



Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program

2025 - 2026

Conserve Georgia

Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program

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Suite 1370 East Tower
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Updated 4/15/2025

Preface: 2025-2026 Grant Cycle

Georgia voters made evident their desire for a funding mechanism dedicated to securing the future of our critical natural resources. In 2018, 83% of voters authorized the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act. Following that, numerous partners, organizations, contributors, and citizens collaborated with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR) to offer the inaugural funding cycle of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP) during the 2019-2020 fiscal year. This program consists of grants, known as Conserve Georgia Grants, and loans made available to local governments, certain nongovernmental organizations, and state government agencies.

Prospective projects will undergo a web-based, multi-phase, competitive application process submitted to GADNR, which opens August 1, 2025.

The purpose of this manual is to serve as a source of information and guidance for prospective applicants in securing program funding. It details important program fundamentals and goals, while also providing instruction on how to apply for the various project types authorized under Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act.

Note: This booklet does not contain all materials and forms needed to apply for GOSP assistance. Applicants should visit the GOSP Homepage to access all current application materials and forms. These can be accessed at www.gadnr.org/gosp

Funding

The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act dedicates 40% of existing State sales and use taxes on outdoor sporting goods to fund stewardship projects for existing state and local parks, acquire and develop new state and local parks, and acquire and protect new lands critical to the protection of our wildlife and clean water supplies. Each year's official funding amount will be announced shortly before the funding cycle begins. These funds are available without raising or enacting any new taxes.

Support

GA DNR staff is available to help guide applicants through the process associated with successfully submitting a complete grant or loan application. The best source of information in preparing an application is this manual used in conjunction with the resources found at www.gadnr.org/gosp. You may also contact the GOSP Grant Specialist who can explain the program in detail, help determine eligibility, and provide assistance to make an application as competitive as possible.

Quick Facts

Program Name	Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program
Funding Allocation	Dependent on State sales and use tax collected by sporting goods stores
Eligible Applicants	Qualified local governments; Constituted recreation authorities; State agencies; and certain nongovernmental entities
Permissible Uses	- Stewardship and acquisition projects that support local parks and trails - Stewardship projects that improve and maintain state owned land and facilities - Acquisition projects that protect critical conservation areas
Minimum Conserve Georgia Grant Amount	Local Parks & Trails Projects: \$500,000 State Projects: No min. amount
Maximum Conserve Georgia Grant Amount	Local Parks & Trails Projects: \$3,000,000 State Projects: No max. amount
Match Requirements	25% Match Required (Minimum)
Retainage	25% held
Grant Term	2 years

Funding Cycle 2025-2026 Timeline

The application process consists of two phases. The Pre-application is an initial submission of projects plans and funding needs. After the project evaluation process, successful Pre-applicants will be invited to a Second-level application which primarily consists of higher level, greater detailed information requirements. All invitees will receive funding pending a fully completed Second-level Application. The application deadline schedule for this cycle is as follows:

Pre-application deadline: Midnight, October 17, 2025

Second-level Application deadline (if invited): Midnight, May 29, 2026

The 2025-2026 funding cycle timeline is as follows:

- August 1, 2025: Pre-application period opens
- October 17, 2025: Pre-applications due
- October 18 - December 2025: GADNR staff reviews, evaluates, and ranks Pre-applications
- January - spring 2026: Proposal of Conservation Projects approved by the GOSP Board of Trustees, Board of Natural Resources and the Appropriations Subcommittees of the House and Senate over GADNR and GEFA
Note: Meeting dates for the January Board of Trustees and Board of Natural Resources meetings will be publicly noticed at www.gadnr.org/gosp.
- Spring 2026: All Pre-applicants are notified of results, and selected Pre-applicants are invited to Second-level application
- May 29, 2026: Second-level applications due
- Summer 2026: Financial workshops conducted for successful applicants
- Summer 2026: Project Agreements anticipated to be signed

Contact Information

To better assist Georgia residents in attaining their recreation and conservation goals, the GOSP team is available through the following contact information during normal business hours. All general information or procedural inquiries should be sent to the GOSP Grant Specialist.

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Section 1: Overview and Process

1.1 Program Overview

The purpose of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program is to provide support to state parks and trails; to support local parks and trails of state and regional significance; to provide stewardship of conservation land; and to acquire critical areas for the provision or protection of clean water, wildlife, hunting, or fishing, for military installation buffering or for natural resource-based outdoor recreation. This mission is accomplished through the distribution of funds through the Conserve Georgia Grant and low interest loans.

1.2 Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund is the body statutorily charged with evaluating and awarding funding for eligible project applications. The Board of Trustees, in coordination with the Board of Natural Resources, shall evaluate the proposals in accordance with priorities established by the Board of Trustees. There shall be 11 Trustees as follows:

- (1) The Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, who shall also serve as Chairperson of the Board;
- (2) The Director of the State Forestry Commission;
- (3) The Director of the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) of the Department of Natural Resources;
- (4) The Commissioner of the Department of Transportation;
- (5) The Director of the Coastal Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources, as an ex officio, nonvoting member;
- (6) The Director of the Wildlife Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources, as an ex officio, nonvoting member;
- (7) The Director of State Parks & Historic Sites Division of the Department of Natural Resources, as an ex officio, nonvoting member;
- (8) (A) Two members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; and
(B) Two members appointed by the President of the Senate.

2025-2026 Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund Board of Trustees



Walter Rabon, Chairman
Commissioner of the Georgia
Department of Natural Resources



Jeff Cown
Director of the
Environmental Protection
Division



Russell McMurry
Commissioner of the Department
of Transportation



Johnny Sabo
Director of the State Forestry
Commission



Bo Butler
Lt. Governor Appointee
(Term expires on 06/30/2025)



Eddie Canon
Speaker of the House Appointee
(Term expires on 06/30/2025)



Aaron McWhorter
Lt. Governor Appointee
(Term expires on 06/30/2025)



Truitt Eavenson
Speaker of the House Appointee
(Current term expires on 07/20/2027)

Ex-Officio Nonvoting Members



Angie Johnson
Director of the State Parks &
Historic Sites Division



Chris Harper
Director of the Wildlife Resources
Division



Doug Haymans
Director of the Coastal Resources
Division

Section 2: Policies

2.1 Conserve Georgia Grant Funding Basics

Funding Amount

Conserve Georgia grant and loan requests have a \$500,000 minimum and are limited to a maximum award of \$3,000,000.

