



74th Annual Southeastern Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Conference



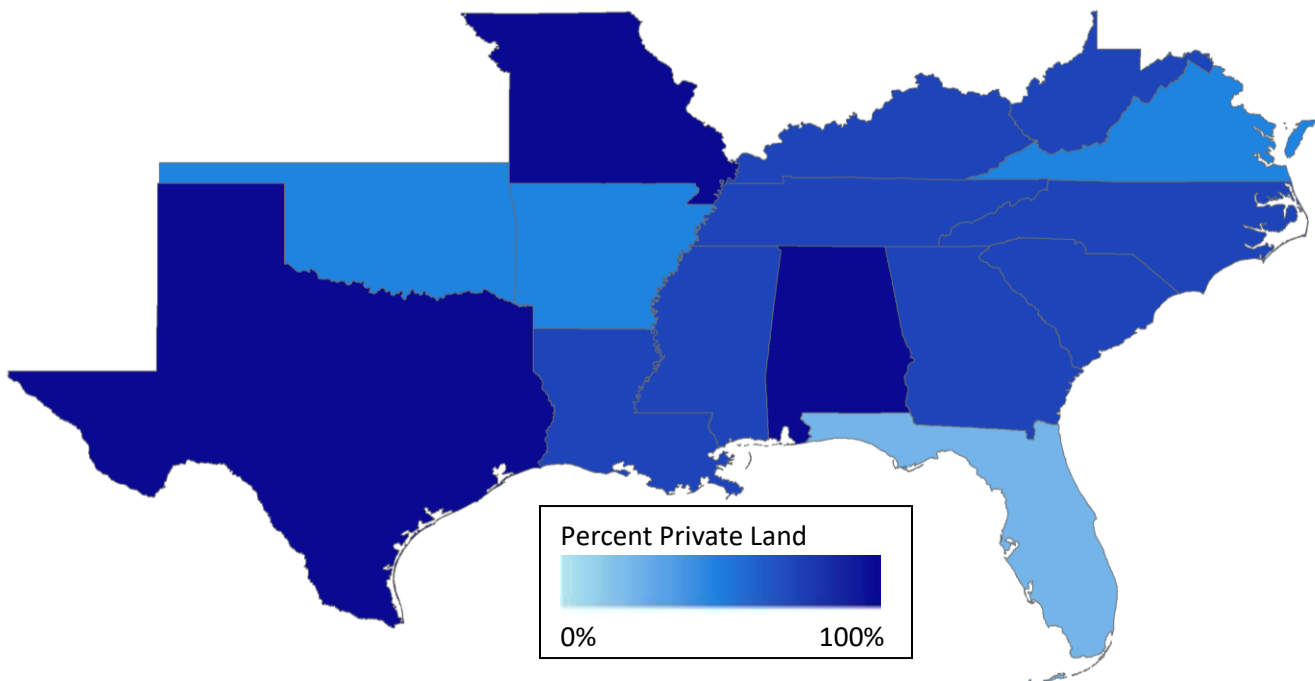
October 26-28, 2020
Hosted by the Missouri Department of Conservation

SEAFWA 2020 PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION SYMPOSIUM

28 October 2020

8:00 – 12:00 (CDT)

The states included in the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies are, on average, composed of 89% privately owned land. This land is where the vast majority of sportspeople recreate. It also holds the majority of critical habitat for threatened and endangered species in the southeastern United States. The role of state fish and wildlife agencies in managing this private land for wildlife is the key to conservation relevancy in the future. Currently, there is a lack of commitment by state fish and wildlife in the southeast to meet the demands of private lands conservation. This symposium seeks to address successful state programs for private lands conservation along with novel solutions in an attempt to foster regional dialogue on the relevancy and critical importance of private land conservation in the United States.



