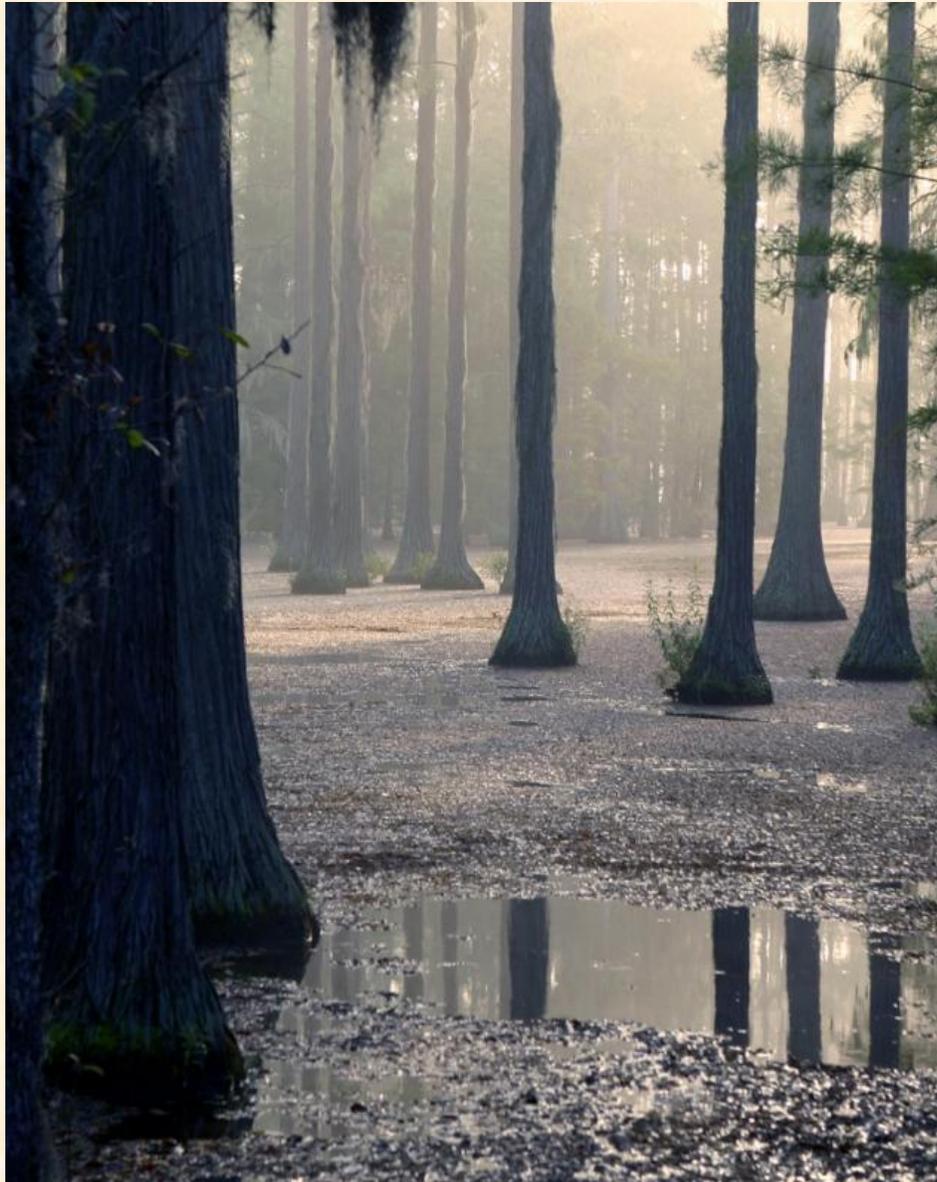




# THE GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM

## ANNUAL REPORT

July 2008 to December 2009



*Preserving Our Natural Resources  
for Generations of Georgians to Come*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Georgia Land Conservation Program (GLCP) is a commitment to our children and grandchildren to preserve a statewide network of land and water resources for current and future generations to use and enjoy. The program provides financing options such as competitive grants and low-interest loans for land acquisitions and conservation easements. It also offers state income tax credits to donors of conservation lands and easements. The Land Conservation Council governs the program in accordance with the objectives outlined in the Georgia Land Conservation Act of 2005. The Council approves project applications and provides general policy guidance to program staff.

