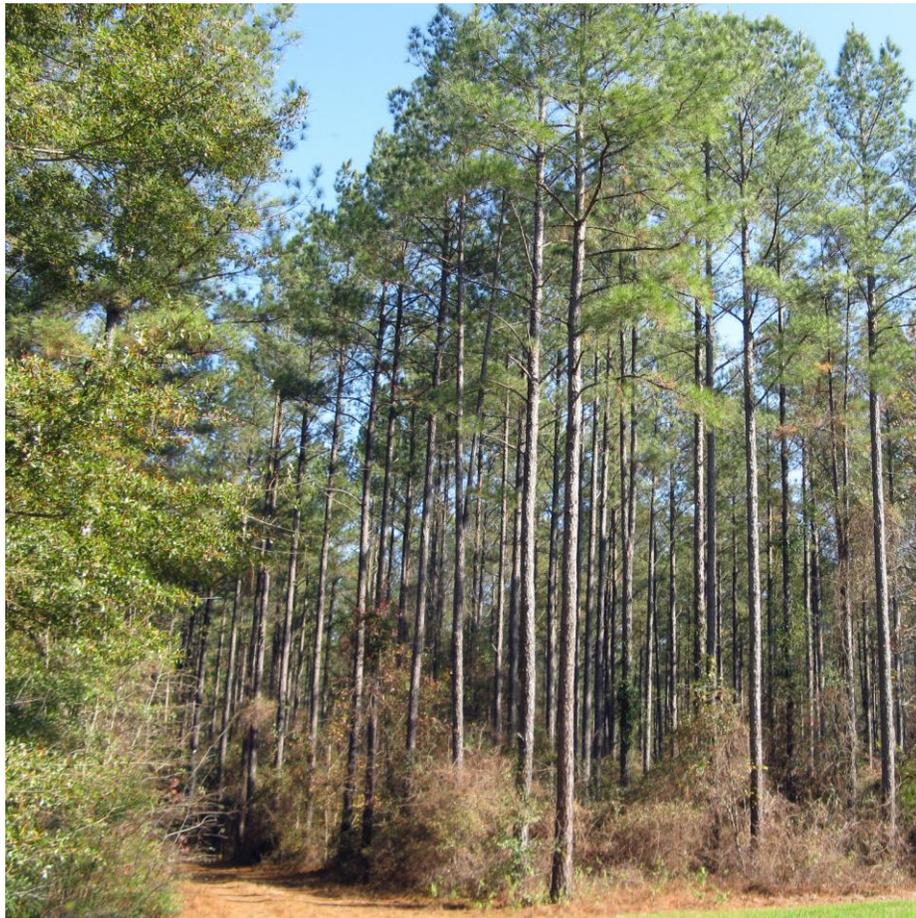




PERMANENTLY PROTECTING
GEORGIA'S LAND RESOURCES

GEORGIA LAND
CONSERVATION PROGRAM
2014 Annual Report



*Securing the State's Natural and Cultural Legacy by
Permanently Protecting Georgia's Most Valued Resources*

LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

Five state agency leaders and four gubernatorial appointees comprise the Land Conservation Council, which governs the Georgia Land Conservation Program (GLCP). The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) provides GLCP staff and program resources.



Steve Stancil, Chairman
State Property Officer
State Properties Commission



Dr. John Bembry
Tree Farmer and Veterinarian



Camila Knowles
Commissioner
Department of Community Affairs



Brent L. Dykes
Executive Director
Georgia Soil and Water Conservation
Commission



Robert Farris
Executive Director
Georgia Forestry Commission



Chuck Leavell
Musician and Owner
Charlane Plantation



Paul H. Michael
Vice President
TPA Realty Services



Stacy R. Patton
Managing Member
Minerva Real Estate



Mark Williams, Vice Chairman
Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources

*as of January 31, 2015

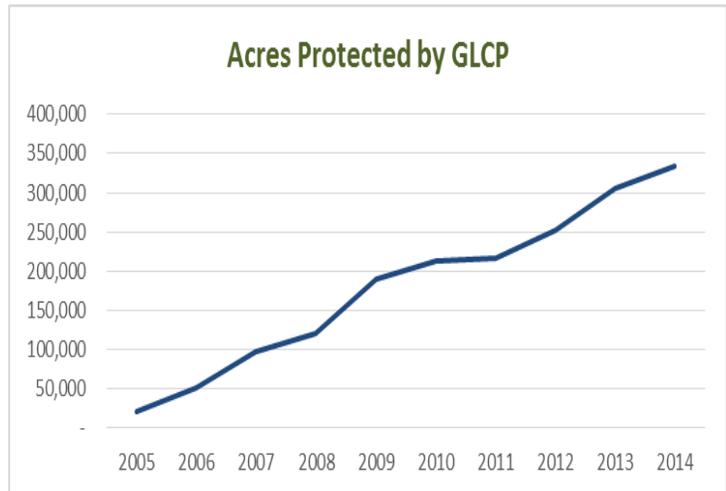
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the GLCP is to preserve a statewide network of land and water resources for current and future generations to use and enjoy. The GLCP works with local governments, state and federal agencies, landowners, and non-government organizations (NGOs) to permanently protect natural, agricultural, historic and recreational areas.

Since the Georgia Land Conservation Act was passed in 2005, *the GLCP has played a role in permanently protecting 334,632 acres of land.* Financing is the GLCP's primary mechanism for supporting land conservation. The GLCP offers grants, due diligence micro-grants, state income tax credits and low-interest loans to fund and incentivize the permanent protection of the state's natural resources.

Fiscal responsibility is one of the hallmarks of the GLCP. Project applications undergo thorough financial and environmental reviews by:

- GEFA
- The Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- The Environmental Protection Division (EPD)
- The State Properties Commission (SPC)
- The Department of Revenue (DOR)
- The Land Conservation Council



This process ensures that projects achieve a maximal amount of funding leverage and cost-efficiency. Together with other state and federal agencies, private sector conservation groups and generous landowners, the GLCP has leveraged \$252.4 million in state funds to conserve approximately \$1.29 billion worth of conservation land – *a better-than five-to-one return on Georgia's investment.*

The GLCP helped conserve close to 30,000 acres in 2014, including buffers on important waterways, habitats for endangered species, and active agricultural and timber lands. Council members and staff continued to build upon successful partnerships and refine the program's offerings to encourage conservation activity. The GLCP will continue these efforts in 2015 with a focus on facilitating conservation projects, leveraging the state's investments in conservation, and communicating the benefits of conservation.

CONSERVATION FINANCE TOOLS

The GLCP promotes permanent land conservation by offering flexible and cost-effective financing options to local governments, state agencies and conservation organizations. The program offers these financial tools:

Competitive Grants: The 2005 Land Conservation Act created the Land Conservation Trust Fund, which is capitalized by state appropriations. Grants were awarded on a competitive basis to state agencies and local governments. No funds were allocated to the Trust Fund in fiscal years 2009 through 2014, so the GLCP has suspended its grant program.

Due Diligence Micro-Grants: The GLCP provides micro-grants of up to \$50,000 to reimburse state agencies for legal and other expenses associated with accepting conservation donations. These micro-grants are funded by donations from taxpayers on their state income tax returns through the Checkoff Georgia program. Since 2010, \$364,603 in taxpayer donations has allowed the state to accept 30 new conservation easements. These lands cover 37,432 acres – three-times the acreage previously under state-held easement – and were permanently protected at the rate of *one acre per \$9.38 donated to the GLCP*. The GLCP received two more due diligence grant applications in 2014, which are being acted upon in 2015.

Low-Interest Loans: The GLCP offers loans to local governments and NGOs to complete land conservation projects. The Land Conservation Loan Fund is capitalized with \$55 million from the federal Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which is jointly administered by GEFA and EPD. More than \$42 million has been awarded from the loan fund since 2005 to protect almost 35,000 acres through 15 different projects. The GLCP awarded one loan in 2014 for \$25 million to purchase 19,566 acres along the Altamaha River in Glynn and Wayne Counties.