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AGENDA

8:00 – 8:05 **Opening and Logistics**

Curt McDaniel

8:05 – 8:20 **Private Lands in the Southeast: Are we rising to the challenge?**

Rusty Garrison

The southeastern United States is 89% held by private entities. Therefore, conservation of the public's wildlife resource must include strong collaboration with individual landowners and corporations to accomplish sustainability for the future. State wildlife agencies are faced with diverse and complicated challenges on both private and public lands. Yet, our historical investments have largely centered on public lands management. In the Southeast, most states have developed a private lands effort aimed at restoring the northern bobwhite and other species requiring much needed conservation. For example, the Georgia Private Lands Program, including Bobwhite Quail Initiative, has been in existence since 1995. Even though states have private lands programs, more investments still need to be made. The southeast is misaligned with our conservation investments with respect to private lands conservation. For example, Georgia is over 93% private lands and yet we have nine biologists compared to 12 biologists working on our public lands. Adding to the challenge, the private lands working arena continues to grow in complexity. Nuisance wildlife, disease response, monitoring/research, changing landownership patterns and hunter access are all challenges that must be considered when conserving habitat for declining species of wildlife. New funding initiatives, like Recovering America's Wildlife Act, should include private lands conservation as a priority for funding. In the interim, we must refocus our attention and collaborate with conservation partners (government and non-government) to tackle one of wildlife's most daunting 21st Century challenges – the conservation of habitat on private lands.

8:20 – 8:40 **Development of strategic partnerships to increase conservation delivery and lift on private lands**

Ryan Diener

As the need for private and working lands conservation continues to increase, so too increases the need for new and innovative tools and delivery mechanisms to help wildlife organizations and agencies address these new and exciting opportunities. Both technical and financial assistance opportunities have proven to be critical to the implementation of conservation practices; delivering the environmental goods and services that taxpayers want and that private lands need. According to a Congressional Research Service report from 2010, a lack of technical assistance was cited as a barrier to the adoption of conservation and enrollment into state and federal conservation programs. The delivery of conservation for fish and wildlife habitat is based on a one-on-one relationship with each landowner. While both financial incentives and technical support are available to producers to implement conservation practices across the country, the ability for conservation agencies and organizations to adequately address the demand can still be limited. Leveraging the resources, abilities and technical expertise of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) has greatly increased state and federal fish and wildlife agencies abilities to leverage their resources and provide increased lift for conservation across the board. This presentation will discuss the role that NGO's can play in working lands conservation and describe shared successes that have occurred in partnership with state, federal and other NGO partners.

8:40 – 8:59 **Panel Discussion**

Kenny Ribbeck, Billy Dukes, Nick Wiley, Jef Hodges, Dr. Dwayne Elmore, Dr. Matt Springer, Dr. Darren Miller

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9:00 – 9:20 Understanding the economy of agricultural conservation: the challenge of making profitable land use decisions

Mark McConnell

Addressing conservation challenges in agricultural landscapes is hindered by numerous obstacles directly linked to economic outcomes of land use decisions. Agricultural producers are expected to provide a myriad of ecosystem services that benefit society (e.g., carbon sequestration, air/water quality, pollination services, wildlife habitat, etc.) at a personal cost. The asymmetric economic burden of creating and maintaining environmentally resilient agricultural landscapes poses a considerable challenge to conservation efforts. Incentive-based conservation, exemplified in the United States Farm Bill, attempts to address this economic asymmetry by providing economic incentives for conservation actions on working farms. Unfortunately, the ebb and flow of conservation policy creates disparity in economic opportunities for conservation. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that economic outcomes drive conservation actions in agricultural landscapes yet minimal research exists to identify the economic opportunities of conservation. Conservation actions that are not economically beneficial are rare and difficult to implement. Precision agriculture technology provides the opportunity to identify economic opportunities in agricultural landscapes by mapping unprofitable field regions at multiple scales. When applied in a conservation framework, precision agriculture can help identify the overlap between conservation and economic opportunities that lead to profitable, conservation-friendly land use decisions. I describe a novel approach to conservation delivery where conservation decisions are only implemented when they increase revenue for agricultural producers. The ultimate goal of this approach is to view conservation a profitable business decision.