Since its inception, the GLCP has approved 210 grant, loan and tax credit applications that have helped preserve over 150,000 acres in Georgia. From July 2008 to December 2009, the program played a part in permanently conserving more than 38,000 acres. This period also experienced an economic downturn nationally and a sharp decline in revenue being received by the State of Georgia. Consequently, the program focused on completing lower-cost conservation projects such as low-interest loans and easement donations.

The GLCP also continued to promote land conservation through comprehensive statewide outreach efforts in 2009. Staff conducted workshops, seminars and presentations throughout the state, and provided consultation and technical support for various land conservation partners and initiatives. The program also maintained and expanded its on-line presence and developed new mapping tools and products to aid conservation efforts.

The program completed multiple landmark projects during 2009. The Land Council approved a grant utilizing remaining 2008 funding to preserve a 7,180-acre tract along the Altamaha River containing the largest and older cypress trees in Georgia and surrounding states. The program also executed the first-ever loan between the State of Georgia and a private non-governmental organization, creating a new park in the heart of Atlanta. And the GLCP pioneered a cost reimbursement program that allowed state agencies to accept a greater number of donated conservation easements. Despite tough economic conditions, the GLCP continues to achieve its vision of permanently protecting Georgia's most valued natural resources.





# LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL AND STAFF

The Land Conservation Council is composed of nine members: the leaders of five State agencies and four gubernatorial appointees. The Council met four times in 2009 to approve projects, discuss conservation opportunities, conduct strategic planning and offer direction to its staff. The Council currently consists of the members listed below.

**Steve Stancil, Chairman**  
State Property Officer,  
Properties Commission

**Robert Farris**  
Executive Director,  
Forestry Commission

**Stacy R. Patton**  
Managing Member,  
Minerva Real Estate

**Chris Clark**  
Commissioner,  
Dept. of Natural Resources

**Brent L. Dykes**  
Executive Director,  
Soil & Water Commission

**Chuck Leavell**  
Musician & Owner,  
Charlane Plantation

**Mike Beatty**  
Commissioner,  
Dept. of Community Affairs

**Dr. John Bembry**  
Tree Farmer & Veterinarian

**Paul H. Michael**  
Vice President,  
TPA Realty Services

The Land Conservation Program employs three staff members to administer the program. These positions are supported by the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA). The program is staffed by:

**Curt Soper**  
Executive Director

**Andrew Szwak**  
Program Manager

**Kristina Sorensen**  
Wildlife Biologist





# CONSERVATION TOOLS

## Competitive Grants

The Land Conservation Act authorizes the GLCP to provide grants to State agencies, cities, and counties with funds from the Land Conservation Trust Fund. The Trust Fund is fed by State appropriations and supplemented with funds donated annually by taxpayers through a State Income Tax Checkoff option. Funds initially appropriated to the Land Conservation Trust Fund in fiscal year 2009 were rescinded due to the economic downturn affecting the U.S. economy and the sharp decline in revenue being received by the State of Georgia. Therefore, the GLCP suspended its grant awards program and focused activities on low cost efforts such as encouraging and implementing conservation easement donations.



The Land Council dedicated \$400,000 in remaining 2008 funds from the Trust Fund to reimburse state agencies for expenses incurred while accepting donated conservation easements. In support of this initiative, the GLCP worked with staff members from the Department of Natural Resources, the Georgia Forestry Commission, the State Law Department and the State Properties Commission to enhance the State's ability to accept and manage donations of conservation land and easements. In 2009, a total of 15 conservation easements were donated to the State permanently protecting 19,987 acres.

## Low Interest Loans

The GLCP also offers low interest loans for conservation projects to local governments and non-governmental organizations. The Land Conservation Loan Fund is capitalized with \$55 million from the federal Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which is jointly administered by the GEFA and the Environmental Protection Division of DNR (EPD). More than \$10 million of these loan funds are currently in circulation.



The GLCP completed the State's first ever loan to a non-governmental entity in December of 2008. GLCP staff members worked with the Virginia Highland Civic Association, EPD and the Law Department to develop and execute a contract that met the recently adopted legal and conservation requirements of this approach. This contract now serves as a model for future loan agreements between the State of Georgia and non-governmental organizations.

