



## Fast Facts

Georgia citizens who hunt and fish have gladly paid license, stamp and tag fees for decades in order to make sure that wildlife and fisheries are managed to promote the taking of game and fish.

Georgia businesses have paid significant fees under programs designed to protect the environment.

A fee of one dollar is charged each time a person buys an auto tire to cover the cost of properly disposing of that tire when it is used up as well as to encourage waste reduction and recycling.

All of these fees have been subject to diversion by legislative action, and have been used for other purposes unrelated to the activities under which they were collected.

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# Natural Resource Management Costs Require Dedicated Funding

## What's at Stake?

Georgia's programs for the protection and management of our natural resources need adequate and secure funding. In the last two decades, the assurance of such fiscal security has declined for the Department of Natural Resources and for its Environmental Protection Division. This has occurred during times when the population and economy of the state, and the impacts of that growth, have grown dramatically. As needs have increased, funding has declined.

## Challenges

Georgia has always relied on annual appropriations from the state's General Fund to support most state program activities, with the notable exception of the funding of the Department of Transportation, which receives a constitutional appropriation provided by the 7.5 cents per gallon excise tax on sales of motor fuel. Georgia's Constitution prohibits the "dedication" of any revenues to specific programs without such constitutional designation.

Meanwhile, the legislature has passed several pieces of legislation that can be interpreted as "dedicating" certain funds to certain purposes, by using language declaring that it is the intent of the legislature that certain funds go to particular uses. Among these "extra-constitutional" allocations, the largest, three percent of the General Sales Tax levied on motor fuel, goes to the Department of Transportation. That particular allocation has never been subject to legislative raiding, but other funds with intent language have been raided, some repeatedly.

Fees collected under the Hazardous Waste Trust Fund, the Solid Waste Trust Fund, and the \$80 per acre fee charged to developers for land disturbing activities are all intended to fund the programs under which they were created and under which they are collected. Fees paid by Georgians who hunt and fish are intended to support programs for those activities. But these funds have regularly been used to plug holes in other places in the State Budget since the Barnes Administration. This is a non-partisan application of the letter of constitutional law: our basic governing document says that funds cannot be dedicated and these funds certainly have not been dedicated to the programs under which they have been collected.

Georgia's natural resources are under growing pressure from development and increased use by all sectors of the population and the economy. The state has a duty to protect and manage these resources. If the funds for those purposes are not secure, then our natural resources are not secure.

## Next Steps

Georgia needs a Natural Resources Protection Constitutional Amendment that will allow the General Assembly to create natural resources programs that have dedicated funding from fees collected from the users of those programs. The Amendment should allow for legislative creation, modification and termination of those programs and the fees that support them. The amendment will allow for the timely implementation of programs and will adjust their costs to their actual needs.