



MINUTES

GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM First Quarter Council Meeting March 4, 2009 - 10:30 AM

Call To Order

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order.

Present at the meeting were:

Council Members: Steve Stancil, Chairman, John Bembry, Stacy Patton, Brent Dykes, Chris Clark, Robert Farris, and Chuck Leavell.

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from the November 13, 2008 GLCP meeting for approval. Brent Dykes made a motion seconded by Stacy Patton to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Review of Budget and 2009 Legislative Activity

Curt Soper stated that more than 100,000 acres have been permanently protected since inception of the program; 53 grants/loans totaling 69,663 acres and 77 certified tax credit projects totaling 30,680 acres. The following funding is available: \$6 million for statewide significant projects, \$40+ million for low interest loans and \$200,000 in taxpayer donations. Curt stated that with the current budget situation the \$10 million in FY2009 funds had been reverted back to the state budget. The Governor has requested \$5 million for FY2010 for local land conservation grants. There are 2 bills that have been introduced that are pertinent to land conservation program 1) Senate Bill 55 addresses the way property taxes are handled in the state and the bill has two provisions in it that make changes to the tax code and that would require county assessors to consider the impact of a permanent conservation easement on the value of the property when they do the assessed value for the local property taxes. The second thing the bill would do is look at foreclosures in the area when considering the assessed value. House Resolution 293 has been introduced that proposes an amendment to the Constitution to provide a permanent source of funding for land conservation.

Report on Projects Previously Approved by the Council

Curt Soper stated that 54 projects have been approved by the Council, 5 of those projects have not closed, 3 are pending execution in the next few months, 1 loan project has withdrawn due to local splost funds passed and being made available for the project cost. The Silverlake project has been denied because property must be restricted at the time the loan is given. The Land Conservation Act will have to be amended in order to make bridge loan projects work.

Curt stated that the State Properties Commission Board approved an updated legal document for conservation easements. The document is designed to protect the land forever, and to hopefully simplify the process. Robert Farris stated that significant changes have made it an easier process.

Curt stated that the Council had approved the use of \$200,000 to pay for some of the costs incurred for conservation easements being donated to the state. Two conservation easements projects closed at the end of the year and the Georgia Forestry Commission now holds these easements. We are getting more interest in these types of projects. Robert Farris made a motion to make the remaining

taxpayer donated funds available to cover costs associated with donated conservation easements, totaling \$200,000, Chuck Leavell seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Report on Land Values Study

Carolyn Dehring from the Terry School of Business and the Carl Vinson Institute at UGA presented a report from North Carolina on land values and the impact of conservation donations. A copy of the report was included in the meeting materials and titled: The Value of Conservation Donations.

Report on Conservation Priorities Mapping and Program Outreach

Andrew Szwak presented several maps that have been developed using the GLCP's 10 conservation criteria: 1) water quality; 2) flood protection; 3) wetlands; 4) erosion; 5) habitat; 6) prime Agriculture and forestry; 7) cultural, historic resources; 8) scenic; 9) recreation; and 10) connectivity. Once data is complete we will be able to run a map for each County in Georgia.

Andrew Szwak stated that there is a billboard now on I-75 South below McDonough; we had the 100,000 acre announcement and Curt has appeared on Georgia Outdoors for a session on public land in Georgia. More people are visiting our website and the tax credit page is viewed most often. Scheduled to speak at several upcoming conferences.

Brent Dykes requested a County map to be presented with future project request.

Report on Conservation Tax Credit Program

Kristina Sorensen stated the Conservation Tax Credit legislation was signed into law on April 21, 2006, creating a new state income tax credit for land conservation. The purpose of this tax credit is to increase the financial incentive for a willing landowner to permanently protect their property through donation. The tax credit is for up to 25% of the fair market value of the donation with a maximum credit of \$250,000 per individual and \$500,000 per corporation. The increased federal tax incentives will expire at the end of this year. To date the DNR has received 122 tax credit certification applications; 99 projects have been approved to date; 58 counties are represented.

Emerging Issues

John Bembry asked if funds were available for marketing the program. Curt stated that currently there are no funds for marketing. Stacy Patton stated that internet and blogging could be used to promote the program. Chris Clark stated that under the Conserve Georgia website information relating to land conservation is included. Chuck Leavell stated that he would like to add clips relating to the land conservation program on his website as well. Robert Farris stated that Forestry is currently working to reforest the land that had wildfires last year. The state is currently working to grant a conservation easement on the Dixon Forest, the State Properties Commission approved it last week. Oglethorpe Power Company has agreed to plant 500 acres of bottom land that Forestry Commission had no dollars to reforest in exchange for the carbon credits of the 500 acres. At the end of a 25 year period the state will receive half of those credits.

Next meeting is scheduled for June 4, location to be determined.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:49 a.m.

Kim Yawn, Senior Executive Assistant

Phil Foil, Executive Director