



Georgia Now and Forever

*How do we grow while maintaining what sustains us?
Are we asking too much of our land?*



Georgia Conservancy
October 20, 2023





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Millions of people have discovered our state's economic opportunities, beautiful landscapes, and high quality of life.

Millions more will. ~4 million by 2050, to be exact.






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LAND CRISIS  **RESOURCE CRISIS**



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LAND CRISIS  **RESOURCE CRISIS**

We cannot build such a future without addressing the use of our land.



We rely on our land for everything.

Jobs & employment

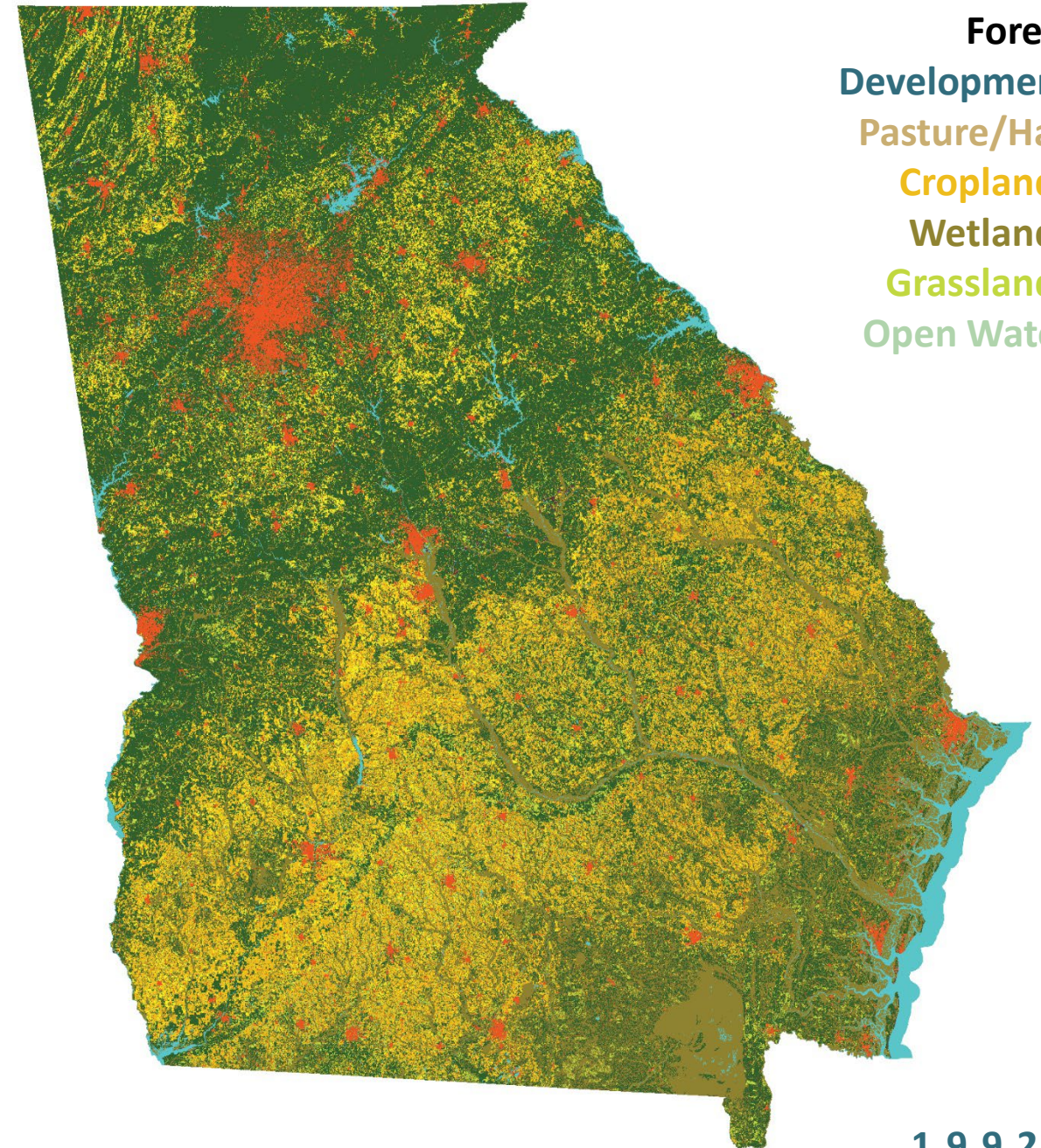
