

## **Georgia Department of Natural Resources**

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### Georgia EPD releases study on trout streams

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has released a three-year study prepared by the University of Georgia Institute of Ecology, which examines buffer protection for north Georgia trout streams.

The EPD-funded study, titled "Implications of Changes in Riparian Buffer Protection for Georgia's Trout Streams," compared the potential effectiveness of 100-foot versus 50-foot buffers in providing healthy conditions for trout. A buffer is the undisturbed natural area on either side of a stream. Current state law requires that this buffer be at least 50 feet wide along a trout stream. Trout thrive in cool water containing low amounts of sediment. Disturbing the natural buffer by removing trees and groundcover can cause water temperatures to rise and an increase in sediment.

The study found that most trout streams on public land have buffers at least 100 feet wide, however the majority of Georgia's trout streams are on private land where the buffers are often narrower and may not be as effective in providing healthy conditions for trout.

The research concluded that the presence of young trout in a stream is most likely when the water temperature is below 67 degrees Fahrenheit. The UGA scientists also reported that sediment might affect trout spawning by settling in streams and covering trout eggs. Mathematical equations were used to predict the consequences of removing or reducing buffer protection on trout populations. Those predictions suggest that young trout populations are significantly reduced when forested buffer width is reduced from 100 feet to 50 feet.

A second EPD-funded report relating to stream buffers also has been released. It is titled "Georgia's Trout Stream Buffer Program Assessment" and was prepared by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia. Both reports are available for downloading and printing on the EPD Web site at [www.gaepd.org](http://www.gaepd.org) by clicking on the "What's New at EPD" button.

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