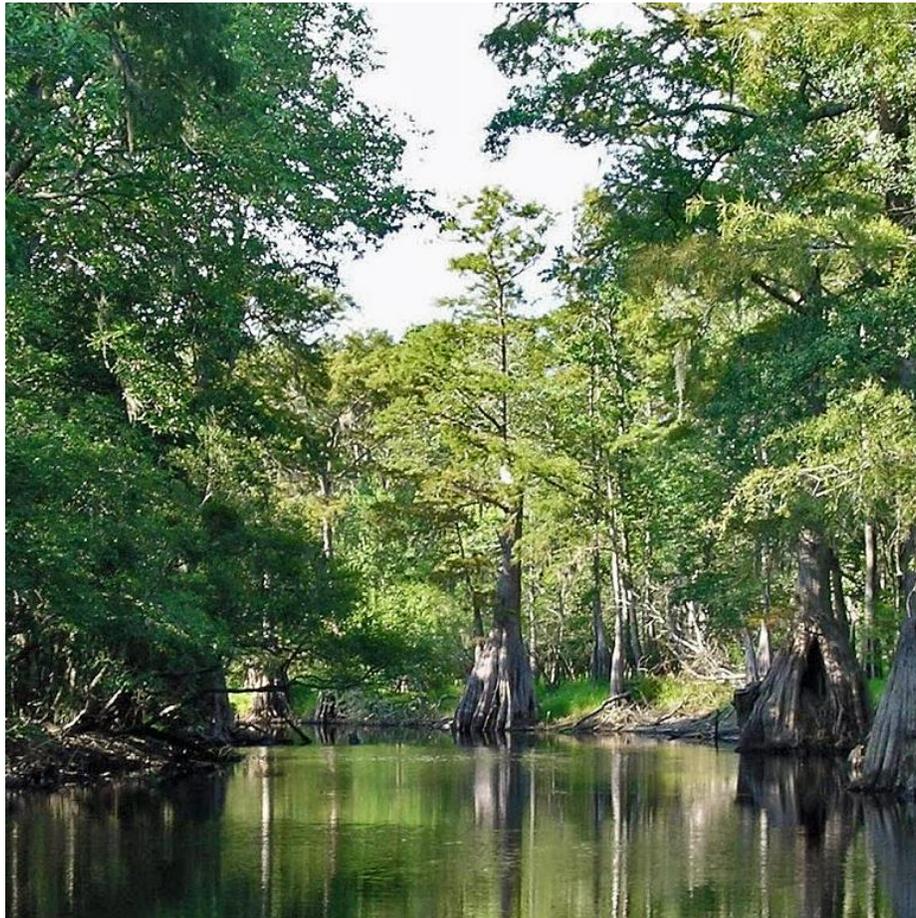




PERMANENTLY PROTECTING  
GEORGIA'S LAND RESOURCES

GEORGIA LAND  
CONSERVATION PROGRAM  
*2015 Annual Report*



*Ebenezer Creek – Photo courtesy of Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails®*

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

# LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

The Land Conservation Council governs the Georgia Land Conservation Program (GLCP). The council includes five state agency leaders and four gubernatorial appointees. The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) provides 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**  
Director of Entitlements & Forward  
Planning  
Meritage Homes



