

TERN TRACKS

Newsletter of The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) ~ www.tern.homestead.com

Spring 2015

Please Join Us!

Enjoy a spring afternoon with your fellow TERN members at the 2015 annual meeting where you can play a role in how TERN will aid Georgia's nongame wildlife in 2015-2016. Bring your canoes and fishing gear, books, boots and binoculars, folding chairs and bag lunch to enjoy a beautiful spring day of outdoor fun along the Persons' Farm Lake!

WHEN: Saturday, May 16

1:00-3:00 p.m.—General membership meeting:

- Election of officers
- Approval of new board members
- Vote on funding of Nongame Conservation Section projects for 2015-2016

3:00-5:00 p.m.—Enjoy visiting with other TERN friends and family while exploring the lakeside flora and fauna.



WHERE: The Persons' Farm, Forsyth, Georgia 31029

DIRECTIONS: Take I-75 to Exit 187 (Highway 83, Forsyth).

Travel west on Hwy. 83 to Monroe County Courthouse Square.

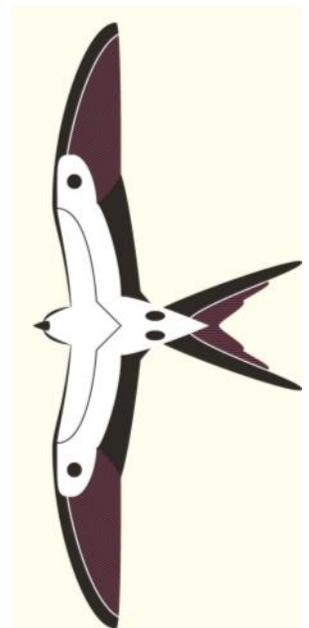
Cross the Square and turn right on Hwy. 41 north to Barnesville and proceed north out of town. Pass a cemetery and then Wilson Propane on the left. Cross a creek and go up a long hill. Turn left on the next paved road (2.2 miles from the Courthouse). The number on the fencepost by the driveway is 1376. Follow this paved driveway 1/4 mile through a pasture until it dead ends at the lake house. For more information, call Wanda Granitz: 478-361-8144

27th Annual Weekend for Wildlife Benefit

Another Successful Year for Nongame Wildlife Conservation

The 27th annual Weekend for Wildlife celebration was a great success raising more than **\$826,000** for Georgia's nongame and endangered wildlife. The event was held February 6-7 at The Cloister Resort on Sea Island. TERN's MarketPlace booth and raffle were a hit with the more than 400 guests, showcasing a variety of unique items celebrating nature. The silent and verbal auction items featured many beautiful works of art, exclusive trips and other magnificent gifts donated by TERN members and Nongame Conservation Section friends. A special thank you to Peggy Everett for her continued support of donating to TERN her exquisite original painting in the verbal auction and to Gogo Ferguson for showcasing her handcrafted jewelry in the TERN MarketPlace and donating a percentage of sales to TERN. These gracious artisans have consistently given of their talents and time to help raise funds for TERN and nongame wildlife in Georgia—Thank you!

The TERN booth, raffle and auction items combined raised more than **\$50,050** at the 2015 event. All the proceeds will be used to fund Nongame Conservation Section projects, chosen by TERN members at the annual membership meeting on Saturday, May 16 at The Persons' Farm in Forsyth, Georgia—see details above.



TERN Officers

President

Brock Hutchins, *Peachtree City*

Vice President

Jim Candler, *Villa Rica*

Secretary

Leigh Callan, *Rome*

Treasurer

Eva Persons, *Forsyth*

TERN Board

Jerry Booker, *Columbus*

Patty Deveau, *Atlanta*

Oscar Dewberry, *Bainbridge*

Jerry Donovan, *Eatonton*

Stacia Hendricks, *Brunswick*

Noel Holcomb, *Plainville*

Walter Hoyt, *Atlanta*

Jim Kluttz, *Tybee Island*

Ron Lee, *Jonesboro*

Dwight McLaurin, *Columbus*

Sandy McLendon, *Perry*

Brooks Schoen, *Atlanta*

Charley Tarver, *Newton*

Lindsay Thomas, Jr., *Watkinsville*

Russell Wright, *Jasper*

Honorary Board Members

Maurice Crenshaw, *Brunswick*

Emmy Minor, *Townsend*

Don Pfitzer, *Lithonia*

TERN Staff

Terry Johnson, *TERN Executive Director, Forsyth*

Wanda Granitz, *Executive Sec.*

Kitty E. Spivey, *Tracks Editor*

Jon Ambrose, *NCS Section Chief, Social Circle*

Jim Ozier, *NCS Program Manager, Forsyth*



T.E.R.N.
The Environmental Resources Network

Friends of Georgia's Nongame Conservation Section

The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) is the official friends group of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Nongame Conservation Section. Contributions made to TERN go directly to help fund important nongame plant and animal projects conducted in Georgia.

