Georgia Land Conservation Program

Preserving Our Natural Resources for Generations of Georgians to Come

Annual Report: June 2007 to July 2008

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GLCP: Annual Report 2008

When it comes to land, Georgia is truly blessed. The state's diverse landscape provides clean air and water, public recreation lands, habitat for rare species, productive forest and farmland, and provides our citizens and communities with a connection to nature.

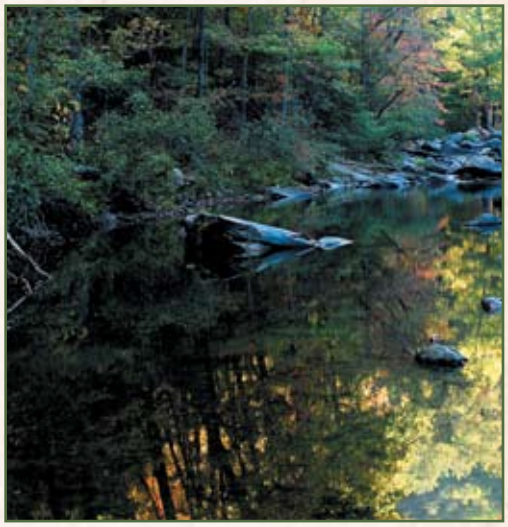


Photo: Holly Creek

However, less than five percent of Georgia's land is permanently conserved and available for public use. Meanwhile, Georgia remains among the nation's fastest growing states, currently ranking third nationally. Each day, more of the state's landscape is transformed by development and other uses to support a growing population and economy.

To help manage this transformation, the Georgia Land Conservation Program (GLCP) brings together private and public entities to preserve our vital natural resources for future generations.

The Program

The GLCP is operated by the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA) in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources, the Georgia Forestry Commission, the Department of Community Affairs, the Soil and Water Conservation Commission and the State Properties Commission.

The Georgia Land Conservation Council approves projects and provides guidance for the program. The program offers competitive grants and low-interest loans for land acquisition or conservation easement purchases. A state income tax credit and federal tax incentives are available for donations or discounted sales of conservation lands or conservation easements.

The Georgia Land Conservation Act of 2005 established the program and set the goal of permanently conserving lands that protect water quality, increase wetland function, reduce erosion and flood damage, protect streamside buffers and preserve areas that provide habitat for native plant and animal species. The goals also include the protection of prime agricultural and forestry lands; scenic, cultural and historic sites; and public recreational areas for the use and enjoyment of Georgia's citizens.

Working with a program budget of $47.3 million in Fiscal Year 2008, the GLCP provided technical and project management support resulting in 100 applications from cities, counties, agencies and landowners across Georgia for program grants, low-interest loans and tax credits. A total of 85 applications were approved resulting in the permanent conservation of 45,372 acres bringing the program's overall total to 82,900 acres since its inception in 2005.

The GLCP's staff provides consultation and technical support for land conservation projects throughout the state. In Fiscal Year 2008 they offered over seventy educational workshops and presentations to cities, counties, municipal organizations, citizen groups, soil and water conservation organizations, state and federal agencies, landowners, farmers, foresters, real estate groups, conservationists and tax preparers.

Photo: One of seventy workshops offered by GLCP

Public Awareness

The GLCP embarked on a public awareness campaign in 2008 to inform community leaders and landowners about the benefits of conserving land in Georgia and to encourage the donation of conservation easements. Information packets were mailed to 2,094 landowners who own at least 1,000 acres of land in Georgia with details on tax incentives and long term conservation options.

This Legacy Landowner mailing helped set the stage for a series of regional landowner workshops scheduled throughout the fall of 2008 and into 2009.

Various magazines and newspapers published more than 25 articles on the GLCP in the past year. Program brochures and a new trade show exhibit are now available to showcase program benefits to a variety of audiences.

The www.glcp.ga.gov website remains a vital information source for program applications, tax credit information, approved projects and legislative updates. The GLCP is also featured prominently on the new *Conserve Georgia* website: www.conservegeorgia.org.

