

Minutes
Land Acquisition Committee
Board of Natural Resources
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, S. E.
Suite 1252 East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334

March 24, 2009

Attending:

Committee Members

Warren Budd, Chairman
David Allen
Earl Barrs
Gene Bishop
Walter Hudson
Bob Rutland
Loyce Turner
Philip Watt
Tom Wheeler
Bill Carruth, Board Chairman, ex-officio

Board Members

Bill Archer
Jenny Lynn Bradley
Joe Hatfield
Mabel Jenkins
Phyllis Johnson
Ray Lambert
Jim Tysinger
Jim Walters

Visitors

Thomas Farmer, The Nature Conservancy
Shana Udvardy, The Georgia Conservancy
Bettie Sleeth, Home Builders Association of Georgia
Katie Kirkpatrick, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce
Andrew Schock, The Conservation Fund
Michelle Cable, The Nature Conservancy

Staff Members

Noel Holcomb
Chris Clark
Carol Couch
Susan Shipman
Steve Friedman
Dan Forster
Marlin Gottschalk
Becky Kelley
Ray Luce
Jim Ussery
Karl Burgess
Linda MacGregor
David Crass
Todd Holbrook
Doralyn Kirkland
Wally Woods
Steve Saunders
Connie Buck
John Bowers
John Thompson
Sally Winchester
Paul Nelson
Brad Gane
Sherry Crew-Jay
Emily Hitchcock
Lauren Curry
Sarah Dearman
Mary Ann Evans
Hellen Harris

Land Acquisition Committee – Minutes

March 24, 2009

Page 2

Andy Fleming, Friends of Georgia State Parks

Skin Edge, Allied Golf

Jim Scarbrough, Gwinnett County Water

Phil Zinsmeister, Sierra Club

Ronny Just, Georgia Power Company

Graham Holden, Jones Day

Bryan Tolar, Georgia Agribusiness Council

Nathaniel Hunt, Southern Environmental Law Center

The March 24, 2009 meeting of the Land Acquisition Committee was called to order by Board Chairman Bill Carruth.

Chairman Carruth called on Warren Budd, Chairman of the Land Acquisition Committee.

Mr. Budd called on Steve Friedman, Chief, Real Estate, to present two projects for consideration.

Mr. Friedman stated that the first project involved the acquisition (purchase) of 7,180± acres of real property, Altamaha River Townsend Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Rayonier Forest Resources, L. P. Tract Phase I via The Nature Conservancy (TNC), McIntosh and Long Counties. He further stated that this acquisition was Phase I of a larger project that would eventually protect over 14,000 acres with several miles of river frontage, and would expand the Townsend WMA to 18,000 acres. He added that this tract of land is one of the most important conservation targets identified in Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan and is important for the protection of the lower Altamaha River corridor. He further added that the property would buffer the Townsend Bombing Range, one of the military's most important practice bombing ranges on the east coast.

He stated that the tract is located in the lower Altamaha River floodplain, one of the most valuable ecological areas in Georgia and includes forested wetlands, inland maritime forest hammocks and upland longleaf pine sandhill habitat. He further stated that the property offers excellent recreational opportunities, is in pristine condition, and that preservation of this tract would protect habitat for at least 17 federal and/or state endangered species. He added that the appraised value and sale price of the land has been set at \$12,358,060. He further added that funding would come from Georgia Land Conservation Program funds, DNR Nongame funds, grants from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) and North American Wetlands Conservation Act; and a cash contribution of \$4,078,612 from The Nature Conservancy.

Mr. Friedman stated that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) pays McIntosh County \$100,000 annually to cover lost property taxes from currently state-owned land in that county, and that property taxes on this tract would amount to approximately \$26,000 per year. He further stated that properties like this bring eco-tourism and recreation to the area, create jobs, and provide clean water for the fishing and shrimping industry, which benefit the economy of the area. He added that the Department was requesting approval to acquire Phase I of the Rayonier tract in McIntosh and Long counties.

Discussion ensued.