Housing & people

Utilities & infrastructure

Ecological services & habitat

Outdoor recreation & natural resources

Climate change adaptation/mitigation strategies





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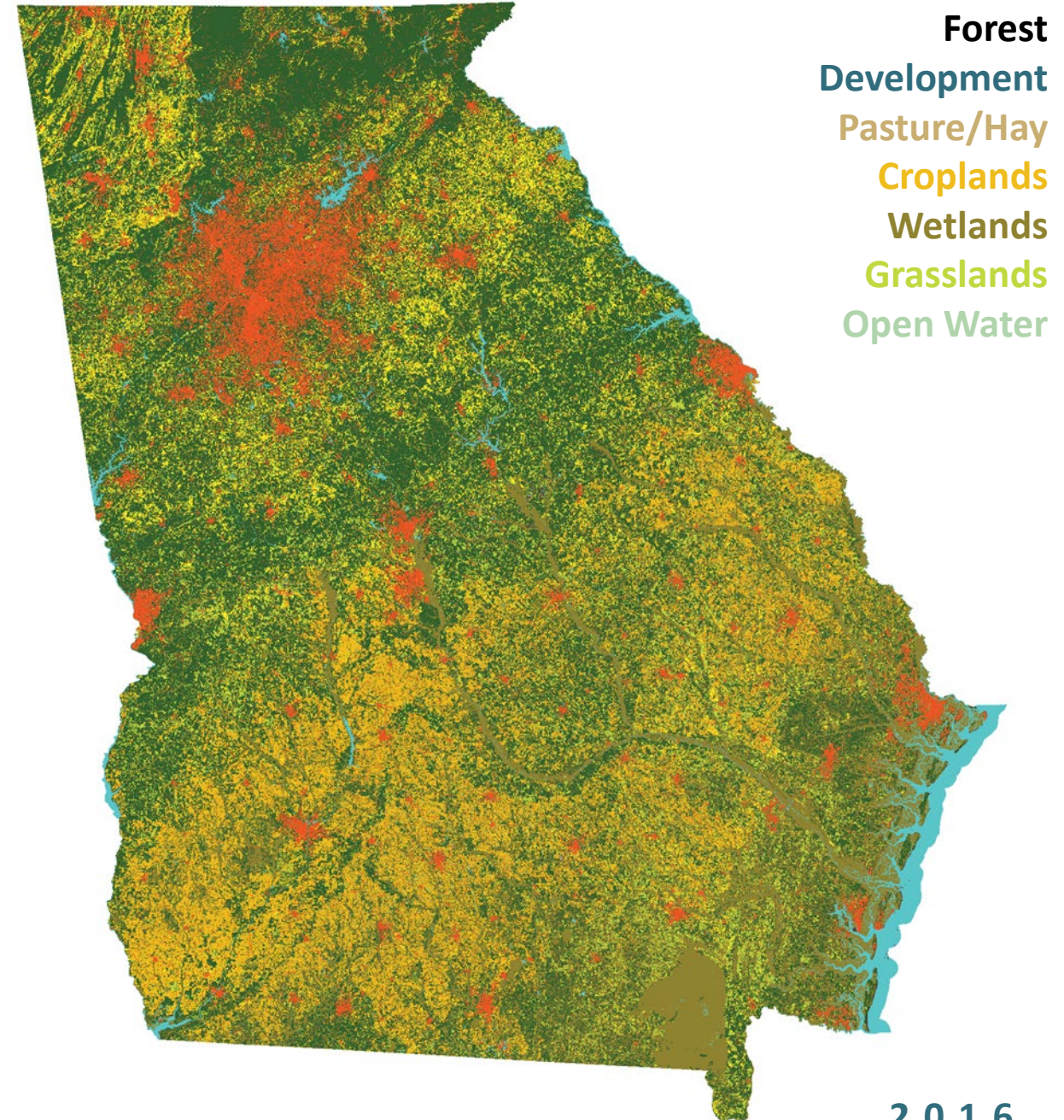
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BUT OUR LAND IS A LIMITED RESOURCE.





Key points:

1. Georgia is growing, and fast
2. Low-intensity development is driving land cover change across the state, especially just outside major metros
3. Land cover change rates don't always correlate with population growth
4. Unchecked land cover change threatens our top industries
5. This can be addressed through intentional decision-making



