



MINUTES

GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM Fourth Quarter Council Meeting November 18, 2008 - 9:30 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, Mike Beatty, and Paul Michael.

Present by speaker phone were: Noel Holcomb and Robert Farris

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from the July 9-11, 2008 GLCP Strategic Planning session and the July 11, GLCP meeting for approval. Mike Beatty made a motion seconded by John Bembry to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Report on FY 09-10 Strategic Plan

Curt Soper stated that back in July the Council had a strategic planning session to develop the FY09-10 Operating Plan and a copy is provided in the Council book. Staff will be working to complete the goals and objectives and will provide an update at each meeting.

Land Conservation Project Reviews

Curt Soper stated that the Council has approved 51 projects totaling 64,886 acres since its inception; total state investment is \$66.3 million; total project value/cost is \$225+ million; 25 grants and 6 loans have been provided to DNR, cities, and counties; 17 conservation easements and 37 fee title acquisitions have been approved; and there have been 9 outright gifts of property to the state.

Curt Soper presented the following projects:

Virginia Highland Civic Association

The Virginia Highland Civic Association is requesting a loan in the amount of \$855,500. The project would establish a community greenspace and storm water management demonstration project on a 0.4 acre tract of land in one of Atlanta's most thriving neighborhoods. First, the non-profit Virginia Highland Civic Association will purchase the land. Then, it will clear the area of debris, including a former building foundation and other impervious surfaces that still exist on site. Finally, the Association will bed native plants, create rain gardens and install passive recreational amenities, such as footpaths and benches. When complete, the property will absorb storm water from both on and off-site and serve as a local demonstration of environmentally-responsible urban land use and water

management. This project is similar in design and concept to projects completed in cities in other states using this source of federal funding. GLCP loan funds are requested for the purchase of the property from its current owner. The applicant has completed an MAI appraisal and the property is valued at \$855,500. Stacy Patton made a motion seconded by John Bemby to approve a loan in the amount of \$855,500 to the Virginia Highland Civic Association. The motion passed unanimously.

Silver Lake/The Conservation Fund

The Conservation Fund is requesting a loan in the amount of \$8,317,638. This is Phase 3 of the Silver Lake tract in Decatur County, which contains 8,430 total acres, in 2007 and financed the acquisition through an internal loan with a 5% interest rate. TCF acquired the entire Silver Lake tract in Decatur County, which contains 8,430 total acres, in 2007 and financed the acquisition through an internal loan with a 5% interest rate. TCF is in the process of selling the entire Silver Lake tract to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in three phases, two of which have already been completed. DNR intends to purchase Phase 3 of Silver Lake within the next 23 months using grants from the federal government and two private foundations. TCF is seeking to accept a GLCP loan of 2% to replace its existing 5% loan, and in turn, pass the savings on to DNR. The Conservation Fund is the loan applicant, and has agreed to sell this tract to the State at a reduced price that would incorporate debt service savings accrued by accepting this Land Conservation loan instead of its existing financing. As with the first two phases of the Silver Lake project, much of the property is in pristine ecological condition, with rich and healthy expanses of native groundcover found on this tract along with numerous ponds and wetlands. The tract contains abundant wildlife as well as rare, threatened, and/or endangered aquatic and terrestrial species that are federally protected and/or State protected. Two appraisals have been completed for the full 8,430 acres with fair market values of \$40 and \$45 million. Robert Farris made a motion seconded by Stacy Patton to approve a loan in the amount of \$8,317,638. The motion passed unanimously.

Dawson Forestar Project

The Department of Natural Resources is requesting a grant in the amount of \$200,000. This project would acquire a 488-acre tract owned by the Forestar Real Estate Group. This project has long been a priority of the State and is being pursued by DNR to accomplish a number of natural resource conservation goals. The property contains nearly 2 miles of Amicalola Creek – a tributary to the Etowah River, which supports an exceptional concentration of aquatic biodiversity. The Forestar Tract is primarily covered by thinned loblolly, and supports a suite of plant species that contribute to the very high water quality in Amicalola Creek and the Etowah River. The property also falls between and would link the two principal areas of the Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area. Its acquisition and incorporation into the WMA would connect these areas, creating a continuous greenway along Amicalola Creek running nearly 20 miles between Amicalola Mountain and Chattahoochee National Forest in the north and the city of Atlanta's considerable 10,000-acre land holding to the south currently leased to the DNR for public use and managed by the GFC for forest production. GLCP funding for this project would come from monies donated directly to the program through the Greenspace Tax Checkoff on Georgia's income tax form. A motion was made by Paul Michael and seconded by Stacy Patton to approve a \$200,000 grant to the Department of Natural Resources. The motion passed unanimously.

Report on Pending Conservation Easement Donations to the State

Curt Soper stated that staff is currently working on revising the state's form of conservation easement. One issue is how to handle the third party violation clause. We have provided data to the Law Department on how other states handle this issue and are waiting to hear back from them. John Bemby stated that many complications come up with conservation easements and we need to make it as smooth a process as possible when a landowner is donating an easement. Paul Michael suggested that some type of endowment fund be set up to handle the state's responsibilities associated with holding conservation easements. Curt stated that currently state agencies are using existing staff to monitor their conservation easements and the Law Department office to defend them if needed. Staff is currently researching the idea of a transfer fee that could be collected by the State when the property is sold in the future to create such a fund. Curt will continue to work with the Law Department and hopes to have a document ready to present at the March meeting. Geoff Rockwell with the Georgia Forestry discussed several pending conservation easements that they are working on.

Outreach Update

Andrew Szwak stated that there have been two Landowner Legacy Workshops thus far held in Hawkinsville and at the Jones Research Center with approximately 30 landowners attending. Staff also presented at the Annual CPA Conference and is developing a land conservation toolkit and has attended several ceremonies for land closings. Staff is also working on updating its conservation priorities maps for Georgia and hopes to have them ready for the March meeting.

2009 Schedule

Chairman Stancil stated that the following dates will be scheduled for the 2009 Council meetings: March 5 in Atlanta; June 4, September 3 and December 3, 2009.

Emerging Issues

John Bemby asked Council members and staff to think about some way that we could make people aware of the tax credit check off box to help increase donations.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:53 a.m.

Kim Yawn, Executive Assistant

Phil Foil, Executive Director