



MINUTES

GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL Scheduled Council Meeting December 5, 2007 - 12:15 PM

Call To Order

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

Present at the meeting were:

Council Members: Kevin Clark, Chairperson, Noel Holcomb, John Bemby, Stacy Patton, Robert Farris, Wade Shealy, and Mike Beatty.

By Phone: Chuck Leavell

Staff: Chris Clark, GEFA; Curt Soper, GEFA; Rod Bowlden, SPC; Steve Friedman, DNR; Jennifer Spivey, GEFA; Buford Sanders, GFC; Kristina Sorensen, DNR ; and Kim Yawn, GEFA.

Approved Project Status

Curt Soper stated that the approved project status sheets are provided at each Council meeting to keep the Council members informed about the status of approved projects.

2008 Meeting Schedule

Curt Soper presented the 2008 Land Conservation Council meeting schedule.

The Economics of Land Conservation

Jeff Dorfman with the University of Georgia gave a presentation entitled "Why Preserving Land Makes Economic Sense".

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Clark presented minutes from the September 11, 2007 GLCP meeting for approval. John Bemby stated that on page 5 the sentence should read "Staff will continue to ask for a contribution from the landowner but also have the flexibility to not absolutely require them to do the contribution". Noel Holcomb made a motion seconded by Stacy Patton to approve the minutes with the noted correction. The motion passed unanimously.

Expenditures to Date

Curt Soper stated that since the inception of the program (April 2005) the Council has approved 36 projects protecting 38,000 acres. The funding breakdown is as follows: The first year there were \$20 million in DNR bond funds and \$18 million of that has been approved or endorsed by the Council. There was \$25 million in private foundation funds and \$22.3 million has been committed to projects. Then there has been 2 years of \$5 million appropriations for local projects and of that \$10 million there has been \$3,970,460 approved by the Council for

12 projects. In the last legislative session \$42.3 million appropriated grant funds for projects of statewide significance and to date no projects have been approved, Council will be voting on two projects today for these funds. There were also the low interest loans funds that helped to kickoff the program which was \$55 million and to date \$4,931,500 has been approved for 6 projects.

Curt Soper stated that there are 11 projects that were submitted in 2006 and 2007 totaling \$7.6 million in grant requests but which still are not ready for Council action. We expect to receive 4 additional applications by April 2008 totaling \$2 million. The total of these projects in the pipeline are \$9.6 million.

Land Conservation Project Applications

Curt Soper stated that he would be presenting 4 projects to the Council for approval today. Wade Shealy stated that he would like to discuss the Council's role in approving applications. He stated that he felt that the Governor should not have a press announcement already planned on projects that had not been approved by the Council, he did not agree with the process. John Bemby and Chuck Leavell both stated that they appreciate the support of the Governor and the opportunity for the press coverage today but thought that the process should be reviewed. Curt Soper stated that the Council has been informed previously on the projects so that any questions or concerns could be addressed. Kevin Clark stated that the process would be reviewed.

Curt Soper presented the following projects to be considered for approval:

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) requests a grant of \$15,177,320 for the Paulding Forest project. This project would protect 6,865 acres of currently leased Paulding Forest WMA in the ownership of the DNR and Paulding County with continued management by DNR. Property contains examples of the montane longleaf ecosystem, one of the rarest and most endangered in North America. Also includes significant portion of the Raccoon Creek watershed which contains populations of the rare and endangered Etowah and Cherokee darters. The popular Silver Comet Trail bisects this property. An historical Native American village archeological site is located on the property. This property is currently in private ownership but has been eased to the State for many years and is adjacent to the State owned 3,300 acre Sheffield WMA. The owners wish to see the property protected by the State and are willing to sell at below fair market value. Match sources include Paulding County (\$15M), Polk County (\$100,000) federal Forest Legacy and Endangered Species grants (\$6.5), and private foundations and organizations (\$7.8M). The Nature Conservancy will purchase and hold 320 acres of the property until the final federal funding is appropriated for this project and will then sell this portion to the DNR at cost. Two appraisals have been completed with values set at \$48 M and \$42.5M. A motion was made by Noel Holcomb and seconded by Robert Farris to approve a \$15,177,320 grant to the DNR. The motion passed unanimously.

