



CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF) AND GEORGIA LAW

Existing state and federal funding levels are not sufficient to address all our outdoor recreation needs. Too often, other priorities take precedence over outdoor recreation facilities and maintenance. Therefore, we must use sound science to establish stronger and more strategic positions that support additional state and federal funding for outdoor recreation land acquisition, development, rehabilitation, operations and maintenance.

A. Guiding Principles for LWCF

Funding

Appropriation of available state and federal funds should go to jurisdictions that have demonstrated knowledge and awareness of their outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation priorities and how these priorities affect the health, livability and economic vitality of their communities. Preference should be extended to communities that:

- Show commitment to improve their outdoor recreation opportunities;
- Seek creative or alternative approaches to service delivery funding; and
- Establish partnerships that leverage and supplement requested state and federal funding.

At the same time, we must be mindful of and committed to assisting communities that demonstrate a need, but have little opportunity to invest in outdoor recreation due to their economic condition.

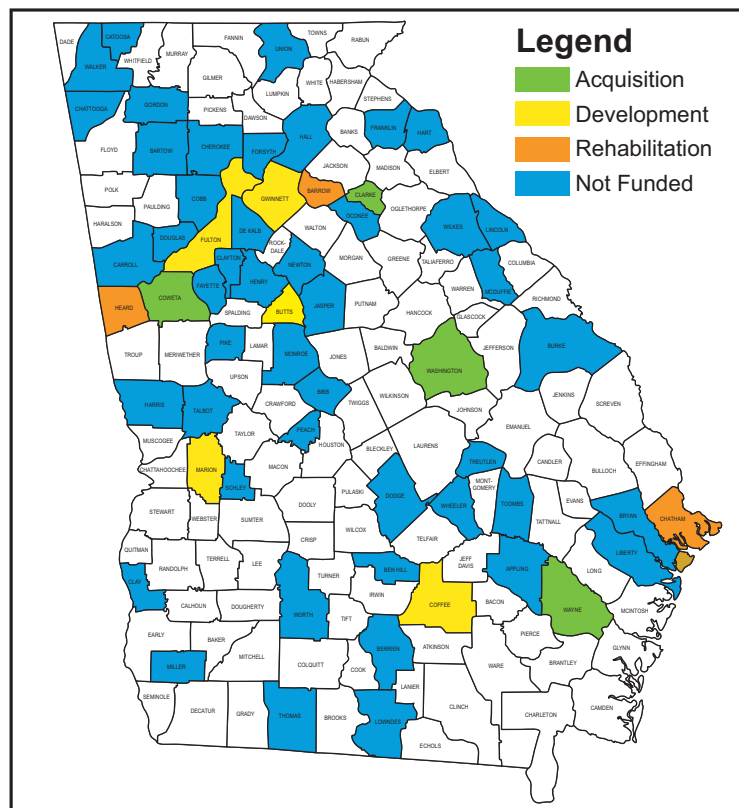


Figure 11. Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) Requests and Awards, 2005

Priorities and action strategies

As stated in the introduction, SCORP 2008–2013 must be completed in order for Georgia to be eligible for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grant dollars. These funds must be used to address the priorities that were established during the development of SCORP (see Chapter 3) and the six key strategic actions for SCORP (see Chapter 4). But how do these priorities and recommended actions really relate to LWCF and grant awards?

Below is a listing of the strategic actions that have a direct correlation to the LWCF funding process. Based on these strategic actions, criteria will be developed for scoring applications and ultimately making grant awards. These criteria will be based on the strategic actions below:

Key Element	A Health and Livability	B Economic Vitality	C Conservation	D Commitment	E Education	F Funding
Coded Action Strategy	A.1., A.3., A.4., A.7., A.9., A.10.	B.1., B.6.	C.1., C.2., C.3., C.4., C.12., C.13.	D.5.	E.12.	F.1., F.2., F.4., F.8.

Table 2. Strategic Actions Related to Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Standards for recreation facilities

SCORP 2008–2013 recognizes the importance of establishing universal standards for the identification, establishment and maintenance of recreational sites and facilities. However, this SCORP is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of recreation needs throughout the state, not necessarily to define the specific set of metrics for judging individual facilities or services.

Developing specific metrics and standards for outdoor recreation are tasks delegated to GORP (Georgia Outdoor Recreation Partnership). GORP will be a DNR-initiated partnership of professionals and stakeholders responsible for implementing the objectives and strategic actions of SCORP 2008–2013. GORP will report its findings on recreational standards at a conference on outdoor recreation.

Wetlands Preservation



Wetlands: A Definition

Expanses of land periodically inundated or saturated by groundwater or surface water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support vegetation adapted for life in such conditions.