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Sportsmen's Day at the Capitol

Brooks Schoen, *TERN board member*

Each year at the beginning of the Legislative Session, Sportsmen's Day at the Capitol is a day of recognizing the contributions made to the Georgia economy by hunting, fishing, bird watching, and enjoying our natural resources. TERN board member Brooks Schoen and Georgia Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Mark Williams felt this was the most appropriate time to present a plaque of appreciation to the Legislators who carried House Bill 881 (H. B. 881) to the House and Senate in 2014.

H. B. 881 was historic legislation. This bill changed the fee structure for wildlife license plates so that a new plate costs \$25.00 more than a standard plate with \$19.00 going to the Nongame Conservation Fund, \$1.00 to the county tag office and \$5.00 to the state general fund. The annual renewal fee is also \$25.00 with \$20.00 going to the Nongame Conservation Fund and \$5.00 to the state general fund.



Thanks to the work of Rep. Bubber Epps of Dry Branch, who sponsored the bill, Senator Horacena Tate, Senator Jeff Mullis and several others who supported the legislation, TERN was proud to present these leaders with a special plaque highlighting a photograph of H. B. 881 being signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal.

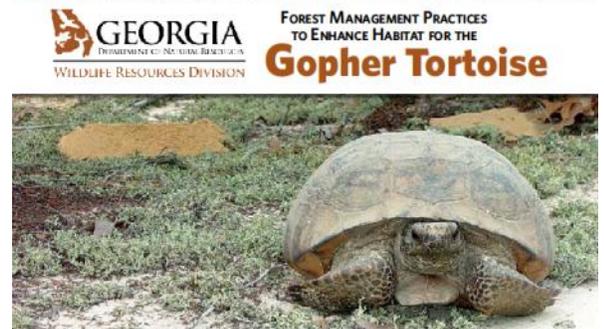
Getting this bill passed was a significant accomplishment in helping sustain the conservation of nongame wildlife in Georgia for current and future citizens. Many thanks to Brooks, the committee members, and other supporters who made this happen!



TERN Funded Project Updates

John Jensen, NCS sr. wildlife biologist

Forest Management for Gopher Tortoises Brochure (TERN funded \$1,800) – Many of the private lands inhabited by gopher tortoises, a candidate species for federal listing as “threatened,” are actively managed for timber production. Management for these two purposes (timber and tortoises) can be quite compatible if done properly, and many landowners are willing to accommodate the needs of tortoises in their management planning. Most landowners and managers, however, are relatively uninformed about what can be done to minimize impacts to tortoises while pursuing timber operations. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (and other agencies and non-governmental organizations) will be able to easily provide recommendations to landowners and land managers on ways to manage their properties for the benefit of gopher tortoises simply by handing out or mailing this brochure. This will arm such owners and managers with great information that they can apply to their lands, and hopefully pass on to friends, colleagues, and neighbors. For more information on how to obtain a copy of the Forest Management for Gopher Tortoises brochure, contact sr. wildlife biologist John Jensen, john.jensen@dnr.state.ga.us



The Gopher Tortoise: A Keystone Species

Georgia's official state reptile, the gopher tortoise is a conspicuous animal in the sandy lands of our Coastal Plain region. Gopher tortoises dig deep, long burrows that provide critical shelter for them and hundreds of other animal species. Gopher tortoises eat leaves and fruits, and benefit plant communities by dispersing seeds across the landscape and improving germination. Because the gopher tortoise has such a profound impact on the ecosystems where it lives, it is considered a “keystone species” that is critically important to the survival of many other species and to the health of the overall system.

Population Abundance and Persistence

Though gopher tortoises appear to still be fairly well distributed throughout their range and are frequently encountered in some areas, their populations have been affected by human activities such as the direct take of tortoises, conversion of forests to other uses, management of forests in ways that reduce tortoise habitat quality, and the suppression of fire. These impacts have led to a decline in overall tortoise numbers and acres of occupied habitat. Because gopher tortoises are long-lived animals (commonly attaining ages of 60 years or more) and adults have few natural predators, individuals can persist in some areas for several years even when the amount and quality of habitat has been greatly diminished. Small, isolated populations and those in marginal habitat often lack sufficient reproduction and juvenile recruitment, and may be in a slow, steady decline. For example, in many areas tortoises disappeared from much of the landscape as dense vegetation shaded out the ground, but a few individuals have managed to hang on by utilizing open roadsides. In these situations, roadside surveys might seem to falsely indicate healthy populations.

