

# Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment

## Southern Blue Ridge FLN

Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina

868,000 acres

**Tallulah Gorge**, at the far southwest edge of the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment landscape, is best described as a transitional zone between the southern Appalachian piedmont to the south and the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains to the north. Numerous upland ridges and south-facing woodland slopes are embedded in a larger mesic forest matrix. The ecological system to which these upland habitats most closely conform is the Southern Appalachian low-elevation pine forest (NatureServe). This system occurs in a variety of topographic and landscape settings and is dominated by either shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) or Virginia pine (*P. virginiana*) and also contains numerous dry-site oak species, such as southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*), chestnut oak (*Q. prinus*) and scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*). In addition, numerous pitch pine and Table Mountain pine specimens can also be found scattered throughout the landscape, particularly in the most rugged terrain near bluffs and cliffs.

Within this landscape, a diverse group of partners are working to use prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to restore the natural structure and function of the upland pine and oak ecosystems and to maintain a rich array of rare plants and animals. Historically, frequent low-intensity fires occurring every 3-5 years were responsible for maintaining a bi-layered forest structure, with widely spaced pines and oaks in the overstory and a rich and diverse grass, forb and shrub layer in the understory (oak/pine heath).

Currently, this type of forest habitat—generally described as pine-oak-heath woodlands—is declining throughout the region, primarily due to fire suppression and other incompatible land use practices. Such woodlands are ideal habitat for a variety of sun-loving plants, as well as for numerous wildlife species that depend on the bi-layered structure. Wildlife species that will benefit from treatments that restore this structure include black bear, white-tailed deer, eastern wild turkey, ruffed grouse,



View looking toward Tallulah Gorge from South Carolina. Low-elevation pine habitat is visible in the foreground, and the Blue Ridge Mountains rise in the background. The project area is tucked in the transition area up against the mountains. © Mike Brod/USFS



An open woodland structure maintained by fire supports a variety of grasses, forbs and shrubs in the understory. © Mike Brod/USFS

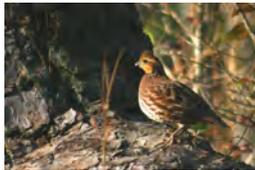
## Landscape Goal

A variety of partners will work together across jurisdictional boundaries to effectively and efficiently restore pine-oak woodland habitats on suitable sites in the Tallulah Gorge area, developing methods that are applicable to the larger Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment landscape.

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northern bobwhite, the rare Bachman's sparrow and the declining brown-headed nuthatch and eastern wood pewee. In addition, a number of rare plants, including turkeybeard, sundews, and a number of grasses and forbs associated with tallgrass prairies—such as cone-flower, big bluestem and silphium—occur in these fire-maintained habitats.



## Landscape Partners

Georgia Department of Natural Resources—  
State Parks and Historic Sites Division  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources—  
Wildlife Resources Division, Nongame  
Conservation Section  
Georgia Forestry Commission  
North Carolina Division of Forest Resources  
The Nature Conservancy—Georgia, North  
Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee  
USDA Forest Service—Chattahoochee-Oconee  
National Forest (Chattooga River Ranger  
District)  
USDA Forest Service—Nantahala National Forest  
(Wayah Ranger District)

Wildlife species benefitting from treatments in this landscape includes black bears, brown-headed nuthatches and bobwhite quail.

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## Recent Accomplishments

Partners have treated approximately 6,500 acres with prescribed fire since 2007. This includes the first multi-jurisdictional prescribed burn in the area, which was held in winter 2010. The burn included lands managed by State Parks and USDA Forest Service, and was implemented with numerous assisting agencies, including the Atlanta Botanical Gardens, Georgia Forest Service, Georgia Power and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 2012, the group plans to implement another cooperative prescribed burn of about 3,000 acres that will again include multiple land jurisdictions and the contributions of a variety of local agencies. In addition to fire treatments, partners have mechanically treated about 300 acres to restore ecosystem health and function.

Ecological and a prescribed burn prioritization models are now being developed for the landscape, and will be used in future ecosystem restoration planning.

Research plots to monitor rare species, such as persistent trillium, have been installed in burn units and a multi-year research project has been initiated with Georgia Southern University.

In cooperation with Western Carolina University, fire effects monitoring plots have been installed at key points within the landscape.

Due to the success of the landscape's collaborative efforts, the Consortium of Appalachian Fire Managers and Scientists is now highlighting the FLN's Tallulah Gorge demonstration site as a good example of a collaborative fire restoration project.



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