There is no minimum or maximum grant request amounts for the projects submitted by State agencies.

Reimbursement Payments

GOSP functions primarily as a reimbursement program for Conserve Georgia grant recipients. Grantees must have the financial capacity to pay for project expenses prior to being reimbursed by grant funds. Once project expenses have been incurred and paid for by the Grantee, payment documentation can then be submitted to GOSP for reimbursement, up to the amount of the grant award. Where required by law, intergovernmental agreement, or budget policy, etc., state agencies may be allowed funding draws, requiring approval of GADNR. All reporting responsibilities must still be adhered to throughout the entirety of the project.

Expenses directly related to the project scope but incurred prior to the Project Agreement effective date are not reimbursable. Appraisals, project design, environmental compliance reviews, and grant writing expenses may be counted **as match only** if incurred within 18 months of the close of the second level application. Furthermore, the aggregate of these match items may not to exceed 15% of the total project cost. These expenses are subject to GADNR approval on a case-by-case basis. See Section 2.3A for eligible expenses that may be reimbursed.

Matching Requirements

Conserve Georgia grant funds can reimburse up to 75% of a project's total cost. Grantees must provide at least 25% of the total project cost as match, either in the form of cash or in-kind match. The exact match requirement for individual projects will be determined by an approved Project Budget and identified in the Project Agreement (see section 2.3B for eligibility of match and grant expenses).

Retainage

GOSP will retain 25% of each reimbursement request. Once the project is complete and all required documentation is submitted and approved, the retainage will be released to the grantee following a final audit and inspection by GADNR.

Property Appraisals

Property appraisals are required for all acquisition projects and must be based on current fair market value of the land. Appraisal requirements also apply to any property proposed as match for acquisition or stewardship projects. Where an appraisal is necessary, one current full narrative appraisal report produced by a licensed appraiser, which meets current State guidelines, is required for the Pre-application phase.

The Applicants will be required to submit second full narrative appraisal during the Second-level Application if invited.

Current GADNR Appraisal Guidelines are outlined below and should be consulted before initiating the appraisal process:

- 1) The Applicant will complete one appraisal during the Pre-application phase for all acquisitions and donated real property if used as match (either fee-simple, or the acquisition of a conservation easement). The appraisal must be performed by a Member Appraisal Institute (MAI) certified appraiser.
- 2) The Applicant will be required to submit second full narrative appraisal during the Second-level Application if invited.
- 3) At least one of the two appraisals will be reviewed by an outside review appraiser assigned by GADNR.
- 4) Costs incurred by the independent appraiser are eligible for GOSP reimbursement, and subject to all GOSP reimbursement policies if awarded.
- 5) All appraisals must be completed to the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) standards.
- 6) All appraisals must be in narrative format.
- 7) For a **donation** of fee-simple property, the Applicant may complete an appraisal, accept an appraisal prepared by the donor, or accept a signed letter of value from the County Tax Assessor.
- 8) For a **donation** of a conservation easement, the Applicant may either complete an appraisal or accept an appraisal prepared by the donor.
- 9) The Applicant and the seller will agree on a sales price within twelve months of the effective date of the appraisal. The Applicant will work to assure the option is signed within twelve months of the effective date of the appraisal acceptance by GADNR.

All appraisals are subject to an independent appraisal review **for Applicants who are invited to the Second-level Application stage only**. This is required by GADNR to ensure compliance with appraisal standards and consistency with current fair market value. GADNR will assign the independent reviewer and forward the appraisals to the reviewer on behalf of the Applicant.

This service incurs a cost, however, independent appraisal reviews are eligible for reimbursement under GOSP. Applicants should expect an invoice directly from the independent reviewer, and must make payment directly to the reviewer.

Once this review has been concluded, GADNR will update the Applicant on whether each appraisal is accepted or rejected. In the occurrence of a rejected appraisal, the Applicant will receive the reviewer's recommendations on how to bring the appraisal into acceptance. Acceptance of appraisals will be entered into the application by the GOSP Grant Specialist when requirements are met. Notification will be sent to Applicants in the occurrence of a rejected appraisal, including an explanation of the items which must be addressed in order to achieve acceptance.

Note that appraisals and the independent GADNR review can be quite time consuming. **Ordering your appraisals as early as possible is strongly encouraged.**

2.2 Applicant Eligibility

The following summarizes the eligibility requirements for entities and organizations to be eligible for GOSP assistance. Entities that are not eligible are encouraged to consider partnering with eligible entities.

Eligible Project Applicants include:

- Qualified local governments as defined in paragraph 18 of subsection (a) of O.C.G.A. 50-8-2:
 - A county or municipality which:
 - (A) Has a comprehensive plan in conformity with the minimum standards and procedures;
 - (B) Has made its local plan implementation mechanisms consistent with those established in its comprehensive plan and with the minimum standards and procedures;
 - (C) Has not failed to participate in the department's mediation or other means of resolving conflicts in a manner which, in the judgment of the department, reflects a good faith effort to resolve any conflict; and
 - Must be in good standing with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA)