Under the GLCP, cities, counties or state agencies work with land owners and private conservation organizations to apply for assistance such as:

Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority | 233 Peachtree Street, NE | Harris Tower, Suite 900 | Atlanta, Georgia 30303 | www.glcp.ga.gov

Legislative and Policy Improvements

In response to feedback from its constituents, GLCP obtained approval of two pieces of state legislation that will greatly improve the program's effectiveness. House Bill 1176, sponsored by Representative David Knight and carried by Senator Ross Tolleson, was approved in March 2008 by the Georgia General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Perdue in April. This bill makes low-interest land conservation loans available to non-governmental organizations.

House Bill 1274, also sponsored by Representative Knight and carried by Senator Bill Heath, was approved by the General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor in 2008. This legislation makes several improvements to the tax credit available to taxpayers who donate land or conservation easements in Georgia. Most notably, House Bill 1274 allows partial donations to qualify for tax credits and extends the period of time over which donors can claim their credits from five to ten years.

The GLCP also implemented important changes to its low-interest loan program that increases its attractiveness to potential applicants. The interest rate was reduced from three percent to two percent for land conservation projects located in 112 of Georgia's 159 counties and the closing fee was reduced for applicants that commit to repaying their loans in less than ten years.

The GLCP also was part of the creation and rollout of the *Conserve Georgia* campaign and website, a one-stop shop for Georgia's conservation initiatives and programs. Through *Conserve Georgia* citizens find links to state programs that can help them incorporate conservation of our state's precious natural resources into their daily lives.

Photo: Long-leaf pine forest at Silver Lake WMA

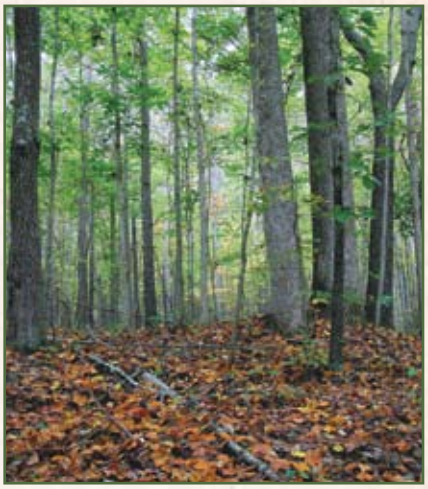


Photo: Paulding Forest WMA

Tax Credit Program

The state of Georgia provides a state income tax credit of 25 percent of the value of a land or conservation easement donation. These credits are capped at $250,000 for individuals, $500,000 for corporations, and an aggregate amount of $1 million for partnerships. Any unused credit can be used over the next ten years. From July 2007 through June 2008, 52 tax credit applications were certified, protecting 21,055 acres across Georgia. This represents a 166 percent increase over the previous fiscal year, when the tax credits for land and conservation easement donations were first introduced.

