Loggerhead sea turtle *(Caretta caretta):* The carnivorous loggerhead sea turtle is one of the seven species of sea turtles alive today. The loggerhead has a vast range and can be found in the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans, as well as the Mediterranean and Caribbean seas. It ranges from the open ocean to bays, lagoons, and estuaries (where rivers flow out to sea). Female loggerheads do not begin laying eggs until they are between 15 – 30 years old. Once a female begins breeding, she will often return to the same site where she hatched to lay her eggs. The female loggerhead sea turtle lays an average of 100 eggs in a clutch (group of eggs), typically laying three to four clutches each nesting season. When the season is over, females do not breed again for two to three years. Sea turtle numbers (loggerhead and all other types of sea turtles) have declined due to a variety of threats. Humans have collected eggs and other body parts for food and decoration. Turtles' nesting habitat is degraded as beaches are developed. Artificial lights installed on the beaches confuse newly hatched turtles, due to their instinct to move from the ocean – the habitat they need to survive. Climate change could further affect turtles as sea levels rise and flood nesting areas. The temperature of the turtle's nest determines which eggs become female or male. As temperatures warm, it will likely mean fewer males and thus reduce genetic diversity in the species. (FEDERALLY THREATENED/STATE ENDANGERED.)

Red-cockaded woodpecker *(Picoides borealis):* This woodpecker inhabits old growth pine forests year-round in the southeast United States. Each year, female and male breeding pairs work together to incubate a clutch of three to five eggs. Young male siblings also help raise the young birds. The red-cockaded woodpecker is considered a keystone species, since the nesting cavities they excavate are used by so many other animals. Many of the forests where these birds live are used for timber harvesting, which limits the number of old trees that are suitable for nesting, and which also fragments the birds' habitat. The specific habitat upon which this woodpecker relies has been reduced by 97 percent from its original range. This has caused the specie's numbers to significantly decline. Woodpeckers frequently use the same nesting sites from year to year, which may make them less resilient in the face of changing habitat. Impacts of climate change further threaten the woodpecker, as some populations have been devastated by hurricanes and loss of trees due to pine park beetle infestations. Some birds have also been unable to adapt the timing of their breeding to the earlier emergence of insects. (THREATENED)

Gopher Tortoise *(Gopherus polyphemus)*

The gopher tortoise prefers well-drained, sandy soils found in habitats such as longleaf pine sandhills, scrub, pine flatwoods and coastal dunes. They enjoy the same type of habitat as the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. The gopher tortoise is considered a keystone species because its burrows provide shelter for more than 350 other species living in their habitat. Females lay their eggs near the entrance of the burrow, and many are eaten by coyotes, raccoons, and eagles passing by unguarded nests. Gopher tortoise eggs take up to 80 to 110 days to hatch and babies are independent from birth. Gopher tortoises are slow to reach sexual maturity (ages 10 – 20 years) and they have a low reproductive rate. Only about 3 – 5% of the young tortoises survive. The gopher tortoise is the only tortoise in the Southeast and is the official reptile of Georgia. Habitat destruction is a significant threat to the tortoise. Threats include habitat fragmentation, degradation, predation, inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms and incompatible use of herbicides in forest management. Road kill is one of the major causes of death for adult tortoises. The tortoise is threatened in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama but are not protected in eastern Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. (FEDERAL CANDIDATE FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES -IN REVIEW/ THREATENED AT STATE LEVEL)

North Atlantic Right Whale *(Eubalaena glacialis)*

Right whales received their name from whalers who began calling them “right whales” because they were the right whales to kill; easy to harpoon and yielding large amounts of valuable oil for fuel and soap. Commercial whaling brought them to the brink of extinction by the early 1900s. In 1935, an international agreement went into effect banning the hunting of all right whales. However, North Atlantic right whales are now one of the rarest of all the great whales. The current population is estimated to be around 300 individuals. Northern right whales mate and approximately 12 months later give birth to a single young calf. Females give birth to one calf every three or four years. Entanglement in fishing gear is one of the greatest threats to the right whale. Fishing gear cuts through the whale’s body causing serious injuries and results in infections and death. Boat collisions, ocean noise and climate change are also threats to the right whale. (FEDERALLY ENDANGERED/STATE ENDANGERED)

