



News Release

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FOREST LAND CONSERVATION GETS A BOOST IN PERDUE-SIGNED BILL

Georgia forest land owners have been given extra time to assess the benefits of and to enroll in a significant forest conservation program, the Forest Land Protection Act (FLPA). With the signature of Governor Sonny Perdue, Senate Bill 55 (*Senator Chip Pearson, R-Dawsonville*) extends the filing deadline for landowners in the FLPA by two months, from April 1, 2009 to June 1, 2009. The bill also requires tax assessors establishing a property's fair market value to consider any decreased value of the land as a result of its being in a conservation easement.

"This is a step in the right direction for sustaining our forested acres in the state of Georgia," said Buford Sanders, Georgia Forestry Commission Staff Stewardship Forester. "Instead of focusing on 'highest and best use' land values, tax assessors must now consider diminished monetary values of forested land placed in conservation easements. Naturally, that helps owners keep their lands in forests, which benefit every Georgian in terms of clean air, clean water, and abundant forest products for the future." In addition, said Sanders, the filing extension allows landowners ample time to review tax implications as they apply to an owner's specific forest land.

Georgia voters approved the FLPA in November of 2008. It stipulates that landowners with more than 200 acres of contiguous forested property may receive significant property tax relief in exchange for agreeing to not develop the land for 15 years.

Georgia recently reached a milestone for conservation by protecting its 100,000th acre under the Georgia Land Conservation Program begun in 2005. For more information about conservation easements and other conservation-related issues such as tax implications, visit the GLCP webpage at www.glcp.ga.gov. Additional information about working forest conservation easements and services of the Georgia Forestry Commission can be found at GaTrees.org.

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