day at Di-Lane WMA attended by 26 folks despite heavy rain.
- Updated and edited the quail management handbook and one-page handouts available at georgiawildlife.com/bobwhite-quail.
- Increased efforts to monitor population trends and provide more data to set sustainable harvest regulations for quail.
- Increased spring breeding bird counts with assistance from region and Wildlife Conservation staff. Spring counts were done on 23 WMAs, 2 private properties and 1 federal property (up from 6 WMAs and 1 private property in FY2019). These counts monitor for 7 species that utilize upland savanna habitats, including Northern Bobwhite, Bachman’s Sparrow, Prairie Warbler, Loggerhead Shrike, Indigo Bunting, Field Sparrow and Painted Bunting.
- Continued coordinating fall covey counts on 9 WMAs, 2 private properties and 1 federal property.
- Improved collection of hunter harvest records by updating the hunter harvest record cards and installing new collection boxes on 10 WMAs and creating a Survey123 app to be used by hunters to submit harvest data.
Several prolonged and complex projects made significant forward progress in FY 2020. Not the least of which are renovations to both ferry docks, renovation of the lighthouse and construction of multiple parking areas at Meridian and Marsh Landing. Vacancies in several program areas, retirements, and significant staff changes with island partners like State Parks have created challenges in long-term project administration and with daily tasks of island operations. Continued staff provision for island solid waste management, water supply, transportation and other needs accounted for significant amounts of staff time and operational budgets.

While no tropical systems directly hit Sapelo Island there were still impacts from Hurricane Dorian and other heavy weather events in which WRD staff led on-island clean up and recovery efforts. Since mid-March, significant time and energy has been devoted to COVID-19 response as related to programming and services provided by WRD. Modifying services to meet public health mandates while providing for needs of island partners and the public has been a constant obligation. While overall island visitation is down as a result of the pandemic, it has been surprising to see some of WRD’s services in normal or even greater demand.

**Ferry Operation**
- Safely transported over 51,200 passengers to and from Sapelo Island.
- Made 11 emergency medical evacuations.
- Mobilized and evacuated for Hurricane Dorian.
- Successfully completed U.S. Coast Guard inspections for both island vessels.
- Invested significant time into renovation planning for both Meridian and Marsh Landing docks and completed engineering and contracting process.
- Invested significant time into ADA compliance on vessels and dockside facilities as well as purchased an ADA-compliant wheelchair lift.
- Hired new Vessel Captain Supervisor.
- Completed parking lot renovations at Marsh Landing and Meridian.
- Completed causeway renovations at Meridian.
- Completed public restroom ADA renovations.
- Created and continue to implement COVID-19 operational plans to protect crew, residents and visitors.

![New ADA-compliant wheelchair-lift for the ferry system.](image)

**Other Operations**
- Provided clean, reliable water to residents of the Hog Hammock Community and successfully completed monthly, annual and other sampling and reporting.
- Repaired water line leaks and installed new service connections.
- Maintained solid waste collection site for Sapelo Island, public and private partners.
- Transported 107 tons of solid waste to county landfill via 50 box loads on lift truck.
- Organized and conducted 32 barge runs.
- Staff invested significant time into maintaining roads and coordinating with GA Power on island electricity failures and heavy weather issues.
• Coordinated and participated in delivery of over 67,000 gallons of fuel to island fuel station.

• Parking areas at Meridian and Marsh Landing were expanded and renovated as several years of planning culminated in these months-long construction projects. WRD coordinated on-site logistics and communicated with impacted island partners throughout project construction.

• WRD staff coordinated with Hog Hammock residents involved in projects in the Behavior Cemetery. WRD provided heavy equipment ops, staff time and barge transportation.

Special Projects

• WRD staff worked with partners in NOAA and Parks to secure over $250,000 in grant funding to complete projects associated with the lighthouse. As of the close of the fiscal year, the projects have been bid and are awaiting contracts. A new pavilion, walking path, interpretive signage and elevated boardwalk are key components of the project. Renovations to the lighthouse, range beacon, oil houses and cistern were completed over the past year. NOAA funding provided for removal and reconstruction of the elevated boardwalk damaged by Tropical Storm Irma.

