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BIRDS GEORGIA RECEIVES NFWF GRANT TO RESTORE HABITAT AT HISTORIC WILBURN FARM AT DAVIDSON-ARABIA MOUNTAIN HERITAGE AREA

(Atlanta, Ga.) September 9, 2024 – Birds Georgia has been awarded a grant from National Fish & Wildlife Foundation’s (NFWF) Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program to restore 19 acres of Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve at the historic Wilburn Farm to promote biodiversity and ecosystem resiliency. This is Birds Georgia’s third focal site centered on the South River Watershed in southern DeKalb County.

Birds Georgia will work with a network of regional and statewide organizations, including Georgia Native Plant Society, DeKalb County, Arabia Mountain Heritage Alliance, and the Georgia Conservancy, to remove non-native vegetation from 19-acres of the Wilburn Farm site and install bird-friendly native plants and seed to provide high quality habitat for birds and other species. In collaboration with other partner organizations, Birds Georgia has pledged to engage with at least 100 volunteers and 300 local community members through volunteer projects, bird and wildlife monitoring, and public outreach and education programming.

Wilburn Farm dates back to the late 1800s. The farm was abandoned during the Great Depression in the 1930s, and in 1953 it was purchased by Ross Wilburn, who repaired the house, built a pond, and constructed a horse barn. DeKalb County acquired the property in 2000, and it became part of the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve.

“Historically, Wilburn Farm was used for agriculture and, in recent decades, large portions of the area have been maintained as a partially mowed field dominated by non-native fescue grasses,” says Adam Betuel, Birds Georgia’s director of conservation. “The ecological value of this site has been limited by the presence of non-native grasses that prevent a diversity of native plant species from becoming established to support birds and other wildlife and to protect the watershed from erosion and sedimentation.”

Birds Georgia's habitat restoration team and volunteers will remove invasive plant species, including Bradford Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*), Chinese Privet (*Ligustrum sinense*), and Autumn Olive (*Eleagnus umbellata*), as well as non-native, invasive herbaceous plants such as Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*) and Brazilian verbena (*Verbena brasiliensis*). After the invasive plants are cleared, Birds Georgia will add native seeds, a diversity of wildflower plugs, and gallon-sized woody, native plants to the space to support and jumpstart the native regeneration of habitat.

The project is located in the South River watershed, a vital yet often overlooked resource in metro Atlanta and further down river. Encompassing approximately 544 square miles, the South River is an important corridor for migratory birds and nesting area for breeding birds and is one of only two rivers in Georgia with an urban origin. Approximately 40 percent of the watershed lies in the southern part of urban DeKalb County. This and other Birds Georgia projects within the watershed serve as a model of bird-friendly habitat and protect South River-adjacent communities from flash flooding and other effects from climate change that are disproportionately impacting communities of color. This is the fifth grant that Birds Georgia has received to complete habitat improvement work in the South River Watershed, including three grants for work at different areas within Panola Mountain State Park, at Lyon Farm, and now at Wilburn Farm.

"We are excited to have the support of the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation for this project in the South River Watershed, which is one of Birds Georgia's priority areas for engagement," says Betuel. "Wilburn Farm is located near the South River, and our restoration work will directly benefit the larger river corridor that not only provides valuable habitat for birds and other wildlife but also acts as a buffer to protect and enhance the health of this important metro watershed."

This is the seventh award that Birds Georgia has received from The Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program, which seeks to develop nation-wide community stewardship of local natural resources, preserving these resources for future generations and enhancing habitat for local wildlife. Grants seek to address water quality issues in priority watersheds, such as erosion due to unstable streambanks, pollution from stormwater runoff, and degraded shorelines caused by development.

The Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration grant program is sponsored by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) with major funding provided by U.S Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, FedEx, Southern Company, and Salesforce.

About Birds Georgia: *Birds Georgia is building places where birds and people thrive. We create bird-friendly communities through conservation, education, and community engagement. Founded in 1926 as the Atlanta Bird Club, the organization became a chapter of National Audubon in 1973, and continues as an independent chapter of National Audubon Society. Learn more at <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org/>.*

About the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation: *Chartered by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal, corporate, foundation and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 21,000*

projects and generated a total conservation impact of over \$10 billion. NFWF is an equal opportunity provider. Learn more at nfwf.org.

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