

MAINTENANCE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAVES, NESTS AND ROOKERIES ON GEORGIA POWER COMPANY RIGHTS OF WAY.

These 3 categories apply primarily to the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) and grey bat (*Myotis grisescens*)/caves; American bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*)/nests; and wood stork (*Mycteria americana*)/rookeries. **Federal Listed Endangered** applies to the bats, woodpecker and eagle. The wood stork is **Federal listed Threatened**.

CAVES:

STATUS: The Indiana bat is known to occur in two caves in Dade County. Neither is close to Georgia Power lines. The grey bat has been found in 5 northwest Georgia counties (Dade, Walker, Chatooga, Bartow and Polk), but only the Dade and Walker county locations appear to be active. Neither of the two is near power lines. The other 3 locations are within a mile of transmission lines.

BASIS MYOTIS BIOLOGY: Both species are on the fringe of their range and their critical habitats (hibernation and maternity caves) are located in other states. Hibernation or winter caves are usually deep vertical shaft caves. Maternity or summer caves are generally located within ½ mile of a lake or pond for feeding. Both species are strongly associated with caves but will roost in forest areas. Hibernation caves require a strict temperature regime (43-52 F) while maternity caves must be warmer (57-77 F). Less than 5% of caves in the Southeast meet the temperature, humidity requirements necessary for *Myotis* habitation.

THREATS: Human vandalism to caves, especially maternity caves; pesticides and loss of forest habitat along flight corridors to foraging areas are the major threats.

RECOMMENDATIONS: There seems to be little likelihood of rights of way maintenance impacting *Myotis* bat areas in Georgia. However the location of caves on or adjacent to rights of way should be known and the use by *Myotis* bats determined. Restricting mowing operation around such *Myotis* caves to dormancy periods is the only measure we can use.

NESTS (RAPTORS)

STATUS: Bald eagles are increasing in Georgia, inland as well as in the coastal areas. With this increase, the potential for eagle nests to be built on transmission towers or near rights of way is increased. Although a number of eagle nests (5) occur on Georgia Power Company lands, none are known to exist near rights of ways or on towers. A County

record of a nest feet from a line was found to be outdated. The nest had been relocated several miles away. Several raptors nest on transmission towers (ospreys, red-tail hawks and vultures) but the eagle is the only one with Federal Endangered status. It is also the largest and therefore most likely to be harmed through collision or electrocution on the lines.

EAGLE NESTING: bald eagles usually nest in tall tree tops, within a couple of miles of a lake or major stream. The nests are large; 4-6 feet in diameter and may be enlarged each year. The same nest may be used for several years. Nesting occurs in winter and it is critical that disturbance near the nest be minimized to avoid scaring the birds and aborting the nesting effort. A disturbance buffer of feet is recommended.

THREATS: Due to education, protection and controls on DDT use, the American bald eagle population is increasing throughout its range. Nest numbers and numbers of birds have steadily increased in Georgia over the past decade. Education has decreased the once common problem of shooting so that now human threats, although still present, are not as great as in the past. As the population continues to increase, the likelihood of birds nesting on transmission towers or near rights of way will increase. Eagle electrocution and collisions have been major concerns with golden eagles in the western states, but of much less concern with bald eagles in the east. This difference may be due to hunting habits, topography, perch availability and bird density. Rights of way maintenance has no influence on collisions or electrocutions, but a nest on a tower will be treated the same as a nest in a tree adjacent to the right of way.

RECOMMENDATIONS: (1) Maintain an up-to-date location list of active eagle nests in the state. (2) Determine which nests are close enough to the right of way to be a concern (within 1500 of an active nest). (3) Schedule maintenance to times when nesting is not occurring within 1500 feet of an active nest.

NESTS (WOODPECKERS):

STATUS: The concern with woodpeckers has been the cost of repairing or replacing wooden poles damaged by nesting cavities. Concrete and metal towers are not damaged and hardware cloth screening is the remedy for protecting wooden poles. None of these remedies have a negative impact on the bird. The red-cockaded woodpecker is the only woodpecker that warrants concern to rights of way maintenance due to its endangered status and because of its habitat.

NEST CAVITIES: Nesting occurs in old growth pine forests; primarily in south Georgia. Most red-cockaded woodpecker colonies are on public lands, military reservations and private plantations that are actively managed (prescribed burning and understory control) for their survival.

THREATS: threats from maintenance will rarely occur. Potential threats could be: (1) Mower activity close enough to an active colony to disturb the nesting effort. (2) Cutting den trees during side clearing or building access roads.

RECOMMENDATIONS: (1) Identify all active colony areas within 2 miles of a right of way. (2) Identify all active "Hot-spots" within 750 feet of a right of way. (3) Conduct maintenance work around "Hot-spots" during non-breeding periods. (4) Inform Transmission Line Construction and Regional Transmission Sections aware of the efforts being made by Right of Way Maintenance.

ROOKERIES (WADING BIRDS, PRIMARILY WOOD STORK):

STATUS: A number of wading birds have colonies and rookeries throughout Georgia (primarily south Georgia and the coastal counties). The wood stork is the greatest concern due to its **Federal Listed Endangered** status and because it's range is expanding northward into Georgia from Florida due to habitat destruction.

ROOKERY/COLONY: Wood storks nest in colonial rookeries located in forested wetlands, preferably over permanent, fairly deep water. Foraging and roosting activities is carried out in groups. Foraging areas must be shallow enough so the stork can forage as it wades. Drought conditions have a very adverse affect on nesting and foraging. Storks are seen on power line rights of way, usually just loafing but sometimes foraging where wetlands occur under the lines.

THREATS: The primary threats are loss of water in foraging and nesting areas due to drought and/or drainage and also human disturbance in/around nesting sites (construction, timber harvest, clearing).

RECOMMENDATIONS: (1) Identify all active nesting rookery locations in the state and particularly those within a mile of a Georgia Power Company transmission line. (2) In areas within 750 feet of an active rookery, conduct mowing during non-nesting season. (3) When side trimming, avoid areas know to be stork rookeries.