• Coordinated with Public Service Commission, GA Power, Hog Hammock Community Public Library and several private contractors to install a solar pavilion at the library. Staff also coordinated a ribbon-cutting event and transported multiple contractors and visitors throughout project.

• Several WRD staff participated in management planning with USFWS. These multiple-day planning workshops dealt with federal properties adjacent to Sapelo Island and throughout the Georgia coast.
Sapelo Island NERR Annual Highlights FY 2019–2020

FY 2020 was a year of significant progress on both administrative and structural plans. NOAA’s Section 312 Evaluation, the first in 12 years, identified numerous Sapelo Island Natural Estuarine Research Reserve (SINEER) program strengths and accomplishments, and pointed to several areas of opportunity for the future. SINERR staff completed the full draft of a new management plan for the reserve, focused around an ambitious and exciting new strategic plan. As far as facilities and infrastructure, we are moving forward on renovating the 25-yr old Nature Trail boardwalk, creating new office space in Long Tabby, and expanding and re-imagining the Sapelo Island Visitors Center which opened in 1995. Both SINERR and the DNR Island Manager are partnering on a 200th Anniversary “make-over” for the Sapelo Island Lighthouse, including refurbishing the tower and adding new visitor amenities such as a picnic pavilion, replacing interpretive signs, and constructing a new boardwalk to replace the one damaged by Hurricane Irma.

Research
- Selected first Natural Estuarine Research Reserve Margaret A. Davidson Fellowship Program Fellow.
- Purchased a 19 ft Carolina skiff and Polaris UTV.

- Facilitated 10 new field research projects on Sapelo conducted by partners.
- Research Coordinator completed FAA UAV Pilot’s course, obtained drone pilot’s license.
- Submitted $98,000 NERRS Science Collaborative “Catalyst” proposal to NOAA.

Education
- Engaged over 1800 students (35+ classes) in Education Program classes on Sapelo Island.
- Trained 87 teachers in 7 professional development workshops.
- Provided outreach presentations to ~1,200 participants in 70 Public Tours and ~370 participants in 15 Group Tours.
- Helped train future coastal leaders in DNR Leadership Academy, Leadership Glynn, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- Ordered new tour bus to be used for Public Tours, Group tours and VIP guests.

Stewardship
- Completed the design plan for renovation of Nature Trail and submitted $300K grant proposal to NOAA.

Research Coordinator Dr. Rachel Guy and SWMP technician Thompson Rose sample vegetation at the Sentinel Site.

Education Coordinator Adam Mackinnon gives teacher training workshop at the Long Tabby Education Lab.
• Completed a draft report on freshwater wetlands on Sapelo Island WMA.
• Over 300 Friends of Sapelo Volunteers contributed 1,100 hours to repair, maintenance, and property enhancement projects on Sapelo.

Visitors Center
• Roughly 12,500 visitors to Sapelo bought ferry tickets, while about 9,700 others enjoyed exhibits & displays.
• Along with DNR Engineering and Construction, developed Scope of Work plans for major renovation of exhibits & displays (includes moderate facility expansion) and will submit $600K grant proposal to NOAA in 2021.
• Contracted parking lot improvements and installed new ADA-compatible water fountain near entrance.

Coastal Training
• Completed major Needs Assessment & Marketing Analysis in partnership with DNR’s Coastal Resources Division Coastal Management Program that will be implemented once Coastal Training Program Coordinator position is filled.

Administration
• NOAA presented SINERR Section 312 Evaluation “Findings Report” to DNR WRD.
• Successfully transitioned annual NOAA award cycle to match GA DNR Fiscal Year cycle.
• Developed design plan for renovation of storage room in Long Tabby into a new office.
• Thanks, and big hugs to SINEER Volunteer Coordinator Linda Daniels with Friends of Sapelo after 12 years of warm, wonderful and thoughtful help.
• Best wishes to Visitors Center Clerk Pat Carson on her retirement after 20+ years of welcoming Sapelo visitors and guests.
• Best wishes to Secretary Lu Mutzabaugh after 10 years of staffing the Sapelo WRD “hub central” in Long Tabby!
Game Management’s Urban Wildlife Program (UWP) has completed its first full year. The UWP has expanded to include six staff members, a program manager, a lead technician, two technician 2s, a wildlife biologist, and a communications specialist.

