

**Minutes**  
**Land Acquisition Committee**  
Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center  
Shepherd Conference Room

**December 3, 2013**

**Attending:**

Committee Members

William Bagwell, Chairman  
Mark Mobley, Vice Chairman  
Dwight Davis  
Duncan Johnson  
Bill Jones  
Mike Phelps  
Philip Watt  
Philip Wilheit  
Dee Yancey  
Rob Leebern, Board Chairman, ex-officio

Board Members

Nancy Addison  
Walter Hudson  
Phyllis Johnson  
Ray Lambert  
Aaron McWhorter  
Paul Shailendra  
Bodine Sinyard  
Mark Smith

Visitors

Chris Manganiello, Georgia River Network  
April Ingle, Georgia River Network  
Michael Pisciotta, Georgia Agribusiness Council  
Katherine Zitsch, Atlanta Regional Commission  
Andrew Schock, The Conservation Fund  
Danny Johnson, Atlanta Regional Commission  
Steve Caley, GreenLaw  
Jimmy Kirkland, WCSR  
Debbie Phillips, Georgia Industry Environmental Coalition  
Mark Woodall, Sierra Club  
Ronny Just, Georgia Power  
Thomas Farmer, The Nature Conservancy  
Lea Kirschaw, GADA

Staff Members

Mark Williams  
Jud Turner  
Homer Bryson  
Spud Woodward  
Dave Crass  
Becky Kelley  
Eddie Henderson  
Steve Friedman  
Kyle Pearson  
Lauren Curry  
Taylor Brown  
Keith Bentley  
Jac Capp  
Jeff Cown  
Mary Walker  
Russ Pennington  
Jeff Weaver  
Stephen Adams  
John Bowers  
Mark Whitney  
Antoinette Norfleet  
Rusty Garrison

The December 3, 2013 meeting of the Land Acquisition Committee was called to order by Chairman Rob Leebern.

Chairman Leebern called on William Bagwell, Chairman of the Land Acquisition Committee, who called on Steve Friedman, Chief of Real Estate.

Mr. Friedman stated the first item would be a briefing on the Petition for Change of Use of a Heritage Preserve, Panola Mountain State Park, 760± acres, Rockdale County and Henry County.

Mr. Friedman stated this change of use was requested by the Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division (PRHSD) and the Historic Preservation Division (HPD). He further stated PRHSD and HPD seek to change the Heritage Preserve designation to expand the primary goals to include a historical and cultural preservation laboratory, facilities for the staff of both divisions and public overnight accommodations.

Mr. Friedman stated a public hearing would be held on January 7, 2014. He further stated this matter will return to the Board for a vote during the January 2014 Board meeting.

Mr. Friedman stated he anticipates no opposition to this change of use. He further stated the Department wants to act safely by going through the entire process to be granted the change of use.

Mr. Friedman stated the next item would be the granting of a revocable license and permanent easement to Comcast for the purpose of installing, maintaining, and operating underground fiber optic cables for AT&T cellular at Richmond Hill Wildlife Management Area.

Mr. Friedman stated Richman Hill WMA is also protected under a Heritage Preserve. He further stated DNR feels like a change of use is not necessary because the cable will be underground and will follow the footprint of an existing utility easement.

Mr. Friedman stated he would request the committee recommend that the Board approve the item as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Davis and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to grant a Revocable License and Permanent Easement of .00851± acres by the State Properties Commission and the General Assembly to Comcast for the purpose of installing, maintaining, and operating underground fiber optic cable for AT&T cellular at Richmond Hill Wildlife Management Area, Bryan County, as presented.

Mr. Friedman stated the next item would be the acquisition of 1,902± of real property at Flat Tub Wildlife Management Area, Redstripe Stage II.

Mr. Friedman stated the Department closed on Stage I in January of 2013. He further stated this is an important tract of land along the Ocmulgee River and will add additional river frontage and more public recreational opportunities.

