



Fast Facts

In Georgia, 108 acres of forest and farmland are converted to impervious surfaces every day, which adds up to more than 39,000 acres annually.

In the Atlanta region, approximately 54 acres of trees are lost to asphalt and concrete each day.

Metro Atlanta has higher asthma rates than the national average because of our poor air quality.

Road-based emissions, exacerbated by long commutes, are no longer just an Atlanta problem. They are now contributing to air quality problems in many mid-sized Georgia cities including Athens, Columbus, Macon and Augusta.

For More Information:
Georgia Conservancy,
Saskia Benjamin

Promote Sustainable Growth Management

What's at Stake?

Georgia is a state of remarkable natural diversity. Fresh water, clean air, and vast green and open spaces helped attract the families and businesses that have spurred economic development, making Georgia one of the fastest growing states in the country. Maintaining our position as an economic leader will require Georgians to adopt more sustainable development patterns. We must make sure that growth is accommodated, but not at the expense of the environment.

Georgia's rapid growth has increased the demand to develop more of the state's dwindling natural areas. Sprawling, decentralized development threatens our quality of life. It is also more expensive for local governments to serve and has a burdensome effect on the environment. Many of Georgia's most serious environmental problems – air quality, water quality, and loss of natural habitat – are a direct result of improper land use.

Sustainable growth management is not about stopping development. Instead it is about identifying natural, historic, and cultural resources worthy of protection and directing development away from these areas to ensure a responsible balance between the protection of our natural systems – air, land, and water – and the development needed to support population growth and the economy.

Challenges

The results of poor, at best uneven, land planning are evident in our water shortages, poor air quality, traffic congestion, loss of natural habitat, and our land conversion rate. Hurdles to proper growth management in Georgia include:

- Lack of incentives and disincentives that promote balanced growth practices;
- Inconsistent zoning and weak land use regulations, which makes it difficult for developers to “do the right thing;”
- A distinct urban/rural political divide (“two Georgias”) and the misperception that growth management strategies are at odds with economic development goals;
- No dedicated source of funding for land conservation and for transit; and
- Lack of a requirement plan for land use and transportation simultaneously.

Next Steps

- Integrate transportation investments with land use in regional centers and corridors, especially in metro Atlanta. Planning for transportation and land use simultaneously will improve traffic congestion thereby having a positive effect on commute times and air quality.
- Increase the variety of housing choices by promoting the removal of barriers that restrict the market and creating incentives to encourage more development options. Housing should be encouraged near jobs, transit, and services to increase access and decrease the need to travel by car.
- Create and/or educate local governments about the techniques and tools available to them for managing growth. Regulatory barriers to smart growth should be eliminated.
- Encourage the development of regional and state growth management policy. Coordinate local policies and regulations to support regional policies.