The main objective of the UWP is to provide technical assistance and field response to customers in the metro Atlanta area (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties) experiencing human-wildlife conflicts. While most technical assistance can be provided over the phone, staff conducted 488 site visits to help advise residents and mitigate conflicts in person. Examples of on-site responses would be to big game species (bear, turkey, or deer) conflicts or rabies vector species when Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators or animal control agencies are not an option. During the UWP’s first year, staff have responded to 1,238 calls in their core coverage area plus an additional 112 calls outside their coverage area when region staff needed assistance.

In addition to providing technical assistance for human-wildlife conflict, staff also conduct education and outreach for interested civic groups or local governments as well as provide media interviews when requested. Over the past year, the UWP has given 35 presentations to 2,524 participants and provided 22 media interviews to 12 different media outlets.

Another large part of the program’s outreach effort this fiscal year was to update the WRD’s living with wildlife webpage. The main page was updated, and three additional pages were added to address common questions customers ask WRD. Four high conflict species factsheets were updated to reflect current information on conflict mitigation. UWP staff also assist with WRD’s new Talking Nature Tuesday series on social media and provide other content for social media posts.

Staff assisted UGA in an urban coyote camera research project. Thirty cameras were set throughout the metro Atlanta area for 3 weeks with a bait and scent lure. A novel object was also placed at half of the sites to see how the animal interacted with it. Videos of coyotes at these urban sites will be compared to videos of coyotes at rural camera sites to evaluate any difference in behavior. This is part of a nationwide study being conducted by the USDA Wildlife Research Center. In addition, UWP submitted a research proposal and received funding for a project with UGA’s Deer Lab to evaluate alternative methods of immobilizing deer in an urban environment. This project is set to start August 2020.

In an effort to improve communications with our partner agencies, the UWP met with 6 animal control agencies to discuss how our program can benefit them and their citizens. UWP also met with two DNR LED sections, presented at the current LED Academy class, statewide Extension Agent meeting and DNR 2020 Leadership Academy Class.

New Urban Wildlife Program logo designed during FY19-20.
Urban Wildlife Program Accomplishments
FY 2019–2020

Calls by County
August 21, 2019 - June 30, 2020
(n = 1,350)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Number of calls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dekalb</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayette</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forsyth</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwinnett</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of calls the UWP by county during FY 19–20.

Action Taken
August 21, 2019 - June 30, 2020
(n = 1,350)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site Visit</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Call</td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Reply</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of actions taken by the UWP during FY 19–20.

Nature of Call
August 21, 2019 - June 30, 2020
(n = 1,350)

- Sick, Injured, Orphaned: 2%
- In Area, In Yard: 1%
- In Structure: 1%
- Threatened Human/Animal: 1%
- Property Damage: 3%
- Dead Animal: 10%
- Other: 39%
- 43%

Nature of calls taken by the UWP during FY 19–20.

Phone Calls by Species
August 21, 2019 - June 30, 2020
(n = 1,350)

- Bats: 2%
- Bobcats: 3%
- Turkeys: 4%
- Opossums: 13%
- Geese: 15%
- Raccoons: 15%
- Foxes: 15%
- Birds: 15%
- Other: 15%
- Coyotes: 15%
- Deer: 13%
- 20%

Number of phone calls by species taken by the UWP during FY 19–20.
In FY 2020, WRD’s Wild turkey program:
- Continued long-term population monitoring of turkey populations statewide.
- Supported turkey research in the Georgia Piedmont.
- Continued outreach and collaboration with partners.

Population and Harvest Monitoring

Production Survey
DNR personnel and volunteers record all turkeys seen with or without poults, during June, July and August. Average observed poults per hen are calculated for each year and used as a measure of relative quality of the reproductive season as compared to the long-term data set.

