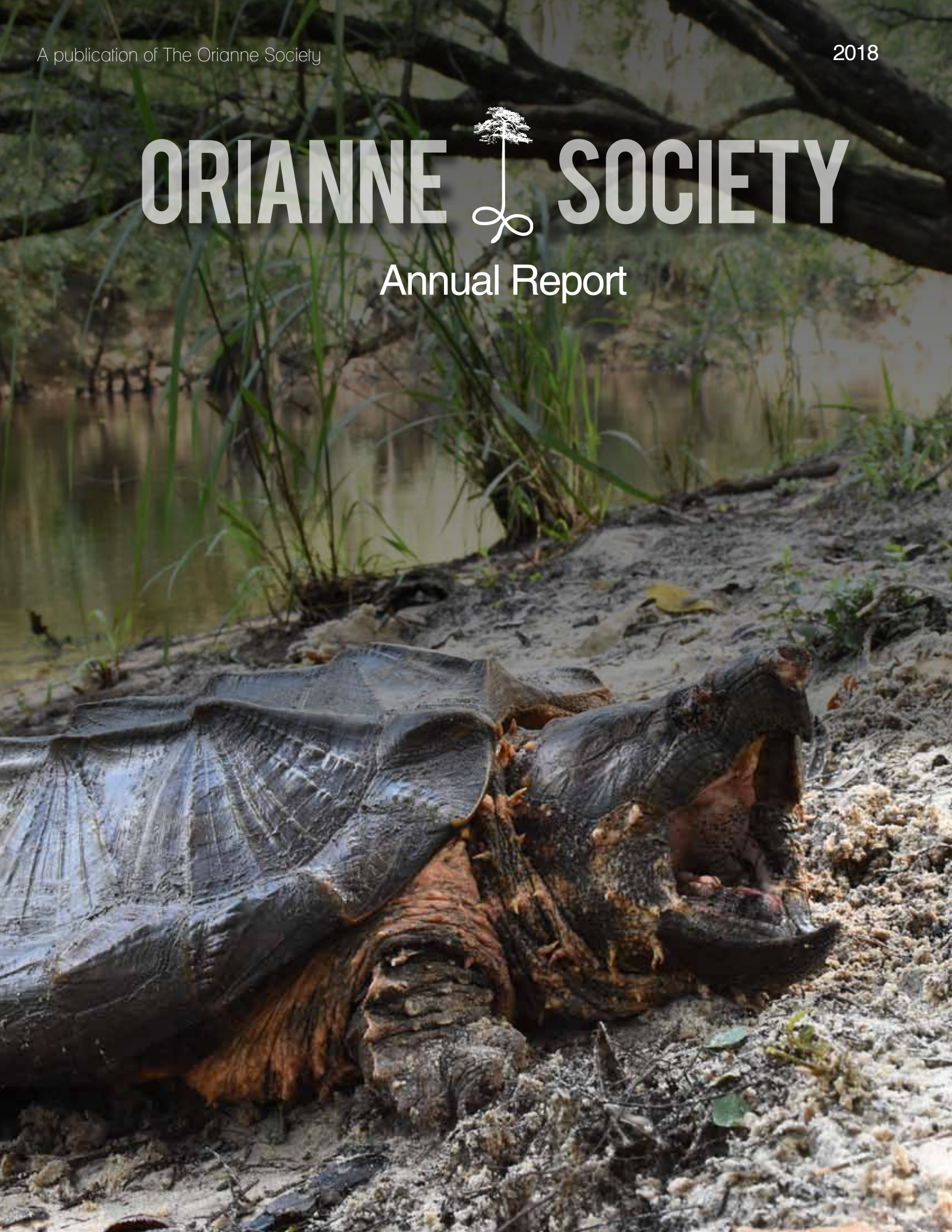


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2018

# ORIANNE SOCIETY

## Annual Report







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Wood Turtle with shell damage from a mower. Photo: Megan Jolly

## STAFF

**Christopher Jenkins**  
Chief Executive Officer

**Gary Baldaeus**  
Chief Financial Officer

**Heidi Hall**  
Development Director

**Houston Chandler**  
Director, Longleaf Savannas Initiative

**Brannon Knight**  
Stewardship Coordinator

**Ben Stegenga**  
Research Assistant

**Jacob Barrett**  
Field Operations Coordinator

**Kiley Briggs**  
Northeast Turtle Conservation Coordinator

**William Rodriguez**  
Communications Coordinator

**Charli Palmer**  
Program Manager

**Patty Li**  
Accountant

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**Mrs. Heidi Hall - Secretary**

The Orianne Society Annual Report is produced, designed, and edited by the staff of The Orianne Society.

**The Orianne Society**  
 11 Old Fruit Stand Lane, Tiger, GA 30576  
 706-224-1359  
[info@oriantnesociety.org](mailto:info@oriantnesociety.org)  
[www.OrianneSociety.org](http://www.OrianneSociety.org)




 @OrianneSociety

# Message from the CEO

As I sit at my desk thinking about writing this letter there is so much choose from. Should I write about the ten-year anniversary, the inspiring story of a young girl who's desires changed snake conservation forever, or the story of working through a difficult, some say almost impossible task, of taking a family foundation to a functioning public charity. All of those have crossed my mind but I keep coming back to the people in particular our staff. I am known to be a straight forward person and one who does not say much about the good job someone has done, instead always trying to get people to work harder on those areas where they need improvement. So let me take a few minutes and tell you about what really makes the Orianne Society great, our people.

There is no one who has given more to the success of Orianne than Heidi Hall. Heidi is educated as a wildlife biologist and was working in Idaho when she helped me found the Orianne Society. In some ways, she gave up so much and that is not lost on me. She left her job as a biologist to become our Program Manager, which is a position that focuses on the operations of the organization. She has generously changed her focus among administration, communications, fundraising, programs, education... whenever it was needed. She has and continues to be one of the most critical things leading to Orianne's success; she is a friend and a leader that despite being behind the scenes, drives the organization forward.