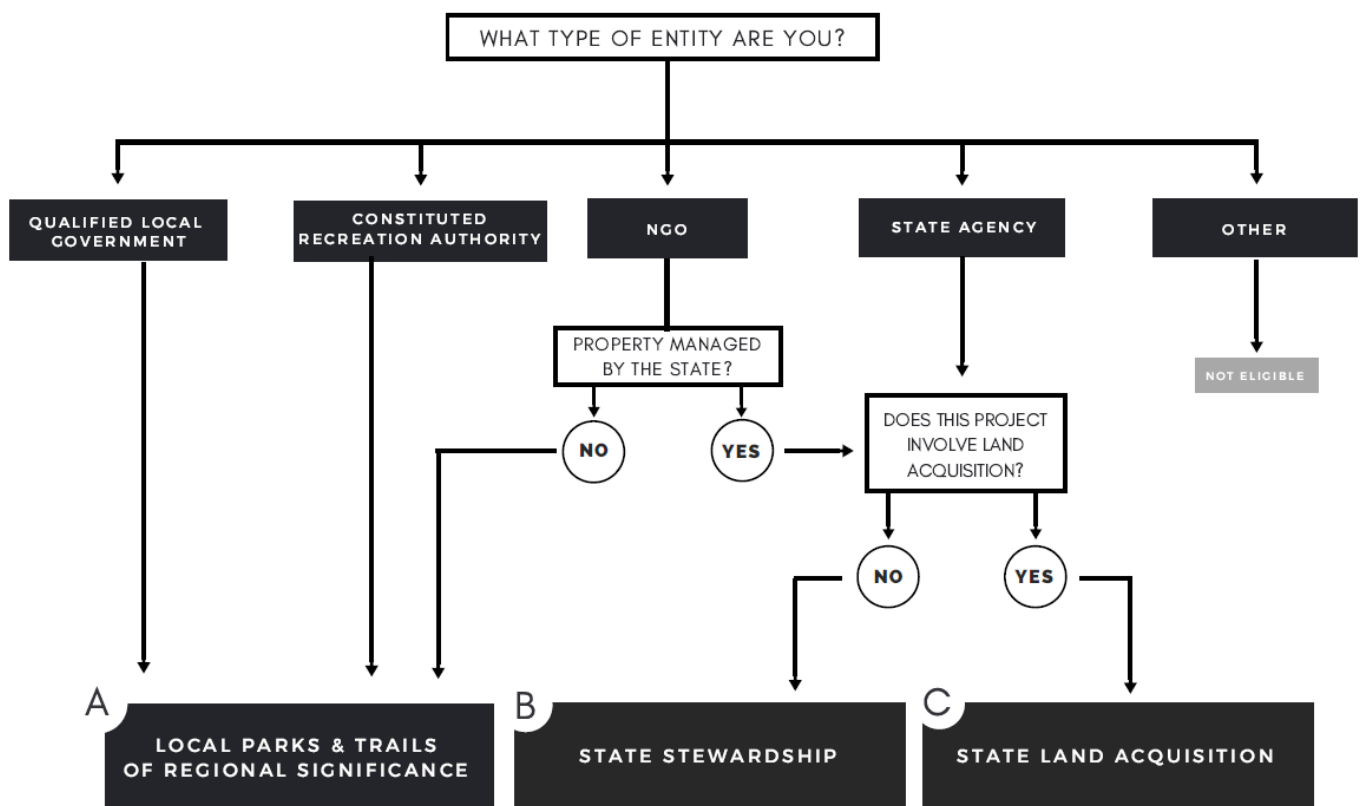
Note: Applicants may contact DCA to verify if they have met these criteria and are thus currently in good standing. The current DCA compliance report can be found at <https://apps.dca.ga.gov/LocalGovStatus/planning.asp>.

- Any constituted recreation authority registered with DCA
- State agencies
- Nongovernmental entities, defined as any nonprofit organization **on file with the Secretary of State Office** primarily concerned with the protection and conservation of land and natural resources, as evidenced by its organizational documents.

2.3 Project Eligibility

Since no two projects are exactly alike, GOSP projects will be funneled into one of three distinct project types. This ensures that each project can compete fairly with other closely related projects, while allowing the Board of Trustees to address the wide array of priorities for any given funding cycle.

The flow chart below is provided to further explain the three GOSP application paths and assist applicants in identifying the proper application to complete:



The three GOSP project types are:

A. Local Parks and Trails of State and Regional Significance

These funding opportunities are specially reserved for **local governments, constituted recreation authorities, and nongovernmental entities** to acquire and/or improve **local** parks, trails, and conservation lands. The Local Parks and Trails of State and Regional Significance Application shall be used to apply for any of the three distinct projects below:

- Acquisitions of property, to include conservation easements
- **Local** stewardship funding for maintenance, restoration, or improvement projects
- **Combination projects** that involve both the acquisition of land, either through fee-simple or conservation easement purchase **AND** for maintenance, restoration or improvement for the land or conservation easement acquired

Note: Local governments and constituted recreation authorities MAY NOT apply for state stewardship or state acquisition grants.

B. State Stewardship

State stewardship funding opportunities are available for **State agencies and nongovernmental entities only**. These entities may apply for maintenance, restoration, or improvement projects to enhance public access, use or safe enjoyment of permanently protected conservation land and current state-owned parks.

Local governments and constituted recreation authorities MAY NOT apply for state stewardship grants.

C. State Land Acquisition

State Land Acquisitions funding opportunities are available for **State agencies and nongovernmental entities only**. These agencies may apply to acquire critical areas for the provision or protection of clean water, wildlife, hunting, for military installation buffering or for natural resource based outdoor recreation. The State Land Acquisition Application shall be used to apply for either of the two distinct projects below:

- Acquisitions of property, to include conservation easements.
- **Combination projects** that involve both the acquisition of land, either through fee-simple or conservation easement purchases, **AND** for the maintenance, restoration or improvement of the lands or conservation easements acquired.

Local governments and constituted recreation authorities MAY NOT apply for state acquisition grants.

Note: All aspects of prospective projects and acquisitions must completely reside within Georgia's borders. Applications for projects in which any part of it resides in another state other than Georgia, either in part or in whole, will not be considered for funding.

2.3A Items Eligible for Reimbursement

Below are the most typical items which may be submitted for reimbursement. To qualify for reimbursement, an expenditure must be directly related to the project and have occurred after the signed Project Agreement date, but before the maximum 24-month project completion period. All costs must be reasonable and support responsible financial stewardship principles. The Board of Trustees and GADNR may evaluate budget items for exorbitance and require costs to be adjusted where prudent. Final Reimbursement Requests must be made within 45 days of the project completion date.

