Search for the Vice President of Conservation and Science
Atlanta Botanical Garden
Atlanta, Georgia

THE SEARCH

The Atlanta Botanical Garden (the Garden), an iconic destination and globally renowned center for plant conservation and research, seeks a collaborative, strategic, and innovative leader to serve as its next Vice President of Conservation and Science (VP). The VP will lead the Garden's ambitious efforts to protect rare species and habitats across the Southeastern United States through ex situ and in situ conservation, habitat restoration and management, genetics, and applied research, and will effectively represent the Garden nationally and internationally as a thought leader and advocate for plant conservation science.

Since 2017, the Garden's Conservation & Research program has grown from a team of four into the Southeastern Center for Conservation (SECC), an internationally recognized center with more than 40 staff and a budget nearing $5 million, featuring cutting-edge genetics, micropropagation, cryopreservation, and seed banking laboratories. The SECC performs extensive work across the Southeast, one of North America's most biodiverse regions, to conserve imperiled plants and habitats, from coastal wetlands in Florida and various national forests to orchid and carnivorous plant species in Puerto Rico. The Garden also maintains deep conservation interests beyond the U.S., across the Caribbean, Colombia, Ecuador, and beyond, and leads important international partnerships, including the groundbreaking Global Conservation Consortium for Magnolia.

The Vice President of Conservation and Science will set the strategic direction for the Garden's Conservation & Research program and lead the SECC through three divisions: Applied Conservation, Conservation Partnerships, and Research. This is a high-profile senior leadership role that combines scientific expertise, fundraising, financial oversight, and team management, with the ability to build and sustain partnerships across academic, government, Tribal, and nonprofit sectors, domestically and around the world. The VP will ensure synergy and shared connections across the Garden's departments, including the development team, with which the VP will partner to build a sustainable funding base for the SECC through government awards and private support.

The VP will hold a PhD or other relevant terminal degree in botany, life science, environmental science, or a related field, and demonstrate an excellent record of scholarship and experience successfully soliciting external grant funding. The preferred candidate will bring skill as an effective external representative, including the ability to convey plant science fluently to a broad audience. They will be a capable financial and operations leader and an attentive manager of large teams, with a history of promoting a culture of inclusivity, respect, collaboration, and well-being.

ABOUT THE ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDEN

The Atlanta Botanical Garden, opened in 1976, is the emerald jewel in the crown of Atlanta culture. An urban oasis in the heart of Midtown Atlanta, the Garden features 30 acres of outdoor gardens, an award-winning Children's Garden, the serene Storza Woods highlighted by a unique Canopy Walk, and the picturesque Skyline Garden. Under the leadership of President and Chief Executive Officer Mary Pat Matheson, who has held the CEO role since 2002, the Atlanta Botanical Garden has risen to become what the industry considers one of the top 10 public gardens in the United States.

During Matheson's tenure, the Garden has significantly expanded fundraising, education, marketing, business administration, horticulture, and conservation efforts and has attracted a rapidly growing membership base of more than 42,000. The Garden has become known for innovative strategies for attracting new and diverse audiences and encouraging repeat guest visits by offering unique programs, including exhibitions by some of the world's leading artists and popular outdoor performances.

Matheson has been the driving force behind two $50 million-plus capital campaigns that doubled the Garden's acreage through the addition of new gardens and facilities. Further expansion of the Garden's footprint is imminent as it nears completion of a visionary $165 million capital campaign supporting the development of a pedestrian-friendly entrance on the Atlanta BeltLine's northeast corridor. This will transform nearly eight acres along Piedmont Avenue into a sweeping expanse of horticultural beauty, featuring dynamic new garden spaces, immersive exhibits, and best-in-class amenities.

Matheson's tenure has also seen the Garden make substantial investments in its conservation and science mission. The Garden directed efforts to develop the foremost collection of orchid species in North America, on permanent display in the Fuqua Orchid Center, and in 2015, opened the Atlanta Botanical Garden satellite campus in Gainesville, Georgia (ABG-Gainesville), an 185-acre public garden home to the largest conservation nursery in the Southeast. In 2019, the Garden founded the Southeastern Center for Conservation (SECC), the home of the Garden's conservation and research work and a nexus for powerful collaboration with partner institutions across the region and around the world.