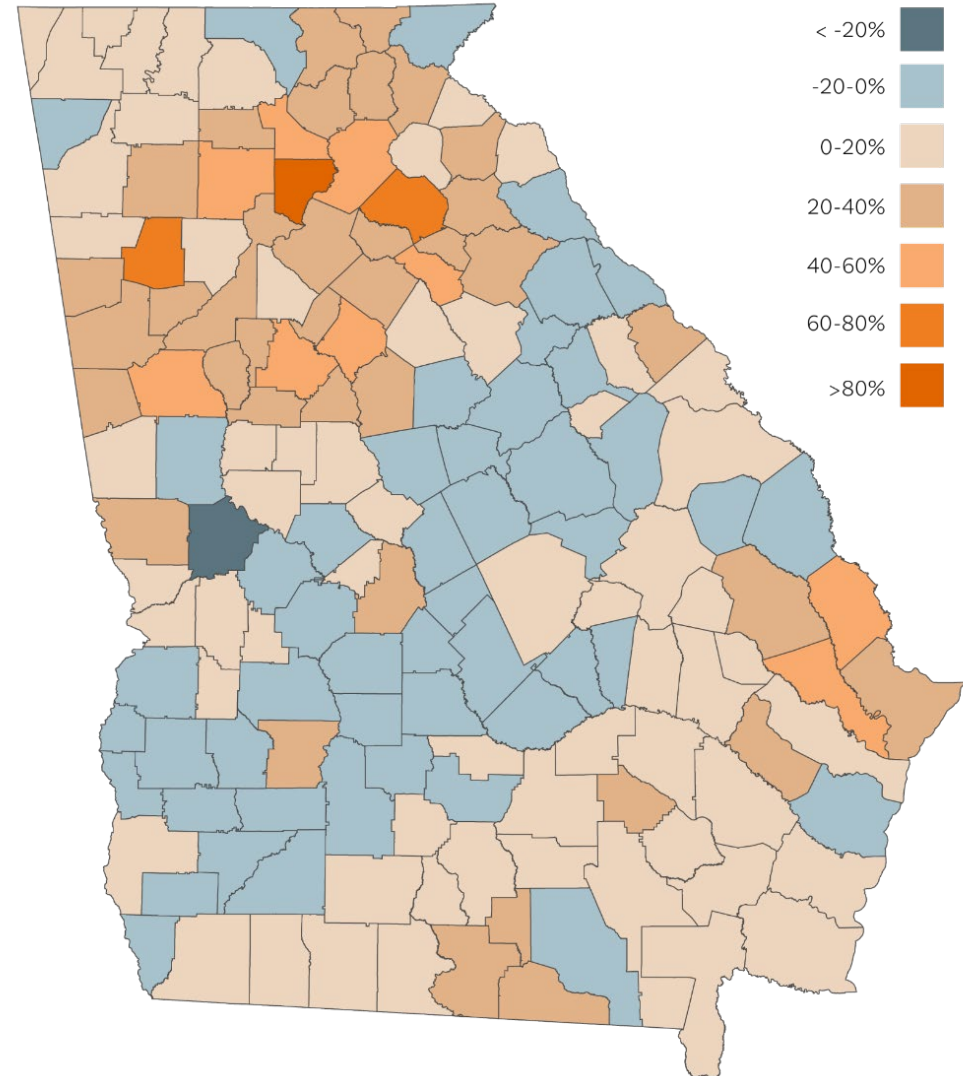
By analyzing how our land has changed,
we can better understand and advance
sustainable solutions.



1) Georgia is growing, and fast

- Requirements of our land:
- **House** new residents
- **Steward** our natural resources
- **Grow** our economy
- **Build** new infrastructure
- **Provide** food for our population
- **Protect** endangered species
- **Increase** quality of life

Percent Change population by 2050





2) Low-intensity development is driving change

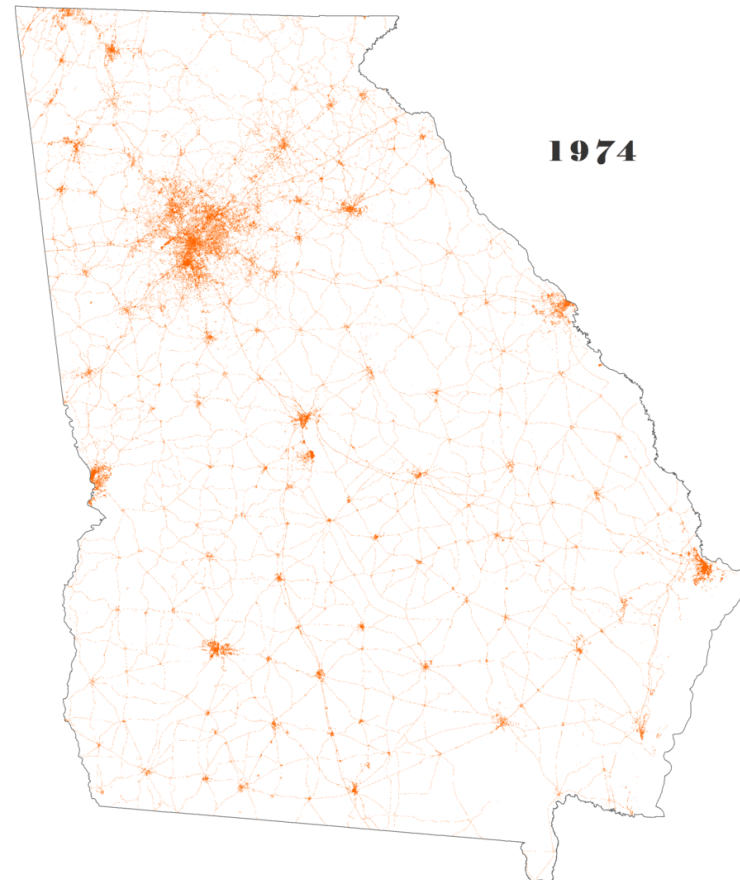
New development

Over the last 50 years, Georgia's communities have developed land quickly and broadly.

