

Multiple Partner Make Possible Valuable Land Purchase in Camden County

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More than 24,000 new acres serving as a critical buffer to the Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, as well as Cumberland Island National Seashore, will be available for southeast Georgia outdoor enthusiasts, thanks to the partnership efforts of multiple agencies, groups, and individuals.

An additional 3,000 acres were protected by a conservation easement co-held by the State and Navy, bringing the total acres protected to 27,000. These groups gathered today to celebrate the acquisition of these important properties, known as Ceylon Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and which includes property formerly part of Cabin Bluff.

“We are incredibly fortunate to be able to obtain these extraordinary properties and now will be able to manage them for the benefit of our citizens,” said Georgia Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Mark Williams. “It cannot be emphasized enough that the purchase of these properties would not have been possible without the support and investment of all of our dedicated partners.”

These new properties include longleaf pine uplands, maritime forest, freshwater wetlands, and tidal salt marsh wetlands. Protecting them will allow for the expansion of a fire-managed longleaf pine ecosystem beneficial to the gopher tortoise, and other imperiled species and allow Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to offer more public recreation lands.

This area is home to multiple game species, at least 10 federally listed, candidate and petitioned species, and 24 State-protected, rare, or species of concern, including 4 viable gopher tortoise populations, wood stork, Florida manatee, the bald eagle, painted bunting and, the hooded pitcher plant. With restoration, Cabin Bluff and Ceylon will also provide future habitat for red-cockaded woodpeckers.

Funding for the purchase of the properties was made possible by multiple partners (state and federal agencies, conservation groups, private foundations, and others) through conservation easements, grants (federal and private) and the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program. Following are comments from some of these involved and integral partners:

US Navy (Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program)

"The collaboration between Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay and the REPI partners resulted in the protection of more than 27,000-acres of land known as Cabin Bluff and Ceylon," said Capt. Chester Parks, commanding officer of Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay. "These successful projects protect the mission of Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay from incompatible development, while also preserving vital habitat for a number of threatened and endangered species."

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (National Coastal Wetland Conservation and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grants Program)

"Rarely do you find such an amazing piece of property that checks so many of the conservation boxes – pristine habitat for gopher tortoises, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and migratory birds; recreational access to hunters and anglers; important historical and cultural resources; connected lands and waters for a growing climate corridor – that our agency holds dear," said Leopoldo Miranda-Castro, the regional director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the South Atlantic, Gulf and Mississippi Basin. "The breadth, and financial commitment, of our many state, federal, military, nonprofit, and private partners too is something to behold."

USDA Forest Service (Forest Legacy Program)

"The USDA Forest Service remains proud of the tangible partnerships built with state and federal agencies, land trusts and other conservation organizations," said Director of Cooperative Forestry Kay Reed. "We are grateful for their continued support and commitment to keeping forests as forests so that future generations can enjoy the benefits of nature."

Georgia Forestry Commission (Forest Legacy Program)

"The Ceylon and Cabin Bluff acquisitions not only protect a significant footprint of rare maritime forestland along our coast, but they also ensure that productive forestry and wildlife conservation will continue far into the future providing both economic and environmental benefits to all the citizens of Georgia."

The Nature Conservancy

"The permanent protection of this large landscape, once the home of Timucuan native Americans, European settlers and slave plantations, saw and timber mills, is only possible because Georgia has a visionary group of conservation leaders in the government, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors who work together to share resources," said Deron Davis, Executive Director, The Nature Conservancy, Georgia. "These collaborations give the people

of our state beautiful natural areas to explore, provide vital habitat for plants and animals, help clean our air and water and buffer communities from storm surges, and allow us to recognize and pay respect to the ancient stewards of this land.”

The Conservation Fund

“The Ceylon property was one of the largest, unprotected, and undeveloped Atlantic coastlines in Georgia, and it could have become 20,000 residential units with commercial development—an ecologically devastating result had The Conservation Fund and the Open Space Institute not stepped up to purchase and secure it for the State,” said Andrew Schock, Georgia and Alabama State Director for The Conservation Fund. “Now that it is protected as a WMA, this land can continue to provide critical habitat for an array of wildlife and new recreational access to outdoor enthusiasts. A truly wonderful outcome made possible by many strong partnerships.”

Open Space Institute

“Permanent protection of the Ceylon and Cabin Bluff properties are enormous conservation victories for Georgia and the coastal U.S. In protecting this fragile landscape from further development, we have protected inland communities from flood risks, created recreation offerings for the people of Georgia, and provided critical habitat for the gopher tortoise, migratory birds, and other wildlife, said Kim Elliman, President and CEO of the Open Space Institute. “OSI is proud to be part of this transformative effort and we offer our great thanks to the Wyss Foundation for their support. We also congratulate the State of Georgia and our conservation partners for this momentous conservation achievement.”

Management of the Ceylon WMA will focus on recreational opportunities and continued restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem which provides important habitat for wildlife. For more information, visit <https://georgiawildlife.com/ceylon-wma>.