



**MINUTES**  
**GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM**  
**First Quarter Council Meeting**  
**March 3, 2011 - 9:30 AM**

**Call To Order**

After establishing a quorum, the meeting was called to order.

Present at the meeting were:

Council Members: Steve Stancil, Chairman, John Bembry, Mark Williams, Paul Michael, Brent Dykes and Robert Farris.

Present by speaker phone was:

Stacy Patton

**Approval of the Minutes**

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from the December 2, 2010 Georgia Land Conservation Council meeting for approval. Robert Farris made a motion seconded by John Bembry to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

**Program and Legislative Update**

Curt Soper stated that 213,401 acres have been permanently protected since inception of the program; 96 grants/loans totaling 109,207 acres and 223 certified tax credit projects totaling 104,448 acres. The state's investment is \$135.8 million. Total project value/cost is \$573+ million. All projects have been executed that the Council has approved.

Curt stated that the 2011 legislative session there will be no funding request due to the continued current revenue shortfalls. There is HB222 sponsored by Representative Jay Roberts, that would make any earned land conservation tax credit transferable (saleable). If passed this incentive would be available to two primary groups of landowners that currently cannot use it: 1) Out of State landowners without a Georgia income tax liability; 2) Georgia landowners with low incomes and therefore low income tax liabilities. Currently a fiscal analysis is underway by the State Economists.

**Report on Land Conservation Tax Credit Program**

Curt stated that Georgia currently holds a total of 41 conservation easements; 27 conservation easements have been donated to DNR or GFC or GSWCC since 2006 as part of the GLCP; additional easement donations are currently under negotiation; and approximately \$150,000 is remaining to cover donated easement due diligence costs incurred by agencies. Curt presented the 2010 Annual Report and asked Council members to let him know if they wanted copies sent out to anyone.

Kristina Sorensen stated that she had just completed the 2010 report for conservation tax credits. The increased federal deductions for conservation easements was extended for tax years 2010 and 2011 with the signing of HR4853 in late December. Since inception, the State has received a total of 228 applications. Over the last three years applications have increased each year. The request for pre-certification has started to increase as well. The amount of acreage conserved through the tax credit program has also increased. Most of the donations are being done through various private sector Land Trusts. More state government easements are beginning to be done. There were no

denials in 2010, and new rules adopted in 2009 have helped clarify program guidance and requirements.

**Presentations**

Steve McWilliams with GFA presented on quantifying the value of non-timber ecosystem services from Georgia private forests. A press event on this topic was held at the Capitol in February with Governor Deal and others and was been well received. The total annual value of these ecosystem services in Georgia is estimated to be \$37 billion. Frank Green with GFC presented to the Council on the recently statewide Forest Resources Assessment and Strategy.

**Next Meeting**

Curt stated that at its next meeting the Council will have a chance to review the next 2 year Operating Plan for the GLCP. The Council also has been invited by the Army to take a tour of Fort Stewart to see their natural resource conservation efforts, some of the projects that have been funded in the past together with GLCP, and a potential future project for when grant funding is restored. Currently the scheduled dates are June 2 and 3 but Chairman Stancil has a conflict so we will confirm dates soon.

Robert Farris asked what agenda items would be presented. Curt stated that there would be a couple of action items including a revised scoring system for approving due diligence funding for agency costs incurred in accepting donated conservation easements. The current scoring system was designed primarily for competitive grant and loan applications and needs to be updated. Robert Farris stated that he would like staff to focus on scoring for easements in priority areas. Curt stated that he will also be asking the Council to possibly consider charging a fee for the state to hold a conservation easement.

John Bemby stated that the Georgia Income Tax check-off program that benefits the GLCP needs to be promoted.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 10:49 a.m.

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Kim Yawn, Senior Executive Assistant

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Kevin Clark, Executive Director