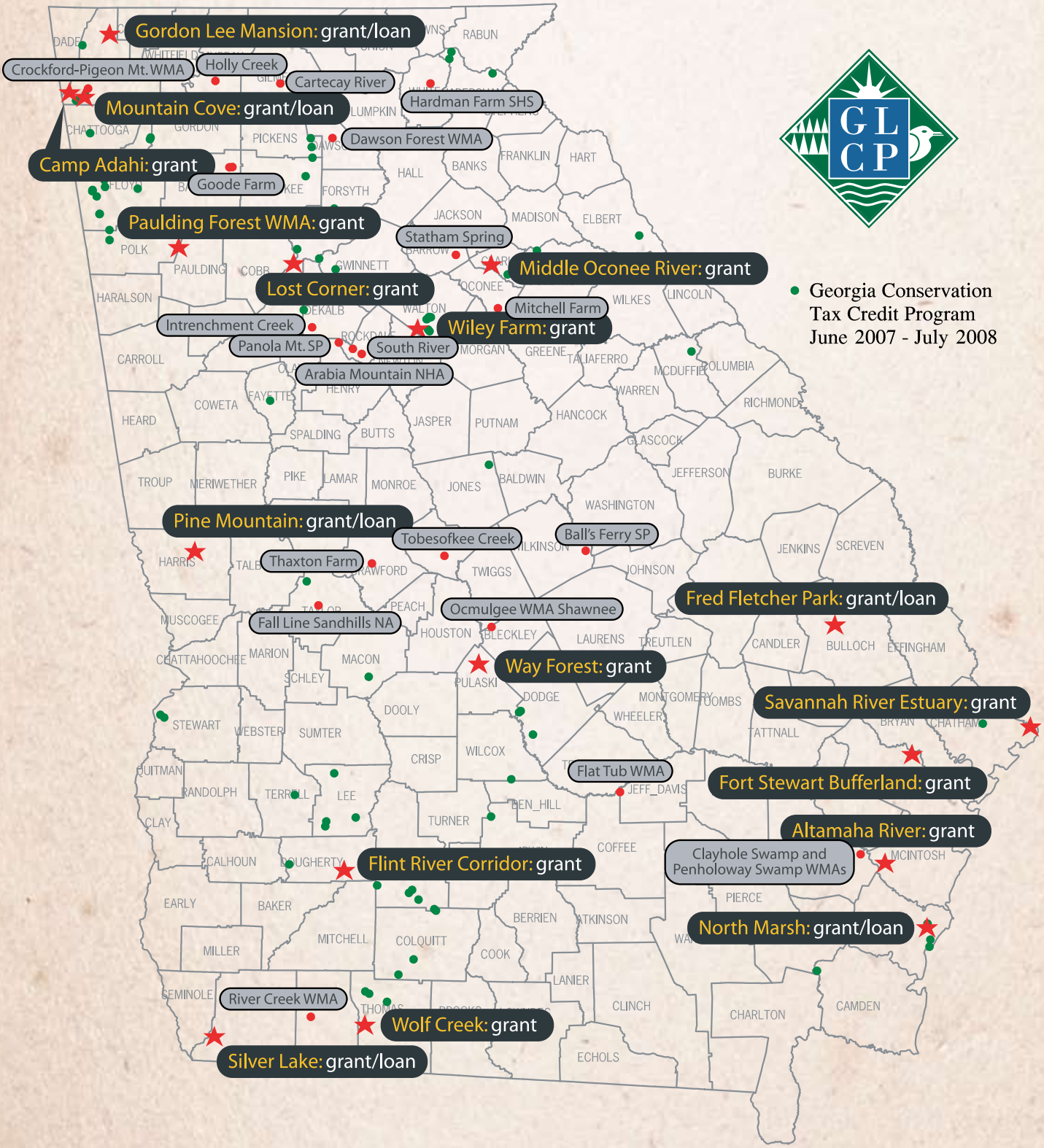
With the passage of new federal legislation in 2008, a taxpayer can now reduce their Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) by up to 50 percent, or up to 100 percent for qualifying ranchers and farmers, using the value of a donated conservation easement. If the taxpayer cannot use the full value of the donation in the first year, they have up to fifteen more years to use the deduction.

REFER TO MAP ON PAGE 7 FOR THE LOCATION OF CERTIFIED GEORGIA TAX CREDIT PROJECTS

GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM

★ Projects Funded from June 2007 - July 2008

• Projects Funded before June 2007



2008 Project Highlights

Silver Lake Wildlife Management Area

The new Silver Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) opened to the public in August of 2008. This WMA protects 8,430 acres of native longleaf pine forest and wetlands located along Lake Seminole and the Flint River in southwest Georgia.

The property also supports the federally threatened red cockaded woodpecker and provides valuable habitat for gopher tortoise, white-tailed deer, wild turkey, waterfowl and the declining northern bobwhite quail. This land is now open for all Georgians to hike, fish, hunt, bird-watch and picnic on the shores of Lake Seminole. In addition to the GLCP, primary funding partners include Decatur County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation.

McLemore Cove

In Walker County, one of the most beautiful sites in Georgia will be preserved through the GLCP. McLemore Cove will be permanently protected through the purchase of 1,565 acres by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and 295 acres by Walker County as well as a conservation easement covering an additional 740 acres. Funding and cooperation by GLCP, Walker County and the Open Space Conservancy, Inc. all contributed toward this preservation of greenspace, historic values, and scenic beauty in the northwest corner of the state.