### **Conservation Tax Credits**

The GLCP helps administer the certification of State Income Tax Credits for land



conservation donations together with the DNR and the Department of Revenue. Donors of conservation land or easements may apply for credits of up to 25% of their donation's fair market value, with a maximum credit of \$250,000 per individual, \$500,000 per corporation, and \$1,000,000 per partnership. DNR is responsible for ensuring that donated properties meet the definition of conservation land and that the properties are being donated to qualified entities. Federal income tax deductions

and estate tax reductions as well as potential local property tax reductions provide additional financial incentives to landowners interested in conserving their property.

With input from the State's private sector land conservation community, DNR and the GLCP revised the definition for lands that are eligible for conservation tax credits. Seven detailed criteria replaced the GLCP's ten broad conservation objectives as requirements that must be met in order for a donation to qualify for a tax credit. These changes result in more measurable and objective standards for assessing tax credit applications, thereby streamlining the certification process and allowing program compliance to be determined more easily. The new administrative rules instituting these changes became effective in May of 2009.





# OUTREACH

## **Presentations**

GLCP staff delivered numerous presentations and workshops during 2009 to promote land conservation in Georgia. Outreach efforts focused on reaching landowners across the state to answer their questions about the state income tax credit program and conservation easements in partnership with private sector land trusts. The GLCP also presented to other audiences to encourage and inform them about supporting land conservation in their communities including professional associations, business organizations, local governments and conservation groups.



## **Indirect Marketing**

The GLCP supplemented its more direct marketing efforts in FY2009 by more fully developing its indirect marketing resources. The program continued to build and maintain its website ([glcp.ga.gov](http://glcp.ga.gov)) which contains up to date information and resources on the program and land conservation initiatives in general. The program increased its on-line presence by developing a Facebook page in order to reach new audiences and provide an informal and highly-accessible communication vehicle. GLCP also received a donation of billboard space courtesy of the Outdoor Advertising Association of Georgia. Staff assisted in the design and production of the billboard, which was placed and viewed in three separate locations along Interstate 75 during 2009.