Dirk Stevenson no longer works for the Orianne Society but helped form the organization 11 years ago. I was a snake ecologist that had a strong interest in nonprofit management but Dirk was the expert in Indigo Snakes and sandhill ecosystems. Dirk added a great deal of comic relief to our days and was critical in developing and implementing the inventory and monitoring programs we still run today.

Javan Bauder is perhaps the hardest working person I have ever met. I first met Javan when he was a freshman at the University of Idaho. It may sound strange but I almost think of him as family, a family member that I have been able to help mentor through his masters, doctorate, and as an employee. Javan has moved on now and the world is going to be much better for it. He has a bright future and is going to make significant contributions to wildlife conservation.

I have known Steve Spear for over 15 years. Steve started with Orianne as a postdoc and later became an employee playing a critical role in helping Orianne broaden our scope as we began transitioning to a public charity. The amazing thing is that he did all of that with very few resources. We would not have Appalachian Highlands or Great Northern Forests Initiatives if it was not for Steve. Steve has moved on and is working as a wildlife ecologist in Ohio, I have a great deal of respect for him and the work he is doing.

Houston Chandler and Ben Stegenga are the odd couple. They function so differently but I could not imagine them functioning apart. I say this jokingly but both are critical to the growth we have experienced in our Longleaf Savannas Initiative. Houston is very organized and a great research scientist. When Dirk left he took over the reins in our Longleaf Savannas Initiative. With almost no experience in management, in a very short amount of time he has become one of the

better managers I have worked with. Ben runs many of our field crews and does a great deal of education outreach. He works long hard days in the field, I have seen many people with the ability to do this but where he excels is that he is one of the most inspiring educators. He has a skill and a passion for teaching people about reptiles and amphibians that is unmatched.

Charli Palmer is quiet but she is one of the most dependable, hard-working, and thoughtful people I have worked with. Charli started working as a program manager focused primarily on administration but she has never stopped advancing taking on more and more accounting responsibilities. Without her working behind the scenes Orianne would be in trouble. She works hard and always puts a smile on my face.

Brannon Knight and Jacob Barrett live in South Georgia and form the backbone of our land management efforts in the Longleaf Savannas. Brannon is a big strong guy but also has a very soft smile. He is currently away serving our country in the Middle East. I cannot begin to express the level of respect and thanks I have for what Brannon is doing. Without him standing on the front lines none of us would have the opportunity to work on conservation. Jacob Barrett has come into his own while Brannon has been away. Overnight, he needed to step into a difficult situation managing our land management efforts. Land management in the South is full of forestry and fire, one wrong move and there can be serious consequences. Jacob has shown the ability to lead and manage, he has a bright future.

I have known Kiley Briggs for almost 10 years. He is a Vermonter through and through. Growing up in New England as well, Kiley and I always connected around reptiles and amphibians in northern New England. Kiley first came to us as a technician tracking rattlesnakes. After a stint in Texas getting his master's degree he came back to us...and now being in the field was not his only strength, he learned statistics, GIS, and improved his communications skills. Kiley is now our Turtle Conservation Coordinator in the northeast. We have been through a great deal together and I have a ton of confidence in his ability to do this job and respect for his passion to conserve reptiles and amphibians in a place most people do not think about.

Over the years I have worked with so many great people but it is those that I have worked with at the Orianne Society that I will always remember most. We are a group of people who are fighting so hard against the odds to achieve the impossible, conserving the animals everyone else has forgotten by building an organization that is on their side. 2018 was a great year, our ten year anniversary, but it is the people that made it happen that are important. Thank you to all of them.



Dr. Chris Jenkins  
CEO, The Orianne Society



Dr. Christopher Jenkins. Photo: Heidi Hall



# MISSION

*The Orianne Society works to conserve critical ecosystems for imperiled reptiles and amphibians using science, applied conservation and education.*

Our programs are designed using a customized, science-based approach. Specifically, we work on multiple conservation targets within a series of landscapes. We first examine the threats to each conservation target and then determine the research and applied programs required to achieve conservation for each.

There are many themes that are often used across our work. Our primary theme is that we conduct science that informs conservation and we use science to inform on-the-ground conservation actions. However, to maintain our scientific credibility, we do not engage in advocacy or policy, though our work may be used by other organizations to influence policy.





# APPROACH



*Our efforts are divided into three initiatives that focus on declining landscapes and species.*

## **Longleaf Savannas**

*Altamaha River Corridor  
Sandhill Snakes  
Freshwater Turtles*

## **Great Northern Forests**

*Northeast Kingdom  
Freshwater Turtles  
Vernal Pools*

## **Appalachian Highlands**

*Greater Smoky Mountains  
Hellbenders  
Timber Rattlesnakes*



# History of Orianne

The Orianne Society started as a request from a young girl to her father ten years ago. Dr. Thomas Kaplan and his daughter, Orianne, were visiting a zoo, where Orianne had the opportunity to hold an Eastern Indigo Snake. She asked her father if she could have one as a pet but he had to tell her that it was not possible because it was an endangered species. Upon hearing that she made a very selfless request: she asked her father if he could save the Indigo Snake. Dr. Kaplan contacted Dr. Chris Jenkins, then with Wildlife Conservation Society, and together they decided to start an effort to conserve Indigo Snakes. Soon after that decision, a broad group of partners were brought together to develop a strategy and Project Orianne was founded with Dr. Jenkins as Chief Executive Officer and Dr. Kaplan as Chairman of the Board.

Project Orianne developed a comprehensive strategy for conserving Eastern Indigo Snakes. First, a series of properties were purchased in South Georgia in a stronghold for the species. These properties became the Orianne Indigo Snake Preserve and still stand today as a stronghold for rare Longleaf Pine species. Second, Project Orianne built a state-of-the-art

breeding center in Florida called the Orianne Center for Indigo Conservation. The facility is still run today as a partnership between The Orianne Society and Central Florida Zoo and is producing Indigo Snakes that are being reintroduced in Alabama and Florida. Finally, Project Orianne launched range-wide research, inventory, and monitoring efforts that increased their knowledge of Indigo Snake ecology and status significantly.

