



## MINUTES

### GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM Third Quarter Council Meeting September 12, 2006 - 9:00 AM

#### **Call To Order**

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

Present at the meeting were:

Council Members: Gena Abraham, Chairperson, Noel Holcomb, John Bembry, Stacy Patton, Brent Dykes, Wade Shealy and Mike Beatty.

Staff: Paul Burks, GEFA; Curt Soper, GEFA; Debra Elovich, GBA; Steve Friedman, DNR; Beverly McElroy, GEFA; Jennifer Spivey, GEFA; Greg Mason, GEFA; Chris Tomlinson, GSFIC; Chris Canalos, DNR; Buford Sanders, GFC; Mike Gleaton, DCA; Denise Whiting-Pack, Law Department; Tom Steinmetz, Eric Gilkesson and Kim Yawn, GEFA.

#### **Approval of the Minutes**

Chairperson Abraham presented minutes from the June 13, 2006 and July 20, 2006 GLCP meeting for approval. Brent Dykes made a motion seconded by Noel Holcomb to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **New Business**

Chairperson Abraham congratulated Paul Burks on receiving the Public Servant of the year award and for GEFA winning the Georgia Oglethorpe award.

Chairperson Abraham stated that the Governor's office has appointed Mr. Chuck Leavell to the Land Council.

#### **Grant and Loan funding available for the Land Conservation Program**

Paul Burks stated that the Council has \$55 million in loan funds for water quality projects and \$4,970,953 grant funds available to local governments for Land Conservation projects. Paul stated that GEFA has not received the 2005 Income Tax Collection contribution but hopes to receive within the next 60 days. The tax contribution can be used as loan or grant funds.

#### **Land Conservation Projects**

Chairperson Abraham stated that the Council would not be voting on the projects today. The staff will be presenting the applications received and answering questions that the Council may have.

Curt Soper thanked all of the applicants that submitted applications. Curt stated that 21 applications were submitted for a total request in funding for \$15,517,658. Staff received

applications by July 17, 2006 and clarified any outstanding questions. DNR staff visited all the sites and then scored the projects against the established program criteria. GEFA staff reviewed each application and provided a financial analysis.

## **Land Conservation Project Reviews**

Curt Soper stated that he will be presenting each project to the Council in the order that the applications were received. Each applicant is at different stages but staff will work with the applicants to make sure the project is completed.

Curt Soper presented the following projects:

City of Statham requests grant funds in the amount of \$433,382 with matching funds of \$12,308 for a total project cost of \$445,690. The project is for a 20 acre acquisition that would protect the area around Statham Spring which has been a primary water supply for the City of Statham since the 1930's. The site contains primarily mature hardwood forest. Site is adjacent to existing recreation lands and could be connected via trails. If not protected via acquisition at this time, the property is likely to be sold for residential development.

Rockdale County requests loan funds in the amount of \$750,000 to purchase a 5 acre fee acquisition on Highway 138 where it crosses the South River. The total project cost is \$750,000. Property includes South River frontage and an auto salvage business. Phase I and II environmental hazards assessments have been completed. County proposes to remove old autos, carry out restoration, and create a trailhead for the 13-mile South River trail. There is connection to Panola Mountain State Park and part of the larger Arabia Mountain Heritage area.

Polk County requests grant funds in the amount of \$1,600,000 with matching funds of \$453,000 for a total project cost of \$2,053,400. The project is for a 513 acre acquisition with an eventual conservation easement pledged by the County. Polk County may eventually use the area for walking trails, picnicking and possible development of a lake for fishing. The property was obtained by the County from Temple Inland with SPLOST funds. Most of the tract is in pine plantation with hardwoods on steeper slopes. Letters of support were received from Senator Heath and County Commissioner Jarvis.

Baldwin County requests grant funds in the amount of \$225,000 with matching funds of \$45,000 for a total project cost of \$270,000. The project is for a 59 acre acquisition on the banks of the Oconee River near Milledgeville. The property is adjacent to previously protected property, close linkage to Baldwin State Forest and part of the Oconee River Greenway. County/Authority would use the property to help build a river corridor to increase public use, and preserve community history and natural resources. Landowner intends to sell the property in the near future.

Oconee County requests grant funds in the amount of \$467,112.50 with matching funds of \$1,069,037.50 for a total project cost of \$1,536,150. The project consists of 190 acre conservation easement designed to help preserve the rapidly disappearing agricultural heritage of Oconee County. Easement would prohibit development, fence streams from grazing, and preserve forested streams. High funding leverage with 70% of project funding coming from federal (Farm Bill), local (Oconee County), and private (bargain sale) sources. Also in partnership with Oconee Partnership for Farmland Protection.