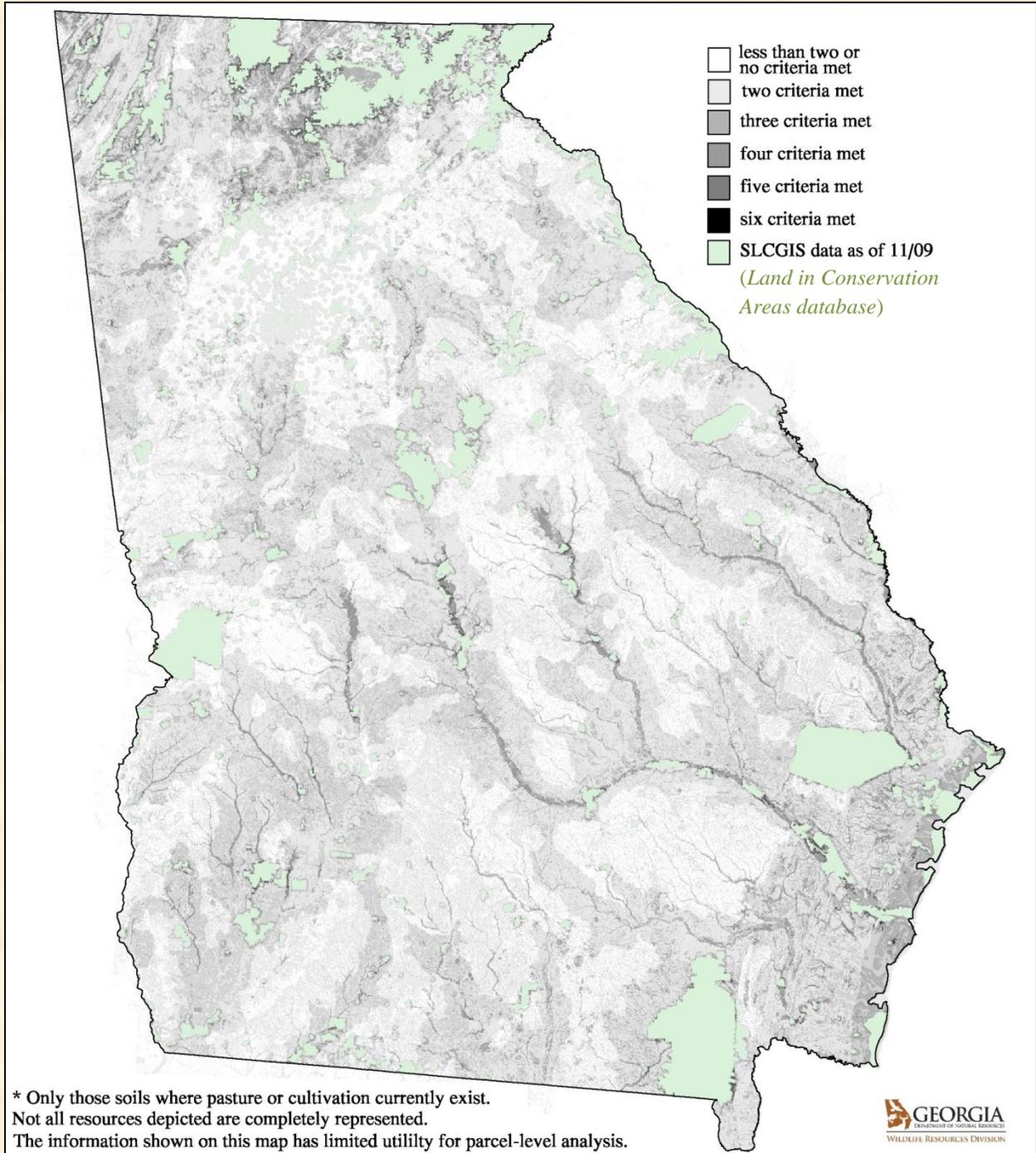
## Mapping

GLCP and DNR conducted a joint effort in 2009 to map the State's conservation values and identify regions of importance. This initiative produced a statewide geographical representation of the program's ten conservation criteria. A data layer was created for each of the ten criteria indicating the presence or absence of specific conservation features, as listed in the table below. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software, these layers were then placed one on top of another over a base map of Georgia. Darker shaded areas represent overlap between a greater number of conservation criteria than lighter shaded areas. The GLCP has begun sharing this information with local and regional governments, other state agencies, and private sector conservation partners and will be targeting the darkest areas for its ongoing outreach efforts.

<b>CONSERVATION CRITERIA</b>	<b>DATA LAYER(S)</b>
Protect water quality for surface waters	Watersheds of DNR's High-priority Rivers
Prevent flooding	Buffers along Major Streams & Rivers
Protect wetlands	National Wetlands Inventory wetlands
Reduce erosion	Steep Slopes (>10%)
Conserve native plant and animal habitat	DNR Conservation Opportunity Areas
Protect prime agricultural & forestry lands	Priority Forestlands & Prime Soils
Conserve historical and cultural resources	Registered Historic Sites & Districts
Scenic protection	Buffers around designated Scenic Byways, scenic rivers, and scenic trails
Provision of resource-based recreation	Buffers around State and local Parks
Connectivity between conservation lands	Buffers around existing conservation lands



# GLCP Conservation Criteria Map





## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

The GLCP approved 84 competitive grant, low interest loan and tax credit applications between July of 2008 and December of 2009. The projects listed below highlight some of these accomplishments.



### **Lower Altamaha River**

The Land Council awarded DNR \$6 million in funds carried over from 2008 to acquire 7,180 acres adjacent to the Altamaha River in Long & McIntosh Counties. The tract supports the State's largest and oldest cypress and tupelo trees and at least 17 rare and threatened species. It connects with other State lands to comprise an area over 83,000 acres in size. The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and DNR's Nongame Program also contributed significant financial resources to secure the State's purchase from Rayonier Timber Company.



### **Saint Charles Park**

GLCP completed the State's first ever loan to a non-government organization in 2009 when it awarded \$855,500 to the Virginia Highland Civic Association to acquire a 0.4-acre parcel in Atlanta. The Association is developing a passive park with rain gardens, benches and walking paths on this site in the thriving urban Atlanta neighborhood of Virginia Highlands.



