

FURTHER READING

- [A Brief History of the Atlanta City Prison Farm](#)
- [Songs of the Forest: A "Re-Matriation" Gathering in the Welaunee \(South River\) Forest](#)
- [Emory Doctors Condemn Cop City, Call to Fund Public Health Initiatives Instead](#)
- [The City in the Forest: Reinventing Resistance for an Age of Climate Crisis and Police Militarization](#)
- [Talking Back: A Preemptive Response to Media Attacks on Defend the Atlanta Forest](#)

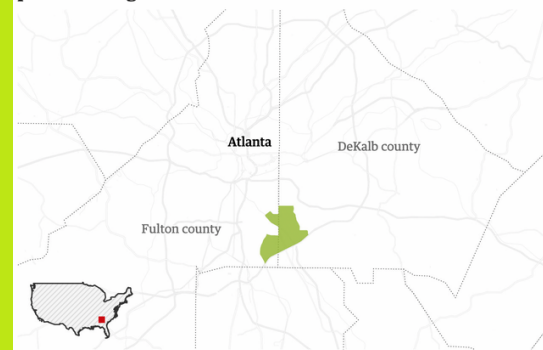
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS COP CITY?

Cop City is a proposed \$90 million+ police training compound backed by the Atlanta Police Foundation and its corporate patrons like Cox, Delta, the Koch brothers, and Home Depot, to name just a few. At over 300 acres, Cop City will be the largest police training facility in the United States and is slated to include a mock city where police will train with firearms, tear gas, helicopters, and explosive devices to repress protest and mass unrest, much as they did during the 2020 George Floyd protests. Cop City will hyper-militarize law enforcement, equipping police with a site to train for the suppression of Atlanta's diverse Black and working-class communities.

Slated to be twice the size of already oversized police training facilities in New York and Los Angeles, Cop City, if completed, will serve as a national model of police militarization and budgetary bloat. The land slated for development into Cop City has long been the site of racialized violence: the land was violently stolen from the Muscogee (Creek) nation, later became the site of a 19th century slave plantation, and was a forced labor camp (the Old Atlanta Prison Farm) as late as the 1990s.

Green space in DeKalb county where Atlanta wants to build a police training center



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

WHAT IS THE SHADOWBOX (BLACKHALL) COMPLEX?

Blackhall Studios is a film production studio owned by a private equity group, Commonwealth Group. Due to a massive massive corporate buy-out and bad publicity, Blackhall has just been rebranded as Shadowbox Studios, but has not changed its plan to threaten the forest or its dependence on public subsidies. Their Chairman/CEO Ryan Millsap acquired 55 acres of forest on Bouldercrest Road in 2017. Upon completion of the purchase, the movie company has realized that flooding and grading problems make the land unsuitable for their proposed use: to build the largest soundstage complex on Earth.

Dekalb County has happily handed over public resources to serve this end, offering massive tax incentives, and giving Blackhall a large portion of Intrenchment Creek Park. Dekalb County Commission has announced they plan to bulldoze nearby historic Thomasville Cemetery in an adjacent neighborhood to build an \$5 million intersection designed specifically for semi-trucks in order to service Blackhall Studios.

WHAT IS DTF?

At once a movement, slogan, and media platform, Defend the Atlanta Forest (DTF) is a fight for the future of Atlanta. DTF is a social movement, not an organization or group of people. As such, it has changing and diverse participation from grassroots groups and individuals dedicated to fighting the creeping dystopia of police militarization and ecological ruin. As a slogan, "Defend the Forest" is a declaration of opposition to the destruction of the South River/Weelaunee Forest and the construction of both the Cop City training compound and Blackhall Studios's Soundstage Complex.

While the movement is decentralized and has no official leadership or spokespeople, this website is a media platform for sharing important information, news, actions, and events. Defend the Atlanta Forest does not speak for the movement as a whole, but media requests concerning DTF can be routed through our email or website.

PRESS RELEASES

As Public Opposition Grows, Atlanta Police Attempt to Begin Work on Cop City, Protestors Occupy Trees

June 6, 2022

Reeves-Young Has Backed Out!

April 25, 2022

Atlanta-area Park Carelessly Destroyed: Bulldozer and Cops Escorted Out of the Atlanta Forest

March 9, 2022

NO COP CITY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FOREST (CONTINUED)

PLANTATIONS & THE PRISON FARM (1827 AD to 1996)

- **Approx. 1827 to 1911:** The Key family purchased and occupied the stolen land, using slaves to operate it as a plantation .
- **1911:** The Key family sold the land to the City of Atlanta.
- **1911 to 1922:** Atlanta acquired more land in the area and began to operate a municipal dairy farm.
- **1922:** The city prison farm was formally established.
- **1940:** Construction on an expansion to the farm was halted due to a lack of permits filed with DeKalb County, and because it would bring the prison farm too close to the nearby school for white children.
- **1941:** DeKalb County residents sued the city for dumping untreated waste into Intrenchment Creek.
- **1957 to 1958:** The Black-owned Atlanta Daily Word published an in-depth investigation into racist abuses at the city prison farm. AJC does not pick up the story until 1965, substantially changing the comment to cater to their whiter, wealthier audience.
- **1938 to 1980s:** The prison farm was cited for violations of human dignity and other abuses. Prisoners were shot in the crossfire during a dispute between two prison guards, killed due to unsafe working conditions while performing forced labor, and witnesses to the inevitable failure of reforms.
- **1982:** Prisoners tend to livestock at the prison farm. Black prisoners were given mule-drawn plows to work the fields while white prisoners were given tractors. A 15-year veteran of the Bureau of Corrections notes that inmates went on strike almost monthly for many years.
- **1990:** Farming and livestock operations at the prison farm ceased.
- **Approx 1995 to 1996:** The Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC) is built as part of a series of infrastructure improvements in preparation for Atlanta to host the 1996 Summer Olympics. Homeless people are swept off the streets and incarcerated in ACDC to improve the city's image. Prison farm operations cease completely.