At the request of Dr. Kaplan, Project Orianne began the transition from a private operating foundation to a public charity and became The Orianne Society. This was a significant move for a nonprofit, moving from receiving the majority of its funding from one donor to receiving its funding more broadly from the “public”. As part of the transition, the now named Orianne Society expanded its board from approximately 3 to 10 people and launched a membership program. But perhaps the most significant changes came from focusing the Indigo Snake programs to specific projects and creating new programs on additional species and in additional areas. The Orianne Society was moving from a single species conservation organization to a





Claxton Rattlesnake and Wildlife Festival. Photo: Houston Chandler

rare reptile and amphibian conservation organization. While Orianne staff remained active in multiple areas, this transition focused Orianne's Indigo Snake efforts to land conservation, management, and monitoring populations across South Georgia.

As part of the transition, Orianne expanded its work on Indigo Snakes into a broader Longleaf Savannas Initiative and launched new efforts, an Appalachian Highlands Initiative and a portfolio of international Conservation Projects. The expanded Longleaf Savannas Initiative included conservation projects focused on other rare snakes, a large Gopher Tortoise conservation effort, and projects to conserve freshwater turtles. The Appalachian Highlands Initiative focused on Timber Rattlesnake conservation in the Southern Appalachians but also included projects to determine the status of and restore habitats for Hellbenders and Bog Turtles. Orianne staff also founded the Viper Specialist Group and worked on efforts for setting global viper conservation priorities and conducting species status assessments. Orianne also has worked on a series of small on-the-ground international projects in places like Costa Rica, Panama, and Bangladesh.

As part of The Orianne Society's transition to a public charity, Orianne launched an initiative for the conservation of Great Northern Forests. This initiative

focused on the region where the boreal forests of the north and the hardwood forests of the south come together. In this region there is an interesting group of reptiles and amphibians adapted to living in cold climates. Orianne's initial efforts focused on assessing the status of Wood Turtle populations in the Northeast Kingdom region of Vermont. Additional efforts included development of a private landowner network and riparian habitat restoration work. Orianne is currently exploring possibilities for future work with conservation of vernal pools and pond breeding amphibians.

Many of the projects and programs The Orianne Society started are still in place today and will continue into the future. Transitioning from a private operating foundation to a public charity is a task some said would be almost impossible, but Orianne is now approaching the end of the transition. With increased and continued support from the public (donations, additional people interested in serving on the board, corporate sponsors, and an increasing membership), The Orianne Society will complete the transition in the next few years and the story of Orianne over the years will continue, building a much longer history of conserving rare reptiles, amphibians, and the ecosystems they depend on.





Annual Report

Eastern Indigo Snake. Photo: Houston Chandler

# Longleaf Savannas Initiative



Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*) forests were once the dominant ecosystem across much of the southeastern United States, stretching from southern Virginia to the Florida peninsula and west into eastern Texas. However, a history of deforestation and land conversion across the southeast has led to a precipitous decline in land area covered by Longleaf Pine forests. Poor management, particularly a lack of regular wildfire, has further exacerbated the decline of Longleaf Pine by significantly degrading many of the remaining stands. These ecosystems are fire-adapted, and

regular fires maintain vegetation structure and promote many of the plant species that are characteristic of a Longleaf Pine savanna. Deforestation and fire suppression have combined to make the Longleaf Pine ecosystem one of the most imperiled in the country, with less than 3% of the historic coverage remaining and much of the extant forests experiencing varying degrees of degradation from lack of fire.

This dramatic decline of Longleaf Pine forests and their associated ecosystems is particularly troubling because of the incredible biodiversity





Seed collected for understory vegetation restoration. Photo: Houston Chandler

that they support. Plants, reptiles, and amphibians are particularly biodiverse in the southeastern U.S. compared to other parts of the country, and there are many endemic, rare, and declining species. Thus, the Orianne Society's Longleaf Savannas Initiative (LSI) focuses on conserving and restoring Longleaf Pine ecosystems and the high biodiversity that they support. Our conservation efforts are centered in southern Georgia, where over 100,000 acres of land have been set aside for conservation. Much of this land falls within the Altamaha River watershed, which is the largest free-flowing river on the east coast of the United States. This region is highly regarded for its unique fauna and overall biodiversity - 120 rare or endangered plant and animal species call this watershed home. Therefore, we chose the Altamaha River Corridor (ARC) as a focal landscape for our restoration and conservation efforts.

The Orianne Indigo Snake Preserve (OISP) supports

populations of at least 46 species of reptiles and 29 species of amphibians and contains a matrix of wetlands and upland Longleaf Pine forests. The OISP borders the Ocmulgee River upstream of its confluence with the Oconee River, which forms the Altamaha River. The property serves as our home base for restoration and research projects that span the entire length of the Altamaha River basin. Our efforts in the ARC require working with a diverse group of partners, including state and federal agencies, other NGOs, and private citizens. Partnerships benefit our conservation goals by allowing us to increase our footprint on the ground, facilitating both land management and research projects. For example, we focus on restoring habitats and conducting surveys for several upland snake species, including the federally threatened Eastern Indigo Snake (*Drymarchon couperi*). This often means restoring and promoting Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) habitat through prescribed fire, thinning planted Longleaf Pine stands,

and restoring native groundcover. Importantly, we focus on ecosystem level restoration and management, and this work benefits far more species than just the species that we focus on.

Last year was another successful year for the LSI. We completed several research and monitoring projects and continued to expand our land management activities. We worked on projects with a variety of species, including Eastern Indigo Snakes, Spotted Turtles (*Clemmys guttata*), Gopher Tortoises, and Suwannee Alligator Snapping Turtles (*Macrochelys suwanniensis*). We set prescribed fires on properties up and down the ARC and worked with a large group of private landowners to accomplish our goals. These research projects and land management activities combine to provide the information that we need to make on the ground conservation decisions that benefit species and restore Longleaf Pine forests across southern Georgia.