Brochure photos by DNR personnel

Is It a Water Moccasin? Brochure redesign and printing (TERN funded \$1,400) This popular publication received updated graphics, redesign, and reprint of 5,000 copies ready for distribution to NCS and partner sponsored public events, statewide nature centers, and DNR state parks. A recent distribution need was identified by WRD’s Law Enforcement officers that patrol major reservoirs in north and central Georgia. These officers use this brochure to demonstrate to concerned boaters, fishermen and citizens that live on these waterways that due to the water moccasin’s range, the snakes they encounter are harmless.

SUMMARY

Water Moccasin/Cottonmouth (Venomous)

Do not occur naturally in most of northern Georgia. They bask in limbs overhanging water and typically swim below the water surface. If banded, the bands are widest on top. They have a single row of scales on the underside of their tails, elliptical eye pupils, and a heat-sensing pit.

Water Snakes (Non-venomous)

Occur in aquatic habitats throughout Georgia. They bask in limbs overhanging water and typically swim below the water surface. If banded, the bands are widest on top and narrow on the sides. They have round eye pupils, and a double row of scales on the underside of their tails.

Is It a WATER MOCCASIN?

Adult red-bellied water snake

Eastern green water snake

Some people ask this question when they see a snake in the water. Unfortunately, many people assume all snakes in the water are water moccasins and kill them “just in case.” Yes, some species of snakes, including the water moccasin (*Aglastodon piscivorus*), also known as the cottonmouth, are venomous and therefore potentially dangerous. However, of the 45 snake species native to Georgia, only six are venomous—all others are harmless. Among the 39 harmless non-venomous snakes, five species of water snakes (*Nerodia* spp.) are often unfortunate victims of mistaken identity: People think they are water moccasins. This brochure was developed to highlight the differences between water snakes and water moccasins with the hope that familiarity with these snakes will prevent further unnecessary killing of non-venomous snakes (which is illegal by state law) commonly found in aquatic habitats in Georgia.

Non-venomous water snakes, such as the brown water snake above, may be mistaken for venomous water moccasins

However, this information is not provided to point out which species to kill and which species not to kill. The water moccasin's rumored reputation as an aggressive snake far exceeds its true character. Research has demonstrated that this species rarely strikes defensively even when harassed, relying much more on bluffing behaviors. Venom is a precious commodity that water moccasins use for subduing prey. Wasting venom on anything that is not food may prevent a snake from catching its next meal. Further, the gaped display of the “cottony” inner-mouth of a water moccasin is not an act of aggression, but rather a warning of its toxicity—no different than the rattling behavior of rattlesnakes or the bright warning colors of the coral snake. Venomous snakes pose very little threat to humans who leave them alone. The vast majority of snakebites result from people attempting to capture, harass or kill them.

WATER MOCCASINS (COTTONMOUTHS) VS. WATER SNAKES

Five species of large water snakes are native to Georgia—eastern green water snake (*Nerodia floridana*), brown water snake (*Nerodia taxipolita*), red-bellied water snake (*Nerodia erythrogaster*), banded water snake (*Nerodia fasciata*) and northern water snake (*Nerodia sipedon*).

Adult water snakes and water moccasins may be very similar in general appearance. Both are large, heavy-bodied snakes with rough scales and relatively dull coloration. However, the following characteristics of habitat, behavior and appearance should help differentiate between them.

RANGE AND HABITAT

The first step in answering “Is it a water moccasin?” should be to refer to the distribution map that illustrates that species’ range. Collectively, water snakes can be found in every county of Georgia, unlike the water moccasin, which does not occur in most of the northern half of the state. Although it is difficult to summarize the habitat preferences of these two snakes, in general water moccasins shy away from large, open reservoirs, whereas some water snake species thrive in them. Water moccasins tend to inhabit slow-moving streams, swamps and backwaters.

Range (in green) of the water moccasin (cottonmouth) in Georgia. Major reservoirs outside of the water moccasin's range include Lake Allatoona and Lake Lanier.

TERN Tracks
116 Rum Creek Drive
Forsyth, GA 31029
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Friends of Georgia's Nongame Conservation Section

TERN is a 501 (C)(3) corporation. All donations to TERN are 100% tax-deductible.

Please Help!

At the annual meeting on May 16, TERN members will be choosing from a list of many important statewide projects for TERN to fund for 2015-2016. The project proposals submitted by NCS staff far exceed TERN's available funds, and ***there is still time for you to help!***

Please consider sending a tax deductible donation before May 16 and help fund as many of these projects as possible. Make your generous donations payable to: TERN, 116 Rum Creek Drive, Forsyth, GA 31029. If you have any questions about this important fundraising effort, please contact Wanda Granitz: 478-361-8144