The Garden is currently being guided by its 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, which focuses on the completion of the Atlanta BeltLine expansion project; investing in people, processes, and programs that nourish culture, support sustainable growth, and maintain long-term financial health; refining the Garden's world-class collections to maximize national and international horticultural significance; engaging Garden guests and

the greater community in its mission; and leading innovative strategies and partnerships to conserve imperiled plants and natural communities.

THE SOUTHEASTERN CENTER FOR CONSERVATION

A keystone of the Garden, the SECC is a local, regional, and international hub for the conservation of rare plants and ecosystems, achieving its mission through collections management, interdisciplinary research, restoration of priority habitats, educational outreach, and the vigorous pursuit of research partnerships and collaborative opportunities.

Applied Conservation and Research

Habitat restoration and plant propagation are central components of the SECC's conservation mission. Staff at the Center lead restoration efforts, serving as facilitators for planning, participating in active management, and monitoring the response of rare plants to management and reintroduction. Staff also engage in extensive plant propagation, a three-fold process that can invigorate declining habitats with rare plant species, restoring a balance to delicate ecosystems damaged by human and natural interference. The SECC's Micropropagation Lab is dedicated to seed germination and propagation of native species, especially orchids. Once endangered plants have been propagated, they are moved to the Conservation Greenhouse to mature before being transported to the field.

The SECC hosts the Safeguarding Nursery, the largest nursery of its kind in the Southeast, home to countless pitcher plants, native orchids, and other threatened species, and the Conservation Seed Bank, which collects and preserves the germplasm of target at-risk native plant species from the southeastern United States, Caribbean, Ecuador, and its living collections. The Garden also maintains a database on behalf of the Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance, of which the Garden is a founding member, that houses information on rare plant collections and material that has been reintroduced into the wild.

Conservation Partnerships

The Garden leads and partners with numerous consortia that seek to conserve imperiled plants and natural communities. The Georgia Pollinator Partnership (GAPP) began in 2009 as a partnership between the Garden and the United States Forest Service to map, create, and promote pollinator gardens in the greater Atlanta area. With the addition of new partners, including the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and State Botanical Garden, GAPP grew into a statewide partnership in 2020.

The Southeastern Partners in Plant Conservation (SePPCon), founded in 2016, is an initiative and conference hosted by the Garden that brings together government agencies, land managers, botanical gardens, university programs, Federally Recognized Tribal Nations, experts, and other interested parties to build capacity and promote novel partnerships for plant conservation in the Southeast. The Southeastern Plant Conservation Alliance (SE PCA), launched during the second SePPCon conference in 2020, is a cross-cutting partnership led by the Garden of public and private conservation professionals

that fosters regional cooperation, provides training opportunities, fills information gaps, identifies conservation needs, prioritizes efforts, and works collaboratively to conserve endangered plants.

The Garden also leads the Global Conservation Consortium for Magnolia (GCCM) in cooperation with Botanic Gardens Conservation International. The Consortium aims to collect, conserve, characterize, and cultivate magnolia species from more than 18 countries worldwide as an insurance policy against their extinction in the wild and as a source of plant material for human innovation, adaptation, and resilience.

Along with its leadership of the above partnerships, the Garden is an active member of the United States Action Plan for Plant Conservation and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The Garden is committed to international collaboration, promoting in-country capacity building, education, communication, and research.

Training, Education, and Outreach

In addition to vital conservation work, the Garden's Conservation & Research team is dedicated to training others and sharing its knowledge with audiences ranging from conservation experts to teachers and the public. The Rare Plant RaMP (Research & Mentoring for Post-Baccalaureates in Biological Sciences) program is a one-year research experience intended for individuals who have completed a baccalaureate degree and are interested in gaining research and professional development experience funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The Garden also offers undergraduate student internships and leads community science programs, including the TreeSnap app and Science Cafés, that contribute data to the scientific community while educating the public. The Garden communicates with constituencies through two annual publications: *Synecology,* which features the work of the SECC, and *PlantIntel*, the Garden's annual science-in-action publication covering education, horticulture, conservation, and more.