9:20 – 9:39 Panel Discussion

Kenny Ribbeck, Billy Dukes, Nick Wiley, Jef Hodges, Dr. Dwayne Elmore, Dr. Matt Springer, Dr. Darren Miller

9:40 – 10:00 Forest Product Markets Can Fund Wildlife Management

Mike Black

Across much of the Southeastern United States, many private landowners own and manage land with varying proportions of forest. Manipulating forest succession is an effective tool in developing or maintaining wildlife habitat, but it can also be the primary funding mechanism to invest in wildlife habitat practices in general. Habitat development can be expensive and in the case of early successional management it can also be frequent. The income from properly managed timber sales for thinning or final harvest can be significant and be used to drive a wildlife program for a private landowner. The availability of markets can vary considerably across the Southeast with a significant impact on potential income. Smaller tracts are increasingly difficult to facilitate a timber sale since most logging crews are mechanized and need larger sale sites to operate efficiently. This presentation will discuss and emphasize the role of strong forest markets to provide income to facilitate wildlife habitat development and maintenance.

10:00 – 10:19 Panel Discussion

Kenny Ribbeck, Billy Dukes, Nick Wiley, Jef Hodges, Dr. Dwayne Elmore, Dr. Matt Springer, Dr. Darren Miller

10:20 – 10:25 Break

10:25 – 10:45 Maximizing opportunities in technology, evaluation and training in academic institutions to support private lands conservation

Kristine Evans

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Privately-owned and managed agriculture and timber lands comprise the majority of the Southeastern rural landscape and can contribute to biodiversity objectives when intentionally co-managed for economic and conservation objectives. Private lands managers can benefit in multiple ways from intentional engagement with academic institutions in pursuit of advanced technologies for design and delivery of conservation, monitoring and evaluation of conservation action, and carefully-crafted programmatic curricula to train the next generation of natural resource managers. However, conservation agencies and organizations and academic institutions have yet to fully capitalize on the potential for mutual gain in conservation outcomes from intentional collaboration. Here we present a series of case studies that highlight a triad of benefits that academic institutions can offer at different points of the conservation planning, delivery and evaluation process. We demonstrate advanced technologies in conservation planning and decision support by highlighting a recently-released Conservation Prioritization Tool which provides a flexible, data-driven, and transferable geospatial framework for evaluation of potential areas for land conservation in the U.S. Gulf Coast region. We also demonstrate other technologies that use geospatial data to facilitate improved design and decision making in agricultural conservation. We emphasize opportunities for engagement with academic institutions in design and delivery of monitoring and evaluation programs to track success of conservation management by highlighting recent successes in large-scale coordinated monitoring efforts on private agricultural and forest lands. Finally, we offer examples of intentionally developed and interdisciplinary academic curricula aimed to prepare undergraduate students for careers in the private lands conservation arena.

10:45 – 11:04 Panel Discussion

Kenny Ribbeck, Billy Dukes, Nick Wiley, Jef Hodges, Dr. Dwayne Elmore, Dr. Matt Springer, Dr. Darren Miller

11:05 – 11:25 Lessons Learned in Developing Missouri’s Successful Private Land Focal Areas

Bill White

Missouri has been experimenting with private land quail and grassland bird focal areas since the 1990s. Early attempts did not lead to successful engagement of enough landowners to impact land use and wildlife populations because the focal areas were too large and lacked dedicated personnel to engage landowners. With these lessons in mind the Department, in 2003, adopted a Strategic Quail Plan which resulted in smaller more numerous private land focal areas, each with a Private Land Conservationist to lead efforts. Private land partner biologists were added to help focus attention in these and other geographies. Some of these areas were the first in the nation to reach the acreage targets laid out in the NBCI 1.0. After NBCI 2.0 was released two of these geographies were chosen to participate in the NBTC’s Coordinated Implementation Plan following standardized monitoring protocols for birds and habitat. To date, these focal areas have the highest sustained quail densities of any participating state.

In 2005, the Department also developed a series of focal geographies to address the State Wildlife Action Plan where concentrations of high quality natural communities and species of conservation concern were found. Significant progress was made in addressing landowners in these geographies and in 2013 these geographies were prioritized in the Department’s strategic plan. By 2015, these geographies were required to be addressed in staff work plans. The result is several cases where over 2/3 of landowners have worked with conservation partner biologists to address local natural community resources.