Typical reimbursable items:

- Capital expenditures for acquisition (indirect costs not allowed). For example:
 - Purchase Cost (must not exceed highest appraised fair market value)
 - Independent appraisal reviews as required by GADNR
 - Legal fees directly associated with the conveyance of real property or conservation easements
 - Expenses directly related to the acquisition of real property or conservation easements
 - Environmental reviews conducted after signing the project agreement with DNR
- Permits
- Small equipment cost in the form of small hand tools and material directly related to construction/development
- Direct materials
- Contractual services such as:
 - Surveys
 - Architectural and Engineering **limited to no more than 15% of the grant value ***
 - Environmental reviews, planning and consulting conducted after signing the project agreement with DNR (**Most other consulting services are not eligible. Contact the GOSP Grant Specialist for guidance.**)
 - Contractors and subcontractors directly related to the project scope
- Contingency - Limited to 15% of the grant value **

* Applicants may include Design & Architectural (D&A) costs on the budget _reimbursable and match_ limited to 15% of the total project cost. **Reimbursable portion of D&A must not exceed 15% of the requested grant amount.**

****Applicants may include contingency on the budget _reimbursable and match_ limited to 15% of the total project cost. Reimbursable portion of contingency must not exceed 15% of the requested grant amount.**

If unsure whether an expenditure is eligible for reimbursement, contact the GOSP Grant Specialist for verification prior to submission.

2.3B Items Eligible for Match

Applicants are required to provide matching funds equal to at least 25% of the total project cost, although Applicants are encouraged to provide more. Higher levels of match commitment will yield higher point awards on the Pre-application. All sources of match must be identified in the grant application. To qualify for match, an item must be directly related to the project and have occurred after the agreement effective date, but before the maximum 24-month project completion period expiration. The only exceptions to this are appraisals, project planning and engineering, grant writing, and environmental compliance reviews, not to exceed 15% of the total project cost, and within 18 months of the close of the second level, which may be counted **as match only**. The following are common sources of matching funds:

- Cash expenses from the Applicant
- Funds secured via external grant
- Financial donations from private organizations and individuals
- In-kind labor, equipment, and materials provided by the Applicant
- In-kind donations of labor, services, materials, and equipment from private organizations and individuals. Professional service donations (e.g. engineering services, landscape design, etc.) are valued at an hourly rate consistent with similar professionals in the same part of the state. **In-kind or Donations of unskilled labor are calculated at an hourly rate of \$11.40 /hour. Applicants must use the Georgia Median Hourly Wage standards for the most comparable occupation identified on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics site, found at https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ga.htm.**
- Donation of real property or conservation easements from a third party. Donating property is an excellent way for private organizations and individuals to support public outdoor recreation. The following are several key considerations regarding donated property used as match:
 - To be considered as match, the Applicant must provide official appraisals, per section 2.1, prepared by a licensed appraiser and deemed acceptable for grant purposes by an independent GADNR appraisal review. This process does not apply to other sources of matching funds.
 - Upon completion of the project, the donated property becomes subject to terms of the Project Agreement.
 - Donated property is subject to the same appraisal requirements as property acquired with grant funds.

Note: Material donations must be entered at fair market value. These items shall not be valued based on donor or applicant opinion nor original purchase price by the donor.

The agreement retainage amount will be withheld by GADNR until the Grantee's total match commitment is reconciled per the Agreement. Shortfalls in match will be reconciled by means of the project retainage.

2.3C Items Ineligible for Reimbursement or Match

Items that are not directly associated and essential for the completion and execution of a project are generally ineligible for reimbursement or match. Since the number of potentially ineligible items is space-prohibitive to list in this manual, it is recommended to contact the GOSP Grant Specialist for verification prior to incurring such costs. Examples of ineligible costs may include:

- Indirect costs
- Heavy Equipment and large tools
- Travel
- Incidental costs
- Ribbon-cutting/inaugurating ceremony costs
- Meals
- Expenditures prior to or after the approved Project Agreement start and end dates, except for those items outlined in Section 2.1
- Administrative labor costs of internal staff
- Maintenance of equipment

Note: Most consulting services are not eligible. Contact the GOSP Grant Specialist for guidance.

2.3D Extensions and Scope Revisions

Extensions

Grantees may request project term extensions if the project is expected to exceed the 24-month deadline. Extensions will be limited to an additional 90 days and approved or disapproved by GADNR staff. Subsequent extensions or extensions in excess of 90 days shall be reviewed by the GADNR staff and a recommendation of action will be forwarded to the Chairperson of the GOSA Board of Trustees. The Chairperson and/or the Board may either approve or disapprove the extension. If the request is granted, the Grantee must sign a Project Agreement Amendment. If disapproved and the original grant term cannot be fulfilled, funding may be deobligated in part or in whole. All extension requests will be submitted via the GOSP online portal.

Change of Scope

Grantees may request to change the scope of the original project. Requests will be reviewed by the GADNR staff, and a recommendation of action will be forwarded to the Chairperson of the

GOSA Board of Trustees. The Chairperson and/or the Board may either approve or disapprove the request. If the request is granted, the Grantee must sign a Project Agreement Amendment. If disapproval of the request will prevent the project from being completed as originally awarded, funding may be deobligated in part or in whole. All changes of scope requests will be submitted via the GOSP online portal.

Should projects included in a proposal be subject to time constraints for completion as determined by the Board of Trustees of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund, the Board shall immediately provide written notice of same to the Chairpersons of the Appropriations subcommittees of the House of Representatives and Senate maintaining oversight authority over the Department of Natural Resources and the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority.

GADNR will make every attempt to submit requests to the Chairperson and the Board of Trustees at the next meeting, although the timing of submitted requests and Board schedules may not allow review until subsequent meetings. For this reason, Grantees should heavily consider the need for such requests in order to minimize project delays.

Note: It is critical that Grantees understand that expenses, donations, or in-kind materials or services may be ineligible for consideration after the original agreement date and before an approved Project Agreement Amendment is mutually signed and tendered by GADNR. Incurring these costs prior to an approved Project Agreement Amendment will be done at the Grantee's own risk.

2.3E Project Types

Loans

From within the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund, moneys may also be made available in each fiscal year for loans to any qualified applicant to defray the costs of conservation land or of conservation easements placed upon property that ensure its permanent protection as conservation land. Any such loan shall bear interest at a rate established by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority. Contact the GOSP Grant Specialist for more information concerning loans.

Acquisition Projects

The acquisition of property may be in the form of either fee-simple, donation, lease (of 25 years or more beyond the Project Agreement date), or through conservation easement.

Land acquisitions for local assistance must occur in accordance with state and Federal guidelines for preparation of appraisals and eligible transaction costs (see section 2.1). The following are several highlights regarding grant-funded land acquisition.

