



## GEORGIA CONSERVATION VOTERS

### March E-Newsletter

March 18, 2009

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### Highlights from the General Assembly

Thursday, March 12th was “Crossover Day” at the Capitol, the last day for bills to pass one chamber and “cross over” to the other to remain alive for consideration during the last 10 days of the session. The Legislature debated dozens of bills with the House remaining in session past 10:00pm.

Below is an update on how the conservation community’s *Leading Georgia into a Sustainable Future* priorities fared as well as several other bills of interest.

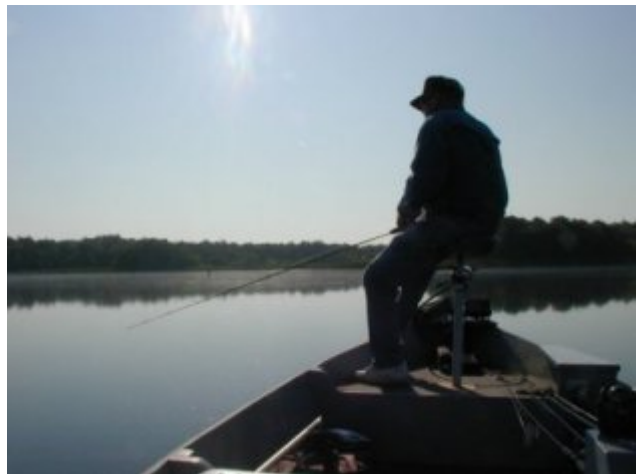
**Accept No Rollbacks:** *We will defend current laws that protect our natural resources.*

[HB 552](#), sponsored by Representative Terry Barnard, extends the moratorium on injecting treated wastewater or surface water into drinking water aquifers. This is a *Leading Georgia into a Sustainable Future* priority.

*Status: Passed House 149-0, In Senate Natural Resources & Environment Committee*

[SB 155](#), sponsored by Senator Chip Pearson, seeks to define temporary, or ephemeral, streams and exempt them from state stream buffer requirements.

*Status: Passed House 35-17, In Senate Natural Resources & Environment Committee*



[SB 164](#), sponsored by Senator Don Balfour, would allow billboard companies the right to cut and remove thousands of trees along public roads for the benefit of billboards located on nearby private property. In exchange, the billboard owners are agreeing to plant some smaller trees and other vegetation. Billboard companies already have the ability to trim vegetation along our roadways. Improving or defeating this bill is a *Leading Georgia into a Sustainable Future* priority.  
*Status: Passed Senate 50-1, In House Committee on Transportation*

[SB 229](#), sponsored by Senator Ross Tolleson, would require state administrative judges to defer to the Environmental Protection Division director, Shore Protection Committee or Coastal Marshland Protection Committee.  
*Status: Lost in Senate 26-25 (29 votes needed for passage)*



**Ensuring A Clean and Abundant Water Supply:** *In response to challenges facing Georgia's water supply, legislators must champion the fastest, least expensive solutions that will ensure clean water for all.*

[HB 158](#), sponsored by Representatives Judy Manning and John Meadows, requires water meters for each individual unit in new multi-family residential buildings rather than one water meter for each building. Submetering will allow the residents to know exactly how much water they are using allowing them to save

water as well as money. This is a *Leading Georgia into a Sustainable Future* priority.  
*Status: Passed House 109-53, In Senate Regulated Industries & Utilities Committee*

[HB 262](#), sponsored by Representatives Calvin Hill and Tom McCall, grants property owners governed by homeowners associations a choice when it comes to landscaping. In its current form, this bill will prohibit covenants from requiring the installation of water-thirsty grasses, shrubs and trees. The passage of HB 262 would allow for more efficient landscaping that will reduce the need for supplemental irrigation and promote water conservation in Georgia.  
*Status: Passed House 157-1, In Senate Natural Resources & Environment Committee*

[SB 228](#), sponsored by Senator Ross Tolleson, clarifies and strengthens the law requiring a 25 foot vegetated buffer between the upland end of the salt marsh and the developable high ground adjacent to it.  
*Status: Passed Senate 43-3, In House Natural Resources & Environment Committee*



**Secure Funding for Transit:** *To address Georgia's transportation challenges and offer convenient and safe alternatives to car travel, the General Assembly must pass measures to expand the state's investment in public transportation.*

[SB 39/SR 44](#), sponsored by Senators Mullis, Stoner, Williams, Reed, Rogers and others, would allow multi-county regions to form so residents can vote to levy a 1-cent sales tax for transportation projects in the region. Local elected officials determine project lists for voter approval and funds would be available

for non-road projects. Last month, the House Transportation Committee struck the original language and inserted new language in SB 39 to change the percent of funding MARTA can spend on project construction and operating expenses from a 55/45 split to a 60/40 split, still not enough to give the agency the flexibility it needs to succeed.