**Stacy R. Patton**  
Real Estate and Asset Management  
Director  
Atlanta BeltLine Inc.



**Mark Williams, Vice Chairman**  
Commissioner  
Georgia Department of Natural  
Resources

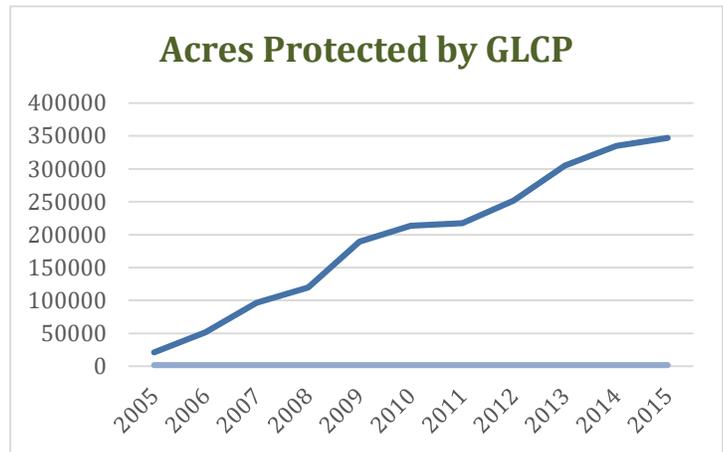
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The GLCP mission 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 passed in 2005, *the GLCP has helped permanently protect 346,940 acres of land.* Financing is the GLCP's primary tool for supporting land conservation—grants, state income tax credits, and low-interest loans 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



The review process ensures projects achieve the greatest amount of conservation benefit, funding leverage, and cost-efficiency possible. Together with other state and federal agencies, private sector conservation groups, and generous landowners, the GLCP has leveraged \$258.9 million in state funds to conserve approximately \$1.32 billion worth of conservation land—a *better than five-to-one return on Georgia's investment.*

*In 2015, the GLCP conserved 12,308 acres, 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 to refine the program's offerings for encouraging conservation. The GLCP will continue these efforts in 2016 with a focus on facilitating conservation projects, leveraging the state's conservation investments, and communicating the benefits of land 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, including:

**Competitive grants:** Grants are awarded on a competitive basis to state agencies and local governments from the Land Conservation Trust Fund. No funds have been appropriated to the Trust Fund since 2009.

**Due diligence grants:** Grants up to \$50,000 reimburse state agencies for expenses associated with accepting conservation easement donations and fee simple donations. These grants are funded by taxpayer donations through the *Checkoff Georgia* program. Since 2010, \$367,196 in taxpayer donations have allowed the state to accept 32 new conservation properties. These lands cover 38,554 acres—three times the acreage previously under state-held easement—and were permanently protected at the rate of *one acre per \$9.52 donated to the GLCP*. The GLCP awarded two due diligence grants in 2015 in the amount of \$24,430 protecting 1,121 acres. The GLCP received three more due diligence grant applications in 2015 that should be completed in 2016.

**Low-interest loans:** Loans are available to local governments and NGOs for land conservation projects through the federal Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), which is jointly administered by GEFA and EPD. More than \$44 million has been awarded since 2005 to protect almost 35,000 acres through 15 different projects. The GLCP awarded one loan in 2015 for \$1.88 million to purchase 794 acres along the Altamaha River in McIntosh County.

**Conservation tax credits:** The Conservation Tax Credit Program offers tax credits to donors of both fee-title lands and easement-restricted lands that have significant conservation values. Since 2006, the tax credit program has certified 531 conservation donations and protected 223,879 acres. In 2015, DNR certified 21 donations covering 10,388 acres.

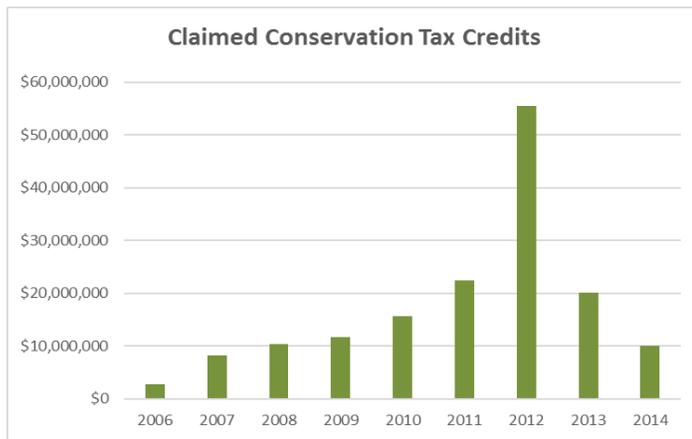
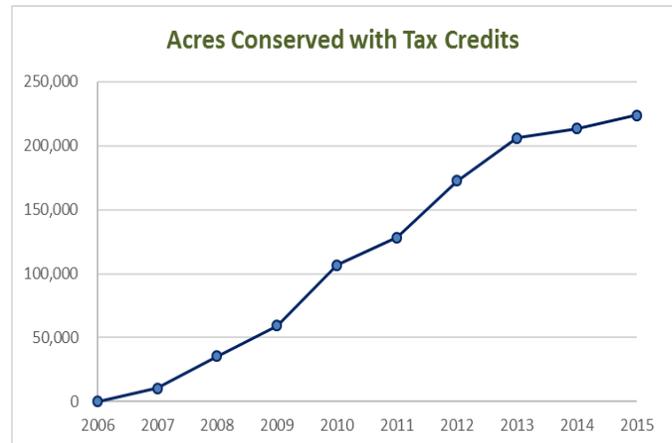