- **Condemnation/Eminent Domain:** Acquisitions must be on a willing-seller willing-buyer basis. State law prohibits the expenditure funds for acquisition of property acquired via condemnation.
- **Property Value:** Awards for land acquisition (and property used as match) are based on the appraised value or the purchase price and must not exceed fair market value as authenticated by the independent appraisal reviewer.
- **Eligible Costs:** Eligible acquisition costs include the fair market value of the property/actual purchase price and real estate transaction costs (e.g. appraisal costs, land surveys, legal fees, etc.).
- **Pre-Award Acquisition:** No land can be acquired prior to funding unless the Applicant receives a letter of retroactivity from GADNR. This letter is subject to Board of Trustee approval, and schedule. Any Applicants who anticipate acquiring property prior to award should contact the GOSP Grant Specialist in order to request a letter of retroactivity. These shall be reviewed and approved on a case by case basis.

NOTES:

Retroactivity requests for Local Parks and Trails of Regional Significance projects are not permitted before the Pre-application period opens.

For Local Parks and Trails of Regional Significance projects, applicants may request retroactivity only if they are invited to submit a second-level application.

Conservation Easements

Conservation easements qualify for GOSP funding. Within the application narrative, the following elements should be addressed:

- Accreditation of application and/or easement manager.
- Clear identification of each **specific** conservation need and value.
 - Specific species or attribute to be protected (habitat, species, clean air, water quality/quantity, prevention of sprawl, etc.)
 - Conservation priority (Species or habitat endangered, threatened, or recommended for listing, nationally or local listed, etc.)
 - Amount and frequency of attribute, species, or Specific Conservation Areas (SCAs) within the protected property. For example: "100 acres of longleaf pine and gopher tortoise habitat in the eastern portion of the total 150-acre property, 25 acres of red cockaded woodpecker habitat on the west end of the property, separated by 25 acres of land with no conservation value."
- A detailed and measurable management plan for each specific conservation need, to include Best Management Practices to be employed. There should be a direct and conspicuous relationship between each conservation need and the associated management plan item.

- How the management plan will maintain its goals into the future.
- Consistency with the Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) priorities, State Parks & Historic Resources Division (SPHRD) priorities, and/or Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).
- Statewide significance and public benefit of the easement.
- Non-conservation development restrictions.
- How and by whom mineral rights will be held.

Required Uploads in the Pre-application for Conservation Easement Purchase or Donation:

- A copy of the proposed easement agreement must be uploaded where noted in the Pre-application.
- Proof of accreditation of application and/or easement manager

Certain elements are not allowed in a conservation easement under GOSP. Those are:

- Subdividing without GADNR or Board of Trustees approval
- Conversion of any part of the easement out of conservation as written in the original easement language
- Amendments to the easement unless it is to expand, protect, or improve the conservation value of the property

Note: In the occurrence of dissolution of the conservation easement trust, manager, or holder, it is important for all parties to understand that the conservation easement shall remain protected in perpetuity.

Stewardship Projects

Funding for stewardship projects is based on costs associated with the activities outlined in the application. For stewardship projects supported by GOSP funding, Applicants must own the property, have secured a conservation easement that provides legal access for the purposes of the project, or have documented landowner authority allowing the development to occur.

Note: All leases and use agreements must have at least 25 years remaining, measured from the mutually signed Project Agreement date, to qualify for GOSP funding.

Combination Projects

A Combination Project includes both the acquisition of a property, and a stewardship component for the property once acquired. Both aspects should be clearly described in the application narrative criteria.

2.3F Regional Significance

GOSP aims to prioritize projects in such a way as to satisfy the public's desire for conservation lands, improve the outdoor recreation experience, and promote the sustainability of Georgia's natural resources. One of the methods used to achieve this is to evaluate the *regional significance* of each project. This can be satisfied in many ways, although in simple terms, regional significance can be achieved by enhancing the natural-resourced based outdoor experience and quality of Georgia's natural resources, while providing value to a greater community beyond the local area.

2.4 Control

Grantees must maintain adequate control over any land acquired or developed with GOSP funds. Adequate control may be defined as ownership, conservation easement, use agreement, or lease. Leases must have at least 25 years remaining at the time of a mutually signed Project Agreement.

Applications submitted by an entity other than the property owner must include a signed Statement of Landowner Support in the Pre-Application phase. This document is to be procured by the applicant.

The applicant must identify all outstanding rights or interests held by others on subject properties. A signed letter explaining control and tenure or an affidavit proving ownership (this document is to be procured by the applicant) will suffice.

2.5 Long-term Obligations for Grant Recipients

It is important for potential Grantees to understand long-term obligations that are associated with this program. The following are several key requirements.

- Ownership: Grantees must retain legal control and oversight of the property (via ownership or lease) and maintain facilities on property acquired or developed with a GOSP funding.
- Income: Grantees may charge reasonable user fees. All income received from these user fees must be used towards management and maintenance of the subject property. GOSP funds shall not be awarded to projects aimed at generating general revenue.
- Perpetuity language for acquisitions – Real property or conservation easements acquired with GOSP funds shall remain protected as conservation lands into *perpetuity*. Grantees are required to record a final deed with the local government having jurisdiction containing the GADNR required Protective Language:

Note: This Protective Language is also available at www.gadnr.org/gosp.

“The Property was acquired in part using grant funds provided to “the Grantee” by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources pursuant to the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act, specifically Conserve Georgia Grant Number _____. The Property shall, from this date forward, be managed for conservation purposes in accordance with the conservation objective of the Grant and in compliance with the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act. The property shall not be used for purposes inconsistent with the conservation objective of the Grant without the approval and conditions set by Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund Board of Trustees.”

Section 3: Application Process

3.1 Grant Application Process

GOSP annual Conserve Georgia grant and loan opportunities involve a competitive application process by means of three distinct funding pools via a 100% online application. **No paper application submissions will be considered for funding.** The funding levels and priorities of each pool is set by the Board of Trustees and may change year to year. The three funding pools are: Local Parks and Trails of State and Regional Significance, State Stewardship, and State Land Acquisition.