Mr. Friedman stated he would like to thank The Conservation Fund, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Knobloch Family Foundation, and The Georgia Conservancy for their support of this project.

Mr. Friedman stated he has spoken with the County Chairman and County Commissioner of Jeff Davis County about ways to promote use of the WMA and drive more visitors to the county. He further stated he has committed himself to promoting the use of this area to different organizations.

Mr. Friedman stated he would request the committee recommend that the Board approve the item as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Jones, seconded by Mr. Yancey and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to acquire (purchase) 1,902± acres of real property, Flat Tub Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Redstripe Tract Stage II via The Nature Conservancy Fund (TFC), Jeff Davis County, as presented.

Mr. Friedman stated the next item for the Board's consideration would be the acquisition of 2,503± acres of real property at the Paulding Forest Wildlife Management Area.

Mr. Friedman stated this property is an important tract within Paulding Forest WMA, an area identified as one of the most important conservation targets in Georgia's Wildlife Action Plan. He further stated this acquisition will greatly improve the management of the WMA and provide public access for hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and other recreational activities. He added this tract will be acquired in two stages.

Mr. Friedman stated the source of funding for this purchase consists of \$2,500,000 by the Pitman-Robertson Grant, \$1,000,000 from the Fish and Wildlife Service Grant, \$2,300,000 from DNR Bond 126, and \$1,303,550 from DNR Bond 120.

Mr. Friedman stated he would request the committee recommend that the Board approve the item as presented.

Chairman Bagwell asked when Stage II would be purchased.

Mr. Friedman stated he anticipates the acquisition in late summer of 2014.

Chairman Bagwell stated he would like Mr. Friedman to briefly explain the competitiveness of these grants.

Mr. Friedman stated the Recovery Grant is highly competitive. He further stated the Department requested three projects and this project was the only one selected.

A motion was made by Mr. Phelps, seconded by Mr. Davis and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to acquire (purchase) 2,503± acres of real property, Paulding Forest Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Ironstab Tract Stage I, Paulding and Polk Counties, as presented.

Mr. Friedman stated the following two items would be presented together. He further stated the first item seeks approval of purchasing the Fort Perry Tract in Marion County and the second item seeks approval of purchasing the Almo Tract in Talbot and Marion Counties.

Mr. Friedman stated these tracts are within the Fort Benning buffer area which is important to national security and for the economy of the region around the Base. He further stated these two tracts will become part of a new Wildlife Management Area in Georgia. He further stated these tracts would be managed in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the Army.

Mr. Friedman stated he would request the committee recommend that the Board approve these items as presented.

Chairman Leebern stated Fort Benning currently does not allow hunting on adjacent property.

Mr. Friedman stated these purchases will now allow the opportunity for hunting on the WMA.

Mr. Jones asked Mr. Friedman the price/acre on the Almo Tract.

Mr. Friedman stated the price/acre is \$589. He further stated the Army is putting up half.

Mr. Yancey asked Mr. Friedman which specific species were being protected by this purchase.

Mr. Friedman stated the woodpecker and gopher tortoise would be protected.

A motion was made by Mr. Davis, seconded by Mr. Yancey and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to acquire (purchase) 1,220± acres of real property, Fort Benning Buffer, Fort Perry Tract via The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Marion County, as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Davis, seconded by Mr. Mobley and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to acquire (purchase) 7,495± acres of real property, Fort Benning Buffer, Almo Tract via The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Talbot and Marion Counties, as presented.

Mr. Friedman stated the following two items would be presented together. He further stated both properties lie in the buffer zone of the Warner Robins Air Force Base. He added this project involves protecting the base from any issues arising during the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Mr. Friedman stated in the upcoming months the Department plans to acquire multiple tracts within the northern buffer zone.