Collecting data on Spotted Turtles. Photo: Patrick Moldowan



Juvenile Spotted Turtle. Photo: Jackie Litzgus





Conducting prescribed fire. Photo: Houston Chandler

## To Date Major Accomplishments

### Inventory/Monitoring/Research

- Conducted research projects and population monitoring on Eastern Indigo Snakes for over 10 years, ensuring that this species persists throughout its current range.

### Conservation

- Purchased, restored, and managed approximately 2,500 acres of Eastern Indigo Snake and Gopher Tortoise habitat on the Orianne Indigo Snake Preserve.
- Burned over 29,000 acres of Longleaf Pine forests in southern Georgia, helping

to restore natural fire return intervals to these fire-dependent systems.

- Participated in Eastern Indigo Snake reintroductions at sites in Alabama and Florida, restoring this species to parts of its range where populations have been extirpated.

### Education/Outreach

- Published over 15 peer-reviewed manuscripts from research projects on imperiled reptiles and amphibians inhabiting Longleaf Pine forests. Sharing our work allows other scientists and managers to use the results to further promote the conservation of these species.



Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake at burrow. Photo: Houston Chandler



## 2018 Accomplishments

### Inventory/Monitoring/ Research

- Surveyed 19 sites for Eastern Indigo Snakes and Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnakes as part of state-wide population monitoring in Georgia. Monitoring these populations allows us to identify how they are responding to on the ground management and identify potential issues that could warrant further management action.
- Completed 5th and 4th year of mark-recapture population monitoring for Spotted Turtles at two sites in Georgia. Long-term monitoring of Spotted Turtles in Georgia will allow us to assess population viability and learn more about these poorly studied southern populations.
- Monitored reproduction in two populations of Spotted Turtles by measuring clutch sizes and locating turtle nests, a crucial aspect determining persistence in turtle populations.
- Conducted inventory surveys for Spotted Turtles in both Florida and Georgia, identifying where populations

of this rare and cryptic turtle are already protected in both states.

- Surveyed for Suwannee Alligator Snapping Turtles at five riverine sites in Georgia. This species was recently split from other alligator snapping turtle species, and its status and range in Georgia are poorly understood.

- Finished two-year study on Snake Fungal Disease prevalence in the snake fauna of southern Georgia. This disease has been implicated in population declines of multiple species, and this research is the first step to identifying how it is impacting Georgia's native snake fauna.

### Conservation

- Applied prescribed fire to over 4,600 acres of Longleaf Pine forests and associated habitats on a combination of private and public lands. Prescribed fires are necessary to restore natural burn intervals to ecosystems that are adapted to regular fires.

- Harvested over 180 pounds of native grass seed and planted 15 acres on the Orianne Indigo Snake Preserve and a nearby private property. Much of the plant diversity in Longleaf Pine forests occurs in the understory, and these native grasses are difficult to restore

once lost. Harvesting seed from intact habitats to plant in areas without these species is a crucial aspect of restoring Longleaf Pine forests.

- Planted approximately 14 acres of Longleaf Pine trees on the Orianne Indigo Snake Preserve.

- Assisted partners with a Basic Wildland Fire Academy, training approximately 30 students in basic prescribed fire techniques.

### Education/Outreach

- Attended 5 wildlife festivals, hosted 2 amphibian and reptile conservation events, gave 5 presentations on reptile and amphibian conservation to the public, and presented the results of our Snake Fungal Disease research at the annual Southeastern PARC meeting. Sharing our work and getting people involved promotes our conservation mission and encourages people to be stakeholders in restoring native ecosystems.

## Future Goals

### Inventory/Monitoring/ Research

- Continue long-term monitoring surveys for Eastern Indigo Snakes and Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnakes, ensuring that populations of both species are stable through



time.

- Identify the effects of Snake Fungal Disease infections on Eastern Indigo Snake populations.
- Continue monitoring Spotted Turtles in Georgia at focal sites and identify other populations on protected lands, allowing for more informed conservation decisions for this species.
- Promote Gopher Tortoise conservation through the Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative with the goal of precluding the need to list tortoises in the eastern portion of their range and simultaneously promoting habitat for hundreds of other species that utilizing tortoise burrows.

## Conservation

- Continue to initiate prescribed fire on private and public lands, while growing our network of participating land owners. The majority of land in Georgia is private property, and it would not be possible to accomplish our mission without the participation of private landowners.
- Establish a second burn team to increase our land management capabilities. One of the main barriers to restoring Longleaf Pine forests is having enough boots on the

ground to do the work and a second burn team would allow us to double our footprint in southern Georgia.

## Partnerships

- Continue to build a network of partners and volunteers that provide on the ground support

for our conservation mission. Partners and volunteers allow us to expand our work by offering access to private lands, assisting with research projects and events, and promoting conservation of herpetofauna.

X-ray of gravid Spotted Turtle. Photo: Georgia Sea Turtle Center



Gopher Tortoise in a burrow.  
Photo: Houston Chandler

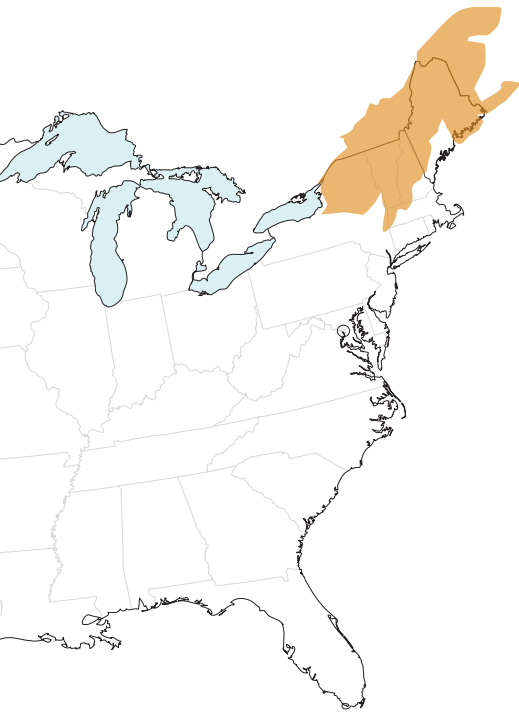




## Annual Report

Wood Turtle at nesting habitat. Photo: Kiley Briggs

# Great Northern Forests Initiative



The Great Northern Forests Initiative (GNFI) is an effort to conserve habitat for rare reptiles and amphibians in the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada, with an initial emphasis on Northern New England. The region sits right at the edge of a major transitional zone between the hardwood forests of the south and the boreal forests to the north, and as such is home to many species that do not overlap anywhere else. Much of this land is vast wilderness, but the river valleys are dominated by agriculture and fragmented by roads, and there is increasing pressure to