Poults/per hen values have decreased markedly since the survey began in 1978. In 2019, an average of 1.5 poults/hen were observed, which is slightly above the 5-year average of 1.46 poults/hen.

Avid Hunter Survey
The spring turkey population is indexed through cooperators reporting their daily hunting statistics throughout the turkey hunting season. Two metrics calculated include hours it takes to harvest a turkey (a measure of hunter effort), and gobblers heard per hour (an index of the male turkey population). Note: Data presented is preliminary, as not all survey results have been received for the 2020 season.
Statewide Harvest
Statewide, an estimated 45,205 (down 4% from 2019) turkey hunters harvested 17,028 gobblers in 2020 (no change from 2019). Jakes accounted for 1,540 of the total gobblers harvested (9%), unchanged from 2019.

Wildlife Management Area Harvest
In 2020, 17,030 hunters signed in on 115 WMAs, a 15% increase over 2019. These hunters harvested 1164 gobblers, a 34% increase over 2019. Jakes comprised 16% of the WMA harvest. Overall, hunters had a success rate of 6.8% on wildlife management areas in Georgia.

Research
Ecology of Wild Turkeys in the Georgia Piedmont
The University of Georgia and WRD are conducting research on two WMAs in the Piedmont to investigate several aspects of turkey ecology. On BF Grant and Cedar Creek Wildlife Management Areas, researchers are looking at gobbling activity and if it is affected by hunters looking at movements and habitat use by males, and reproductive behavior and success of hens. They are using autonomous song meters to track gobbling and using gps technology to monitor turkey movements and reproductive activity.

As part of this research, since 2019, spring turkey season on Cedar Creek and Cedar Creek-Little
Wild Turkey Program
Annual Highlights
FY 2019–2020

River has opened two weeks later than the statewide season to determine if a delay in opening the season impacts gobbling activity and reproductive behaviors and success.

**Gobbler Banding to Determine Harvest Rates on select Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)**

Prior to the Spring 2020 turkey season, the turkey program began a gobbler banding project to determine harvest mortality on select WMAs. Birds were banded on Dawson Forest WMA (Region 2), Yuchi and Di-Lane WMAs (Region 3), and Ceylon WMA (Region 6). Total birds banded and band returns are presented below. This project will be continued in FY 2021 on these areas and expanded to all regions of the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Banded</th>
<th>Harvested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Di-Lane WMA</td>
<td>2 adults</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuchi WMA</td>
<td>1 adult, 8 juveniles</td>
<td>1 juvenile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceylon WMA</td>
<td>5 adults</td>
<td>3 adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawson Forest WMA</td>
<td>6 adults</td>
<td>1 adult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Banded gobblers and returns on WMAs in 2020._

**Collaboration**

The wild turkey program enjoys a productive partnership with the Georgia chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. WMAs across the state received National Wild Turkey Foundation Super Fund allocations to complete projects such as:

- Over 5,000 acres of prescribed fire conducted on WMAs along the coast.
- Understory hardwood herbicide treatments on almost 400 acres on 3 WMAs.
- Over 400 acres of invasive plant control treatments and 75 acres of food plot plantings on Bullard Creek WMA.
- Purchase of a drone-mounted aerial ignition device for use on prescribed fires.

_Herbicide treatment on West Point WMA to control hardwood understory growth._

_Banded gobbler on Ceylon Wildlife Management Area._
Since 2016 turkey harvest has trended upward in NW Georgia. The 2020 turkey season exemplified this positive trend with Polk County leading the state in terms of total reported harvest.

For Region I WMA’s, a total of 3,664 hunters harvested 412 turkeys. Hunters in Region I had the most successful season ever in terms of hunter success — 11.2%.

