



## MINUTES

### GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM Second Quarter Council Meeting June 17, 2010 - 8:30 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 Bemby, Stacy Patton, Mike Beatty, and Chris Clark.

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

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from the March 4, 2009 GLCP meeting for approval. Mike Beatty made a motion seconded by John Bemby to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **Program Update and 2010 Legislative Session**

Curt Soper stated that 171,310 acres have been permanently protected since inception of the program; 72 grants/loans totaling 100,492 acres protected and 207 certified tax credit projects totaling 70,818 acres. The state's investment is \$73 million. Total project value/cost is \$320+ million. All projects have been executed that the Council has approved.

Curt stated that Senate Bill 402 sponsored by Senator Tolleson and Representative Harden passed that will enable the program to carry out "bridge" loans to non-governmental conservation organizations. New rules have been drafted and forwarded to Council member and partners for input next week. Senate Bill 390 sponsored by Representative Stephens and Senator Carter passed and authorizes cities and counties to grant conservation easements on their property without going through a cumbersome bidding procedure. Received \$25 million in bonds that will be used by the Department of Natural Resources for land conservation projects. GEFA's name will change effective July 1, 2010 to the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority.

#### **Marketing**

Curt stated that the check off on GA income tax form line #30 is a way for taxpayers to designate part of their refund go to the GLCP. A new website with information regarding all the check off's has been launched and includes a link to GLCP site website. Other states have tried this and showed a tripling in donations in almost every instance. Curt thanked Steve Stancil for his staff's assistance. Curt stated that our Facebook page is being visited more per month than our website now. Next year we will be doing a series of workshops for agricultural land owners in Georgia and South Carolina with funding available through the USDA to pay for the cost of the workshops. Brent Dykes will be assisting with how we can reach out to these folks as well as the land trusts around the state.

#### **Donated Conservation Easements**

Curt stated that another part of the program that is still very active is the donated conservation easements effort. To date there have been 31,820 acres donated (23 easements to DNR or GFC), and we anticipate approximately 15 easement donations to DNR or GFC in 2010.

## **Operating Plan**

Curt stated that this is the time of year we get together to update our Operating Plan. In the Council's packet is a copy of the current plan with progress to date. Staff stated that with a new Governor starting in January 2011 it would be good to continue on with the goals that we have but take time now to see where we have been and where we want to go and then sit down with the new administration and find out what direction they want to take the program.

## **DNR Priority Landscapes**

Steve Friedman stated that they have identified over 180 priority in-holding and *edge-holding* properties that total over 160,000 acres with an estimated need value of \$400 to \$500 million. Steve walked Council members through several projects that they have identified and been part of.

## **Stakeholders**

Will Wingate from the Georgia Conservancy stated that several private sector conservation groups have been meeting over the last 18 months to figure out what they can do to help put together a sustainable funding source for land conservation in Georgia. The group has put aside any differences and individual agendas and put forward a singular mission to get something done. They were successful a couple of months ago applying for grant funds to do a needs assessment. Currently they are in the process of completing the assessment with a goal to have a powerful business case that can be presented to not only policy makers but to the business community as to why we need a sustainable funding source. Steve Friedman's presentation shows that we need money and that is only about 160,000 acres but Georgia is approximately 37 million acres and only around 6 percent is permanently protected. Over the next few months there will be a formal announcement about the assessment, and the groups will be presenting the case study to both nominees who are running for Governor and other elected officials. We are calling ourselves the Georgia Alliance for Land Conservation and are developing a website and getting sportsman groups, angling groups, birdwatchers groups and people who care about clean water and creating a legacy for our grandchildren.

## **Summary of Georgia Land Conservation Council and Partners Discussion**

### GLCP Strengths to Date

1. The teamwork and dedication among staff, conservation partners, and Council members
2. The track record of successfully leveraging available dollars
3. The variety and quality of partnerships formed and utilized
4. Putting more tools in the conservation toolbox and using them
5. Creation and implementation of the Georgia Conservation Tax Credit program
6. Making bridge loans with private sector organizations a legal possibility
7. The emphasis of the program's goals on water resources
8. The broad, holistic and statewide approach of the program's objectives
9. The strong support of the Perdue administration
10. The positive and helpful attitude of the program
11. The cooperation and involvement of numerous state agencies
12. The working relationship with and support of the ACCG

### GLCP Weaknesses to Date

1. The program does not market and sell itself enough
2. Not enough involvement of legislators and local leaders
3. Not enough inclusion of the agricultural community and NRCS programs
4. Not enough connection with the real estate community
5. Not targeting the greater Atlanta metro area enough
6. Need to take better advantage of the bank foreclosed property situation

7. Need to be educating landowners more
8. Not enough funding and staffing to get the job done right

#### Things to do/Ideas for GLCP

1. Use statewide region wide planning process as a new platform for collaboration and to include land conservation initiatives
2. Market the concept of credit stacking and generating revenue streams on conservation lands more aggressively
3. Bring together nontraditional private sector groups including bankers, realtors, CPA's and developers to market the economic benefits and opportunities with land conservation
4. Reach out to the Speaker, Lieutenant Governor, and legislative leaders regarding GLCP
5. Keep in touch with private sector partners and their efforts to engage gubernatorial candidates and establish a dedicated funding source. Follow up post election.
6. Work with GA DOT and become engaged in their mitigation program implementation
7. Map, publish, and market GLCP success stories
8. Sit down with key banking organizations (GA Banking Association, Alliance of Community Bankers, FDIC) and pursue conservation options for foreclosed properties
9. Research successes in other states and identify opportunities for Georgia
10. Get existing loan funds in circulation utilizing SB 402 and any flexibility available through GEFA and the Clean Water Act State Revolving Fund
11. Summarize and share GLCP legacy with current Governor and be prepared to engage Governor-elect

#### What should GLCP emphasize in 15-minute meeting with Governor-elect or Speaker or Lt. Governor?

1. Focus on the positive by highlighting successes, legacies, funding leverage and project diversity
2. Express the future need and show what potential projects are in the pipeline now
3. Emphasize and demonstrate the economic benefits of land conservation
4. Give a balanced presentation and include program negatives and arguments against it
5. Demonstrate the depth and contribution of partners and that this is not just a tree huggers program
6. Present options and ideas for the Program's next steps
7. Suggest that there is no need to reinvent the wheel or throw out what is working well
8. Provide details on the dedicated funding initiative being lead by conservation groups
9. Suggest that we would benefit from knowing their vision for land conservation and consider recommending establishment of a short term advisory panel to identify updated program goals

#### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 10:47 a.m.

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Kim Yawn, Senior Executive Assistant

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Phil Foil, Executive Director