11:25 – 11:44 Panel Discussion

Kenny Ribbeck, Billy Dukes, Nick Wiley, Jef Hodges, Dr. Dwayne Elmore, Dr. Matt Springer, Dr. Darren Miller

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11:45 – 12:00 Private Land Sits on the Roadmap to Relevancy

Sara Pauley

While many may say the Missouri Department of Conservation can afford to focus on private lands because of the funding coming in from our 1976 sales tax. The truth is before anyone dreamed of this sales tax, the Department had always focused on private land. This was a direct result of Aldo Leopold's influence on our first director and first commission chair back in the late 1930s. Aldo summed it up best in a 1939 radio address where he said, "Farmers are the team in conservation." Starting in the late 1930s we hired a few dozen staff that focused solely on private land. With the addition of our sales tax we stood up a full division devoted primarily to private land and communities.

However, to remain relevant, Missouri still needed to examine what today's conservation and societal needs are, no matter how much income our agency has. The Department has completed a 3 year look at our agency and we have now restructured to meet the changing demands on our financial and staff resources. We have diverted additional staff to private land and communities and targeted efforts at geographies identified in our state wildlife action plan, quail focal areas and landowner habitat cooperatives. We have partnered with agriculture and university extension to reach a constituency that does not frequent our doorstep very often. In a state that is 93% private land, we believe that private land has a few bricks on the road to being relevant to all Missourians

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Speaker and Panelist Bios

Kenny Ribbeck

Current Wildlife Division Chief at Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. My wife, Donna, and I live in Hammond, Louisiana, and are proud parents of 4 successfully raised adult children, with one new grandchild to spoil.

Jef Hodges

Jef Hodges began working with private landowners in 1982 in Missouri. He's dealt with nuisance waterfowl complaints, provided technical assistance on planting site preparation and management for NWSG, and also performed planting services for NWSG in CRP. In 1992 he began operating as a conservation contractor and wildlife habitat consultant offering wildlife and natural resource management plans, NWSG planting, prescribed burning, native seed production, invasive species management and timber stand improvement, along with other services as required. Most recently Jef was a registered technical service provider for the NRCS writing CAP 142 (wildlife) and CAP 112 (prescribed burning) plans until taking the job as grassland coordinator, his current position, with NBCI.

Dr. Matt Springer

Dr. Matthew Springer received his Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, M.S. from University of Delaware, and B.S. from Juniata College. He currently partners with both state and federal agencies as he works with private landowners to raise their awareness of wildlife friendly practices and funding support systems to aid their activities within the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service platform. He has a research program that supports his outreach activities that has focused on various wildlife damage issues, human dimensions research on private property owners and their behaviors as it relates to natural resources, herbivory impacts on mine reforestation, and multiple topics relating to the management of ungulates.

Dr. Darren Miller

After graduating from Mississippi State University in 1997, I spent 21 years working as a wildlife scientist and research manager for Weyerhaeuser Company. In 2018, I joined NCASI as Vice President of Forestry Programs. NCASI conducts research and provides technical support for Member Companies, which include large, private forest landowners. In both roles, I have facilitated understanding of conservation of biological diversity on private, working forests. Recently, I have been engaged with a collaborative project, the Wildlife Conservation Initiative (WCI), which seeks to address needs of at-risk species on private, working forests via cooperation among large forest landowners represented by NAFO, the USFWS, state agencies, SFI, and other partners.

Mike Black

Mike Black has served as the Director for the Shortleaf Pine Initiative since 2014. He graduated from the University of Tennessee with a B.S. in Forestry in 1985 and has held past positions with Bowater as a Landowner Assistance Forester, owner of Sequatchie Forest and Wildlife as a consulting forester, Restoration Ecologist and contractor at Arnold Air Force Base and as past Forestry Coordinator for the NBCI. In his spare time Mike is an avid cook, hunter, fisherman and hunter education instructor.

Dr. Dwayne Elmore

Dwayne Elmore is a Professor, Wildlife Extension Specialist, and Bollenbach Chair in Wildlife Biology in the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Oklahoma State University. Specific areas of interest include wildlife habitat relationships, fire ecology, and thermal ecology. Current projects are focused on how management and human activity affect northern bobwhite, scaled quail, and greater prairie-chicken. He works with various stakeholder groups including private landowners, state and federal agencies, and NGOs to provide technical assistance on land management issues.

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Rusty Garrison

Rusty Garrison serves as the Director of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division.