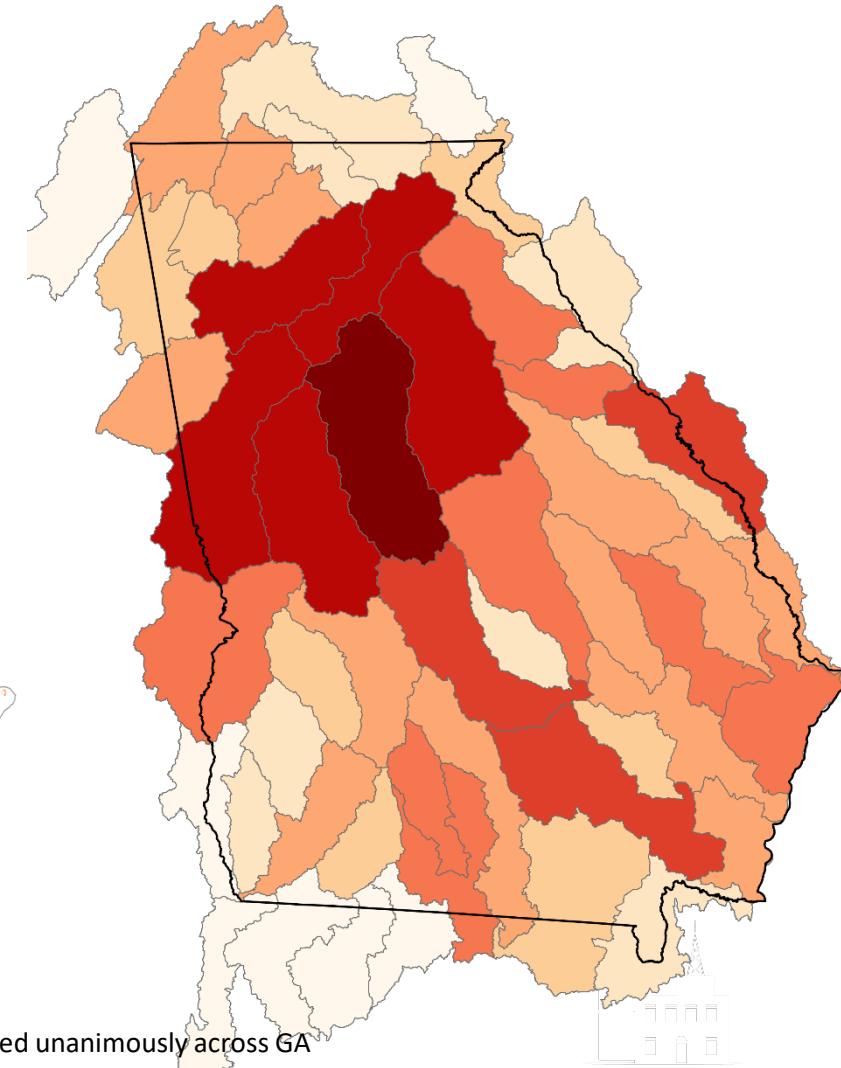
Since 1974, Georgia's developed land cover grew by **2.5 million** acres, most of it low-intensity in character. That's more than the size of Delaware and Rhode Island combined.