develop critical wildlife habitat. Many of the reptiles and amphibians found there are in decline and in urgent need of conservation, including several species of freshwater turtle.

Our main focus in the GNFI is to conserve critical habitat for rare freshwater turtles, especially the Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*), a species that takes over a decade to mature, can live upwards of 90 years, and for which the survival and longevity of adults is absolutely critical to the survival of their populations. Unfortunately, as the forests and river valleys Wood Turtles depend on are under increasing pressure from





Wood Turtle workshop for teens. Photo: Lauren Traister

development and agriculture, fewer and fewer of these turtles survive to old age and their populations are in rapid decline. To address this, Orianne launched a Wood Turtle monitoring and conservation program aimed at identifying critical Wood Turtle habitat and working with landowners to implement conservation strategies protecting the species.

Restoring Wood Turtle habitat depends on partnerships and we have put great effort into building relationships with other conservation organizations in the GNFI to raise

interest and awareness for the need to protect this charismatic species. As a result of our outreach there are now many groups thinking about Wood Turtles as a priority whereas before there were very few. Through those efforts we have initiated conservation actions on several properties in key areas, helped landowners enroll in Farm Bill conservation programs, and are working with federal partners to develop a management plan for over 1000 acres of critical Wood Turtle habitat on public lands.

So far our Wood Turtle program has focused on a region of Vermont known as the Northeast Kingdom, but looking ahead to 2019 we will expand those efforts. We are also undertaking a project to lead the implementation of the Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) Conservation Plan, putting over a decade of monitoring and conservation planning by seven states and dozens of partners into action.



## Major Accomplishments to Date

### Inventory/Monitoring/Research

- Identified two areas critical to Wood Turtle conservation in northeast VT where future landowner outreach and conservation efforts will be targeted.

### Partnerships

- Built and strengthened relationships with over 15 federal, state, municipal, and non-government conservation partners, who are now doing a better job identifying and managing Wood Turtle habitat.

### Conservation

- Worked with federal partners to begin the development of Wood Turtle management plan for 1000 acres of critical habitat on public land. Through this partnership we expect to stabilize or reverse the decline of a significant Wood Turtle population.

### Education/Outreach

- Produced and premiered the Great Northern Turtle documentary and held four screenings before releasing the video online, increasing public support for Wood Turtle conservation and increasing our capacity to raise funds.

## Program Development

- Secured contract to lead implementation of Blanding's Turtle Conservation Plan in 5 northeast states, greatly expanding the scope and impact of our Great Northern Forests Initiative.

## 2018 Accomplishments

### Inventory/Monitoring/Research

- Assessed the status and distribution of Wood Turtles in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, which helps us target conservation efforts to the places with the greatest need.

- Observed 84 Wood Turtles a total of 108 times, giving us good preliminary insights into population demographics at high priority locations.

### Partnerships

- Led Wood Turtle habitat management workshops with conservation partners, rallying support and interest in Wood Turtle conservation in the process.

- Helped refine Wood Turtle conservation efforts through the Natural Resources Conservation Service so that federal conservation funding can be better prioritized to sites

important to Wood Turtles.

### Conservation

- Helped three private landowners conserve Wood Turtle habitat on their lands through conservation easements, the establishment of a riparian buffer, and a stream bank stabilization project. All three projects not only improve habitat quality for Wood Turtles, but also reduce erosion and nutrient runoff, improving water quality in the process.

### Education/Outreach

- Led 8 public reptile and amphibian workshops, raising public interest and awareness of the species in their own back yards.

- Gave 11 presentation about Wood Turtle conservation and other reptile and amphibian topics, increasing public awareness of The Orianne Society and the need to conserve reptile and amphibian habitat among the public.

## Future Goals

### Inventory/Monitoring/Research

- Continue to survey new locations in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom and expand surveys to northwestern New Hampshire



in search of previously unknown robust populations of Wood Turtles.

- Begin using radio telemetry to locate nests and critical upland habitat in one focal area for Wood Turtle conservation, allowing us to make site-specific management plan for a 1000-acre property and surrounding parcels.

## Partnerships

- We will continue to build on existing partnerships and reach out to new potential partners, expanding our capacity to locate Wood Turtle habitat, interface with landowners, and make management recommendations.

- As we begin implementing the Blanding's Turtle Conservation Plan, we will reach out to a variety of previously uncontacted land trusts and other conservation organizations in 5 states to rally support for conserving land in 10 high priority locations for the species.

## Conservation

- We will identify high priority parcels for Wood Turtle conservation and work with landowners to find conservation strategies that balance landowner needs with Wood Turtle habitat management, creating “win-



Estimating turtle age: Photo: Kiley Briggs

win” scenarios for the turtles and landowners.

- Begin working with state, federal, and non-governmental partners to implement the Blanding's Turtle Conservation Plan in the northeastern US.

## Education/Outreach

- Give presentations and lead workshops focused on reptile and amphibian conservation to the public and attend at least three festivals to raise interest and awareness for conserving Wood Turtles and other species.

- Lead an expedition for a public radio program called

‘Outdoor Radio’, introducing Wood Turtle conservation and The Orianne Society to a state-wide audience in Vermont.