The 2019-2020 fiscal year is clearly one for the record books in many ways:

- Six Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) set record harvests – Coosawattee-Carter’s Lake, Coosawattee, Sheffield, Sprewell Bluff East, Sprewell Bluff West, and West Point Dixie Creek.
- Records for highest harvest per square mile were set on Coosawattee-Carter’s Lake, Coosawattee, Sprewell Bluff East, Sprewell Bluff West, and West Point Dixie Creek.
- And lastly, records for highest hunter success were set on Cohutta (17.2%), Coosawattee-Carter’s Lake (9.3%), Coosawattee (12.8%), Crockford-Pigeon Mountain (23.9%), Joe Kurz (23.0%), McGraw Ford (7.0%), Paulding Forest (13.5%), Pinelog (13.2%), Sprewell Bluff West (6.5%), and Zahnd (14.3%) Wildlife Management Areas.
Region 1 Accomplishments  
FY 2019–2020

- Prescribed burning efforts were down significantly this year. Weather hampered early opportunities and concerns for the impact of smoke on citizens with compromised respiratory systems resulted in decreased activity later. Despite these challenges, staff still accomplished prescribed burning 3,437 acres.

- Completed road improvement projects on the following Wildlife Management Areas:
  - Coosawattee
  - Paulding Forest
  - Berry College
  - Pine Log
  - West Point

- This year was a busy one for nuisance bear activities. The first bear crop damage permits were also issued.
- Region 1 staff worked hard and succeeded in obtaining the requested CWD samples for all counties in the region.

resulted in Region 1 helping to provide technical assistance to 40% of the state population.

Prescribed burn on West Point WMA.

Wildlife Tech Foster Hartman with banded American Woodcock.

Gravel being spread on road at West Point WMA.

Sunflowers planted at a Joe Kurz WMA dove field.
Region 2 Annual Highlights
FY 2019–2020

Black bears continue to be the focal species of attention in Region 2. From staging the first ever north Georgia dog-bear hunt simultaneously on Chestatee and Chattahoochee WMAs to responding to numerous human-bear conflict complaints, region staff spent many personnel hours on bears in FY 2020.

During the 9-day quota hunt on Chestatee and Chattahoochee WMAs, eleven separate parties harvested a total of 61 bears during the hunt. Prior to the hunt, nine bears on the 2 WMAs had been fitted with GPS tracking collars as part of an ongoing research effort to monitor bear movements before, during, and after the hunts.

Region 2 assisted DNR’s Parks, Recreation, and Historic Sites Division by trucking a large water storage tank from Red Top Mountain State Park in Acworth to Hard Labor Creek State Park in Rutledge. It would have cost parks thousands of dollars to hire a contractor to move it.

A storm event in late fall caused a strong straight-line wind event on the Chattahoochee National Forest. The U.S. Forest Service asked for and received assistance from Region 2 associates in clearing hundreds of trees from Forest Service roads.
Region 2 Accomplishments
FY 2019–2020

• Planted and cultivated 204 acres of dove fields and planted and/or maintained 670 acres of wildlife openings.

• Conducted a total of 608 programs to 18,649 participants out of the Smithgall Woods Educational Center. Before the COVID-19 mandated stay at home order in mid-March, Wildlife Interpretive Specialist Kathy Church, was on track for another record year of in-person programming impact. In response to the COVID-19 limitations, she ramped up online and social media programming resulting in a reach of 133,583 people with 23,482 views, as well creating 14 new digital programs and materials.

• Applied approximately 5,580 tons of gravel on WMAs, positively impacting about 28 miles of improved access.

• Had 920 documented wildlife technical guidance contacts comprising 1,370 personnel-hours of assistance to the public and other local and state government agencies.
Game Management Region 3 had another outstanding year filled with challenges that tested our ingenuity. Heavy winter rains challenged prescribed burning efforts. Staff tried to utilize every possible burn day including those on weekends to accomplish roughly 70% of our burn acre goals.

Region staff also adopted a new planting technique to combat herbicide resistant pigweed in dove fields and are hopeful that the new planting technique will ensure a better dove field and reduce the need for herbicide use in these fields.

Region 3 also had the opportunity to get involved in the Eastern Woodcock Migration Research Cooperative. This allowed our technicians to show their creativity and resulted in an invention that has been called a new standard woodcock trapping technique across the Atlantic Coast.