Developed Change 1974-2016



Development Change (by HUC8) 1974-2016

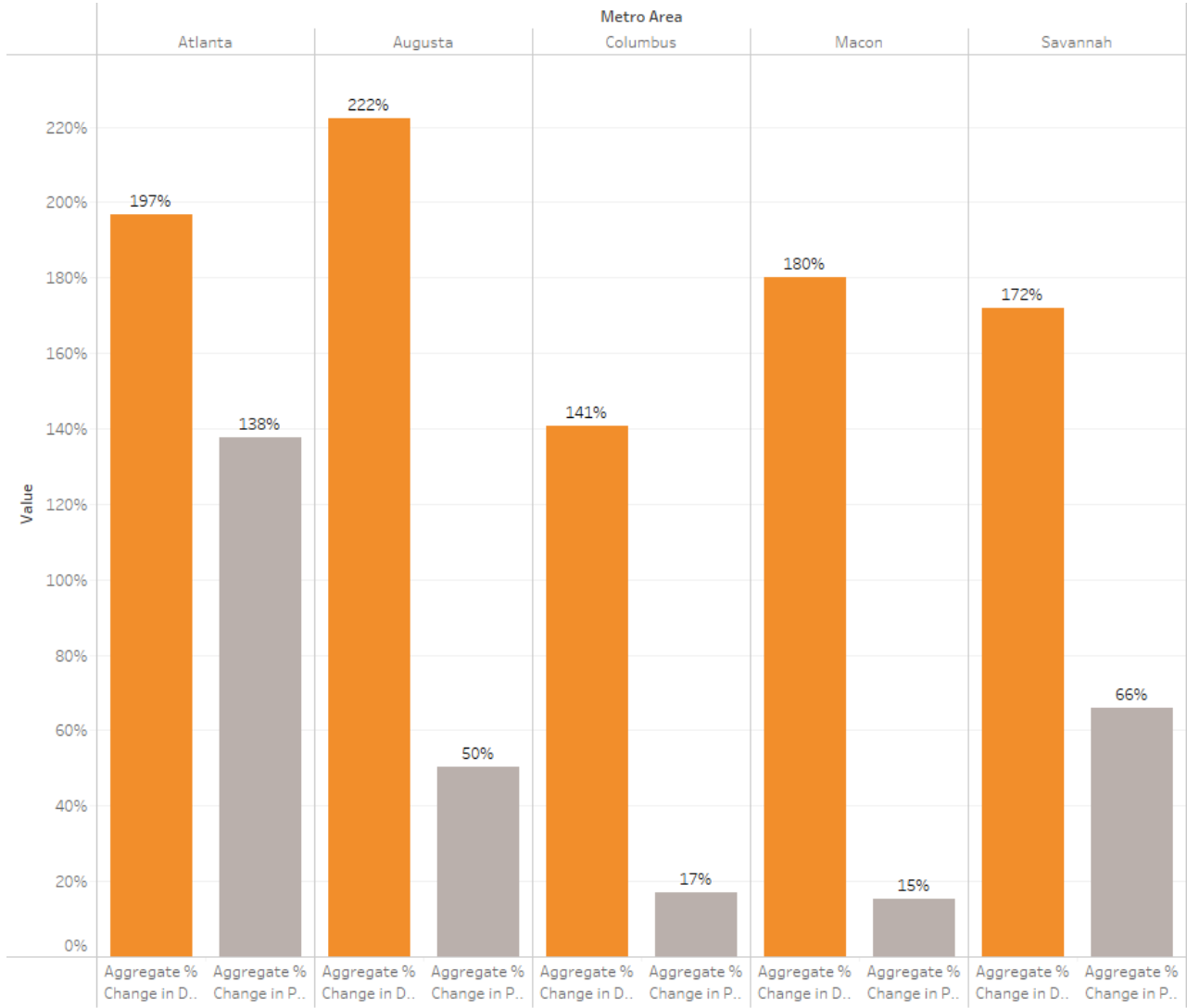


Developed land cover has increased unanimously across GA





3) Land cover change out of sync with pop growth



Change 1980-2016:

Macon-Bibb Metro

Population: **+30,665 people**
 Developed land: **+61,714 acres**
 +dev acres/person: **2.01**

Columbus Metro

Population: **+35,776 people**
 Developed land: **+50,574 acres**
 +dev acres/person: **1.41**



4) Land cover change threatens top industries

Population:	10.8 million (2021)
Agricultural industry:	\$73.3 billion/year (2017)
Forestry industry:	\$35.9 billion/year (2017)
Outdoor economic impact:	\$27.3 billion/year (2015)



4) Land cover change threatens top industries

Population:	10.8 million (2021)
Agricultural industry:	\$73.3 billion/year (2017)
Forestry industry:	\$35.9 billion/year (2017)
Outdoor economic impact:	\$27.3 billion/year (2015)
Projected Population:	14 Million (2060)



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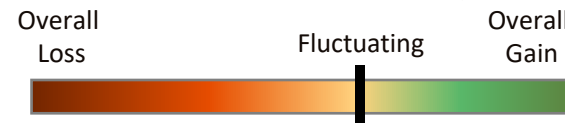
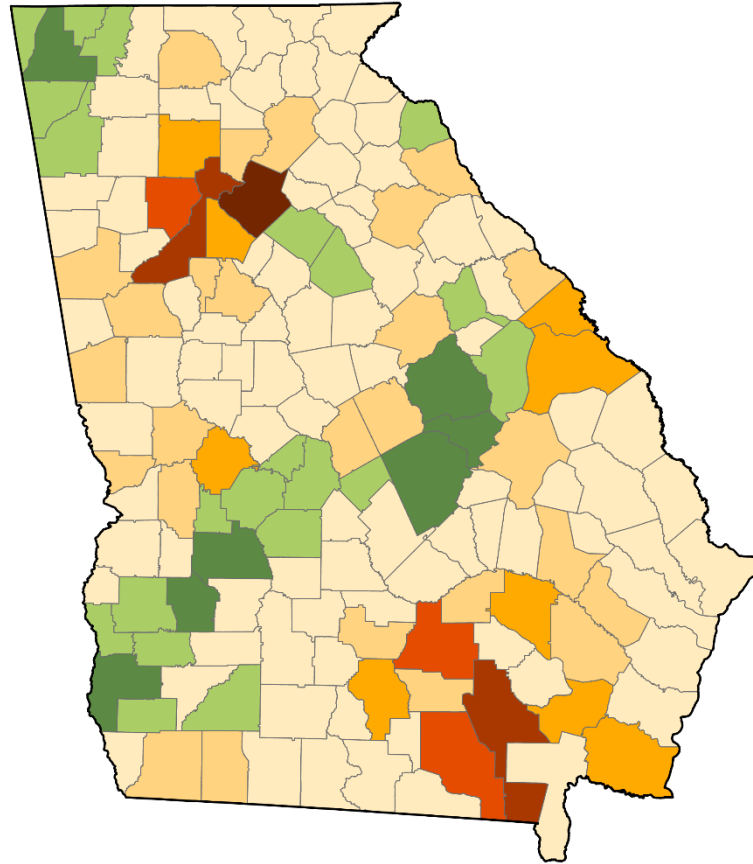
Loss of forest

