



“Saving Southeastern Grasslands”

The Southeastern Grasslands Institute (SGI) was founded in 2017 at Austin Peay State University (Clarksville, TN) by Dwayne Estes and Theo Witsell to advance grassland conservation in the Southeast United States and address the biodiversity crisis affecting southeastern grasslands. Since then, SGI has grown from a team of two to what will be a staff of more than 60 in 2025. Our focal region is the “Biogeographic Southeast”, an area encompassing all or part of 24 states, extending from the eastern edge of the Great Plains in Texas and Oklahoma, north to the glacial boundary, and east and south to the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. SGI works across public and private lands – identifying, researching, and restoring grasslands and grassland-related habitats. We also work to improve education and outreach on the importance of grassland biodiversity and conservation.

Mission

SGI is dedicated to saving the “Forgotten Grasslands” of the Southeast. Grassland loss is the single greatest conservation issue currently facing eastern North American terrestrial biodiversity. These precious ecosystems are nearly extinct and the species that depend on them are fading fast. Many grasslands that had managed to persist for hundreds of years after settlement have disappeared in the past quarter-century. What will the next 25 years bring? As a conservation community we are only now realizing how extensive our grasslands once were. The losses have been truly staggering. If we want to reverse the tide of grassland biodiversity loss, our response must be rapid as well as unparalleled in its magnitude. This is an immensely complex and ambitious challenge that will take some of the brightest and most creative minds in American conservation to solve.

Restoration and Stewardship Program

SGI’s Restoration and Stewardship Program conducts on-the-ground grassland restoration projects. Projects include a wide range of remnant grassland restorations, endangered and rare species conservation and management, and grassland reconstructions across

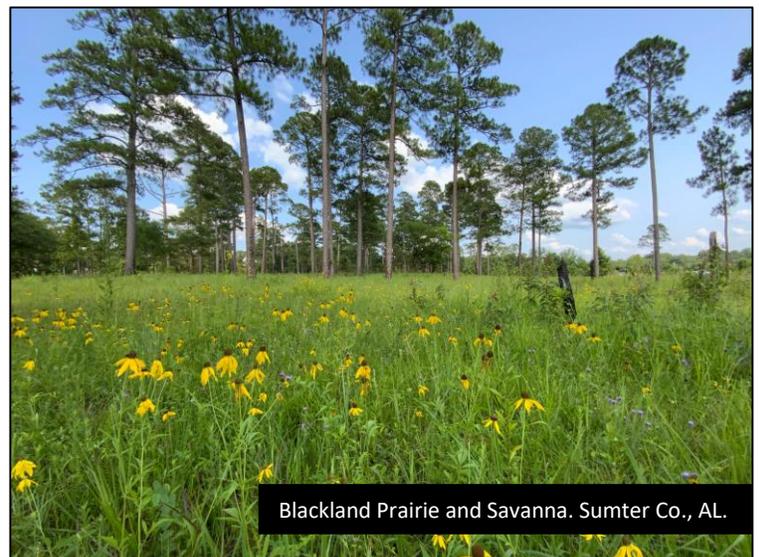
federal, state, and private lands. This includes implementing practices on the ground such as prescribed fire, invasive species removal, grassland planting, open woodland restoration, and more. For example in 2024 we began restoration and stewardship projects in 40 national parks in 16 states.

Grassland Science, Mapping, and History Program

In 2024, we hired two three-person field science teams who are focused on locating, mapping, documenting, describing, and classifying grassland habitats across the Southeast. They also do historical research to illuminate the importance of grasslands in American history and ecology. Information gathered by this program will be made available through our *Grasslandia* portal, an online clearinghouse and decision support tool for all things grasslands, now under development with funding from the US Department of Agriculture.

Native Plant Materials Program

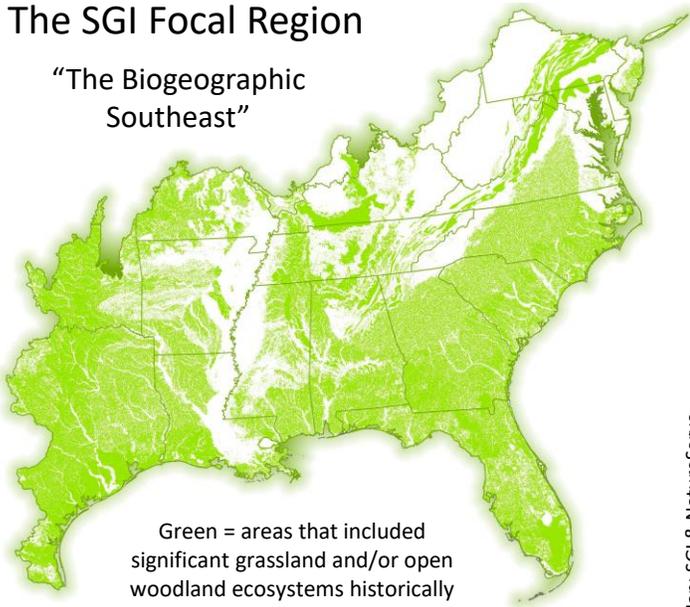
SGI’s Plant Materials Program serves as the Southeast Region hub for the Bureau of Land Management’s Seeds of Success Program and also serves as a seedbank for the Southeast. This program focuses on conserving the ecoregional genetic diversity of grassland plant species by seed-banking them for future increase and use in on the ground grassland ecosystem restoration.



Blackland Prairie and Savanna. Sumter Co., AL.

The SGI Focal Region

“The Biogeographic Southeast”



Green = areas that included significant grassland and/or open woodland ecosystems historically

Map: SGI & NatureServe

Volunteer Program

SGI’s Volunteer Program focuses on educating and exposing the next generation of conservationists to grassland conservation. This includes a mix of field-based restoration training, seed collecting and processing, biodiversity documentation, and education and outreach. NOTE: Opportunities vary geographically.

Tribal Program

SGI’s Tribal Program focuses on bridging the gap between grasslands conservation and Indigenous knowledge, leading to stronger restoration projects and the incorporation of Indigenous priorities in conservation. We now have three full-time tribal liaisons, based in Louisiana, North Carolina, and Oklahoma and will soon be hiring a team of interns for the tribal program.

Funding

SGI is funded through a diverse stream of funding sources. We are eligible for many government research grants through our affiliation with our host institution, Austin Peay State University, and also contract with a wide variety of conservation agencies and organizations. We can also receive tax-deductible donations through the Austin Peay State University Foundation. Since SGI was founded we have secured over 25 million dollars in funding to save southeastern grasslands, from a variety of federal, state, municipal, corporate, and private funders.

Primary Public Funders include the U.S. National Park Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, Tennessee Valley Authority, and Tennessee Dept. of Environment and Conservation. **Primary Private and Corporate Funders** include the BAND Foundation, Tucker Foundation, Google Inc., Lyndhurst Foundation, Riverview Foundation, Maine Community Foundation, and the Dorothy Kate and Thomas F. Frist Foundation.

Acres Impacted

To date SGI has positively impacted over **60,000 acres** of grasslands in 18 states.

Staff and Offices

By the end of 2025, SGI will employ a team of more than 60 staff based in Tennessee, Arkansas, Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida. Our Little Rock office opened in May 2024.

Contact Us

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Novaculite Glade and Barrens. Hot Spring Co., AR.