*Status: Passed Senate 52-3/53-2, In House Transportation Committee*

[SB 200/HB 605](#), the new transportation governance plan announced by Gov. Perdue, Lt. Gov Cagle and Speaker Richardson, would transfer the power over \$2 billion in road funding from the state Transportation Board to an eleven member panel appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Senate version of the plan is sponsored by Senator Tommie Williams and the House version is sponsored by Representatives David Ralston and Jerry Keen. Under SB 200, the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) and the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) will be merged, and all the functions will be transferred to a new State Transportation Authority (STA) for development and operation of state transportation projects. The state Department of Transportation will be left with the management of the state highway network, under direction of the DOT commissioner.

*Status: Passed Senate 30-25, Both bills in House Transportation Committee*

[HB 277/HR 206](#), sponsored by Representative Vance Smith, seeks to raise \$25 billion over the next ten years by increasing the state sales tax to 5% if approved by voters on the 2010 ballot. HB 277 outlines a list of 24 statewide projects including numerous highway projects including the proposed Northern Arc and an underground road tunnel through Metro Atlanta. The Transportation Trust Fund requires reauthorization by voters every 10 years.

*Status: Passed House 149-18/155-15, In Senate Finance/Transportation Committees*



**Make Our Highways Safe and More Scenic:**

*Billboards threaten health, safety and scenic beauty along Georgia highways. The General Assembly should make highways safer and more scenic by ensuring responsible management of rights of way.*

[SB 18](#), sponsored by Senator Seth Harp, authorizes the Department of Transportation to inventory scenic areas and restrict billboards in and near scenic areas. SB 18 sets out to help define the term ‘Scenic Areas’ for the benefit of future legislation regarding the issue. Another bill by the same sponsor, SB 107, would restrict billboards in and near floodplains, wetlands and lands under conservation use valuation

assessments.

*Status: Did not make it out of Senate Transportation Committee*

[HB 620](#), sponsored by Representative Pat Dooley, would declare it unlawful to trim or remove trees along the state highway rights of way for the purpose of increasing the visibility of billboards.

*Status: Did not make it out of House Transportation Committee*



**Create a Climate Action Plan:** *Climate change will likely affect our economy through rising shoreline levels and resulting damage to coastal development, disruption of growing seasons for agriculture and forestry, and reduced tourist trade.*

[HR 10](#), sponsored by Representatives Billy Mitchell, Harry Geisinger, Barry Loudermilk, and John Lunsford, would create a Joint Study Committee for Clean Energy Technology to study the development of a state climate action plan.

*Status: Did not make it out of House Energy, Utilities & Telecommunications Committee*

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## Check out EarthShare of Georgia's Earth Day Events



Georgia Conservation Voters Education Fund is now a member of EarthShare of Georgia, Georgia's only dedicated environmental fund that partners with Georgia businesses and employees to support 60 leading environmental groups through workplace campaigns, Earth Day and other activities.

Check out this year's EarthShare of Georgia Earth Day Events below:

### **Corporate Green Day Challenge**

Through EarthShare of Georgia's Corporate Green Day Challenge, your company's employees can support the environment by volunteering their time to make Atlanta cleaner and greener. To find out how your company can get involved, click [here](#).

### **Earth Day 2009 Party in the Sky: The Air Up There**

Wednesday, April 22 (Earth Day), 7-10 pm,  
Nelson Mullins, 201 17th Street, Suite 1700

Guests will celebrate Earth Day against the backdrop of the largest brownfield redevelopment in the country and a model for smart growth and sustainability.

Proceeds from the evening support EarthShare of Georgia.  
To purchase tickets, click [here](#) or call 404-873-3173.

### **Leadership Breakfast**

Friday, April 24, 8-10 am, the Georgia Aquarium

Tom Pate, Executive Director of U.S. Geographic Services for Accenture, will be the keynote speaker. The program includes air, land and water updates by Dennis Creech, Shelly Lakly and Sally Bethea, respectively, and the annual EarthShare of Georgia awards program.

To purchase tickets or sponsor the breakfast click [here](#) or call 404-873-3173.

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Sincerely,

Chris Osborne,  
Executive Director

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## About Us:

Georgia Conservation Voters works to preserve and enhance the quality of life for all Georgians by making conservation a top priority with Georgia's elected officials, political candidates and voters. GCV understands that the most important decisions made on the environment are made by elected officials, so one of the most important things we can do to protect the environment is to elect pro-conservation candidates.

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