### **Middle Oconee River Greenway**

GLCP completed a grant of \$77,750 to the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County for the acquisition of the 7-acre Crane Tract. The steeply-sloping and wooded property lies along the east bank of the Oconee River and extends a developing greenway between Ben Burton Park and the Atlanta Highway. The tract will support recreational access to the river and multi-use pathways.



### **Gillis Forest Easement**

A conservation easement was donated to the Georgia Forestry Commission on 1,557 acres of working timberland in Treutlen County by Mr. Jim L. Gillis. The project protects multiple creeks, ponds and other water bodies. The State was assisted greatly by the Conservation Fund which secured the easement and later transferred it to the Forestry Commission.



### **Alapaha River Easement**

A conservation easement was donated to the Georgia Forestry Commission on 4,882 acres of working timberland in Berrien County by Mr. Murray Gaskins. The easement protects a 12-mile stretch of the Alapaha River, old-growth longleaf pine, historic burial grounds and gopher tortoise habitat. Mr. Gaskins completed the donation only days before passing on, ensuring a lasting natural legacy for him and his family.



### **Conasauga River Easement**

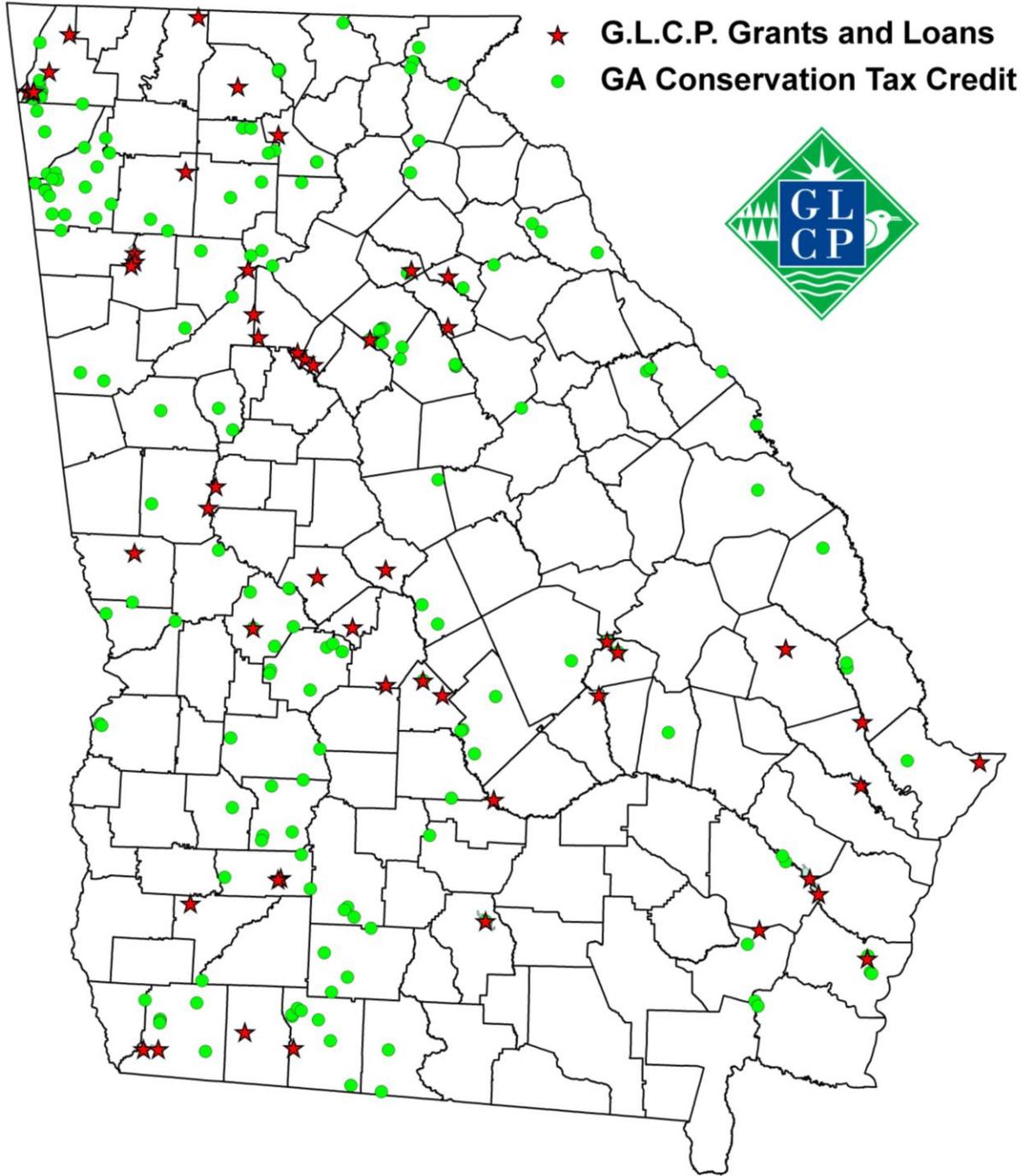
A conservation easement was donated to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources on 1,205 acres of land along the Conasauga River in Murray County by Mr. James Dellinger. The tract is an in-holding within the Chattahoochee National Forest and supports 15 high-priority and rare species. Mr. Dellinger will also participate in a stream mitigation project on the site.