# CONSERVATION TAX CREDITS

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

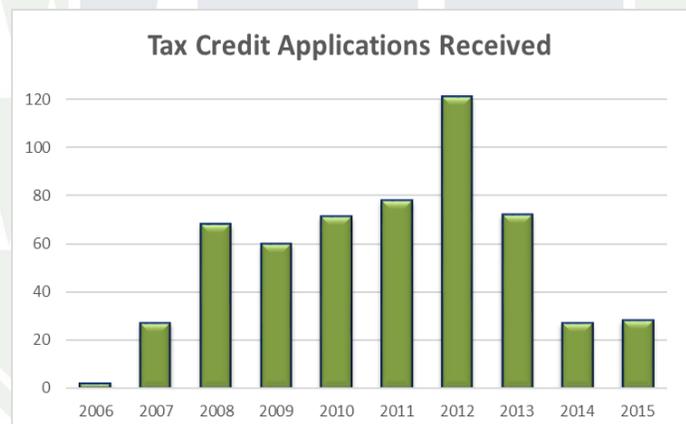
1. Restricting all future uses of their lands according to the state's permanent conservation standards;
2. Donating these restrictions to state agencies, local governments, or accredited land trusts;
3. Submitting complete applications and corresponding donation appraisals to DNR; and
4. Including subsequent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

**Accomplishments:** The Conservation Tax Credit Program has protected 223,879 acres through 531 land and easement donations since 2006. Most land remains privately owned and provides the public benefits of water quality, wildlife habitat, passive recreation, agricultural production, and protection of historic and cultural resources. Conservation tax credit donations have been made in 128 Georgia counties to 38 different local governments, state agencies, and NGOs.



**Benefits:** Conservation tax credits are a financial alternative to development for landowners seeking to generate income from their lands. Donors often re-invest the 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, tax credits help landowners be better stewards of Georgia's land resources. Donors have claimed more than \$156 million in conservation income tax credits since 2006.

**Program changes:** No changes were made to the tax credit program in 2015.



# PROGRAM INITIATIVES

The GLCP continued strategic initiatives in 2015 that will enhance the state's ability to support the permanent protection of conservation lands. Administrative changes in the grant, loan, and tax credit programs provide greater financial incentives to conserve land in Georgia. The program developed new communications and electronic mapping resources that will benefit GLCP partners and stakeholders in 2016 and beyond.

**Administrative changes:** The following administrative changes were implemented in 2015.

- **CWSRF eligibility for land conservation projects** allows communities to qualify for principal forgiveness on low-interest loans for projects that have a permanent conservation outcome, meet at least one of the 10 conservation purposes, and have a water quality benefit.

