



## Georgia Species at Risk Project

04-154

### Background:



*Scutellaria ocmulgee*, Ocmulgee skullcap, a Georgia Species at Risk

“Species at Risk” on Department of Defense (DoD) installations are defined as: (1) plant and animal species that are not yet federally listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, but that are either designated as candidates for listing or are regarded by NatureServe as critically imperiled or imperiled throughout their range, and (2) with populations that are known to occur on or near DoD installations.

### Objective:

The Georgia Species at Risk Project sought to map habitat for Species at Risk at Fort Benning, Fort Gordon, Fort Stewart, Kings Bay Submarine Base, Robins Air Force Base, and Townsend Bombing Range, and identify high priority habitats for conservation both on the installations themselves and within a buffer area.

### Summary of Approach:

Natural environments at the DoD installations were mapped using a mid-scale classification units known as “Ecological Systems” by the Natural Resources Spatial Analysis Laboratory at the University of Georgia. Ecological Systems are defined as “recurring groups of biological communities that are found in similar physical environments and are influenced by similar dynamic ecological processes”, and provide useful surrogates for habitats of most of the Species at Risk.

### Benefit:

Identifying key habitats for Species at Risk both on- and off-base will allow the different installations to plan so as to minimize potential impacts to these habitats, and protect them if possible. Working proactively may preclude a need for federal listing of these species under the Endangered Species Act. High-quality habitats identified by this project may help inform the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program, or become conservation targets for other efforts.

### Accomplishments:

Ecological Systems maps for all six installations have been completed. High-quality examples of important habitats have been identified, and field visits have been conducted. In addition, management recommendations for both the Species at Risk and their associated environments have been made. An important outgrowth of the Georgia Species at Risk Project has been the Gopher Tortoise Candidate Conservation Agreement, in which various



Southern Coastal Plain Mesic Slope Forest Ecological System, Bleckley Co., GA, habitat for *Scutellaria ocmulgee*

cooperating agencies (including DoD) and organizations are working together to protect and enhance habitat for this declining reptile so that federal listing will not be necessary within its non-listed range. At present the gopher tortoise is federally listed as threatened west of the Mobile River, and has been petitioned for listing east of the Mobile.

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