

REAL ESTATE: It's not always about density and development.....The rugged stretch of Pine Mountain along the Flint River in Georgia is a vast wilderness. Long ago loggers found this area and cut what they could, but much of it was so steep and rocky that they moved on leaving most of the centuries old montane longleaf pine in place.

Today - 2,720 acres previously owned by the Alexander family retain the best remaining old growth montane longleaf pine in the world, a community type considered globally imperiled (G2) by NatureServe. Through cooperative agreements, GA DNR has reintroduced fire to the Alexander tract, Sprewell Bluff WMA, and over 11,000 acres of private land surrounding them, with the result that dormant rare species and communities are resurfacing. Every year new state tracked plants and animals are found; in 2012 the state's largest population of the rare fire-



dependent lily *Xerophyllum asphodeloides* which blooms once every 10 years, made itself known with a spectacular display of flowers on a remote cliff following a controlled burn.

Besides being the largest of 5 populations this is also the southernmost population of this species in the world. In 2013 GA DNR scientist found two odd community types. These community types found nowhere else in the world, now named Longleaf Pine Heath Bluffs and Hog Plum Glades are considered Globally endangered (G1, NatureServe 2015).

In 2015 as part of a multistate research effort bait stations were put out for golden eagles on Sprewell Bluff. It was a longshot, since golden eagles are considered rare in the eastern United States. Little was known about these rare 'ghosts of the forest' except that they seem to enjoy rugged mountains with open often burned woodlands. Within 48 hours of putting out bait stations at least 4 golden eagles had been documented. In February 2015 one was caught, mounted with a transmitter and tracked to northern Quebec shedding light on their winter range, migration corridors and breeding ground location (see the Georgia Nongame newsletter for the story: <http://www.georgiawildlife.org/node/3817>). Sprewell Bluff along Pine Mountain has long been noted for its exceptional hunting opportunities. GA DNR currently protects approximately 3,074 acres of Sprewell Bluff split between the Sprewell Bluff WMA (2,780 acres) and Sprewell Bluff Park (294 acres). Pine Mountain is also known for its high biodiversity with many mountain forest bird species, such as black-throated green warbler, worm eating warbler, scarlet tanager and others finding their southern range limit, along with coastal plain longleaf pine birds such as loggerhead shrike, Bachman's sparrow and red-cockaded woodpecker finding their northern range. This is likewise true for plants, reptiles and amphibians, prompting a 2010 paper to claim this region as one of the top biodiversity hotspots in the country (Southeastern Naturalist, Graham et al. 2010).

Steve Friedman, Chief of Real Estate, GA DNR stated the Alexander tract is the highest priority tract on Pine Mountain, because they immediately join the Sprewell Bluff WMA and connect with

multiple privately held conservation partner lands. The Alexander tract protects over 2 miles of the Flint River, one of the most heavily paddled rivers in the state, equally popular for fishing.



GA DNR acquired this tract in October of 2016 through the generosity of a “Bargain Sale” from the Alexander Family. Jim Ramseur, Partner with Lee and Associates Commercial Real Estate Services Atlanta office who represented the Alexander family said, this type of overlooked and underutilized sale really benefits all parties involved. The tax benefits associated with a Bargain Sale really help the landowner with their capital gains issues as well as providing matching

dollars that enable the GA DNR to attract various philanthropic partners who share the same value in preserving such rare and biodiverse lands. On Friday May 5th 2017 members of the GA DNR along with the Alexander family unveiled signs dedicating the loop road and recognition to all the parties who made this acquisition possible.



Having river access will increase public paddling opportunities creating a mid-way point between two WMA’s located up and downstream from the Alexander tract. An existing road system will create opportunities for increased public recreation. Collectively better river and upland access will benefit local economies. A GA DNR 2013 economic study showed spending of visitors to GA’s WMA’s generated 3,700 jobs, generating labor income of \$118 M dollars. The



added land will preserve our ability to manage with fire. While the rugged aspect of this landscape has spared these forests it makes management challenging, stated DNR biologist Nathan Klaus. Fragmented ownership means property lines often run along slopes so steep that equipment cannot be used on them. Fire can only be used on a connected, intact landscape. The purchase of the Alexander tract will allow for restoration efforts for GA DNR and Conservation Partners alike to continue. Protection of these tracts

along with the continued management GA DNR is conducting on surrounding lands will retain a large corridor of well managed montane longleaf pine. Conserving a corridor along the Flint River, a popular area for hunting and recreation, as well as a biodiversity hotspot, with community types still being described by science, where golden eagles find winter refuge and fire moves naturally across the land, is a meaningful contribution toward conserving wilderness for wildlife.