## Program Development

- Grow the Great Northern Forests Initiative through leading the implementation of the Blanding's Turtle Conservation Plan, which will be an entirely new component to the GNFI in 2019 and bring Orianne to several states in which we have never worked before.

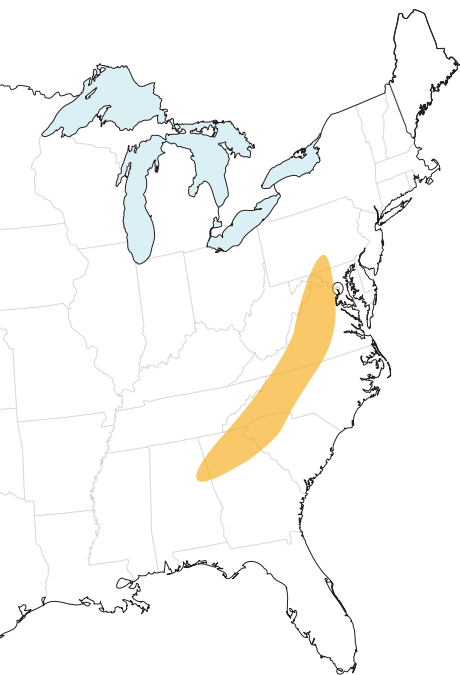




Annual Report

Appalachian Highlands. Photo: Chris Jenkins

# Appalachian Highlands Initiative



The Appalachian Highlands Initiative (AHI) works to protect the species and landscapes of one of the most diverse regions of North America, the Appalachians. Much of the high mountain area is protected as national park or national forests and are places where many people hike, camp, fish, and hunt. In the valleys, human development is increasing, which not only changes the habitat for many species, but also divides and fragments the high mountain areas so that species become isolated.

The Greater Smoky Mountains are the featured landscape of the

AHI. The Appalachian Mountain ecosystem is the predominant ecosystem in this region which includes areas throughout eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina and north Georgia. Within this region are some of the highest mountains in the eastern United States, extensive forests broken up by high mountain balds and river valleys that have traditionally supported farming. People have lived in this landscape for the past 12,000 years. Because of this, the Appalachian Mountain ecosystem serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining the balance between nature and people.





Timber Rattlesnake surveys. Photo: Sara Rogers

In order to achieve this balance, there must be an effort to both protect the remaining forests while also working with community members to make private land more hospitable for wildlife.

This region is a global hotspot for salamander species and provides

important habitat for other species that live at higher elevations, including our focal species, the Eastern Hellbender. Our goal is to reverse the decline of Hellbenders in the southern Appalachian Mountain ecosystem and ensure that populations will be stable for the foreseeable future. To accomplish

this goal, we will continue to develop and apply techniques to monitor Hellbender populations, to increase Hellbender reproduction with stream habitat management, and to restore stream reaches to increase Hellbender habitat.



## To Date Major Accomplishments

### Inventory/Monitoring/Research

- Developed what has become a standard technique for inventory and monitoring Hellbender populations.
- Completed a statewide inventory of Hellbenders in North Carolina.
- Conducted monitoring of twenty five Timber Rattlesnake sites between Georgia and North Carolina.
- Conducted bog turtle inventory work in Georgia.

### Conservation

- Tested the use of Hellbender Huts for providing habitat in degraded streams.
- Completed restoration projects on multiple mountain bogs and streams in Georgia and North Carolina.

### Partnerships

- Members found in a wide range of partnerships for conserving Hellbenders.
- Formed a Timber Rattlesnake Stewards Group in North Carolina.

### Education/Outreach

- Hosted three Places You Have Never Herped citizen science events in North Carolina and Tennessee.
- Presented over thirty presentations on the Timber Rattlesnake biology and snake safety to school groups, agencies, and the general public.

## 2018 Accomplishments

### Inventory/Monitoring/Research

- Used environmental DNA techniques to inventory for the presence of Hellbenders in seventy streams in NC which will allow us and our partners to focus riparian restoration efforts.
- Installed and monitored twenty Hellbender Huts in two North Carolina streams to test if they are an effective method for surveying streams with small populations.
- Completed our 6th year of monitoring Timber Rattlesnakes. Final results allow us to determine if populations are declining or increasing.

### Education/Outreach

- Conducted 6 Timber Rattlesnake presentations to over two hundred people. Direct persecution is one

of the greatest threats to rattlesnakes and education is one of the greatest tools to lower persecution.

## Future Goals

### Inventory/Monitoring/Research

- Continue long-term monitoring surveys for Timber Rattlesnakes and grow the Rattlesnake Stewards Network to ensure more populations are being monitored.

### Conservation

- Increase our efforts in Land Protection and Restoration especially in riparian areas.

### Education/Outreach

- Continue to give Timber Rattlesnake education programs.
- Teach a course on snake ecology at the Highlands Biological Station.

### Program Development

- Hire a full time Director of the Appalachian Highlands Initiative and use the increased capacity to grow our work for Hellbender and Bog Turtle Conservation.





Eastern Hellbender. Photo: Pete Oxford









# More to come

It is with deep gratitude and respect that I convey to our members that Dr. Thomas Kaplan is stepping down as the Chairman of the Orianne, but not without leaving us with a plan to prepare our board for the future. Dr. Kaplan and I have known each other over ten years now. Our story started eleven years ago, I was hiking and studying wildlife in the high deserts of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. I got a call one day from a colleague at Wildlife Conservation Society. He told me that there was a man that wanted to start a snake conservation program. I was intrigued but still skeptical because there were so few people who truly cared about snakes. But before I knew it I was in New York City, sitting across the table from Dr. Kaplan. He started the conversation by telling me a story. On a family trip his daughter had the chance to hold an Eastern Indigo Snake. She was so taken by the animal that she told her father she wanted one, but Dr. Kaplan explained to her that they were endangered with extinction and she could not have one as a pet. At this point in his story Dr. Kaplan looked me in the eye with a serious look and told me that she turned to him with determination and asked if he would save the species much like he was doing with big cats ([www.panthera.org](http://www.panthera.org)). So there we sat, a business man and a conservationist, each with a new mission in our lives. A mission to meet the expectations of a young girl and save a species - a snake no less. We knew immediately that the organization had to be named after his daughter and so the Orianne Society was born.