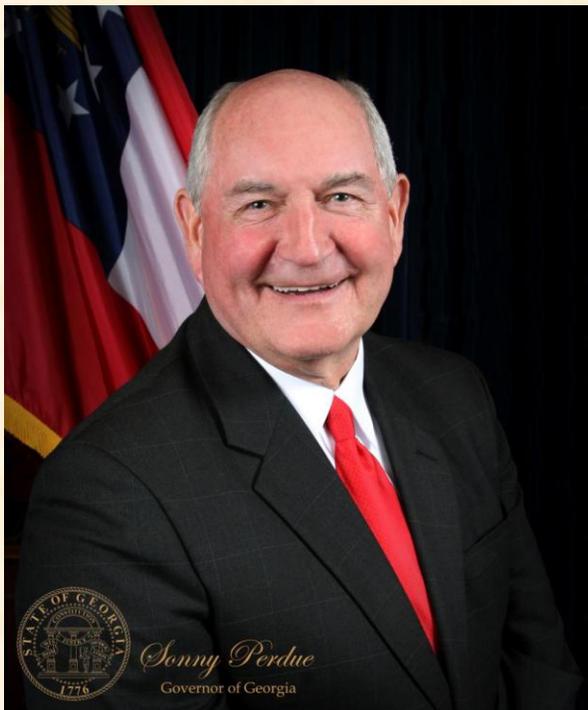
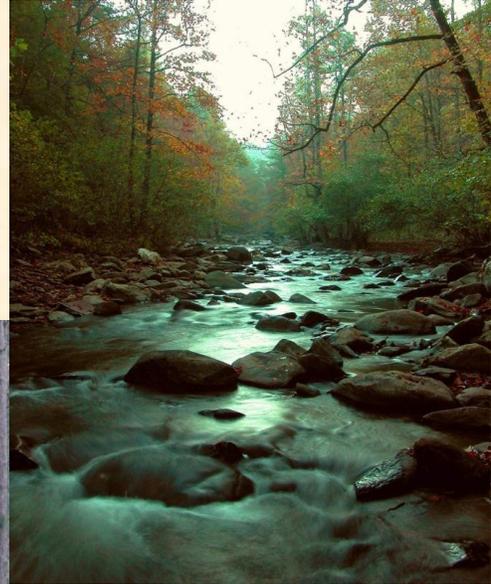
### **Myrtlewood Plantation Easement**

A conservation easement was donated to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources on 1,593 acres of land along the Ochlockonee River in Thomas County by the Balfour Land Company. The property contains large swaths of bottomland hardwood forest and adjoins the River Creek WMA. Easement terms allow silvicultural practices to continue in suitable upland areas while protecting the sensitive bottomland hardwood areas.

# GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM APPROVED PROJECTS 2005 - 2009



# FROM THE GOVERNOR



**“Communities all across Georgia agree on the benefits of land conservation efforts:** a cleaner and more plentiful water supply; improved air quality; additional greenspace; keeping forest and agricultural lands productive; and preserving our rich natural and cultural heritage. The GLCP brings together private and public partners to make it happen.”

**Governor Sonny Perdue**