

2018-2019 Survey for Protected Amphibians/Reptiles on the Twin Pines Tract, Charlton County, Georgia

Executive Summary

From November 2018 – April 2019, I conducted amphibian and reptile surveys on four tracts (Adirondack, Keystone, Loncala, TIAA) that are part of the Twin Pines Site, Charlton County, Georgia. These field surveys were species-specific, targeting 2 reptile species (eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise) and 3 amphibians (frosted flatwood salamander, striped newt, gopher frog) which are federally listed and-or state listed.

Isolated depressional wetlands (i.e., cypress-gum ponds) on-site (n = 41) were reviewed to determine their habitat characteristics and potential suitability for the amphibian species, especially the frosted flatwoods salamander. Almost all wetlands were considered poor habitat due to historic/current disturbances from commercial forestry practices (to both wetlands and adjacent uplands). Twelve depressional wetlands were surveyed by dip-netting and minnow trapping during February-March 2019; no frosted flatwoods salamanders or striped newts were found.

Transect surveys for gopher tortoises identified 118 active/inactive tortoise burrows. Visual encounter surveys conducted at/near each of these gopher tortoise burrows during the winter months (conducted on 2-3 separate dates) did not document any evidence of eastern indigo snake presence on-site. Scoping gopher tortoise burrows in April 2019 with a gopher tortoise burrow camera revealed resident tortoises in 23 adult-sized burrows, 11 subadult-sized burrows, and in 1 juvenile-sized burrow; occupancy of another 4 active adult burrows, 11 active subadult burrows, and 2 active juvenile burrows could not be determined conclusively and these burrows may also contain tortoises.

The state-rare gopher frog was observed on-site (6 adult frogs were observed, all in tortoise burrows). Three “special concern” animal species tracked by Georgia Department of Natural Resources (redface topminnow, pine snake, black swampsnake) were documented on-site during the course of these surveys.