Dr. Kaplan and I had a vision for an organization that would lead the greatest conservation effort in history for a snake; an effort that was partnership driven and was comprehensive in scope. We worked together to bring partners to the table and he invested the capital needed to build a series of comprehensive programs all focused on Indigo Snakes. In 11 years as Chairman of the Orianne Society Dr. Kaplan and his family invested over 17 million dollars into the Orianne Society and Eastern Indigo Snake conservation. His dedication and passion have always been contagious. Every time we met, no matter what business matter he was dealing with, I always had the feeling that talking about snakes was going to be the best part of his day.

Dr. Kaplan had the foresight to realize the scale of this effort and that if we were going to be successful, the organization had to be much larger than just the two of us. With a strategic approach Tom led us as we broadened the mission beyond Indigo Snakes to include all rare reptiles and helped us expand the board, our donor network, and our membership program. He had the vision to transition Orianne to a public charity that was financially sustainable and would work to conserve reptiles indefinitely. His approach to this transition was deliberate, he did not expect an organization like the Orianne Society to be

sustainable overnight, and instead he had a plan to transition slowly from a family funded organization to a public charity. Dr. Kaplan's leadership and dedication resulted in the plan being achieved. We now have a diverse donor base as we are completing our 5 year waiting period with the IRS and our final paperwork for public charity status is being submitted in July 2019.

The Orianne Society could have never have achieved the conservation successes of the last ten years, if it was not for the guidance and investment Dr. Kaplan and his family made. With his support we created the Orianne Indigo Snake Preserve in Georgia to be a place protected in perpetuity and restored and managed for Indigo Snakes and Gopher Tortoises. We created the Orianne Center for Indigo Conservation, a facility in Florida that now serves as the captive breeding hub for one of the greatest reintroduction efforts for snakes ever. Dr. Kaplan also helped by providing much of the funding needed to run the organization to operate these facilities and to be a leader in inventory, monitoring, and research. His funding and guidance was critical as we developed other sources of revenue. Without the initial and continued dedication and commitment of Dr. Kaplan the Orianne Society would not exist.

While Tom is stepping down from the board after 11 years, he will continue to be involved and is helping to ease the transition by promoting the addition of other board members. In summer 2019, Merritt Paulson, owner of the Portland Timbers Major League Soccer team joined the Orianne Society board to help guide us into the future. Merritt and his family have been long time supports of the Orianne Society and dedicated to reptile and amphibian conservation. With Merritt on the board we are working with a group of dedicated supporters to increase our board of 9 people to approximately 20 people by 2021. Tom will be missed, but his generosity and passion have left Merritt and the remaining board with a great base to build from. The future of Orianne is one of growing programs that meets the increasing number of conservation needs for reptiles. We encourage you to become one of our partners, so that together, we can help shape the future of the Orianne Society and the rare species that depend on us.



Dr. Chris Jenkins  
CEO, The Orianne Society



# Who We Are

Gary Baldaeus  
*Chief Financial Officer*



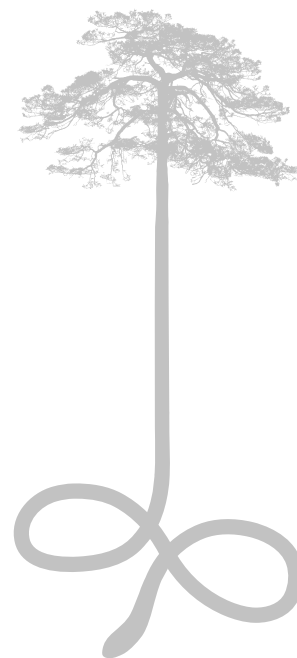
Chris Jenkins, PhD  
*Chief Executive Officer*



Heidi Hall  
*Director of  
Development*



William Rodriguez  
*Communication  
Coordinator*



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Charli Palmer  
*Program Manager*