Bibb County requests grant funds in the amount of \$3,618,000 with matching funds of \$95,000 for a total project cost of \$3,618,000. The project is for a 1,117 acre acquisition (4 tracts) that is part of a larger Tobesofkee Creek/Ocmulgee River protection effort just south of Macon and near I-75. The property contains near pristine bottomland hardwood tupelo swamps and significant wildlife habitat. The project could be phased, with the highest priority being the 400 acre Jordan tract.

City of Kennesaw requests grant funds in the amount of \$171,000 with matching funds of \$399,000 for a total project cost of \$570,000. The project is for a 10 acre tract in the core of downtown Kennesaw. The Georgia Land Conservation program funds would purchase a conservation easement over 3 acres. The site is the location of Camp McDonald, a major Civil War encampment and Confederate training area. The city would put a trail on the property for passive pedestrian use and historic education.

City of Kennesaw requests grant funds in the amount of \$119,008 with matching funds of \$277,686 for a total project cost of \$396,694. The project is for a 12 acre tract slated for development. This proposal would acquire a conservation easement over 4 acres of the tract and set it aside as greenspace. Public access would be allowed via trails. An existing pond could be adapted for public fishing use. The site contains hardwoods with an understory of both native and exotic species.

City of Roberta requests grant funds in the amount of \$165,000 with matching funds of \$50,000 for a total project cost of \$165,000. The project is for a 31 acre acquisition to protect habitat, agricultural land and to serve as an educational site for underprivileged school children. The property is located on the edge of the city of Roberta and adjacent to Crawford Middle School. The property includes a farm pond with beavers present that could serve as an education focal point with potential for nature trails and a picnic area. The landowner is providing a bargain sale and working actively with the school system to convert the property into an agricultural learning center.

City of Buford requests grant funds in the amount of \$225,000 with matching funds in the amount of \$75,000 for a total project cost of \$300,000. The project is for a 4 acre acquisition in the highly developed Buford Highway corridor. The property is within the floodplain of Suwanee Creek, which is highly degraded. The city's intent would be to develop passive recreation such as walking trails. The project would help meet the city's Greenspace Program.

Bartow County requests grant funds in the amount of \$65,625 with matching funds in the amount of \$284,375 for a total project cost of \$350,000. The project is for a 100 acre agricultural preservation conservation easement. The easement will protect prime farmland and stream buffers along Sugar Hill Creek. Part of Bartow County's Greenspace Plan. The project is the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest funding leverage percentage among applications with local (Bartow County), federal (USDA Farm Bill); and landowner (bargain sale) funds.

Harris County requests grant funds in the amount of \$3,383,531 with matching funds in the amount of \$1,127,844 for a total project cost of \$4,511,375. The project is for 2,123 acre conservation easement on and north of Pine Mountain to protect excellent examples of the rare montane longleaf pine ecosystem. Adjacent to 2,507 acre Callaway owned property under easement to the Georgia Forestry Commission and just west of Callaway Garden and

FDR State Park. Highest criteria score among applications. Outstanding views of and from Pine Mountain. The Callaway Foundation would continue ecological restoration and working forest activities and expand passive recreation under terms of the easement.

Walker County requests grant funds in the amount of \$300,000 with matching funds in the amount of \$112,525 for a total project cost of \$412,525. The project is for 145 acre conservation easement designed to protect working farmland. The property is adjacent to Pigeon Mountain Wildlife Management Area and Shirley Miller Wildflower Area. The land is a mix of farmland, plantation pine, and mixed hardwood forest. The property has an excellent scenic view of Pigeon Mountain and pastoral and woodland scenery. The landowner is providing a bargain sale donation. Letters of support have been received from Senator Mullis and The Nature Conservancy.

City of Chickamauga requests grant funds in the amount of \$350,000 with matching funds in the amount of \$1,775,000 for a total project cost of \$3,000,000. The project is for acquisition of 7 acre Gordon Lee mansion historic site that was constructed in the 1840's. The historical values date from the Cherokee settlements, to the antebellum Georgia, to the Civil War, and beyond. The mansion served as the main federal hospital during the Battle of Chickamauga. Annual post war Blue/Gray barbecues were held here for surviving veterans of the Battle. Mansion houses a large collection of period furnishings and antiques. The project is the second highest percentage funding leverage of applications with city, private foundation, and landowner contributions. The city proposes to use the property as a living history center and special events facility. Letters of support have been received from National Park Service, Senator Mullis, and Georgia Civil War Commission.