The road to securing GOSP funding begins with the completion of the Pre-application, available at www.gadnr.org/gosp. It is in this initial phase that the Applicant inputs their demographic data, contact information, project scope, answers administrative and qualitative criteria questions, and supplies required project documentation needed by GADNR to rank each project. After GADNR staff ranks all completed Pre-applications, The Board of Trustees will review the Pre-applications and select projects to move forward to an invitation only **Second-level Application**, also available at www.gadnr.org/gosp. All Applicants receiving this invitation will receive funding, pending a completed and approved Second-level Application. It is in this stage that the Applicants supply more detailed information than what was submitted in the Pre-application. They also submit required environmental reviews, as well as various legal documents required by GADNR.

Second-level Applications must be submitted by midnight on the prescribed deadline date. All Second-level Applications are reviewed by GADNR staff to verify application completeness. Applicants who are unable to meet all requirements for a complete application by the deadline may be granted an extension by GADNR.

Upon completion of the Second-level Application, GADNR will schedule mandatory Financial Workshop with grantees.

After attending a Financial Workshop, Grantees will mutually sign a Project Agreement with GADNR signifying the completion of the application process and may move forward with their project.

3.2 Pre-application

The Pre-Application is the initial stage of the funding application process. Since GOSP is a competitive program, the Pre-application serves as the basis for selecting which projects advance towards approval. It is fundamentally comprised of weighted grading criteria, which shall accumulate a total score reviewable by GADNR and the Board of Trustees. Successful Pre-applications advance to the Second-level Application.

Pre-applications must be submitted by midnight on the prescribed deadline date. All Pre-applications are reviewed by GADNR staff to verify applicant eligibility, application completeness, and are priority ranked based on the project evaluation criteria and funding cycle priorities.

Specific direction on how to satisfy these requirements are contained within the Pre-application itself. The Pre-application can be completed online at www.gadnr.org/gosp. All eligible Pre-applications must include:

- **Responses to each of the Pre-application evaluation criteria**
- **Pre-application Cover Letter** – This official letter is the instrument demonstrating support and authority to submit a Pre-application, signed by a ranking authorizing representative of the entity (Board Chairperson, Commissioner, Mayor, etc.). It must be on official letterhead.
- **Preliminary Site Plan and/or Conceptual Plan** – This may be an artist's or engineer's rendering and visual representation of the proposed project. All elements receiving GOSP funding **MUST** be conspicuously identifiable on the plan. Any prominent features, such as rivers, streams, roads, densely forested areas, etc., should also be represented.

(This is a document of the Applicant's own creation and uploaded into the application portal)

- **Property Boundary Map** – This map shall depict the official boundary, as committed to by the Applicant, which shall be considered the Project Site. All GOSP funded elements must reside within the Property Boundary Map. For acquisitions, the Property Boundary must be the entire parcel(s) receiving GOSP funding. For stewardship projects, it may be only that portion of an existing parcel(s) affected by GOSP funding.

(This is a document of the Applicant's own creation and uploaded into the application portal)

- **Project Location Map** – An unofficial map depicting the relative location of the Project Site to local towns and cities. GADNR staff will utilize this map in order to visit the Project Site for GADNR required inspections. Websites such as Google Maps, Rand McNally, etc. will suffice in being the basis for this map.

(This is a document of the Applicant's own creation and uploaded into the application portal)

The following are minimal criteria for an acceptable Project Location Map:

- Project and Applicant names
 - Project Site address (GPS coordinates may be used if no address is assigned)
 - At least one significant town must be depicted
 - Major highway designations and the street names immediately surrounding/leading to the Project Site.
 - North Arrow
- **Photos of the site with photo key (optional)** – Optional photos may be taken of areas receiving GOSP funding. If submitted, an unofficial map of the Project Site must be included showing the relative location of each photograph taken, each location to be numbered corresponding to the photograph's number, and an arrow pointing in the direction of viewing from the photographer's perspective.

(This is a document of the Applicant's own creation and uploaded into the application portal)

- **Generalized Project Budget Worksheet** - This budget shall include all categories of expenditures, modestly detailed enough to reflect the types of materials and expenses anticipated for reimbursement. Only items and values on this budget will be considered for reimbursement.

(This is a downloadable template to be completed and uploaded into the application portal. This can be found at www.gadnr.org/gosp)

- **A resolution adopted by the governing entity of the Applicant authorizing the application and committing all funds required to complete the proposed project.**

(This is a document of the Applicant's own creation and uploaded into the application portal)

- **Current copy of the lease or conservation easement (if applicable)**
- **A copy of the proposed conservation easement agreement (if applicable)**
- **Proof of accreditation of application and/or easement manager (if applicable)**

- **Copy of conservation easement management plan, current and/or proposed (if applicable)**
- **Signed statement from landowner expressing support (if applicable)** – A legally defensible document that demonstrates the support of the landowner for the project in its entirety *if the Applicant and owner are not the same*.

(This is a document of the Applicant's own creation and uploaded into the application portal)

- **Letters of financial commitment from sponsors and partners**
(This is a document of the Applicant's own creation and uploaded into the application portal)
- **Approvals to cross a public highway or a public utility right-of-way (if applicable)** - Applicants with projects requiring the use of known existing Rights of Way should contact the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) for direction on attaining approval for use as needed. Failure to do so may cause delays in the in the execution of the Project Agreement.
- **Appraisals** (Acquisition or real property donation only. See section 2.1 and 2.3E) – Subject to GADNR independent appraisal review. See section 2.1

Note: Pre-applications must be submitted by the deadline stated on the public announcement or they will not be eligible.

3.3 Pre-application Definitions

Applicant Address: The Main Point of Contact's (defined below) address where the Applicant can be contacted regarding application questions.

Applicant Chief Elected Official, Director or President: Lead official who has authorized and will approve this project on behalf of the applying entity.

Applicant Name: Legal name of the agency or organization requesting funding.

County: County in which project will occur. List all applicable counties.

Entity Characterization: Choose the appropriate option best describing your entity. If you have chosen other, please contact the GOSP Grant Specialist for direction and assistance.

Main Point of Contact: This individual represents the Applicant and is responsible for completing the application(s), working directly with GADNR in submitting all necessary documentation, and managing all inbound and outbound communications between the Applicant and GADNR. While tasks may be delegated within the Applicant's organization, the Main Point of Contact should

remain consistent if possible, and should be well-informed about all aspects of the project's scope and progress.

Project Cost Information: Complete the Project Budget Worksheet by adding individual budget items.