Our tree canopy, one of Georgia's most vital ecological resources, has thinned.

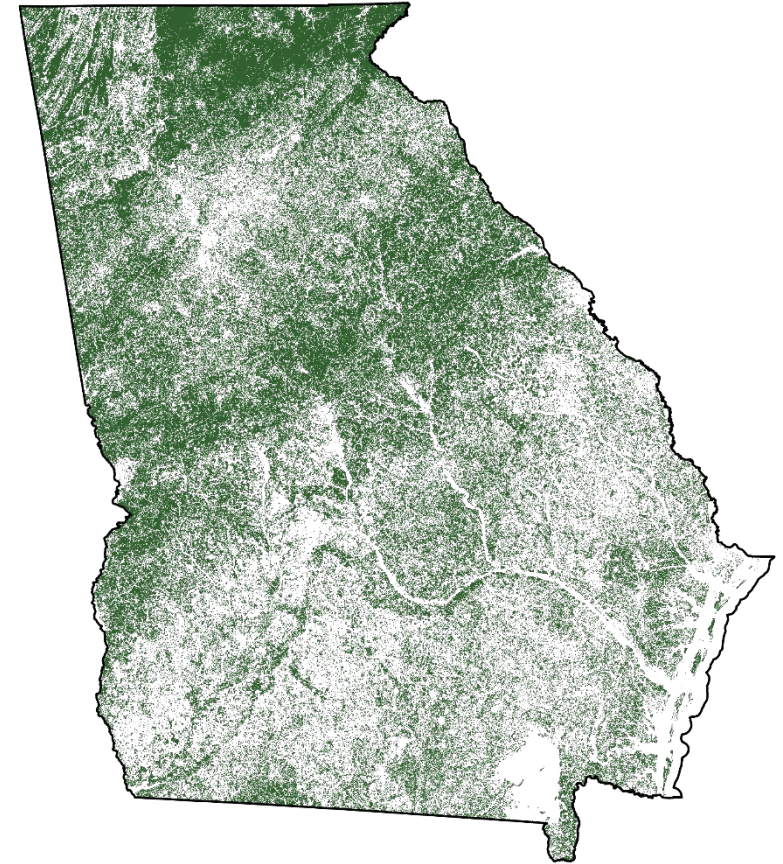
Since 1974, **2 million** acres of forest has been cleared and/or developed. The Atlanta metro accounted for **350,000** of those acres.



Forest Change 1974-2016



Forest Cover (2016)



