One step up, two steps back for open space

House slashes conservation funding by 60 percent

With our strong support, Sens. Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson voted in March to support funding for a critical preservation fund, but the House slashed its funding to $66 million in July—a harsh 60 percent reduction over last year’s support.

“This was a pretty big disappointment,” said Jennette Gayer, state advocate with Environment Georgia. “However, we are going to continue fighting to ensure that future generations also have the opportunity to enjoy the open spaces that we do. Conservation should be a priority.”

Raided funding

The fund is supposed to receive $900 million every year from the sale of offshore oil leases, but it has consistently been raided by Congress for programs that have little to do with conservation. While in recent years funding has hovered around $400 million, Sens. Chambliss and Isakson voted to increase this total to $700 million—up by more than 100 percent from 2011. This was a victory for the unique open spaces of the state—including the Appalachian Trail and the Benton MacKaye Trail.

Last year’s conservation funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund were spent in Georgia by adding 548 acres to national forest lands—including 100 acres in the Chattahoochee National Forest. The properties provided critical habitat for several endangered species, like the red cockaded woodpecker.

Years of protection and recreation

In 1978, LWCF funds were used to establish the Chattahoochee Greenway—a string of parks along the Chattahoochee River, from Lake Lanier to Columbus. The parks have provided opportunities for fishing, paddling, and floating for millions of Atlantans. They have also helped to protect the drinking water for roughly 70 percent of metro Atlanta. Parks like this are at risk. For instance, the Park Service would like to purchase and protect two critical parcels of land north of Atlanta—if the funds were available.

“The Land and Water Conservation Fund has been instrumental to the National Park Service in supporting a legacy of recreation and protection along the Chattahoochee River,” said Patty Wissinger, superintendent of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area.

more inside

Keeping Jekyll Island free from development; Pushing for Georgia to get off oil; Next steps for public transportation, and more.

Every year, Jekyll Island provides a safe place for sea turtles to nest.
To our members

Kayaking down one of the tree-lined segments of the Chatahoochee River is one of my favorite activities to beat the summer heat in Georgia. When we asked for photos of you, your friends and family enjoying your favorite waterway, it was clear that water also plays an important role in your lives. We used the many amazing photos we received to help make a case for clean rivers to Georgia’s congressional delegation. We also posted these photos to our Facebook page. If you have a chance, check them out.

Hot summers are hardly new in Georgia, but this summer’s temperatures broke records. Unfortunately, these examples of extreme weather could become commonplace, as global warming wreaks havoc on our climate. As we move into fall, we will continue our work to reduce climate change pollution in our atmosphere by promoting public transportation in Atlanta. We look forward to your support on this issue—one that could make a big difference in future summers for us all.

Jennette Gayer
State Advocate

Recent action

Senate takes stand to limit mercury pollution

The U.S. Senate rejected a bill that would have allowed power plants to continue spewing toxic mercury pollution into our air. The bill, introduced by Sen. James Inhofe (Okla.), would have put up to 11,000 American lives at risk every year.

The defeated legislation sought to block the Environmental Protection Agency’s recently-finalized Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, which requires power plants to reduce their mercury pollution by 90 percent—the first-ever nationwide standard for mercury pollution from power plants.

In 2010, Georgia power plants emitted more than 1,154 pounds of toxic mercury. This mercury pollution threatens our air, water and health. Thirteen of 14 major watersheds in Georgia have waterways with an advisory for mercury pollution, warning citizens not to eat certain species of fish from those waters.

Fuel economy standards could save billions

Reducing gasoline consumption provides many benefits—among them cleaner air, less global warming pollution and less pressure to drill for oil. And, of course, it saves us money.

According to a report released by the Environment Georgia Research and Policy Center in August, Georgia would have saved more than $2 billion this summer with the new fuel economy standards in place. The state’s global warming pollution would have been reduced by about 5 million tons of carbon dioxide.

“We want Georgia off of oil,” said Jennette Gayer, state advocate with Environment Georgia. “Our fuel economy should reflect that. This gives us one more reason to move toward a cleaner, healthier future.”