Project Description: Provide a detailed description of the proposed project scope as well as all elements that shall receive funding. All narratives are limited to a predetermined word count by the application itself. Applicants should adhere to the following best practices:

- The narrative should focus primarily on elements to be funded or claimed as match. Avoid “fluff” and limit discussion regarding partnership support, which is more appropriately accounted for in Questions 9 and Question 16 addressing public support for Local Parks and Trails Pre-application. Additionally, the same guideline should be adhered to for economic impacts created by the proposal. This should be addressed in Question 12 for Local Parks and Trails Pre-applications.
- Make a strong and obvious distinction between elements seeking GOSP assistance and existing or future elements not applicable to GOSP support. There are times when describing existing/future site elements are vital in depicting the total scope, but this should be kept to a minimum. Failure to do so may cause confusion on what is actually being funded, which may limit the Reviewers’ ability to properly award points during project review.

Project Title: Unique, short, and concise name placed on your project, which will remain the same throughout the life of the project. This name must stay consistent throughout the process and cannot be changed.

Project Type: Mark the appropriate project type denoting the appropriate funding stream for your application. A project must clearly fit into only **one** option.

Secondary Administrator or secondary point of contact: An alternate point of contact used throughout the life of the grant project in the instance that the Main Point of Contact is unavailable. This individual should be familiar with all aspects of the project scope and progress.

3.4 Pre-application Evaluation Criteria

Criteria Associated with All Projects

All Applicants are to complete this section.

Question 1 – Matching Funds

Max Points 5 points

Criteria Question What percentage of matching funds can you provide?

Question Details Applicant must identify the percentage of matching funds that they can provide by dividing the total match dollars available by the total project cost. NOTE: Projects submitted by applicants other than state agencies must provide at least 25% matching funds in order to be eligible.

All matching funds must be included and highlighted as such in the Project Budget Worksheet. Written documentation of monetary investments or in-kind donations must be provided in the form of letters of contribution.

Scoring Metric All Applicants except state agencies:

< 25.0% = ineligible
25.0% = 0 points
25.1% - 34.9% = 2 points
35.0% - 49.9% = 4 points
≥ 50.0% = 5 points

State Agencies:

≤25.0% = 0 points
25.1% - 34.9% = 2 points
35.0% - 49.9% = 4 point
≥50% = 5 points

Question 2 – Project Need

<i>Max Points</i>	Up to 25 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Does this project satisfy specific and clearly identified priority needs, as identified in a formalized planning document?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Describe how elements within your proposal satisfy critical and/or priority needs, as identified in a formalized planning document. Also, describe how they relate specifically to the outdoor experience.
<i>Required Documents</i>	Applicant must list the name of the current planning document in which the project need is identified and upload the cover page and sections applicable to these elements. Current, formalized planning document; expectable forms of documentation include but are not limited to: comprehensive plan; recreation master plan; county or regional master plan; trail system plan; capital improvements plan; regional water plan or land/use management plan.
<i>Scoring Metric</i>	Applicant will receive up to 25 points, based on the degree in which critical and/or priority needs are addressed, and if a current formalized planning document is provided.

Question 3 – Outdoor Recreational Opportunity

<i>Max Points</i>	25 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Will this project provide outdoor nature-based recreational opportunities?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Applicant must list all nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities provided by the acquisition or development of this property. As defined by the GOSA statute, acceptable nature-based outdoor recreation activities include hunting, fishing, hiking, biking,

boating/canoeing/kayaking, camping, and wildlife viewing. Other activities may be considered, but the Applicant must demonstrate how the activity is nature-based.

Required Documents

Map or other document showing the availability of all listed activities. (i.e. If applicant lists “biking” as an activity, applicant should mark the bike trail on the property; If the Applicant lists “camping” as an activity, the Applicant should mark the campsite on the property).

Scoring Metric

Applicant will receive 5 points for each activity, for up to 25 points total.

Question 4.a. - Water Quality and Quantity: LOCATION (0 points*)

*Question 4.a serves as a Qualifier for Question 4.b. Projects that can demonstrate the applicability of one or more items, A through F, have the potential to earn points in Question 4.b.

Criteria Question

Is this project located in one of the areas listed?

Criteria Details

Projects Must be located in at least one of the locations identified in items A-F to qualify for points.

A. The project is located in a Hydrologic Unit Code HUC-12 watershed, identified by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GAEPD) as a priority watershed for water quality purposes.

B. The project is located in a HUC-12 or equivalent size area as impacted by or sensitive to hydrologic alteration.

C. The project is located in a HUC-12 watershed identified by GAEPD as a healthy watershed.

D. The project is located in a HUC-12 watershed with waters identified by GAEPD as impaired and with any of the following criteria: algae, biota impacted (fish community), biota impacted (macroinvertebrate community), bacteria, and dissolved oxygen.

E. The project is located in one of the most significant groundwater recharge areas in Georgia.

F. The project is located in the Inner or Outer Management Zone identified in a Wellhead Protection Plan or a Source Water Protection Plan.

Question 4.b. - Water Quality and Quantity: BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Max Points

5 points each, Up to 25 Points

Criteria Question

Will any of the below listed Best Management Practices be used for any improvements, restoration, or management activities associated with the project *beyond what is required by existing commitments or local and state law?*

Criteria Details

Applicant must select each of the items A-E that apply and describe the implementation and conservation benefit of each.

A. Restoration of vegetated riparian buffers using native plant species in a condition appropriate for the region (minimum = 100 linear feet x 25 foot wide buffer).

B. Restoration of streambanks and natural hydrologic processes (minimum of 100 linear feet of streambank).

C. Protection of wetland/marshland and stream buffers beyond what is required by local and state law.

D. Use of green infrastructure (see Technical Appendix for more information).

E. Permanent protection of a significant portion (>25%) of any USGS HUC 12 or larger watershed.

Scoring Metric

Applicant will be awarded 5 points for each selection identified above in which adequate documentation is provided up to 25 points.

Question 5 – Cultural and Historical Value

<i>Max Points</i>	10 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Does this project include the acquisition or stewardship of land with a cultural or historical value?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Applicant must demonstrate how the property has local, regional or state-wide cultural and/or historical value and describe how this project adds to or enriches that value.
<i>Scoring Metric</i>	Applicant will be awarded up to 10 points based on the property's historical and cultural value, which may also be supported by documentation provided.