Mr. Garrison has been with DNR for 23 years serving as the manager of the Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center, Assistant Chief of Game Management, State Coordinator of Project WILD, and Chief of the DNR Mountain Search and Rescue Team. Before his career with DNR, Mr. Garrison worked for the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service for nearly nine years.

Mr. Garrison holds the degrees of Bachelor of Science in Animal Sciences and a Master of Science in Wildlife Biology, both from the University of Georgia. He has traveled to over 70 countries while on mission trips and remains active in his local church. He is married to his wife Sue, has three daughters, and is a proud grandfather.

Sara Parker-Pauley

Sara Parker Pauley serves as the ninth Director of the Missouri Department of Conservation. The Missouri Conservation Commission announced Pauley's selection effective November 1, 2016. A native of Columbia, Pauley received both her law degree and bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri – Columbia, and did post-graduate studies in Australia as a Rotary Fellow. She previously served as Director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources since 2010. She has worked as project manager for D.J. Case & Associates, a natural resources communications firm, and as a deputy director for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. She has been an instructor at the University of Missouri's School of Natural Resources, teaching a course in natural resource policy and administration. Pauley began her professional career as a Policy Analyst with the Missouri Department of Conservation from 1993-1996. Over the years, though her career path varied, it has never strayed far from her personal desire to be engaged in the stewardship of Missouri's natural resources.

Bill White

Bill White is the Community and Private Land Conservation Branch Chief for the Missouri Department of Conservation. His 32 year career with the Department has revolved around positions dedicated to private lands technical assistance. He has been on the ground floor of efforts at the state, regional and national levels related to private lands, USDA Farm Bill programs, bobwhite quail and pollinators. He currently chairs the AFWA Grassland Working Group, leading an effort to evaluate grassland conservation efforts nationwide. Away from work he enjoys quail hunting and habitat projects on the family farm, including killing fescue, cedars and autumn olive!

Nick Wiley

Nick serves as Chief Operating Officer for Ducks Unlimited, Inc., headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee. Prior to his work at DU, Nick served in several roles over a 30-year career with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) including 8 years as the agency's Executive Director. He is a past president for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies; a fellow of the National Conservation Leadership Institute, professional member of the Boone and Crockett Club, and Board member for the Council to Advance Hunting and Shooting Sports. He is a Certified Wildlife Biologist with a Bachelor of Science Degree in biology from Georgia Southern University and a Master of Science Degree in Wildlife Management from Auburn University. He enjoys hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and boating with family and friends.

Dr. Mark McConnell

Mark McConnell is currently an Assistant Professor of Upland Birds at Mississippi State University. His research program focuses primarily on the ecology and management of gamebirds and integrating profitable wildlife management solutions in working landscapes. He has been conducting precision agriculture research for over a decade focusing on creating innovative tools to help agricultural producers increase conservation and profitability. He is an avid bird hunter, mediocre dog trainer, and even worse fly-fisherman.

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Dr. Kristine Evans

Kristine Evans is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture at Mississippi State University. She also serves as co-director of the Quantitative Ecology and Spatial Technologies lab at MSU. She specializes in large-scale monitoring of wildlife response to conservation, regional conservation planning, landscape ecology and at-risk species conservation.

Ryan Diener

Ryan has served as a Farm Bill Biologist for Quail Forever in Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas from 2010 to 2018. His extensive knowledge and experience with Farm Bill programs is pivotal for the continued advancement of bobwhite conservation efforts in his current role as Quail Forever State Coordinator in Arkansas. Ryan gained his B.S. in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences from the University of Missouri. Among his experience as a Farm Bill biologist, he also brings an understanding of early successional habitat management, establishing and working with local prescribed burn associations, integrating native grazing in eastern pasture systems and a history of improving state level policies for conservation to private lands conservation.

Billy Dukes

Billy Dukes began his career as a staff biologist working with the Fur Resources Project and the Small Game Project for the South Carolina DNR, eventually becoming supervisor of the Small Game Project, assistant wildlife chief and then wildlife chief in 2014. Billy has spent more than 20 years actively involved in private lands conservation.