Paulding Forest Wildlife Management Area

In Paulding County on the edge of metro Atlanta 6,865 acres were permanently protected as part of the Paulding Forest WMA. Bisected by the popular and heavily used Silver Comet Trail, this large tract also contains thriving populations of the rare Etowah and Cherokee darters in pristine Raccoon Creek. Primary funding partners for this project include Paulding County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service and the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation in addition to the GLCP.

Pine Mountain

In Harris County, the backbone of scenic Pine Mountain is being protected through the purchase of a conservation easement covering 2,131 acres by the Georgia Forestry Commission using GLCP grant and loan funds. An additional 150 acres is being purchased by Harris County. Located adjacent to Georgia's largest state park (FDR State Park), this project helps create a large continuous conservation area covering the ridges and slopes of Pine Mountain. The protection of this property also conserves an important example of the very rare montane longleaf pine ecosystem.

Gordon Lee Mansion

The city of Chickamauga obtained a $365,000 grant and $875,000 low-interest loan from the GLCP to acquire the historic Gordon Lee Mansion and grounds. With matching funds provided largely by the landowner's sale of the property at a reduced rate, the city was able to protect a site with extensive historical and cultural heritage value.

Constructed in the 1840s, the home served as both a federal and confederate hospital during the Civil War's famous Battle of Chickamauga and for decades hosted annual Blue/Gray reunions for surviving veterans of the war. Filled with period furnishings and used as a living history center, the site also has historic connections to the Cherokee Nation and the Antebellum periods.

Wolf Creek

A remarkable wildflower site along Wolf Creek in Grady County in the southwest corner of Georgia will be acquired and permanently protected due to a GLCP grant matching funds from a variety of private organizations. The 140-acre tract is known for having one of the largest and most dense populations of trout lilies, a species most typically found in mountainous North Georgia, and is home to several other wildflowers of special concern.

North Marsh

Along Georgia's coast in Glynn County on St. Simons Island, a tract of coastal marsh and upland was acquired to prevent development and maintain the scenic and historic qualities of the adjacent Fort Frederica National Monument, one of the earliest English settlements in Georgia. The 21-acre property includes an undeveloped Native American shell midden dating to 1,000 B.C., salt marsh, maritime forest, and habitat for wood storks, diamondback terrapins and bald eagles. Glynn County used a GLCP grant and low-interest loan to acquire the property.

Flint River Corridor

South of Albany, Georgia, in the Flint River Greenway, two tracts totaling 397 acres with one and a half miles of riverfront were preserved and will be available for the public to enjoy through hiking, biking, boating and fishing. Bordering Radium Springs, the largest natural spring in Georgia, this project protects a critical freshwater resource and important cold-water habitat for fish such as the Striped Bass as well as habitat for rare cave-dwelling species such as the Georgia Blind Salamander. Funding partners include Dougherty County and the Georgia Wetlands Trust Fund.

Wiley Farm

Near Social Circle, Georgia, the 160 acre Wiley cattle ranch and farm was protected from future development through the placement of a conservation easement. Protection of this property preserves land near Lake Varner which serves as the primary drinking water source for Walton and Newton Counties.

The Lost Corner Preserve

In metro Atlanta's Sandy Springs, Georgia, a new city park has been established covering 24 undeveloped acres. Owned and preserved by the same family for more than 100 years, the tract contains a mature loblolly pine and mixed hardwood forest with a large number of trees greater than 100 years in age as well as springs and a creek that feeds into the nearby Chattahoochee River. In addition to support from the GLCP, this project benefitted from a contribution from the city and a greatly discounted sale of the property from the owners.

Summary

Communities all across Georgia agree on the benefits of land conservation efforts: a cleaner water supply, improved air quality, additional greenspace, keeping forest and agricultural lands productive, and preserving our rich natural and cultural history.

"The GLCP brings together private and public entities to conserve our natural resources for current and future generations to use and enjoy."

Governor Sonny Perdue

Georgia Land Conservation Council

Sonny Perdue
Governor

Steve Stancil
Chairperson
State Property Officer

Mike Beatty
Commissioner
Georgia Department of Community Affairs

John Bembry, D.V.M.
Tree Farmer and Veterinarian

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

Noel Holcomb
Commissioner
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Stacy R. Patton
Residential Development Division
Minerva Real Estate Investments, L.L.P.

Robert Farris
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