The Wildlife Resources Division joined the Eastern Woodcock Migration Research Cooperative, an international research group that seeks to better understand American woodcock migration throughout eastern North America. Region 3 led the way in this endeavor for Georgia with 51 woodcocks banded in Region 3 out of 63 banded statewide.

In late January and early February, WRD biologists and technicians used thermal scopes to locate woodcock in roosting areas at night and captured them with nets. Birds were banded with numbered aluminum leg bands and a select few were marked with satellite transmitters that weigh between 4 and 7 grams. The transmitters periodically send data on each woodcock’s location. Using these GPS tags, we can monitor woodcock during their migration. We are principally interested in determining: (1) when woodcock initiate migration, (2) how long it takes individuals to complete migration, (3) survival during migration, and (4) stopover sites where woodcock rest and refuel during migration. Check out the project website at www.woodcockmigration.org.
Region 3 Accomplishments
FY 2019–2020

- Prescribed burned a total of 5,050 acres on 10 WMAs.
- Planted 2,650 acres of summer and winter food plots with peas, clover, sorghum, wheat, and oats.
- Planted 617 acres of dove fields on 11 WMAs with sunflower, brown top millet, and wheat.
- Improved 570 acres of woodlands using mechanical or chemical means.
- Spread 9,000 tons of gravel over 195 miles of roads to improve public access.
- Planted 200 acres of loblolly pine.
- Responded to 2,345 customer requests for assistance managing conflicts with wildlife.
- Responded to 1,243 customer inquiries about wildlife management, WMA management, regulations, licensing, etc.
- Wildlife Technician, Jerome Hay, was awarded NWTF’s Wildlife Manager of the Year for 2019.

The effort to combat glyphosate-resistant pigweed in the dove fields at Alexander and Di-Lane Plantation WMAs continued in FY 2020.

A Monosem no-till planter was selected and several cover crops were utilized (wheat, rye, and fallow) to determine which provided the best weed control. No-till is a form of conservation tillage and provides many environmental benefits beyond potential weed control. Conservation tillage decreases soil erosion, improves soil moisture retention, builds soil quality with increased organic matter residue, and enhances wildlife habitat by providing improved cover and foraging conditions at the ground level.

Preliminary results look promising for the no-till system. However, it should be noted that pre- and post-emergent herbicides have still been utilized in these plots and conditions for favorable herbicide response have been much more prevalent so far this growing season.

Region personnel plan to assess herbicide use, weed control, and crop success to determine whether the no-till system provides any cost savings over conventional dove field planting.

Region 3 personnel researched a no-till planting system for sunflowers with the end goal being less soil disturbance that would lead to more effective weed control in the dove fields.
Region 4 Annual Highlights

FY 2019-2020

Region 4 recreation lands increased by 6,324 acres this year with the addition of the new Canoochee Sandhills WMA. Management of the WMA will focus on recreational opportunities and restoring the longleaf pine ecosystem. The WMA was purchased utilizing a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Coastal Wetland Conservation grant, a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Acres for America (WalMart) grant, the National Wild Turkey Federation, State of Georgia bond funds, Knobloch Family Foundation and Bobolink Foundation funds associated with the Georgia Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative, and The Conservation Fund. The WMA habitat is a mix of sandhills, flatwoods, bay swamps, and floodplain forests. The area opened just in time for the 2020 turkey season and 203 hunters took advantage of the opportunity by harvesting 8 turkeys.

Another addition to recreational opportunity in Region 4 came through a creative Conservation Easement on property in Jeff Davis and Appling Counties. Staff worked with DNR Real Estate, The Conservation Fund (TCF), and NRCS to develop a recreational access and conservation land easement on 6,048 acres of TCF land that became part of Bullard Creek WMA in December of 2019. DNR will control hunting, fishing and recreational access on this new property that brings the total acreage at Bullard to over 15,500 acres.