Organizational Details

The VP leads the SECC through three divisions, each headed by a Director who reports directly to the VP:

Applied Conservation: Conservation horticulture, living and safeguarding collections, and field-based recovery programs across the Southeast, Gulf Coast, and U.S. Territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, including rare plant propagation, seed increase, and field botany.

Conservation Partnerships: External partnerships, regional coalitions, conservation communications, and specialized field programs, including the GCCM.

Research: Conservation genetics, ecology, in vitro propagation, and seed banking, and SECC's early career research mentorship program.

The VP also supervises the Manager of the GCCM and is supported by a grants and contracts analyst, an executive assistant, and an administrative assistant. The VP's peers on the Garden's senior management team include the Chief Operating Officer; Chief Financial Officer; the Vice Presidents of Horticulture and

Collections, Programs, Human Resources, Institutional Advancement, and Marketing; and the Gainesville Garden Director. The Garden is governed by a 29-member Board of Trustees.

The SECC's FY2026 budget was $4.75 million, of which $2.3 million derived from external grant funding (primarily federal) across 31 funded projects. Until 2025, the Garden's conservation and research funding had steadily increased each year. While overall grant funds decreased in 2026 amid upheaval in the federal funding landscape, the SECC continues to succeed in securing grants (receiving 11 new awards this year), and its grant-seeking agenda remains ambitious. The Center also continues to receive support from the Garden's operational revenues.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT

In partnership with the Conservation & Research team, colleagues on the Garden's senior management team, and key scientific collaborators and funders, the VP will:

Set an ambitious, innovative, and achievable strategic vision and direction for the SECC.

The VP will steward the development and execution of the Conservation & Research program's strategy, proactively setting goals that align with the Garden's mission and capacities and ensuring that the SECC remains at the forefront of restoring and monitoring imperiled plants and their fragile ecosystems. The VP will position the Garden for continued leadership in an evolving conservation, research, and funding landscape while fostering both departmental stability and the flexibility to respond to external trends and pursue emerging developments, financial goals, and transformational opportunities. The VP will also partner closely with ABG-Gainesville and serve on the Garden's senior management team, contributing to organization-wide strategy and decision-making.

Lead evidence-based conservation action to support priority species and ecological systems and advance research to enhance collective knowledge and inform conservation practices.

The VP will continue to strengthen the Garden's habitat restoration and conservation collections and develop protocols for propagation, collection management, and material transfer. They will implement a prioritized approach for ex situ plant collection development and enhance the value of ex situ collections. Species critical for ecosystem restoration will be prioritized, and augmentation and reintroduction practices will adhere to conservation best practices. The Garden will maintain its current expertise in research areas, including conservation genetics, evolutionary and demographic studies, seed banking, micropropagation, tissue culture, cryopreservation, ecology, and conservation horticulture. The VP will also incorporate research on the impacts of ongoing climate change on focal plants and habitats; ensure that research results, objectives, and timelines are thoroughly evaluated and clearly communicated; and implement prioritization frameworks to identify research activities that align with the Garden's mission.

Engage with regional, national, and global conservation networks to access and contribute to shared conservation outcomes.

The VP will build and sustain partnerships with an array of constituencies, including local communities, universities, conservation organizations, private landowners and managers, and state, federal, Tribal, and international agencies to support rare species recovery, habitat restoration, and innovative research initiatives. The VP will represent the Garden's conservation program to scientific and professional audiences through peer-reviewed publications, keynote addresses, and leadership roles in national and international bodies. They will also communicate the Garden's achievements and its role as an advocate for plant conservation, emphasizing the fundamental role of native plants in stabilizing ecosystems and bolstering national climate resilience. Under the VP's leadership, the SECC will continue to prioritize cultivating diverse partnerships with historically under-resourced groups.