Mr. Friedman stated the first acquisition is 1.13± acres at 104 Travis Street in Houston County for \$9,600 funded by DNR Bond 123. He further stated the second purchase is .21± acres at 201 Baker Road in Houston County for \$2,300 funded by DNR Bond 123. He added both of these tracts do not have houses on the property.

Mr. Friedman stated he would request the committee recommend that the Board approve the items as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Mobley, seconded by Mr. Davis and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopts the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to acquire (purchase) 1.13± acres of real property, Echeconnee Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), 104 Travis Street, Houston County, as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Mobley, seconded by Mr. Johnson and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to acquire (purchase) 0.21± acres of real property, Echeconnee Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), 201 Baker Road, Houston County, as presented.

Chairman Bagwell stated the acreages stated in the motions presented for Item 'g' and Item 'h' do not match the acreages presented in the Agenda items. He further stated he would like Mr. Friedman to clarify.

Mr. Friedman stated the correct acreages were stated in the motions and were incorrect in the Agenda.

Mr. Bagwell called on Kyle Pearson, Executive Counsel, who commented on this issue.

Chairman Bagwell called on Mr. Friedman to present the next item.

Mr. Friedman stated the final item for consideration would be the acquisition of 343± acres to add to the Crockford-Pigeon Mountain Wildlife Management Area in Walker County.

Mr. Friedman stated this property is important for recreation and conservation, will greatly improve management, and is within one of the top priorities of Georgia's Wildlife Action Plan.

Mr. Friedman stated there is an abandoned 10 acre landfill on the property which was not properly closed prior to it being abandoned. He further stated EPD is aware of this landfill and will properly close it when Solid Waste Trust Fund funds are appropriated for this purpose. He added until that time, the Department will apply for a Brownfield limitation of liability for any groundwater releases at the site of the landfill.

Mr. Friedman stated he would request the committee recommend that the Board approve the item as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Yancey, seconded by Mr. Jones and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to acquire (purchase) 343± acres of real property, Crockford-Pigeon Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Southern Timber Tract, Walker County, as presented.

Chairman Bagwell called on Ms. Johnson to speak.

Ms. Johnson stated she would like to share with the Board her struggle in finding the appropriate and sustainable balance of public and private ownership of property. She further stated she has spoken with Mr. Friedman several times about this issue over the years and does not mean for this to be a negative comment.

Ms. Johnson stated she certainly supports state ownership of property. She further stated she thinks it is imperative to protect military bases, incumbent by the state to provide hunting and fishing opportunities, and it is vital to conserve land.

Ms. Johnson stated her comments were geared towards rural, non-industrial communities that have a very small tax base. She further asked how we can measure the effect that public ownership has on these types of counties. She added she was simply posing the question of how do you know when the State owns enough property.

Chairman Bagwell stated he appreciated Ms. Johnson's comments and believes this is a very important question for the Board to internally discuss.

Discussion ensued on this topic.

Mr. McWhorter stated the Board should look at what the purpose and use of every acquisition and look to where the Department is going in the future.

Mr. Smith asked if there is a strategic plan concerning land acquisition in place for the next five to ten years.

Mr. Friedman stated the State Wildlife Action Plan is used by Real Estate.

Discussion ensued on the topic of a strategic plan.

Dr. Watt asked what the impact is to the tax base in the counties DNR is purchasing property. He further stated he believes it is up to the Board to periodically re-evaluate.

Mr. Yancey stated he believed it is important to evaluate what DNR is currently purchasing but also re-evaluate the property the Department already owns.

Mr. Friedman stated these properties benefit the county through added industry and tourism. He further stated it is hard to calculate the economic benefits of state owned properties.

Mark Whitney, Assistant Director of the Wildlife Resources Division, stated there are companies that do this research. He further stated WRD is very interested in conducting research on economic impact and currently has a proposal submitted to a group.

Discussion ensued on the topic of measuring economic impact of state owned land.

Chairman Bagwell stated this was an important discussion. He further stated if an economic study were to take place he would like the Board to be engaged in the research process.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.