



GEORGIA CONSERVATION VOTERS

Dear Legislator,

As the 2008 legislative session begins, we look forward to working with you to promote common sense policy that protects our air, water, and natural areas. Every year, members of Georgia's conservation community vote to focus our legislative efforts. Georgia Conservation Voters (GCV), the political voice of the conservation community, would like to share the community's five main legislative priorities for the 2008 legislative session. These priorities are listed in no particular order, but will likely be included in our 2007-08 environmental scorecard.

Ensure a Clean and Abundant Water Supply

With the state's population continuing to rapidly grow and the Southeast experiencing an exceptional drought, Georgia faces real challenges in meeting its water needs while protecting the rivers, streams, lakes and coastal marshlands that are essential to our quality of life. In 2004, the state embarked on a water management planning process led by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and the Georgia Water Council. However, the Council-approved draft of the plan fails to ensure protection and equitable allocation of our water resources. In addition, it ignores the watersheds that it purports to protect by creating arbitrary, regional planning districts that do not conform to the state's 14 river basins.

In order to accomplish those goals, we urge altering the regional planning districts so that they strictly follow river basin boundaries. We also urge that legislators be given the power to nominate a pool of regional district members from which EPD can make final selections.

In addition, we recommend passage of statutory protections restricting new interbasin transfers that harm downstream communities. And we further recommend that all conservation measures be exhausted before promoting the creation of new reservoirs. If new reservoirs are built, we urge that they be required to follow strict rules for drinking water supply protection. Additionally, we support the extension of the moratorium on aquifer storage and recovery.

We urge the legislature to develop and adopt statutory protections that accomplish these goals.

Secure Funding for Transit

Former DOT Commissioner Wayne Shackelford may have said it best in 2007 when he stated, "Congestion is killing our competitiveness." Traffic congestion is ruining our quality of life and air quality as well. The quickest and most cost effective way to get permanent congestion relief is through rail travel as is roaring ahead in Charlotte, Nashville, Houston, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles and Albuquerque. More than \$93 million in federal funds already allocated to commuter rail in Georgia sits on a shelf, unused. A new study by the Transit Planning Board and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce shows the Atlanta/Macon line, the "Brain Train" line to Athens, and lines to five other destinations to all be viable.

Georgia must fund commuter and intercity trains. One option we support is to allow local governments to work together to create regional transportation funding that includes significant funding for transit. Another is to direct the 1% of the motor fuel sales tax that is presently sent to the General Fund to "all transportation purposes, including operating costs for public transportation;" money to operate trains and transit. A third method for securing funding would be the creation of a line item in the state's Appropriations Act to fund public transportation operating costs. We urge you to provide Georgians with meaningful transportation solutions that include transit funding.

Make Our School Buses Clean, Keep Our Kids Healthy

Diesel engines are one of the most harmful sources of air pollution in Georgia. Diesel exhaust is a toxic mixture of metals, fine particulate matter, and other pollutants associated with adverse health impacts including asthma, cancer, respiratory disease and premature death. School buses, one of the safest ways for children to travel to school, are one source of this pollution. Diesel exhaust builds up in the cabins of school buses and exposes

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children to diesel pollution. Health care costs resulting from exposure to particulate matter, found in diesel exhaust, total more than \$100,000 per ton.

Thankfully, there are pollution control devices (retrofits) that can reduce this pollution by 90 percent. The federal government provides funding for school bus retrofits but local or state sources must provide a match. Currently, less than 1,000 of the more than 13,000 school buses in Georgia have been retrofitted with pollution control devices.

We urge you to support a minimum budget appropriation of \$600,000 to leverage existing funding for school bus retrofits in non-attainment areas of Georgia. This appropriation would be used to match \$2.4 million in federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds currently available from the Environmental Protection Division and designated for this purpose. These funds would enable financially constrained school systems to clean up their school bus fleets.

Conserve Our Natural Areas

Tax incentives are powerful tools in promoting private voluntary land conservation. The General Assembly recognized this in 2006 when it created by unanimous vote the Georgia Land Conservation Tax Credit Program. While the tax credit has been relatively successful to date, several changes would make the incentive more attractive to a broader spectrum of landowners.

We recommend five changes: (1) the value of donated land should be determined by a qualified appraisal – and not by the local tax assessor as is presently the case; (2) if a landowner sells his/her land at less than fair market value, a bargain sale – the donated portion of the sale – should qualify for a tax credit; (3) if a landowner conveys land to the federal government, the donation should qualify for the tax credit; (4) when the taxpayer cannot use all the tax credits in one year, s/he should be able to carry the credits forward for up to ten years – at present, it is five years; and (5) the value of the tax credit should be increased from 25% of the value of the donation to 50%, while retaining the caps of \$250,000 for individuals and \$500,000 for corporations.

No Rollbacks

We will continue to defend our laws on the books that protect our natural resources and budget cutbacks that would affect funding for important conservation programs.

We thank you for your past support and we look forward to working with you to achieve these additional goals.

Sincerely,



Jill Johnson
Interim Executive Director
Georgia Conservation Voters

Altamaha Riverkeeper
Center for a Sustainable Coast
Coosa River Basin Initiative
Environment Georgia
The Garden Club of Georgia, Inc.
Georgia Conservancy
Georgia Environmental Policy Institute
Georgia Forest Watch
Georgia River Network
Georgia Water Coalition
Georgia Wildlife Federation
GreenLaw

Lake Oconee Water Watch
Lake Oconee Property Owner's Association
League of Women Voters of Georgia
Ogeechee-Canoochee Riverkeeper
Satilla Riverkeeper
Savannah Riverkeeper
Sierra Club, Georgia Chapter
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Southern Environmental Law Center
The Nature Conservancy, Georgia Field Office
Trees Columbus
Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper