

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Georgia aster

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Georgia aster is an uncommon plant that declined for decades, to the verge of receiving federal protection. However, this spring, numerous organizations, private and public, are stepping up to conserve the plant in an effort that should keep it off the endangered species list.

The plant is found in the upper Piedmont and lower mountain regions of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina. In 1999, the Fish and Wildlife Service made Georgia aster a candidate for inclusion on the federal endangered species list, meaning it warranted being on the list, but other species were a higher priority.

The Georgia aster was once more common across the Southeast, living in open savanna and prairie communities. Extensive wildfire control and the disappearance of large, native grazing animals left nothing to keep these areas open and grassy. As a result, forests have largely taken their place on the landscape. This decline in savanna and prairie habitat was reflected in a decline in the plants and animals that depended on these areas. Conserving this species today involves working to keep parts of the landscape open through the use of mowing, cutting, and prescribed fire – fire intentionally set under very specific weather conditions, often to mimic the ecological role of natural fires.

Several partners, from Georgia Power to Clemson University, have committed to manage their populations of the plant through a suite of steps in an effort that should prevent the need to place the plant on the Endangered Species list.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.