City of Tybee Island requests grant funds in the amount of \$380,000 with matching funds in the amount of \$13,000 for a total project cost of \$393,000. The project is for 13.7 acre acquisition on the north end of Tybee Island along the salt marshes adjacent to the Savannah River estuary. Primarily native salt marsh wetlands and maritime stand forest habitat. This project ranked forth highest in criteria score among applications. Project has outstanding scenic value. The property contains raised grade of old Tybee railroad which the city may develop into a walking or bike trail for public access.

Dekalb County requests grant funds in the amount of \$75,000 with matching funds in the amount of \$765,000 for a total project cost of \$840,000. The project is for 140 acre acquisition of floodplain and wetlands along the South River. Primarily freshwater marsh and floodplain hardwood forest habitats. This is one of the largest patches of natural habitat remaining inside Atlanta's perimeter highway. Property is adjacent to the protected Constitution Lakes property owned by Dekalb County. The county plans to construct a multi-use trail through the property as part of the South River trail system. This project is the highest funding leverage percentage among applications with 91% of project funding from other sources.

Carroll County requests grant funds in the amount of \$250,000. The total project cost is \$250,000. The request is to provide seed money to capitalize the innovative Chattahoochee Hill Country transfer of development rights (TDR) program. Funds would be used to pay for conservation easements (development rights) which developers would need to purchase prior to development. Two properties initially identified for the program contain typical pasture land, wooded acreage, and bottomland hardwood forest.

Rockdale County requests grant funds in the amount of \$2,200,000 with matching funds in the amount \$1,600,000 for a total project cost of \$3,800,000. The project is for 150 acre conservation easement which would protect a property at high risk of subdivision and development. Adjacent to an existing 500 acre conservation easement and part of the much larger 8,000 acre Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area in Rockdale and Dekalb Counties, 4,000 acres of which is in protection. Property is largely planted pine and mixed oak-hickory forest. The monks at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, who celebrate an agrarian way of life, purchased this property to prevent its imminent development and are now working in partnership with Rockdale County to protect it.

City of East Ellijay requests grant funds in the amount of \$80,000 with matching funds in the amount of \$120,000 for a total project cost of \$200,000. The project is for 5 acre acquisition along and south of the Cartecay River within the city of East Ellijay. Half of the property is on the floodplain of the river and covered with riparian bottomland forest and the remainder is on steep slopes with mesic hardwood forests. Scenic values are high and the tract is near the Rich Mountain Wildlife Management Area. The city would manage the property consistent with the natural resource element of its comprehensive management plan.

Monroe County requests grant funds in the amount of \$500,000 for a 57 acre acquisition by Monroe County from the Monroe County Development Authority. The total cost of the project is \$500,000. The property is located on the banks of the Ocmulgee River. The property includes an approximately 20 acre treatment pond associated with the former textile mill which was housed adjacent to this tract. Other portions of the property are made up of fairly mature bottomland hardwood forest. The river frontage is very scenic and this tract is not far from the Rum Creek Wildlife Management Area.

### **Land Conservation Project Discussion**

Chairperson Abraham stated that Council members could ask any questions that they may have. Chris Canalos of the Department of Natural Resources stated that staff went out to visit all sites in order to assist with ranking the projects to the criteria. Each project has a copy of the detailed scoring sheet in the Council package as well as a copy of the criteria key. Eric Gilkesson stated that the financial review looked at the community's enterprise fund.

John Bembry asked about the TDR project. Chairperson Abraham stated that we are not sure if the Council can fund a TDR project according to our statute and we have asked the legal department to review. Another policy issue is regarding Polk County. The project is already owned by the Monroe County Development Authority. The Council would need to decide if they would want to reimburse a community for something that is already currently held. Council members will need to discuss and vote on if each project would need to have an easement on it, legal department would also need to review statute and determine if we can require an easement on each project. After discussion of the Council it was determined that Curt Soper will need to provide Council members with the following additional information: dollar amount per acre if project is fee simple, dollar amount per acre for conservation easement, connectivity and adjacencies and urgency on purchasing project.

Mike Beatty stated that the Council needs to make sure that the process can be explained, and look at projects objectively to the criteria, Chairperson Abraham concurred.

**New Business**

Chairperson Abraham stated that the Strategic Planning Session was helpful to give Curt the direction that the Council wanted the Land Conservation Program to move towards over the next three years.

**Adjournment**

A motion was made by Noel Holcomb to adjourn the meeting seconded by John Bemby. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 10:46 a.m.

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Kim Yawn, Executive Assistant

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Greg Mason, Interim Executive Director