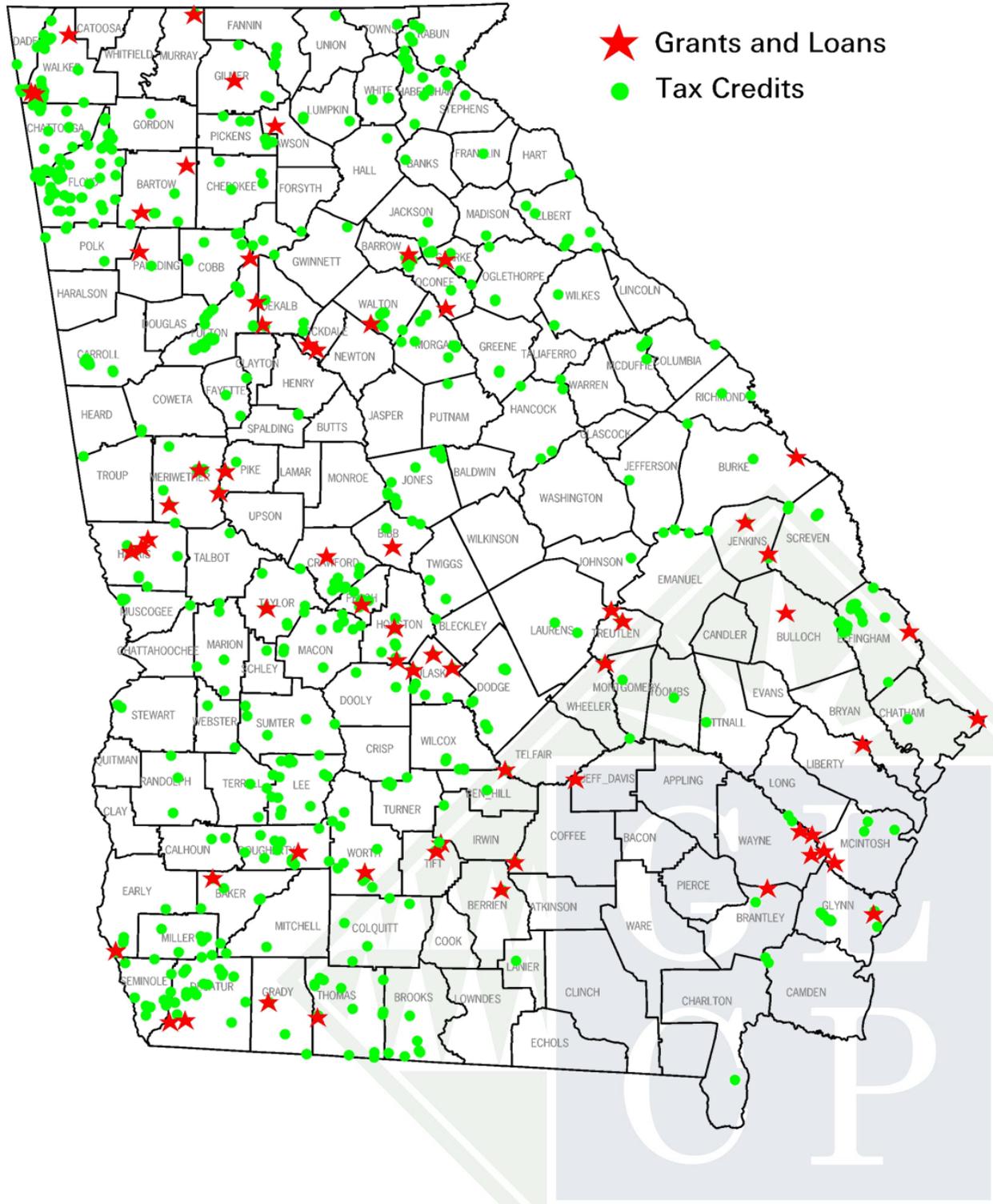
**Strategic plan:** A strategic plan for 2015-2018 was adopted that incorporates feedback from the Land Conservation Council. It also incorporates a comprehensive survey of past, present, and potential customers to identify messages, audiences, tools and opportunities to promote the program's services. The plan identifies three primary communications actions relating to land conservation projects.

- 1) **Expand the program's outreach** to its primary audiences—federal, state, local governments, national conservation groups, and state and local conservation organizations.
- 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.

**Geographic Information Systems (GIS):** The GLCP expanded its electronic mapping and geographic analysis capacity during 2014 and 2015. Project maps showing state-held conservation easements and GLCP projects are now fully interactive for visitors to the GLCP website. Additional functionality and analysis tools will continue to be developed. Visit the GLCP project maps at [www.glcp.georgia.gov](http://www.glcp.georgia.gov).



# GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM APPROVED PROJECTS 2005 - 2015





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

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