Rafinesque's Big-eared bat *(Corynorhinus rafinesquii)*

Rafinesque's big-eared bats are typically found in forested habitats. Roosting sites are usually in or near areas of mature forest, including bottomland and upland hardwoods and pine flatwoods with water nearby. These bats play a key role in controlling insect populations. This species is the least known of any southeastern U.S. bat and are not found anywhere in Georgia regularity. There are few observations due to their highly nocturnal nature. Unlike most bats, which become active well before dark, big-eared bats do not emerge from their rooms until complete darkness has arrived. In late fall, they gather in small groups to mate, then hibernate in caves, rock shelters, mines, and similar structures. Adult females have one pup each year, born in late May or early June. The biggest reason for decline is believed to be loss of habitat, degradation, and pesticides. They are susceptible to environmental change. (NO FEDERAL PROTECTION/STATE RARE)

American Alligator *(Alligator mississippiensis)*

The American alligator populations reached all-time lows in the 1950s, primarily due to market-hunting and habitat loss. In 1987, the alligator was pronounced fully recovered, making it one of the first endangered species success stories. A combined effort by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State wildlife agencies in the South saved these animals. Today there are over two million alligators in the Southeast. Alligators depend on wetlands and in some ways, wetlands depend on them. As apex predators, they help control numbers of rodents and other animals that might overtax the wetland vegetation. Female alligators lay between 20 – 50 eggs in a clutch, are seasonal breeders, and breed once each year. About 1/3 of alligator nests are destroyed by predators or flooding. For nests that survive, an estimated 24 hatchlings will emerge. Only 10 hatchlings will live to one year. The alligator population in Georgia is one of many renewable natural resources that can sustain limited harvest along with biological monitoring and periodic evaluations. Georgia's flourishing alligator population is managed through a regulated hunting season. Additionally, licensed nuisance alligator trappers annually remove about 170 alligators in the state. The American alligator continues to be listed as threatened by similarity of appearance to protect American crocodilians that are still critically endangered. (THREATENED BY SIMILARITY OF APPEARANCE)

Bald Eagle *(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)* The bald eagle is a bird of prey found in North America. In the early part of the twentieth century, bald eagles commonly nested along Georgia's coast and in the Okefenokee Swamp. By the late 1950s eagle numbers had declined and by 1970 there were no bald eagles in Georgia. The high mortality rate and lack of successful reproduction were likely due to the result of habitat loss and environmental contamination by DDT and other toxic chemicals. DDT was outlawed in the United States in 1972. The Endangered Species Act was passed in 1973 and in the same year, Georgia enacted the Endangered Wildlife Act. Their habitat includes estuaries, large lakes, reservoirs, rivers, and some sea coasts. Eagles mate for life and breeding eagles typically lay one to three eggs a year. Young eagles have a high mortality rate due to disease, lack of food, bad weather or dangers associated with humans. The Bald Eagle Protection Act of 1940 (amended in 1972 and 1978) protects the U.S. National Bird from being killed. It is illegal to possess any part of an eagle, including the feathers. (LEAST CONCERN/PROTECTED)

Wood Stork *(Mycteria americana)* The wood stork is the only true stork that regularly occurs in the U.S.

Wood storks breed in Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina. They require both shallow wetlands for feeding and deep wetlands for nesting. If the water is not deep enough, predators are able to access the nests and eat the eggs and young. Attractive feeding sites are depressions in marshes or swamps where fish become concentrated during periods of falling water levels. Wood storks are social animals, feeding in flocks and nesting in large rookeries. Females lay two to five eggs, which both sexes incubate for about one month. An average of two young will fledge under good conditions. The wood stork serves as an indicator species to help identify behavior patterns of surrounding creatures in the ecosystem. Habitat loss and water level changes in Florida have led to the wood stork now nesting in Georgia and South Carolina. About 2500 pairs nest in Georgia. Wood storks are very shy and spook easily from boat traffic or humans that come to close to rookeries. (FEDERALLY THREATENED/STATE ENDANGERED)

Eastern Indigo Snake *(Drymarchon couperi)*

The eastern indigo snake is a massive, black snake. It is the longest snake native to the United States. Eastern indigo snakes are restricted to Florida and southern areas of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. The habitat they are restricted to are areas of pine-oak sandhills, which are usually inhabited by gopher tortoises. These snakes use gopher tortoise burrows as shelter during the winter and during the warmer months for nesting and refuge from intense summer heat. They are associated with the longleaf pine ecosystem and this habitat has experienced widespread loss of range and degradation. Habitat destruction is caused by the extension of urban development. Eastern indigo snakes were an unintended casualty of the gassing of gopher tortoise burrows during rattlesnake round ups. They are immune to the venom of pit vipers, and will readily eat copperheads, cottonmouths, and rattlesnakes. Eggs are laid in May or June with a single clutch containing 4 to 12 eggs. Fearful property owners, domestic animals, highway mortality and pesticides pose a hazard to both adults and juveniles of the species. (FEDERALLY THREATENED/STATE THREATENED)