The DNR request a grant of \$15,000,000 for the Silver Lake project. This project would protect 8,430 acres of largely native longleaf pine/wiregrass forest and wetlands located along Lake Seminole and the Flint River in SW Georgia. This is a rare property with a rich history. The owners (International Paper) wish to see the property protected by the State and are working exclusively with the Conservation Fund on the sale of the property. Much of the property is in pristine ecological condition, with rich and healthy expanses of native

groundcover found on the 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. There are approximately 19 active groups of red cockaded woodpeckers found on the property, and this acquisition would make it the first State owned property with these rare birds present. An important consideration is that International Paper has agreed to sell the tract to The Conservation Fund as long as they can close with 20% down by December 2007. The Conservation Fund will take out a loan from International Paper for the balance but must pay that loan off by June 2008. If The Conservation Fund does not act, the opportunity will be lost. The property is being purchased by the Conservation Fund with the intent to sell to the State in three phases. Match sources include Decatur County (\$3M), federal Forest Legacy, Endangered Species and Wildlife grants (\$7.1M), private foundations and organizations (\$9.8M), and State Nongame funds (\$2M). Two appraisals have been completed with values set at \$40M and \$45M. A motion was made by John Bemby and seconded by Wade Shealy to approve a grant in the amount of \$15,000,000 to the DNR. The motion passed unanimously.

Acquisition of the Fort Barrington Tract will permanently conserve 4,547 acres and add significant new public outdoor recreational opportunities. This particular tract has been a conservation priority for the DNR for many years. The expansive floodplain at Fort Barrington provides important hydrological functions, such as water storage, release, and filtering, which are critical to the health of the Altamaha River estuary. Fort Barrington also contains high quality natural areas, including upland sandhills, natural stands of longleaf pine and fresh water tidal cypress-tupelo stands. This tract provides protection for rare species such as the eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise, and Radford's mint which is a rare plant only found on the sandhills of this area. Protection of the Fort Barrington tract is also important to our nation's defense department because it will buffer the Townsend Bombing Range which is one of the most important bombing ranges in the country which is used by all four branches of the military. Two MAI appraisals have been completed with values set at \$9M and \$9.3M. A motion was made by Noel Holcomb and seconded by Mike Beatty to endorse the Lower Altamaha Acquisition. The motion passed unanimously.

Tallulah Gorge/DNR Project. This project would permanently protect 2,268 acres of property currently leased to the State as Tallulah Gorge State Park and fit very well into implementation of the Statewide Outdoor Comprehensive Recreation Plan. One of the most spectacular canyons in the eastern United States, Tallulah Gorge is two miles long and nearly 1,000 feet deep. This area has numerous outstanding natural communities, rare plants and animals such as persistent trillium, monkey face orchid, Carolina hemlock and the green salamander. In addition to the recreational attractions of the gorge itself, Tugalo Lake is probably the most "pristine" reservoir in North Georgia. An appraisal has been completed by the donor with a value of approximately \$60 million established. A motion was made by Wade Shealy and seconded by Stacy Patton to endorse the Tallulah Gorge project. The motion passed unanimously.

Emerging Issues

John Bemby stated that during the coming legislative session tax reforms and revisions are a likely topic of discussion and action. He reminded the Council members that property tax is a significant aspect of the cost of owning land. Ninety percent of forest land in Georgia is privately owned and being converted rapidly to other uses. John is not sure if property taxation should be some or none of our state tax revenue, but he wants those who are concerned about conservation and the environment to be aware that this is a significant

burden of forest property owners, and also that their forest related income potential seems to be steadily diminishing.

Robert Farris asked for an update regarding the federal legislative tax credit that will expire in January. Curt Soper stated that he is aware of a bill that has been introduced to make it permanent, but they have not passed yet, could possibly be attached to the Farm Bill. The bill does not seem to have a lot of opposition to it.

Robert Farris asked the status of working with the Attorney General's office regarding accepting survey's older than two years or accepting legal descriptions. Curt Soper stated that not a lot of work has been done on this since our last meeting, but that a landowner can provide a survey to the State Properties Commission and it can be reviewed for acceptance. But we do not have a blanket statement that any age survey will qualify. This will continue to be reviewed.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mike Beatty seconded by John Bembry to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 1:08 p.m.

Kim Yawn, Executive Assistant

Chris Clark, Executive Director