



MINUTES
GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM
First Quarter Council Meeting
January 10, 2013 - 9:30 AM

Call To Order

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

Present at the meeting were: Steve Stancil, Chairman, John Bembry, Brent Dykes, Robert Farris, Mark Williams, Paul Michael and Stacy Patton.

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from September 25, 2012, Georgia Land Conservation Council meeting for approval. John Bembry made a motion seconded by Robert Farris to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Loan Application

Andrew Szwak stated that The Conservation Fund (TCF) requests a land conservation loan to acquire the Rocky Hammock Tract. After acquiring the property, the Conservation Fund will transfer it to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for incorporation into the state's system of Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). The TCF request is for a loan in the amount of \$2,400,000 at 0.9 percent interest rate.

Conserving this tract would extend the protected buffer on the Ocmulgee River. It would also expand upon a growing core of permanently protected sandhills and native wiregrass understory, both of which provide vital habitat for endangered indigo snake and gopher tortoise populations. As a WMA, the tract will offer public recreation opportunities, including hunting fishing and kiking, and provide additional connectivity between two other state-owned WMAs (Horse Creek and Flat Tub WMA).

TCF will acquire the property and transfer it to the DNR on or about January 17, 2013. TCF will repay the loan utilizing internal funds for up to 20 years, although the DNR will request funds to fully repay this loan within the state's FY14 bond package. TCF and the DNR seek to acquire this tract before receiving FY2014 bond funds because the landowner plans to sell the tract as soon as possible. Sale of this tract on the private market could result in fragmentation into smaller parcels, use for intensive silviculture and subsequent loss of conservation values. Steve Friedman thanked the Land Conservation Council for consideration of this loan and thanked the TCF for doing the project.

A motion was made by John Bembry and seconded by Stacy Patton to approve a loan in the amount of \$2,400,000 at 0.9 percent interest for The Conservation Fund. The motion passed unanimously.

Communications Plan Update, Customer Survey and Checkoff Georgia Contributions

Andrew Szwak stated that staff has everything we need to begin drafting a communications plan for the Land Conservation Program that will more adequately and fully guide our outreaching efforts. Council members have provided feedback from questions that will guide the general direction of the plan. Council members pointed to a number of products that the program has to sell from the state's natural resources to the various ways the state works to preserve and protect them. Council members also identified five audiences that the program should be targeting (voters or the general resource users, policy makers, interest groups, conservation professionals and the potential customers, such as land owners and local governments). Council members agreed that the most effective method for the program to communicate is with the Governor's office, but also, in partnership with conservation groups and through past customers. Suggestions were made to have another land summit meeting like we had back 2006, work with conservation groups to utilize their communications staff and work with the Governor's office to develop a more defined long term strategic plan that works with the current administrations goals and objects for conservation.

Andrew stated that GEFA is also developing a customer service base line within its individual divisions that would be good to incorporate into the communication plan as well. The survey will go out to stakeholders within the next month and the intent is to develop a base line against which to measure customer service/satisfaction and get public input on the direct general activities and direction the program is taking. A copy of the survey is provided under tab 3.

Andrew stated the we received \$40,000 from taxpayer checkoff donations last year and these funds are available for use at the Council's discretion. So far, they have been dedicated to projects that reimburse state agencies for due dilligency expenses that are involved in accepting conservation easements.

Legislative Preview

Andrew Szwak stated that the fiscal cliff was averted and within that process the enhanced easement incentive that was available since 2007 was extended through 2014. There are people lobbying members of the general assembly on behalf of the Land Conservation. Chairman Stancil mentioned that there are a couple of items being discussed regarding the Land Council; one is to add the Department of Agriculture Commissioner to the Council and another is to amend meetings schedules to meet only as needed, rather having to meet four times a year.

2013 Land Conservation Council Meeting Schedule

Chairman Stancil presented the 2013 meeting schedule dates for approval. Brent Dykes made a motion, seconded by Stacy Patton, to approve the schedule meeting dates as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Emerging Issues

John Bembry stated that the Institute for Georgia Environmental Leadership program will hold their annual meeting next Thursday. The program is always addressed towards environmental challenges around the state. He encouraged anyone that can to attend. John Bembry stated that he met with an attorney from the Macon area who has been working on a project for about 10 years to develop a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation for the consideration of developing a proposed national park and reserve around the Ocmulgee River corridor between Macon and Hawkinsville. This is only a proposal. John Bembry would like to suggest that we include Brian Adams to present to the Council members at one of our meetings.

Robert Farris stated that the Forestry Commission worked with Georgia Tech to do an economic impact of the study of forestry in Georgia and finally received some good news after three years of steady decline in the forestry industry. From 2010 to 2011, we have seen some really good improvement; the number of jobs has increased, wages in forestry have increased 13 percent and the forestry industry contributed \$487 million to the state's budget in 2011. The total impact of the forest industry increased over \$25 billion., Add to that the University of Georgia study showing \$37.3 billion in annual benefits from private forestlands through ecosystem services, and there is lots of positive economic growth that can be related to conservation.

Robert Farris wanted to congratulate John Bembry on being named tree farmer of the year in Georgia.

Chairman Stancil stated that at the next meeting we will present proposed bylaw changes. Right now we don't have a vice chairperson position, so if something happens and the chairman is not able to attend, we would not be able to have a meeting. We will like to have a bylaws proposal to include a vice chairman. It has been suggested that we make that position be the DNR Commissioner. Kevin Clark stated that the bylaws require that we bring a change one meeting and then vote on the next meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Kim Yawn, Senior Executive Assistant

Kevin Clark, Executive Director