Benefits of wetlands

Wetlands provide a wide variety of benefits including: maintaining water supplies, enhancing water quality, controlling floodwaters, erosion control and providing recreation opportunities.

Wetlands and SCORP

Section 303 of the Federal Emergency Wetlands Act requires that the SCORP address wetlands as an important

outdoor recreation resource and that protection priorities be established in consultation with both DNR’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and WRD. The priorities established in this SCORP satisfy that requirement.

Area of wetlands in Georgia

According to the USFWS, Georgia currently has about 20% of its land area in wetlands (7.7 million acres).³⁴ This total includes nearly 367,000 acres of estuarine wetlands and 7.3 million acres of palustrine wetlands. The National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates that, by the 1980s, about 23% of Georgia’s original wetlands acreage was lost to conversion.³⁵

Loss of wetlands in Georgia

The greatest loss of wetlands occurred in the Atlantic Coastal Plain. Much of the land conversion was from deciduous forested wetlands to intensively managed pine plantation. The major conversion of wetland areas to pine plantation occurred between 1985 and 1992. The greatest conversion of wetlands to agriculture occurred from 1974 to 1985. An increase in harvesting occurred in 1998–2001, perhaps due to the record droughts that allowed access to riverine areas from low flows.

Population growth and wetland conservation

Georgia ranks second among EPA Region 4 states in estimated wetland acreage and its complex physiography results in a rich diversity of wetland types. A large proportion of our anticipated population growth over the coming decade is projected for areas proximal to wetlands such as coastal counties. Currently, we have no coordinated statewide program to identify and prioritize landscape-level wetland areas for development of wetland mitigation banks or other wetland restoration activities. As a result, current restoration projects, while benefiting the immediate area and satisfying no-net-loss standards, may not contribute greatly to the overall health of the watershed. Developing and using a prioritization map of potential wetland restoration areas will help natural resource managers focus restoration efforts in areas that will provide the greatest positive cumulative effect on the health of a watershed and surrounding communities. Augmentation of funding opportunities for the restoration of wetlands also would be advised.

Comprehensive wetlands protection plan

In response to this lack of coordination, DNR-EPD has begun a process to develop a comprehensive assessment to identify high priority areas for wetland restoration, mitigation and protection. This project will provide state, federal and non-governmental natural resource managers with a database of potential areas for wetland mitigation banks, conservation activities and restoration projects through the development of a GIS model that establishes priorities for wetland functions and values. The priorities are: wildlife habitat, water quality/quantity, flow regulation/flood control, ecological services, biodiversity conservation, recreation, education, connectivity, ease of restoration and scenic value. The results of this effort will provide information and coordination for a number of statewide planning activities such as the Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan, activities of the Land Conservation Partnership, the State Wildlife Action Plan and the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

B. Fulfillment of Legal Mandate

As stated in the introduction, DNR is legally mandated to prepare outdoor recreation planning documents by the Official Code of Georgia: Section 12-3-1. Table 3 identifies the specific requirements under Section 12-3-1 and the elements of this SCORP that address them.

SCORP Elements Addressing Legal Requirements	
Legal Requirements	SCORP Elements
Formulate a comprehensive recreation policy for the state of Georgia.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This document, SCORP 2008–2013, and anticipated development of an implementation team (GORP).
Appraise recreation needs of the state and disseminate information relative to recreation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conducted GIS analysis, town hall meetings, focus groups, statewide telephone survey, online questionnaire, NSRE survey, “Outdoor Recreation Participation and Trends for Georgia.”
Cooperate in the promotion and organization of local government recreation systems—advise them in the planning of facilities and consult with them in the financing.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Proposing establishment of a “technical assistance” service to be coordinated by PRHSD. Open invitation for local service providers to attend and participate in GORP.
Aid in recruiting, educating and placing recreation workers and promoting recreation institutes and conferences.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaborating with the Departments of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Georgia (Athens) and Georgia Southern University (Statesboro) and the Recreation Curriculum at Georgia State University.
Help establish and promote recreation standards.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring various mechanisms to define measurable standards, including CEPAE (Comprehensive Evaluation to Promote Active Engagement).
Cooperate with public and private interests in promoting recreation opportunities.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sharing GIS data, providing technical assistance, invitation to participate in the SCORP implementation team (GORP). Proposed Conference on Outdoor Recreation in Fall 2008. Health initiatives with DHR.
Submit a report of activities and recommendations to the Governor and notify the General Assembly of its availability.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This document, SCORP 2008–2013, as well as progress reports prepared by GORP.

Table 3. SCORP Elements Addressing Legal Requirements