COP CITY WILL BE DEFEATED (2017 to Present)

- **2017:** The corporate-funded Atlanta Police Foundation announced a campaign to build a new training center for the Atlanta Police Department. The city, as part of its ambitious Atlanta City Design plan, announced its intent to help clean up and protect the forest.
- **2021:** Plans for the police training facility were presented to city council. Former City Council member, Joyce Sheperd, introduced Cop City legislation. To her surprise, this is met with widespread dissent and opposition. The DTF movement gathers its momentum.

SOURCE: ATLANTA COMMUNITY PRESS COLLECTIVE
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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

WHY ARE PEOPLE DEFENDING THE FOREST?

On the heels of the historic 2020 uprising, following the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police Department, the current movement inherits all of the wisdom and ingenuity of those unforgettable days. After millions marched, demonstrated, and took action against police brutality, the Atlanta government and countless others found creative ways to give local law enforcement even more resources and funds, under the cover of "reform" and "trainings." We do not forget that Garrett Rolfe, who killed Rayshard Brooks here in Atlanta for sleeping in his car on University Avenue, also underwent many hours of "sensitivity trainings" and "de-escalation" courses. Unequal societies can only be preserved with violence and intimidation. Many of the residents and community members on the receiving end of this violence and intimidation are opposed to the forces hoping to increase it.

The land slated for the Cop City development has been inhabited and stewarded by human civilizations for tens of thousands of years. In the last 300 years it has been colonized through the violent dispossession and genocide of the Muscogee (Creek) peoples who stewarded the land. It has been turned into a plantation reliant on slave labor, and it remained a prison farm and forced labor camp until the 1990s. The movement to prevent the development of Cop City is a fight against hundreds of years of racialized violence and ecological destruction.

The fight against ecological destruction and racialized violence in Atlanta, and beyond, are inextricably linked. Today, climate collapse disproportionately affects disadvantaged groups such as Atlanta's Black communities. Rather than investing in solutions to the environmental crisis, governments are investing in heavier policing, especially of those disadvantaged groups. Atlanta's tree canopy is one of its main sources of resiliency in the face of climate change. The threatened forest is home to wetlands that filter rainwater and prevent flooding which is a growing issue in the city. It is also one of the last breeding grounds for many amphibians in the region and an important migration site for wading birds. Nevertheless, the police and Blackhall Studios are set to bulldoze every inch of it. The period of planetary climate collapse that we are all living in will continue to pose urgent and unsettling questions to our species as we fight for dignity in a world of increasingly dangerous wildfires, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and mass extinction. Rather than address the problems as they really present themselves, world and local leaders are hurling us into the fire. As we fight for a life worth living, the system seems prepared to prop up its petroleum-based economy with tear gas and lines of riot police.

Defend the Forest/Stop Cop City is one part of a larger struggle dedicated to opening up a different path forward.

MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Media representatives should introduce themselves to forest defenders with their full name and media outlet before filming, taking photos, or beginning an interview.

KNOW THE HISTORY

The land has a long history as a site of oppression and struggle.

Include this history in your story.

DO NO HARM

Forest defenders and organizations involved in forest defense are sometimes the target of police and government repression.

Respect requests for anonymity in interviews and photos, and take photos and videos that do not show the face of anyone who has not consented to be interviewed or filmed.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FOREST

MUSCOGEE STEWARDSHIP & STOLEN LAND (8,000BC to 1822 AD)

- **Before the historical record:** Remnants of soapstone in the nearby Soapstone Ridge suggest that people lived, harvested soapstone, and worked the stone into bowls and tools here for tens of thousands of years.
- **8,000BC to 1,000BC:** Archaeological remnants show an unbroken chain of human civilizations in the Ocmulgee River Basin dating back to the Ice Age migration of humans across North America.
- **1,000BC to 1825BC:** The Muscogee (Creek) people, a dynamic confederacy consisting of several tribes, stewarded the land known today as the South River Forest. This land was gradually stolen from them through brutal violence and illegal treaties. Much of the history of Muscogee stewardship was lost through genocide and dispossession.
- **1600s:** The English began trading in Muscogee territory.
- **1733:** The English establish the Georgia Colony along the Savannah River.
- **1783:** After losing the Revolutionary War, the English ceded Muscogee territory to the Americans. New waves of American settlers poured in, many coveting the rich river bottomlands possessed by the Muscogee. The state of Georgia negotiated an illegal treaty at Augusta taking Muscogee lands from the Ogeechee to the Oconee River.
- **Between 1805 & 1813:** Under pressure from the government and hostility from settlers, internal conflict arose among the Muscogees, as well as nearby Choctaws and Cherokees. Some sided with more northern Shawnee leaders in resisting assimilating to colonization and giving up more land.
- **1813:** War broke out between the loyalists, backed by General Andrew Jackson, and those who resisted assimilation and land theft. The war lasted until a Georgia militia and federal troops destroyed a stronghold at Horseshoe Bend in Alabama. This violent attack killed many in the resistance and convinced Muscogee towns to side with Jackson.
- **1814:** To punish Muscogee resisters, the US government took a significant portion of land from the Muscogee territory, 23-million acres, including southern Georgia bordering Florida.
- **1821:** The First Treaty of Indian Springs, led by William McIntosh, ceded Muscogee lands to America. McIntosh had not been granted authority from the Muscogee nation to sign the treaty.
- **1822:** DeKalb County is founded on Muscogee land that was stolen through prolonged violence and the implementation of illegal treaties.

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