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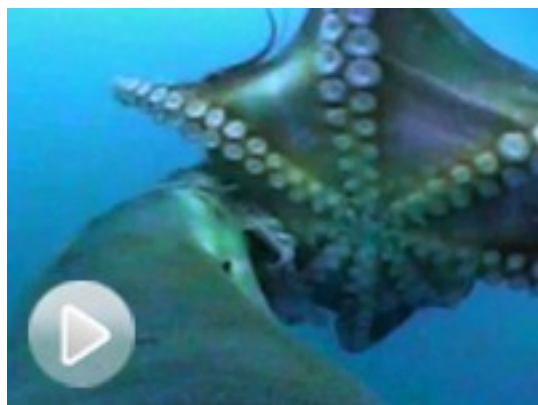
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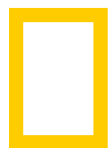
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# Water Currents

Insights into the freshwater world

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## [On #worldwetlandsday, Stakeholders Form Alliance to Conserve Wetland Forests of the U.S. South](#)

VOICES

Posted by [Guest Blogger](#) in [Water Currents](#) on February 2, 2017

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## **New Initiative to Conserve Southern Wetland Forests Launched on World Wetlands Day**

**By Scot Quaranda, Wetland Forest Initiative**

On World Wetlands Day (February 2, 2017), a diverse group of stakeholders have joined together to announce a major multi-state effort to conserve one of America's most precious natural resources, wetland forests of the South. The [Wetland Forest Initiative](#) is a new, collaborative effort dedicated to conserving, restoring, and improving the condition of Southern wetland forests.

The initiative will work with landowners, communities, conservation organizations, and government agencies to create a future where there are abundant and healthy wetland forests for the benefit of local communities and native wildlife. A majority of wetland forests have been lost due to conversion to agriculture and real estate development in the last 300 years.

“Today we are excited to join with communities, landowners, government agencies, and conservation partners to shine a spotlight on the role that our forested wetlands play in protecting our coastal communities from the worst impacts of climate change and as a treasure to our region's natural heritage,” said Danna Smith, Executive Director at Dogwood Alliance. “We all share the common belief that working together we can make these forests the next great conservation priority in the United States.”



A world biodiversity hotspot, the Southeastern and Gulf Coastal Plains have nearly 600 animal and over 1800 plant species found nowhere else on earth.

Historically, wetland forests blanketed much of the Southern US. However, as the region continued to grow, wetlands and wetland forests were converted for other uses. As a result, a majority of the original wetland forests in the region have been lost. The wetland forests that remain are sometimes degraded so much that there is a great need for restoration in these areas.

Southern wetland forests are home to many threatened and endangered species which rely on these unique habitats to survive and reproduce. Many of the region's intact wetland forests occur in the coastal plain. A world biodiversity hotspot, the Southeastern and Gulf Coastal Plains have nearly 600 animal and over 1800 plant species found nowhere else on earth.

Wetland forests provide critical “ecosystem services” — benefits to human communities that go beyond monetary value. For example, wetland forests provide twice the value in endangered species and wildlife habitat, pollution control, flood control, and water treatment than upland forest habitat (e.g., mixed pine and hardwoods). They are also significantly better at storing carbon, which helps to offset manmade carbon emissions and mitigate climate change.

### **No-Regrets Investment**

“Wetland forest conservation and restoration is a no-regrets investment,” said Maria Whitehead, Senior Project Manager at the Open Space Institute. “In communities across the Southeast, the benefits derived in protecting these forests are significant in both impact and effectiveness—providing abundant and clean drinking water, serving as storm and flood barriers, and increasing natural areas for people and wildlife.”



The Wetland Forest Initiative will elevate wetland forests as a national conservation and restoration priority. Additionally, the collaboration plans to work with landowners, foresters, and others to help implement sound management practices on “working lands” — lands used for timber production, while also working with nearby communities to increase resilience, diversify economic opportunities and enhance quality of life.

“The Southeastern US represents one of the most biodiverse regions in world,” said Ben Prater, Defenders of Wildlife. The wetland forest habitats in this region support a dizzying array of wildlife including birds, amphibians, fish and freshwater mussels. Many of these species are at-risk and protecting wetland forests is the best way to ensure these species thrive.”

*The Wetland Forest Initiative is currently composed of a steering committee and several working groups, which include members from these organizations (alphabetical): American Forest Foundation, National Audubon Society, Black Family Land Trust, Carolina Wetlands Association, Clemson University, Defenders of Wildlife, Dogwood Alliance, Forest Stewards Guild, Gulf Restoration Network, Hip-Hop Caucus, Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries, National Wildlife Federation, National Woodland Owners’ Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, One Hundred Miles, Open Space Institute, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Public Lab, Southern Group of State Foresters, University of Georgia, Wildlands Network, Wild South, and Wild Virginia.*

For more information, visit: [www.wetlandforests.org](http://www.wetlandforests.org)

Keywords:

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## Comments

- 1. Gregory D Long  
Laurens County, Georgia  
February 6, 1:21 pm

Fantastic goal with a multitude of benefits. I am a landowner on the Oconee River with several hundred acres of “low” and “high” river swamp, dissected by numerous sloughs, ponds, etc. Although we recently harvested some of the timber, we made the conscience effort to maintain broad SMZ corridors of cypress and tupelo on all the sloughs and ponds, as well as significant acreage of mature hardwood timber for wildlife management and recreational purposes. Our southern swamps are a true treasure.

### Post a comment

Name:\*   
Email:\*

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## Water Currents

The goal of [Water Currents](#) is to bring together diverse voices to discuss pressing issues in freshwater. We are particularly interested in water consumption, locally and globally, and restoration and conservation of freshwater ecosystems.

Opinions expressed in Water Currents are those of the blogger and/or the blogger's organization, and not necessarily those of the National Geographic Society. Bloggers and commenters are required to observe [National Geographic's community rules](#).

Water Currents is hosted by [Sandra Postel](#), Director of the [Global Water Policy Project](#).

Water Currents director: David Braun ([dbraun@ngs.org](mailto:dbraun@ngs.org))

## [Recent Water Currents Posts](#)

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- [WHAT THE RIVER KNOWS: Narmadā River, India](#) *Basia Irland*
- [1Frame4Nature | Art Wolfe](#) *International League of Conservation Photographers*
- [How Was the Okavango Delta Formed?](#) *Paul Steyn*
- [Putting D.C.'s Wastewater Treatment to the Microplastics Test](#) *Gregg Treinish*

## Freshwater Species of the Week



Freshwater Species  
of the Week

From fishing spiders, blind cavefish, and river dolphins, to Mexican water monsters, bird-snatching tigerfish, and beavers that emit goo from their butts that we use for vanilla flavoring, the life that lives under, in, on, and alongside water is endlessly fascinating.

Water Currents bloggers have produced more than 80 posts in the series [Freshwater Species of the Week](#), a wealth of information about the weird and wonderful critters of our watery world.

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