Ben Stegenga  
*Research Assistant*



Houston Chandler  
*Director of Longleaf  
Savannas Initiative*



Kiley Briggs  
*Northeast Turtle  
Conservation  
Coordinator*



Brannon Knight  
*Stewardship Coordinator*



Jacob Barrett  
*Field Operations  
Coordinator*

# Orianne Society

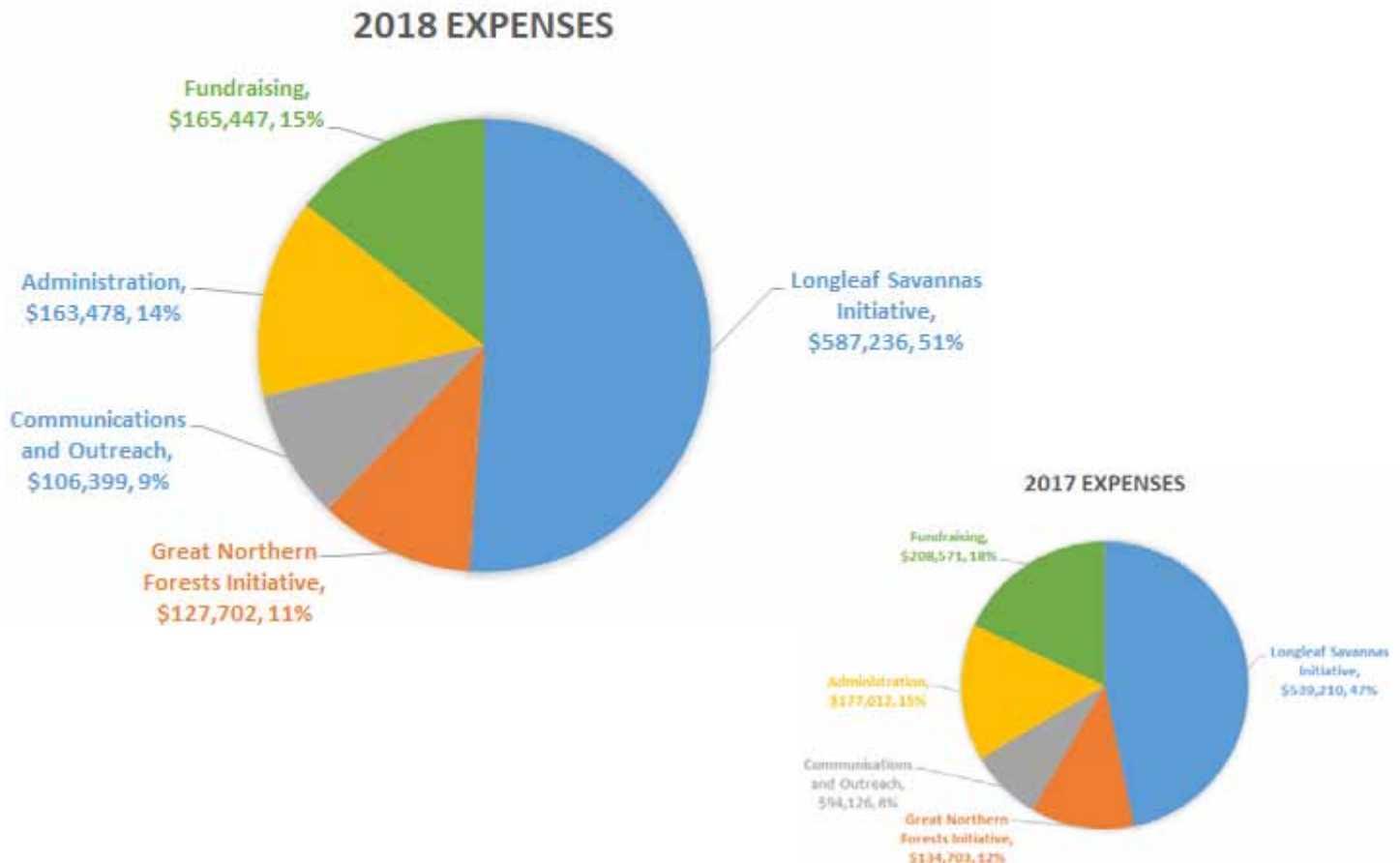






# 2018 Financials

Our goal is conservation and we are fully dedicated to maximizing our financial resources to achieve our mission. We work diligently to attract and employ a professional staff with diverse skill sets while keeping our overhead costs low. Continuing and identifying new funding sources to fulfill our conservation goals, pay our dedicated staff, and grow the organization and our reach remains a priority within our long-term financial planning. Support from foundations, grants, state and federal agencies, partners, and our generous donors, and members allows us to keep moving forward, to strengthen our initiatives, and, ultimately, conserve reptiles, amphibians, and the landscapes they need to persist.



Over the last few years, Orianne has had a relatively high ratio of fundraising and administration relative to program expenses. This is attributed to our transition from a private operating foundation to a public charity and our corresponding efforts to build our development program. In 2017 fundraising accounted for 18% of our overall budget, in 2018 it is 15%. In 2017, administration accounted for 15% of the overall budget and in 2018 it is 14%. Our strategic plan is designed to continue to lower this ratio over the next three years to our desired 10% to 15%.



# THANK YOU!

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Brett Albanese  
Christopher Alberts  
Milissa Alexander  
Don Alford  
Matthew Allender  
Gail Allinson  
Cameron Alvis  
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# TAKE action



## BECOME A DONOR

From pledging a reoccurring donation, to becoming a member, to making a one time donation, our supporters are the backbone of the organization. Donations can be made through our secure website or by contacting us directly at 706-224-1359



## SPREAD THE WORD

We don't underestimate the power of word of mouth when it comes to letting people know about our work and the ways they can contribute! Please consider sharing this magazine with others who have an interest in conservation, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



## PLAN YOUR GIVING

Don't just plan for your future—plan for the future of reptiles, amphibians and the great places they inhabit. Whether you prefer to set up an annual donation or a deferred gift, we can work with you to determine what you want your gift to support and how it will benefit these amazing animals and landscapes. Please contact us at [info@oriannesociety.org](mailto:info@oriannesociety.org) or 706-224-1359 for more information about our planned giving opportunities.



# Become a Corporate Sponsor

The Orianne Society's corporate sponsorship program allows business entities to assist in furthering conservation efforts for reptiles, amphibians, and critically important landscapes. We invite potential sponsors to learn more about our work and how your organization can get involved through one of our three annual sponsorship levels. Please note that not all gifts must be monetary. The Orianne Society is often in need of in-kind donations, such as assistance in specific skill sets, maintenance, field vehicles, etc. To learn more, contact Heidi Hall at [hhall@oriannesociety.org](mailto:hhall@oriannesociety.org).

## FRESH WATER PARTNER (\$1,000)

- Acknowledgement in Social Media
- Logo on Orianne Website
- Listed in Annual Report
- Electronic Version of Magazines/Annual Report

## HEALTHY FOREST PARTNER (\$5,000)

- Acknowledgement in Social Media
- Logo on Orianne Website
- Logo in Annual Report
- Electronic Version of Magazines/Annual Report
- Hardcopies of Magazines/Annual Report
- ¼ Page Ad in Magazines
- One Employee Volunteer Day

## ENDANGERED SPECIES PARTNER (\$10,000)

- Acknowledgement in Social Media
- Logo on Orianne Website
- Logo in Annual Report
- Electronic Version of Magazines/Annual Report
- Hardcopies of Magazines/Annual Report
- ½ Page Ad in Magazines
- Two Employee Volunteer Days
- Company Logo at Events
- Press Release on Partnership





The Orianne Society  
is a proud, nonprofit  
partner of  
1% for the Planet and  
EarthShare Georgia