Uphold the health and sustainability of the SECC through skilled revenue generation and effective fiscal management.

The VP will lead fundraising efforts across grants, foundations, and private donors, with responsibility for securing significant funding to sustain the Center's programs and align with its stated priorities. The evolving federal funding environment means that the VP must pursue a multifaceted approach to revenue diversification that cultivates NSF, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other government funding while exploring additional private sources. They will own the full budgeting for the department, maintain accurate financial records, approve financial transactions, oversee grant reporting and compliance, and set the tone for sound fiscal stewardship of multi-million-dollar program funds.

Invest in the SECC's passionate and hardworking group of staff and attend to inclusion, belonging, and community.

The VP will lead and support the SECC's three directors and their teams, cultivating a collaborative, mission-driven culture of mentorship and professional growth, from early-career researchers through senior scientists and program managers. The VP will invest in professional development, training, and infrastructure, foster an organizational culture in which employees feel valued and able to thrive, and develop effective internal communication practices and systems. In addition, the VP will invest in the conservation community more broadly by providing experiential learning, mentoring, and professional opportunities, including internships, particularly to under-resourced communities to foster an inclusive community at the Garden and within the broader plant conservation and research landscape.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no individual will possess every quality, the successful candidate will bring many of the following qualifications, professional experiences, and personal attributes:

- A PhD in biology, botany, ecology, conservation, or a related field, with deep scientific expertise in plant conservation. Familiarity with the native flora of the southeastern United States preferred.
- A track record of driving science and research toward real-world impact. An appreciation of the importance of modern molecular, genomic, and data-driven approaches to plant biodiversity, systematics, economic botany, and related areas.
- Significant senior leadership experience in conservation science at a botanical garden, a research organization, a university research program, or similar organization focused on conservation, biodiversity, or other related fields.
- Experience with strategic planning and expertise in translating a vision and strategy into a practical plan with concrete implementation methods and measures of anticipated outcomes.
- Demonstrated success in recruiting, motivating, inspiring, and retaining multidisciplinary teams of staff, including direct management of department-level directors.
- Proven record of effective financial management and securing competitive federal and foundation support, as well as individual donations.
- Experience building partnerships across academic, governmental, Tribal, and nonprofit sectors, domestically and internationally.
- The ability to be a spokesperson at the highest level of international bio-politics and an international ambassador for plant research while also communicating effectively to lay audiences.
- Demonstrated commitment to environmental justice, excellence, equity, educational opportunity, and to building and inspiring diverse faculty and staff as individuals in a scientific and creative community.
- Strong written and oral communication skills, with a record of publication and public representation at professional and scientific venues.
- A collegial approach. A demonstrated ability to work effectively across all levels of a large, complex organization, and to engage a broad range of individuals and constituencies.
- Alignment with the Garden's core values, which include conservation, excellence, inspiration, integrity, and respect.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The salary range for this position is $190,000-$215,000. This is a full-time, in-person role based in Atlanta, Georgia. Regional travel is required, with occasional national or international travel depending on project needs. Travel may represent up to approximately 25 percent of the position.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Nominations, inquiries, and applications, including CVs with cover letters that address the opportunities and challenges outlined above, should be submitted to the search team via the hyperlink below. Screening of applications will begin immediately and continue until the search process is completed. If you require reasonable accommodation to complete an application, interview, or otherwise participate in the candidate selection process, we welcome you to submit an inquiry to the team.

Jackie Mildner, Tatiana Oberkoetter, and Pamela Carty
Isaacson, Miller

Atlanta Botanical Garden VP, Conservation and Science

It is the policy of the Atlanta Botanical Garden to provide equal employment opportunity (EEO) to all persons regardless of age, color, national origin, citizenship status, physical or mental disability, race, religion, creed, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, genetic information, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local law. In addition, reasonable accommodations will be made for qualified individuals with disabilities.

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