Conservation Tax Credits: The GLCP jointly finances and administers the state's Conservation Tax Credit Program in partnership with DNR, SPC and DOR. Tax credits are available to donors of both fee-title lands and easement-restricted lands that are determined to have significant conservation values. Since 2007, the tax credit program has certified 510 conservation donations and protected 213,491 acres. In 2014, DNR certified 11 donations covering 7,163 acres.

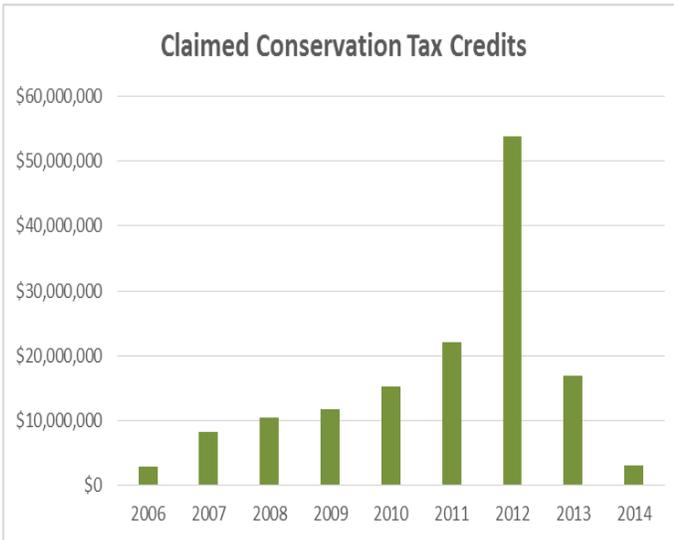
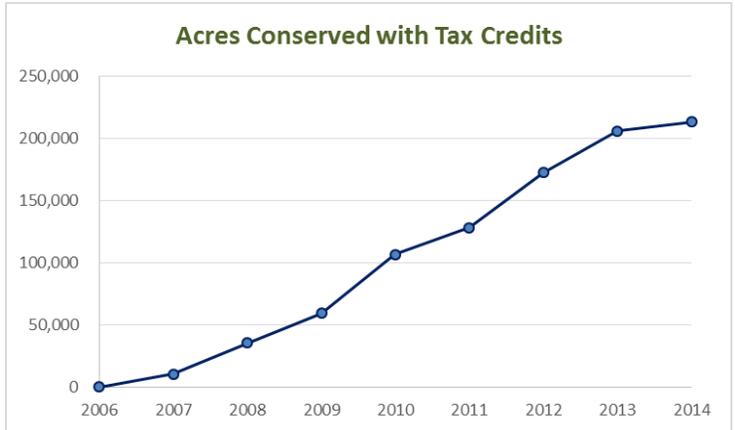


CONSERVATION TAX CREDITS

Georgia offers state income tax credits to landowners who make donations of lands and easements. Individual donors may earn credits up to \$250,000, which can be applied against their state income tax liabilities. Corporate and partnership donors may earn up to \$500,000 in credits. Landowners earn conservation tax credits by:

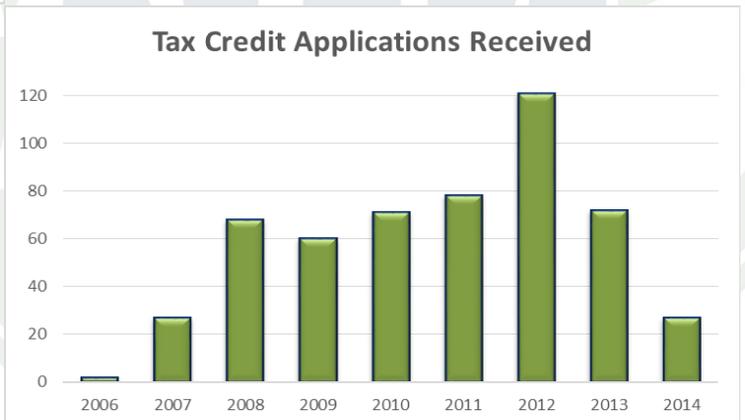
1. Restricting all future uses of their lands in ways that meet the state’s permanent conservation standards;
2. Donating these restrictions to state agencies, local governments or accredited land trusts;
3. Submitting complete applications and corresponding donation appraisals to the DNR; and
4. Including subsequent tax credit approval letters with their annual income tax statements.