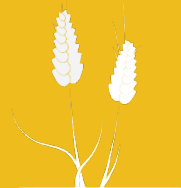


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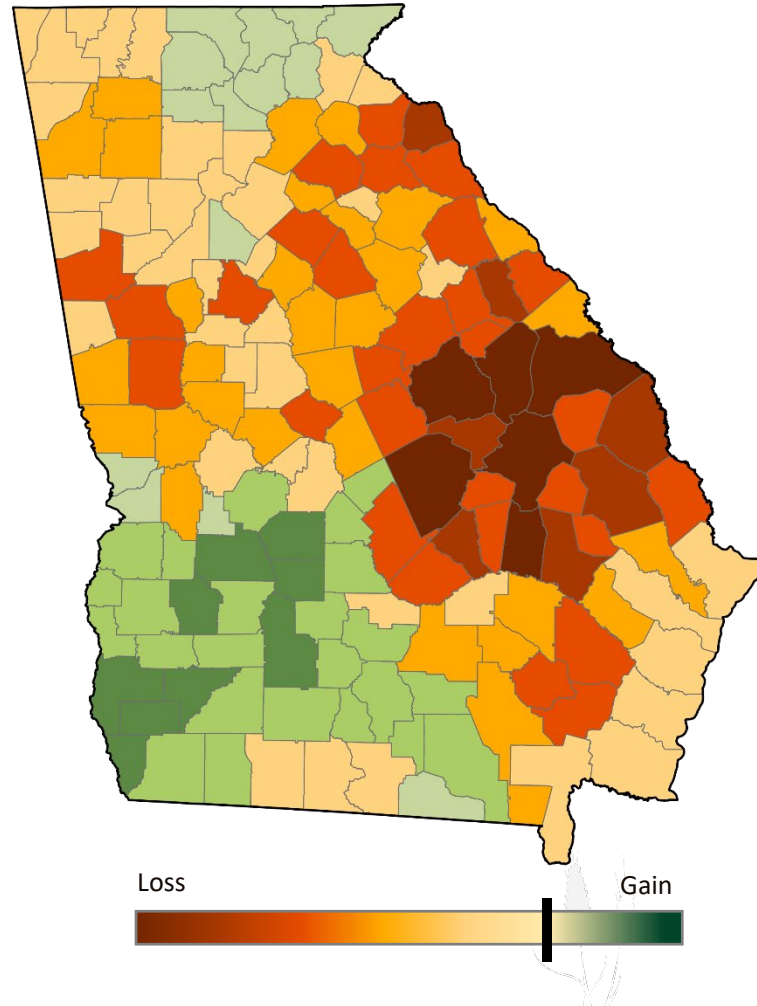
Loss of ag land

Croplands and pastures, which support Georgia's \$70 billion ag industry, are at risk of conversion.

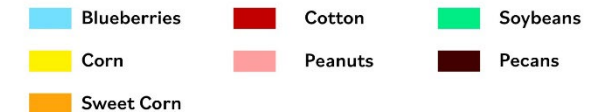
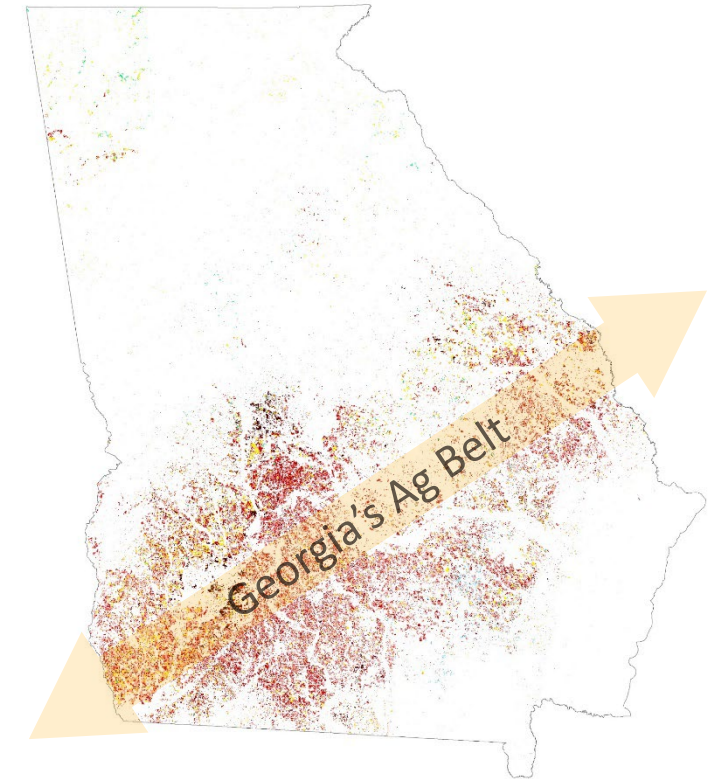
Since 1974, **2.6 million** acres of ag land have been transformed into another use. The expansion of low-density residential is one of ag land's biggest threats.



Cultivated Crops Change 1992-2016



Georgia's Croplands





5) We can address this through intentional decision-making

We have the power to **protect our land, support our economy, grow our communities, and maintain high quality of life** for everyone who calls Georgia home.



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We have the power to **protect our land, support our economy, grow our communities, and maintain high quality of life** for everyone who calls Georgia home.

To achieve this, we have to make **informed, intentional decisions.**



Decision-Making Targets

Focus 1: Can we identify highest-priority natural resources & find the will to protect them?

- carbon sinks (i.e. forests, swamps, peatlands)
- critical habitats
- critical waterways & watersheds
- working farmlands, especially small-scale tracts
- scenic landscapes, both for environmental services and economic benefits
- **recognize that even “common” natural resources can serve critical needs**

FOREST SERVICES

COOLING THE AIR

Trees cool the surrounding air when they release water that then evaporates in a process known as transpiration cooling.

CARBON CAPTURE

Trees capture atmospheric carbon through photosynthesis and store it as biomass. This process is known as carbon sequestration.

REDUCING AIR POLLUTION

Forests remove air pollutants by gaseous absorption and by intercepting particulate matter.