Curt McDaniel

Born and raised on a farm in Rutherford, Gibson County, Tennessee, Curt attended nearby University of Tennessee, Martin where he received a Bachelor's degree in Agriculture Science. He furthered his education by obtaining a Master's degree in Plant and Soil Science at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He is currently the USDA/NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in West Tennessee. As Area Conservationist, Curt leads a group of over 100 direct and in-direct staff and personnel in providing the best conservation education, resources and opportunities for farmers, producers and land stewards to help protect, conserve and rejuvenate their land.

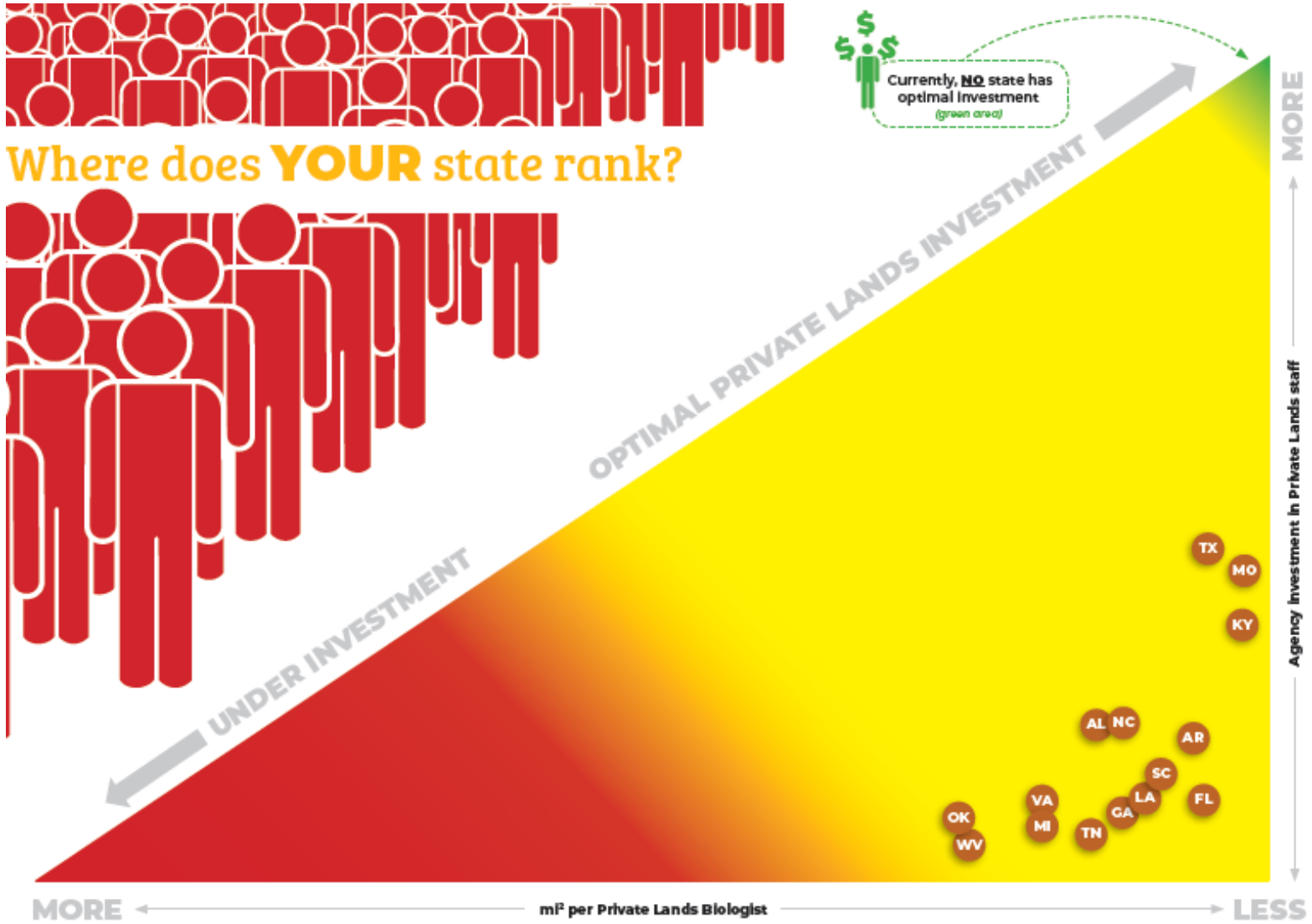
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