Accomplishments: The Conservation Tax Credit has helped protect 213,491 acres through 510 donations of land and easements since 2006. Most of these lands remain privately owned and will permanently provide the public benefits of water quality, wildlife habitat, passive recreation, agricultural production and historic and cultural resources. Conservation tax credit donations have been made in 121 Georgia counties to 38 different local governments, state agencies, and non-government organizations.



Benefits: Conservation tax credits provide a financial alternative to development for landowners seeking to generate income from their lands. Donors often re-invest their tax credit proceeds back into their lands by purchasing agricultural equipment, performing needed maintenance or creating retirement ‘nest eggs’. By incentivizing the protection of conservation lands, as opposed to their development, tax credits help Georgia’s landowners be more effective stewards of our state’s land resources. Donors have claimed more than \$144 million in conservation income tax credits since 2006.

Program Changes: In 2013, new conservation donations were required to meet additional protection and valuation requirements. Beginning in 2014, only local governments, state agencies and NGOs accredited by the Land Trust Alliance may receive tax credit-eligible donations.



PROGRAM INITIATIVES

The GLCP continued to advance strategic initiatives during 2014 that were initiated in 2013 to further enhance the state's capacity to support the permanent protection of the Georgia's most valuable conservation lands. Staff made administrative changes in its grant, loan and tax credit offerings that provide greater financial incentives to conserve land in Georgia. The program also developed new communications and electronic mapping resources that will benefit GLCP partners and stakeholders during 2015 and beyond.

Administrative Changes: GLCP staff implemented the following administrative changes during 2013 which were implemented during 2014.

- **Lowered Interest Rates** on all loans as part of GEFA's Conservation Initiative to incentivize projects that conserve the state's energy, land and water resources. Land conservation projects are now eligible to receive an interest rate that is either 200 basis points below GEFA's benchmark rate, or 0.50 percent, whichever is higher.
- **Expanded Grant Eligibility** to state agency projects that include donations of fee-title lands, as well as conservation easements. The Land Council also increased the maximum grant award to \$50,000. Program staff will continue to identify administrative revisions that benefit GLCP stakeholders during 2015.

Communications Plan: The Land Council adopted a programmatic communications plan in 2013 that was implemented during 2014. The plan incorporates feedback from Land Council members, as well as a comprehensive survey of past, present and potential customers, to identify messages, audiences, tools and opportunities to promote the program's services. The plan identifies three primary communications actions.