MANAGING STORMWATER RUNOFF

By intercepting and absorbing stormwater, forests reduce runoff.



LIMITING EROSION

Tree roots help stabilize soils, reducing sedimentation in streams and improving water quality.

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Forests provide an abundance of opportunities for outdoor activities and the enjoyment of nature.



Decision-Making Targets

Focus 2: Can we invest in solutions that render environmentally-supportive choices easy and feasible for all household income levels?

- **locating new housing within walking distance of jobs, schools and services**
- investing in pedestrian infrastructure and transit where feasible
- advancing alternative models like Community Land Trusts (CLTs)





Decision-Making Targets

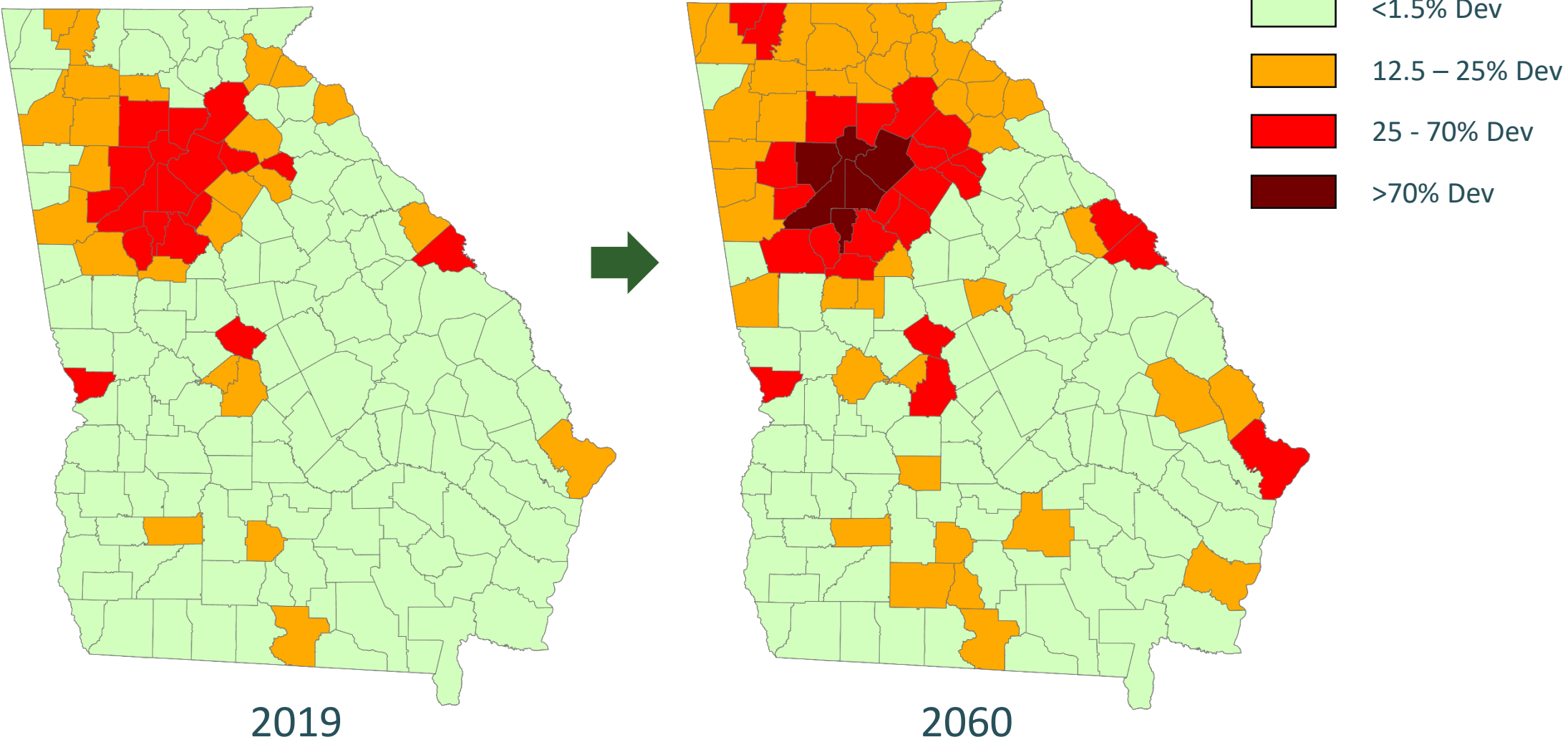
Focus 3: Can we curb the proliferation of low-intensity development?

- fragments landscapes
- houses fewer people
- **increases cost of community services, often rendering systems unsustainable**
- impacts social fabric of communities





Parting Thought:





Georgia Conservancy

www. georgiaconservancy.org

Georgia Now & Forever StoryMap Collection

https://arcg.is/18Tq4G

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