But the costs of our oil dependence extend far beyond dollar signs. Relying on this dirty form of energy ties us to dangerous and unsustainable practices and has serious consequences, including smog, climate change and oil spills.

New fuel economy standards could save Georgians $2 billion at the pump.
Clean energy is hitting a milestone this fall—breaking 50 gigawatts of installed wind energy in the United States—enough to power 11 to 15 million homes. This benchmark is a huge step toward a cleaner and healthier future.

But we still have a lot of work ahead of us before we’ve totally re-powered our country with clean, renewable energy. A few key decisions will determine how much closer we can get to that vision.

A key incentive for the wind industry is about to expire at the end of the year. Equipped with the renewable energy production tax credit, the wind industry has been able to lower the cost of wind power by more than 90 percent, provide power to the equivalent of 10 million American homes, and foster economic development in all 50 states, including Georgia.

**A potential loss of 37,000 jobs**

If Congress doesn’t act to extend the credit before it expires, the wind industry will lose 37,000 jobs, and manufacturing of wind turbine parts will come to a screeching halt.

But Big Oil and other polluting industries have already begun to put their weight up against incentives that promote clean energy, and with only a few months until they expire, we’re running out of time.

Despite being behind in the race to install offshore wind farms, Georgia has continued to benefit from wind jobs as manufacturers, like ZF, site factories to build gear boxes around the state.

Further this summer, Environment Georgia worked with our sister organizations on the Atlantic coast to draft a letter to the president from more than 215 state, regional and national stakeholders urging his administration to take action this year on developing our offshore wind potential quickly and responsibly.

“Clean energy is remarkably important for Georgia,” said Jennette Gayer, state advocate with Environment Georgia. “Hitting these milestones will help get Georgia off oil and boost the state’s economy.”

**A vote to get off oil**

Throughout the summer, Environment Georgia also worked to secure a yes vote on Atlanta’s Regional Transportation Referendum. The referendum would have created a 1 percent sales tax for 10 years, and over half the regional funds would have been spent on public transportation projects—an imporant move toward getting off oil for good.

Atlanta suffers from a severe dependence on car transportation, which is a major part of Atlanta’s air pollution problem. Overall, the reduction in air pollution would have been equivalent to removing 72,000 cars from the road every single day.

Unfortunately, the referendum failed on Election Day.

“This is a setback for transit and cleaner air in Atlanta,” said Gayer. “But it can’t be the end of the story. We’ve already started to research the next best option for transit in Atlanta.”

As a Green Future Fund donor, with your permission, we’ll recognize your gift in our annual report and other publications, helping to inspire other members to make their own legacy gifts. Of course, you may also choose to give anonymously. Either way, any specific details you choose to provide about your gift will remain confidential.

If you’d like to become a member of the Green Future Fund, or if you have questions, call our planned giving coordinator, Marilyn Tesauro, at 1-800-841-7299 or plannedgiving@EnvironmentGeorgia.org.
Environment Georgia

Actions continue to keep Jekyll Island wild

Environment Georgia’s State Advocate Jennette Gayer has been appointed to a task force that will help rewrite a master plan for Jekyll Island—where she will move to keep development and drilling away from the island and its fragile ecosystems.

Jekyll Island is one of Georgia’s most beautiful natural places. But in recent years, developers have threatened the island’s forests, marshes and beaches with overdevelopment. In 1971, legislation protected 65 percent of the island from future development—a step that preserved the wild character of the island and that has allowed it to flourish as a nesting ground for sea turtles.

The status of the remaining 35 percent of the island has been the source of debate. Jekyll Island is one of Georgia’s 12 barrier islands and a remarkably unique spot for appreciating Georgia’s beautiful coast and viewing wildlife. Environment Georgia will work to ensure that it stays this way.

more online  
For updates on our work to keep Jekyll Island free from development and pollution, and our other efforts to preserve Georgia’s open and wild places visit:
www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org
or find us on Facebook at:
www.Facebook.com/EnvironmentGeorgia