

Minutes
Board of Natural Resources
Special Called Board Meeting
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, S. E.
Suite 1252 East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334

Wednesday, March 13, 2024
10:00 a.m.

Board Members

Joe Hatfield, Chair
Gary Vowell, Vice Chair
Lesley Reynolds, Secretary
Nancy Addison
Patrick Denney
Dan Garcia
Mark Hennessy
Duncan Johnson
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Paul Shailendra
Bodine Sinyard
Harley Yancey

Staff Members

Walter Rabon, Commissioner
Thomas Barnard
Trevor Santos
Kyle Pearson
Artica Gaston
Cathy Barnette
Taylor Brown
Soheila Naji
Jeff Cown
Katie Hegarty

The March 13, 2024 Special Called Conference Call Meeting of the Board of Natural Resources was called to order by Chairman Joe Hatfield.

Chairman Hatfield called on Cathy Barnette to declare a quorum.

Chairman Hatfield stated the special meeting was called to revisit the proposed projects for the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program that this board approved at the January board meeting.

Chairman Hatfield called on Walter Rabon, Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, to give background information and present the action item for the amended slate of projects.

Commissioner Rabon stated the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program is very important for conservation in our state. He further stated there are a number of checks and balances in place in this program, including staff review, approval by the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Board of Trustees, approval by the Board of Natural Resources, and then for consideration by the House and Senate subcommittees. He added the Senate Appropriations Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee voted down the slate of projects that this board passed in January and suggested that more reserves be kept in the Program's trust fund. He further added that pending legislation could impact what is taken into the trust fund in the future and the department should consider keeping reserves in the trust fund should that legislation pass.

Commissioner Rabon stated that for the four previous funding cycles, the program has allocated all available funds for projects each year, which left no reserves in the trust fund. He further stated that the Senate has asked that the program further increase the reserves should a need arise for funding larger projects such as land acquisitions of significant conservation importance.

Commissioner Rabon said it is truly amazing to see the impact GOSA has made on Georgia's recreational access and land protection in the last five years. He further stated that to date GOSA has awarded almost \$100,000,000 to cities, counties, state agencies, and non-profit organizations. He added that when you add in the grant recipient's matching funds, it is a total of \$272,000,000 in conservation efforts, since the beginning of this program in 2019.

Commissioner Rabon stated that yesterday, the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund Board of Trustees voted in favor of an amended slate, taking into consideration the request made by the Senate subcommittee.

Commissioner Rabon called on Soheila Naji, GOSA Program Coordinator, to present the amended slate of projects for the 2023-2024 funding cycle.

Ms. Naji stated that the Senate Appropriations Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee voted down the 2023-2024 proposed slate of projects and asked the Board of

Trustees and the Board of Natural Resources revisit the slate of projects. She further stated that the proposed approved projects have been adjusted accordingly to comply with that balance. She added that the Board of Trustees met yesterday via conference call and approved an amended slate of projects.

Ms. Naji stated she would like to revisit the major considerations used in selecting these projects. She further stated that for the 2023-2024 funding cycle, there was a total of 34 submitted pre-applications which accounted for over \$63,000,000 in requested funding. She added that the proposals were reviewed in accordance with the approved pre-application evaluation criteria. She further added that the revised proposal of approved conservation projects were sent to the board via email last week. Ms. Naji stated that the map depicts the distribution of these projects throughout the state.

Ms. Naji stated that upon approval, the slate of projects approved today by the Board of Natural Resources shall be forwarded to the Chairs of the State Appropriations subcommittees in both the House and Senate seeking final approval. She further stated that these approved applicants at that point will be invited to progress to the second-level of application.

Commissioner Rabon stated that the proposed slate provides over \$20,000,000 in funding to 12 projects around the state. He further stated that in doing so, it allows nearly a third of the collected funds, around \$10,000,000, to remain in the reserves.

Chairman Hatfield called for a motion to approve the amended slate of projects.

Mr. Hennessy announced that he would abstain from the vote.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Vowell, and carried with Mr. Hennessy abstaining that the Board approve the Board of Trustees of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Fund 2023-2024 Amended Proposal of Approved Conservation Projects.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Joe Hatfield, Chairman

ATTEST:

Lesley Reynolds, Secretary