To better protect Georgia’s streams and other water bodies from forestry nonpoint source pollution (primarily erosion and sedimentation), the forestry community developed Best Management Practices (BMPs) recommendations in 1981. These recommendations address all categories of practices that are encountered during normal silvicultural operations.

Since 1981, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GAEPD) has designated the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) as the lead agency for the forest water quality program. The GFC’s main role is BMP education. Other responsibilities include mediating forestry complaints on behalf of GAEPD and monitoring BMP implementation.

In order to determine if BMP educational efforts have been effective, as well as the BMPs themselves, the GFC conducted BMP implementation surveys. In addition to this 2011 BMP Survey, GFC conducted surveys in 1991, 1992, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2007, and 2009, and also conducted a BMP effectiveness (turbidity) study in 1992. Together with these previous surveys and study, this 2011 Survey represents 20 years of forestry BMP monitoring in Georgia. These surveys have concluded that water quality, including aquatic habitat and overall stream ecosystem health, benefits when BMPs are consistently applied.

As with all our previous surveys, the objectives of the 2011 Statewide Forestry BMP Survey were to determine the: rates of BMP implementation; units of measure (acres, miles of road and stream) in BMP compliance; effectiveness of BMPs for any needed modifications; comparability of stream habitats above and below stream crossings; and areas to target for future BMP training.

The GFC conducted the survey using the protocol adopted by the Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF). The SGSF developed this monitoring protocol through a task force comprised of hydrologists and water specialists from state forestry agencies, the US Forest Service, forest industry and the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI) in consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
Overall, the forestry community’s self-imposed BMPs are being implemented and are proving effective in protecting water quality on these sites. However, there are still opportunities for improvement, including forest roads and stream crossings, especially in certain areas of the state.

Since December 1995, the GFC has been cooperating with the University of Georgia, the Georgia Forestry Association (GFA), Southeast Wood Producers Association (SWPA) and the forest industry in the education of loggers and timber buyers through the Master Timber Harvester (MTH) program. This training includes intensive sessions on BMPs and related information conducted by GFC forest water quality professionals. Training stresses proper road layout and design and avoidance of stream crossings, but emphasizes full and proper installation of stream crossing BMPs where crossings are absolutely necessary. GFC Water Quality Program foresters average carrying out approximately 80 BMP training sessions per year, reaching an audience of over 2,500 forestry professionals annually.

The GFC will continue to work with other natural resource agencies and organizations to educate private landowners on BMPs.