

Beth Brown, Director of Communications
404.522.5022 x.123 bbrown@accg.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COUNTY GOVERNMENTS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN LAND CONSERVATION

Celebrate County Government Week, May 3 – 9, 2009
“Greening Our Future”

ATLANTA, Ga. (May 5, 2009) – From small parks of just a few acres that provide an outdoors escape for local residents to large tracts that are nationally recognized for their natural resource and recreational value, county governments are actively involved in funding land conservation projects throughout the state. The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) celebrates these efforts as part of County Government Week, May 3 – 9, 2009 which focuses this year on “Greening our Future.”

“Just a decade ago, we did not have many requests for technical assistance on land conservation issues,” said ACCG Deputy Director Ross King. “As Georgia’s population grew, people started making the connection between land conservation, water stewardship and protecting their quality of life. County officials responded by proposing Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) and bond projects that included funding for green space that have been widely supported by local voters.”

In the metro Atlanta area, **Cobb, Cherokee** and **Forsyth** counties all passed bonds in 2008 to support a variety of land conservation projects representing an investment of \$150 million. Other counties have actively participated in the Georgia Land Conservation Program which provides grants and low-interest loans for land conservation projects. Some of the counties that have protected conservation lands from funds provided through this program include **Bulloch, Wilkinson, Harris, Glynn, Bibb, Bartow** and **Dougherty**.

A common theme in today’s approach to land conservation is partnerships, especially when it comes to funding large acquisitions. County governments are working with the State of Georgia, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service as well as private foundations and conservation organizations including The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land and others to piece together funds and apply for grants to protect conservation lands of statewide significance. Many of these lands have been identified by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as priorities for protection through the State Wildlife Action Plan.

Projects of statewide significance that have involved financial support from Georgia counties include the protection of McLemore Cove in **Walker County**, Silver Lake Wildlife Management Area in **Decatur County**, Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area in **Rockdale County**, and Paulding Forest Wildlife Management Area in **Paulding** and **Polk** counties.

(more)

“County government is really stepping up and playing a critical role when it comes to land conservation in Georgia. They are anxious to work with us to ensure these lands are conserved for future generations – even in today’s challenging economic times,” said Rex Boner, Southeastern Regional Director of The Conservation Fund. “The Association County Commissioners of Georgia is providing an important link between county government and the land conservation community, and we appreciate the statewide network that they represent.”

ACCG is committed to assisting counties with land conservation efforts throughout the state. In 2008, ACCG launched its Land Conservation Initiative and dedicated a full-time director to assist counties with land conservation efforts including project identification and funding. ACCG also is partnering with DNR and the Georgia Conservancy thanks to a grant provided through the Woodruff Foundation in the Coastal Georgia Land Conservation Initiative. This project involves mapping species and their habitats in 11 counties along and near the Georgia coast and working with those counties to incorporate this information into future land use decisions.

In addition, ACCG is working with the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) on the Green Infrastructure Project through the Sustainable Community Forestry Program. Through this effort, ACCG and GFC are working with counties to protect tree canopies and promote connectivity.

“Land conservation is important to Georgia’s counties, and we want to help facilitate their efforts with state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, private foundations and others to give them the resources that they need,” said ACCG Land Initiative Director Beth Bradley. “We’re excited to see county government taking such a leading role in land conservation and look forward to even more success stories in the years to come.”

First celebrated in 1991, National County Government Week (NCGW) was created by the National Association of Counties (NACo) to raise public awareness and understanding about the roles and responsibilities of the nation’s 3,068 counties.

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Editor’s Note: ACCG encourages you to contact your county officials for more information on land conservation projects in your area. For more information on ACCG’s Land Conservation Initiative, please contact Beth Bradley at bbradley@accg.org or (404) 522-5022.

About ACCG: It is the mission of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia to enhance the role, stature and responsiveness of county government in Georgia. Since counties are the level of government closest to the people and serve all the people of the state, ACCG will promote the ability of Georgia counties to provide public services responsibly, efficiently, and cost effectively through cooperative legislative action, education of public officials, provision of quality member services and technical assistance, and increasing public awareness of critical local government issues. For more information, go to www.accg.org.