Another highlight of the region is very special for one person in particular, Mr. Dwight G. Waters. After 30 years of service to the Wildlife Resources Division, decided to retire. He served as the project leader of the alligator and furbearer projects after starting his career on the coast of Georgia working on the barrier islands. We wish him luck as rides off into the sunset!
Region 4 Accomplishments
FY 2019–2020

- Prescribe-burned 7,666 acres on WMAs.
- Installed 330 miles of firebreaks on WMAs to provide control of prescribed burns and protect unburned areas.

Prescribed Burn Acres Completed by Area

- Alapaha River
- Alligator Creek
- Beaverdam
- Bullard Creek
- Flat Tub
- Horse Creek
- Moody Forest
- Ocmulgee
- Ohoopee Dunes
- River Bend

- Made 328 contacts for media requests and wildlife education programs.
- Completed 165 miles of survey lines to gauge alligator, black bear, and neotropical migrant bird population densities and trends.
- Collected 145 CWD samples from deer from WMAs, road kills, and Big Buck contests.
- Banded 536 doves and wood ducks to evaluate populations densities, species movement, and survival.
- Managed 866 acres of dove fields for public access.
- Managed 262 wetland acres for waterfowl through water level control and herbicide application.
- Planted, disked, or otherwise manipulated 512 acres of food plots to provide forage and cover for wildlife.
- Improved WMA infrastructure including constructing additions to equipment storage facilities at Alapaha River WMA (top left), Bullard Creek WMA (top right), Horse Creek WMA (bottom left) and Ohoopee Dunes WMA check station (bottom right).

- Mowed, graded, rocked and maintained 649 miles of roads and trails for public access to WMAs.
- Checked and maintained 144 of the 261 wood duck nest boxes in Region 4.
- Harvested 580 deer and 145 turkeys (hunter success 6%) on 120,220 acres of WMA land, and tagged 149 bears during the 12-day S Zone bear season.
- Answered 816 requests for nuisance wildlife abatement including 605 deer crop damage permits.
- Answered 230 requests for agency assistance and wildlife management technical assistance.
- Made 112 contacts for diseased/injured wildlife.

Improved infrastructure at several Region 4 Wildlife Management Areas.
Region restructuring within the Wildlife Resources Division resulted in Region 5 acquiring nine WMA tracts totaling 38,951 acres. The number of counties in the Region increased from 29 to 31. Four counties, Muscogee, Harris, Talbot and Taylor were added on the north end of the Region and two counties, Tift and Turner were lost on the east side.

The Region is still dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Michael on the prescribed burning program in the southern portion of the Region. Large fuels from unsalvaged downed timber have negatively impacted prescribed burning on Silver Lake WMA.

Road access has been restored to normal but there are still some firebreaks and hunter access trails that are affected by downed trees and debris on Silver Lake, Mayhaw and Chickasawhatchee WMAs.

Another type of natural disaster, the Corona Virus (Covid-19) impacted the entire planet beginning in January 2020. The indirect impacts of this viral pandemic have resulted in decreased prescribed burning productivity due to reduced staff availability. There was also an increased use of WMAs during the pandemic during turkey season which resulted in an increased turkey harvest. The increased turkey harvest will further complicate the decline in turkey populations and will likely result in lower turkey productivity and harvest rates in future years without science-based revisions to the season structure and bag limit.

Dove hunting opportunities continue to increase in the Region with 106 more acres planted this year at Chattahoochee Fall Line WMA Hilliard Plantation Tract and an additional 60 acres planned there for FY 2021. The total dove field acres for FY 2020 were 573.

Quail population monitoring in the Region was suspended in FY 2018 due to Hurricane Michael. Monitoring resumed this year with density numbers approaching or at the target of 0.5 birds per acre (one bird per 2 acres).
The breach at the Cordele Hatchery waterfowl impoundment was repaired this year allowing management of the impoundment to resume. Approximately 4,200 cubic yards of fill dirt was needed and over 75 man/days of labor. The 15-acre impoundment was planted following completion of these repairs.

Prescribed burning totals for the Region in FY 2020 were 15,358 acres which is a good recovery from last year’s total 8,326 due to effects of the hurricane and region reorganization.