To respond to questions regarding public access and management of the property, Mr. Friedman called on Dan Forster, Director, Wildlife Resources Division, who stated that the property would be blended with the Altamaha River Townsend WMA and would be managed consistent with the WMA, that the property would have public access 365 days a year, and that camping and hunting opportunities would be liberal. He further stated that as part of the WMA, planning and improvements would be advanced as resources become available. He added that DNR's timber management on the property would be a resource tool to achieve goals set for habitat management.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Barrs expressed concerns that the 2007 appraisals on the property may not be consistent with current market values.

Mr. Friedman stated that the appraisals had been reviewed by State and USFWS appraisers. He further stated that compared to other properties purchased by the State in that area, the proposed Rayonier property is well below the price of earlier purchases.

Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Holcomb stated that he respected and appreciated concerned questions from Committee members regarding the project. He further stated that the Marine Corps was interested in the State's purchase of this property, its value to national security and its use as a buffer to the Townsend Bombing Range in respect to training involving updated tactical weaponry. He added that the partnership would benefit the State and the Marine Corps.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Friedman stated that this project began in 2007, and that the Office of Planning and Budget had been informed of the progress of the project on a weekly basis. He further stated that federal grants in Phase I require matching funds, and that most of the funds for Phase II would be provided by outside sources. He added that when both phases are averaged and diluted with contributions, the cost to the State would be about \$500 per acre. He further added that the monies from the State on Phase I have been set aside in the 2008 budget for land acquisition only, and if this project were to fail, those monies would not come back to DNR for other uses.

Discussion ensued.

A motion was made by Mr. Wheeler, seconded by Mr. Rutland and carried unanimously that the Committee recommends that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval for the acquisition (purchase) of 7,180± acres of real property, Altamaha River Townsend

Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Rayonier Forest Resources, L. P. Tract Phase I via The Nature Conservancy (TNC), McIntosh and Long Counties. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part hereof)

Mr. Barrs stated that for the record, he voted for the motion to approve the project but was concerned that the appraisals presented did not represent the current fair market value of the land.

Discussion ensued.

Mrs. Johnson stated that for the record, she supports conservation easements over fee simple land purchases and that she supports multi-use forests and working landscapes. She further stated that she would like to see DNR move toward conservation easements rather than land purchases, which she understands from Mr. Friedman would be the preference of the administration.

Mr. Budd stated that in the future the State may not have any other choice but to move to conservation easements, and that he feels that the State should only purchase historically significant or ecologically sensitive land, which would provide amenities for the State of Georgia.

Mr. Budd called on Mr. Friedman to present the next project.

Mr. Friedman stated that the second project involves approval for the granting of a Revocable License and granting of a permanent right-of-way easement by the FY-11 General Assembly, for a maximum of 0.19± acres of real property for road construction on State property, Hugh Gillis Public Fishing Area (PFA), Laurens County. He further stated that Laurens County has requested that the State of Georgia grant it the right to widen Keen's Crossing Road onto State property at the Hugh Gillis Public Fishing Area and that widening and paving the road would benefit the Department, provide a safer entrance into the PFA and improve access for recreation. He added that the Department has wanted to improve the entrance to Hugh Gillis PFA for years because the angle of the entrance road is dangerous and offers limited sight distance to the nearby intersection of Keens Crossing Road and Highway 80. He further added that the unpaved entrance road is difficult for boaters to use during wet weather.

He stated that the County would correct the angle of the entrance road and pay all of the cost to build the road, and that the County estimates completion of the project by the spring of 2010. He further stated that the Department requests the Committee's support to grant the Revocable License and a permanent right-of-way easement to Laurens County upon approval by the State Properties Commission and FY-11 General Assembly. (PowerPoint presentation attached hereto and made a part hereof)

A motion was made by Mr. Wheeler, seconded by Dr. Watt and carried unanimously that the Committee recommends that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval for the granting of a Revocable License and granting of a permanent right-of-way easement by the FY-11 General Assembly, for a maximum of 0.19± acres of real property for road construction on State property, Hugh Gillis Public Fishing Area (PFA), Laurens County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part hereof)

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.