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Book Review: Saving the Wild South: The Fight for Native Plants on the Brink of Extinction

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Saving the Wild South: The Fight for Native Plants on the Brink of Extinction by Georgann Eubanks
(University of North Carolina Press, 2021: ISBN 9781469664903, \$25.00)

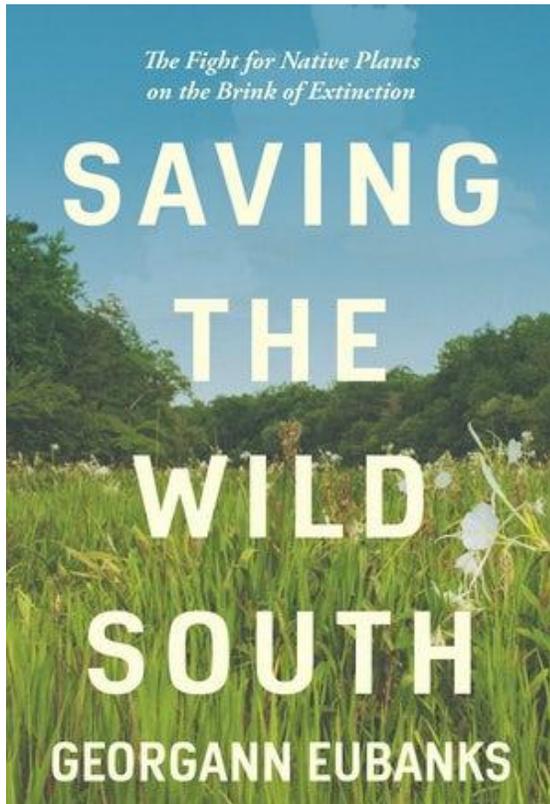


Image courtesy of the publisher

Who knew that long before European settlers made their mark on the southeastern United States, these lands were blanketed not only in pure forests but in massive grasslands as well? This revelation is one of many gleaned in this story-filled work by Georgann Eubanks. Part botanical history and part current-day travelogue, Eubanks makes the reader feel as if they were along for the ride. The book is filled with beautiful photographs of the people as much as the plants that the author and her travel companion and photographer Donna Campbell meet along the way.

The author sets out on a modern journey to investigate the current state—and perhaps

unlikely future—of threatened plant species in the Southeast. The reader will learn nearly as much about early plant explorers and current and ancient local cultural tidbits as they will about the perilous state of the 12 featured plant species.

Eubanks' writing includes striking prose. In the chapter that details the challenge to save the Florida torrey tree, the author compares the north Florida landscape to the Serengeti, with "sapphire skies" and "sculpted" clouds. Many chapters contain thought-provoking concepts that challenge the assumptions of readers. The massive grasslands mentioned in the entry are losing a competition for land to forested acres and invasive species. A host of other challenges include sprawling development, modern agricultural practices, growing herbicide use by states and municipalities, and a lack of fires or controlled burns. These factors, combined with other climate change-related impacts, are devastating a multitude of plant species.

The author questions society's general bias toward the conservation of animals over plant species. She makes a case for the necessity of preserving both and eloquently speaks to the importance of retaining these treasured elements of Southern identity. Eubanks strives to influence current and future generations to the kinds of changes each person can make to tip the scale in favor of these species, which represent just a fraction of the many that may be lost.

Many dedicated people working to advance plant conservation efforts are covered within the pages of this book. The Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance (GPCA), touted as a

conservation organization whose innovative conservation techniques and “intelligent tinkering” other states are working to emulate, is one of the organizations working in the field and providing hope for the road ahead.

Included in the book are a detailed bibliography, an index, and a list of ways each person can help in the fight to preserve fragile

plant populations and leave a better legacy to future generations. This book would be of particular interest to native and general plant enthusiasts as well as conservationists.

Ann O'Brien Fuller is head of circulation and interlibrary loan at Georgia Southern Libraries' Lane Library