- Improved 144 acres of brood fields with imazapyr applications to release ragweed.
- Planted 15 acres of waterfowl impoundments in Japanese millet, 37 acres of food plots in browntop millet, peas, clover, cool season forages and 573 acres of dove fields in wheat, browntop millet and sunflowers.
- Seasonally disked 515 acres of wildlife openings to improve brood rearing habitat.
Game Management Region 6 had a successful year, while meeting challenges from another wet year and fall storms. Hurricane Dorian approached the Georgia coast, just days ahead of the opening of dove season, leaving many of the prepared fields saturated. Similar conditions continued into the Early Youth Firearms Deer hunts at the end of September and early October.

Staff of the Lower Altamaha Corridor work group successfully improved an aging road system. These improvements providing better access to a significant portion of Sansavilla WMA. This was an essential step toward hosting the first Deer-dog Quota Hunt on the property.

Progress continues to be made on work associated with the $8.72 million Ducks Unlimited site-specific agreement for repairs and improvements to Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area. Phase II of the project was completed on Rhett’s Island, improving the management of 1,800 acres of brackish-water wetlands. Phase III is currently underway on all four units of Champney Island impoundments.

In collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Section, the 16,000 acre, Ceylon WMA was opened to the public in early spring of 2020. Three extremely successful quota turkey hunts were hosted immediately following the opening. The protection and future acquisition of this property marks a significant milestone in the continuation of land conservation in the southeastern corner of the state, achieving both game and non-game goals, while also greatly increasing public opportunity and access.
Region 6 Accomplishments
FY 2019–2020

• Provided hunting, fishing and outdoor recreational opportunities for users on 234,510 acres WMA, PFA and VPA lands.
• Actively managed and enhanced 3,160 acres of impounded wetlands, including 34.5 miles of dikes, water control structures and other critical infrastructure damaged during hurricane and storm events, for waterfowl, shorebirds and associate wildlife.

![Successful waterfowl hunter on Altamaha WMA.](image1)

• Processed nuisance alligator removal permits for 130 public complaints.
• Conducted endangered species nest protection along 18.5 miles of beach and adjacent habitats.
• Repaired and improved 24 WMA structures used for WMA operations and maintenance.
• Issued 200+ crop damage permits to farmers covering 35,000+ acreage of farmland.
• Assisted the Wild Turkey research program with capture and tagging of gobblers on Ceylon WMA.

![Region 6 staff assisted with the Wild Turkey research project on Ceylon WMA.](image2)

• Planted, enhanced and maintained 639 acres of wildlife openings and fields to benefit turkey, quail, dove and other game species.
• Maintained and improved more than 600 miles of WMA roads to public access.
• Provided island access, support and transportation to 1,095 quota hunters on waterfowl, deer and hog hunts.
• Staffed check stations on 72 days of check-in deer and bear hunts.
• Conducted visual and remote camera population surveys for waterfowl, deer and alligators along 156 miles of survey route.
• Safely applied prescribed fire to 9,938 acres of regional conservation land to enhance wildlife habitat and assisted Interagency Burn Team partners with burns on an additional 807 acres of land.

• Held staff training events for prescribed fire, First Aid/CPR, chainsaw operation, chemical immobilization of wildlife, and deer management stewardship.
• Continued making progress on critical repairs and enhancements to the road and bridge system on Ossabaw Island.
Acknowledgments

This annual report was developed and updated by Game Management and Public Affairs staff of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division. We thank the many individuals who helped compile and review the information provided.

Download a version with the latest updates: https://georgiawildlife.com/about/what-we-do

Together, with your commitment to conservation, we can protect Georgia’s incredible natural resources for generations to come.

In our state there is a critical connection between car ownership and wildlife conservation—a car’s back bumper.

Sales and renewals of Georgia’s wildlife license plates provide vital support for conserving rare species such as bald eagles, restoring bobwhite quail and enhancing trout fisheries.

These tags are the number one source of non-federal funds for Georgia Department of Natural Resources programs dedicated to nongame wildlife and bobwhite quail, and depend wholly on donations, not state funds.

Bottom line: Wildlife is important to Georgians! Let’s show our support!

Only $25 more to upgrade your license plate today!