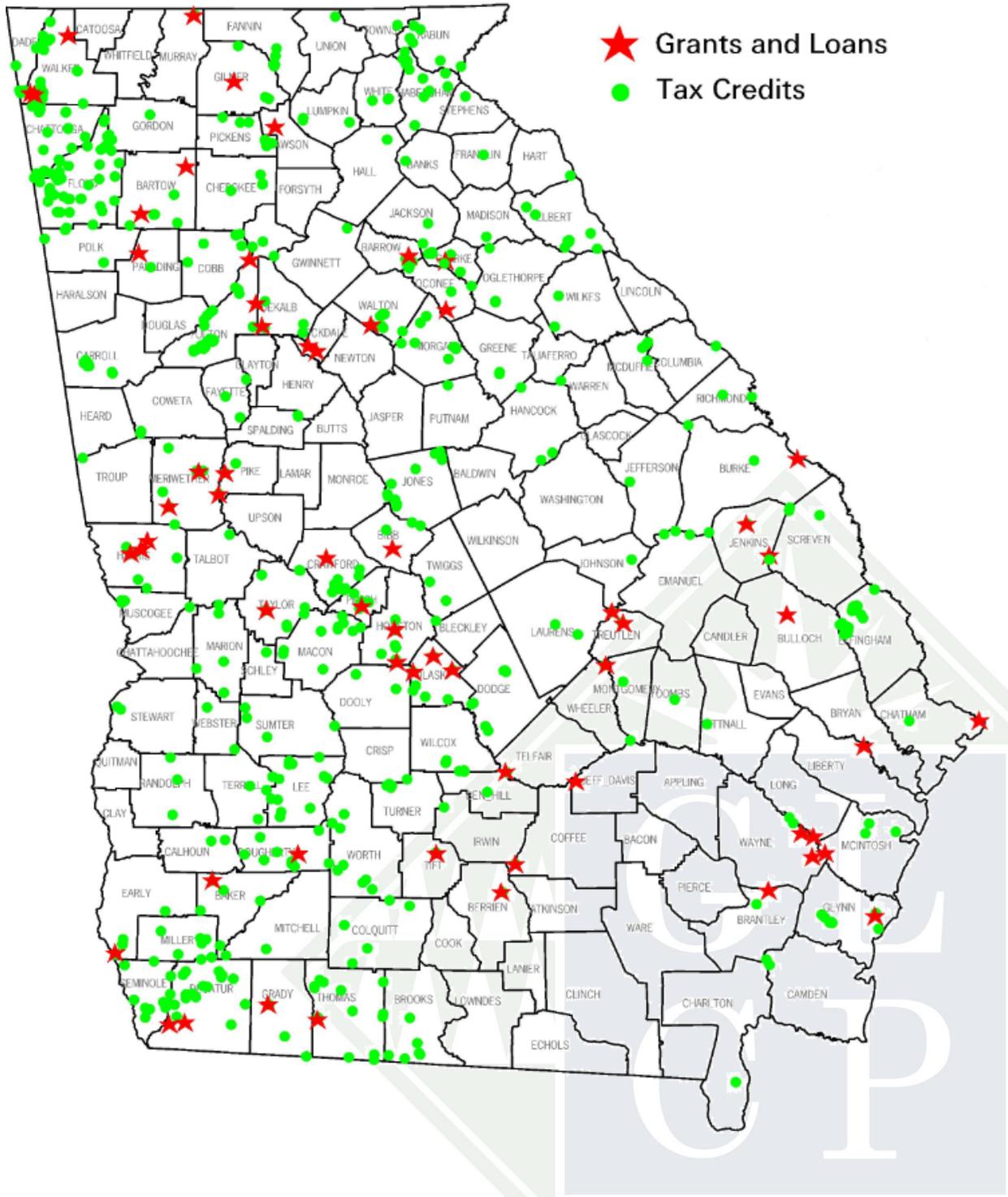
- 1) **Expand the Program's Outreach** to its primary audiences: local governments, state government stakeholders and conservation service providers.
- 2) **Improve the Program's Marketing Collateral**, including case studies, presentation materials, video testimonials and electronic mapping products, among others.
- 3) **Reinforce Existing Communications Partnerships**, especially with other state agencies, Checkoff Georgia members and conservation organizations.

Program staff will work towards these important communications goals during 2015.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS): The GLCP expanded its electronic mapping and geographic analysis capacity during 2013 and 2014. Program staff implemented ESRI's ArcGIS software and online mapping platform. Project maps showing state-held conservation easements, GLCP projects and GEFA projects are now fully interactive for visitors to the GLCP and GEFA websites. Additional functionality and analyses will be developed during 2015. Visit the Endorsed Projects page of the GLCP webpage to view these maps.



GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM APPROVED PROJECTS 2005 - 2014





**Georgia Environmental Finance Authority
Georgia Land Conservation Program**

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