Question 6 – Ecological Value

<i>Max Points</i>	25 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Does this project include the acquisition or stewardship of land with significant ecological, conservation, restoration, or natural resource sustainability value?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Applicant must demonstrate the significant ecological value of the project including, but not limited to, native plant and animal Species of Greatest Conservation Need; and/or the critical importance of habitats, particularly those that include a stream buffer or wetland.
<i>Required Documents</i>	Applicant must provide supporting documentation, such as, but not limited to: copies of pertinent sections of the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), documentation provided by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, GAEPD Watershed Technical Appendix support, photographs, maps, publications news/magazine articles, etc.
<i>Scoring Metric</i>	Applicant will be awarded up to 25 points based off the property's ecological value, supported by provided documentation.

Question 7 – Maintenance, Management, and Security Plan

Max Points

Up to 15 points

Criteria Question

Do you have a plan and budget to maintain, manage, and secure this property for multiple years of commitment beyond the project completion date?

Criteria Details

Applicant must provide an approved applicable maintenance, management, and security plans that shows *multiple years of commitment beyond the project completion date. These commitments must address monetary support as well as address a credible timeline. For example, "Year 1, Year 2, Year 3", "for the foreseen future as approved by the current SPLOST," etc.*

Total points will be divided amongst the following three categories:

- Maintenance Plan: How does this plan address site upkeep and viability into the future?
- Management Plan: How does this plan address management and staffing needs required to support and promote this site into the future?
- Safety Plan: How does this plan ensure that this will be a safe and secure addition to Georgia's public outdoor experience into the future?

This plan should detail hours of operation, fees, staffing, etc. Applicant must also provide proof of dedicated funding for ongoing operations, including funding for staffing, operation and maintenance *for the duration of the commitment.*

Required Documents

Management Plan; Security Plan; Proof of approved funding; Resolution of support for long-term maintenance.

Scoring Metric

Applicant will be awarded up to 5 points for each of the following categories totaling up to a maximum of 15 points:

Maintenance Plan: 0 – 5 pts
Management Plan: 0 – 5 pts
Security Plan: 0 – 5 pts

Question 8 – Project Impact

Max Points 25 points

Criteria Question Is this project regionally significant?

Criteria Details Applicant must demonstrate how this project enhances the natural-resource based outdoor experience and quality of Georgia's natural resources, while providing value to a greater community beyond the local area.

Scoring Metric Applicant will be awarded points based off the project's regional significance as demonstrated through the provided narrative.

Question 9 – Partnerships

Max Points 10 points

Criteria Question Is there a measurable monetary value added to this project through cooperation with external qualified local governments, Local Authorities registered with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, Community Improvement Districts or with other partners?

Criteria Details Applicant must describe the contribution of all partnerships and provide documentation of close participation of all entities. Applicant must identify the scope and participation level of each entity, including donations, cash or materials, volunteer/staff hours or professional services provided. **All entities must provide a monetary value of some kind to the project to be considered.**

Note: Any cash, donations, etc. detailed in commitment letters must be included in the Project Budget Worksheet.

Required Documents The Applicant must upload a letter of commitment for each partnership. Letters of commitment **must quantify the dollar value** of each partnership.

Scoring Metric Applicant may score up to 10 total points as defined by the categories below, although you may have multiple partners

within each category. Each category must meet a minimum of **1% of the total requested funding** to qualify. The scoring metric and eligible partners are as follows:

- 2 points - External Qualified Local Governments
- 2 points - Local Authorities registered with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs
- 2 points - 501 (c)(3) Non-profit Organizations
- 2 points - Community Improvement Districts
- 2 points - Other

**For eligibility purposes, please provide the 501c3 filing for Non-profit partners.*

Question 10 - State SWAP Goals

<i>Max Points</i>	20 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Does this project support goals and objectives in Georgia’s current State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Applicant should describe how the project helps implement SWAP priority conservation actions described in the Conservation Action Tracker, or supports the conservation of any Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), or protects habitats for SGCN that are represented within Conservation Opportunity Areas, Priority Watersheds, or other lands. Points may also be awarded for conservation actions that are consistent with the goals outlined in SWAP story maps, the SWAP implementation strategy or any of the technical team reports. Please reference specific conservation actions, species, habitats, Conservation Opportunity Areas, Priority Watersheds and page numbers from SWAP documents to support your answer.

Note: A link to Georgia’s 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan and all associated reports and applications, including the Georgia Biodiversity Portal, can be found on our website at www.gadnr.org/gosp. You can search for Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the vicinity of your project via the Georgia Biodiversity Portal or by viewing species listed within individual Conservation Opportunity Areas or Priority Watersheds. The

Georgia Biodiversity Portal also includes range maps and ecological information for SWAP Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Scoring Metric

Applicant will be awarded up to 20 points based on the implementation of SWAP priority conservation actions outlined in their project.

Question 11 - State SCORP Foundational Goals

Max Points

5 points

Criteria Question

Does this project overlap with the Foundational Goals in Georgia's current State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan?

- A. Conserve natural resources - conserve and protect the state's vital natural resources, while equally building up a new community committed to natural stewardship and outdoor recreation.
- B. Enhance economic vitality - support and maintain Georgia's outdoor resources to be attractive to new and current residents and businesses or draw tourists across our borders.
- C. Promote health, fitness, and livability of communities - encourage physically active lifestyles near where people live and work, connect existing facilities for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles via trails, increase opportunities proven to enhance quality of life.
- D. Improve awareness, accessibility, and inclusion – improve and develop opportunities for all ages, backgrounds, means, and abilities to have access to and an awareness of outdoor recreation areas.
- E. Partnership - effective collaboration among stakeholders to response to the overall needs of citizens.

Criteria Details

Applicant must identify any of the applicable SCORP goals and describe how the proposed project overlaps with each of the selected goals.

Note: A copy of SCORP can be found on at www.gadnr.org/gosp.

Required Documents

Copy of the pages of the SCORP that support this finding.

Scoring Metric

Applicant will be awarded 1 point for each SCORP Goal identified above in which the project overlaps with and documentation is provided.

Additional Criteria for Local Parks and Trails of State and Regional Significance

Complete this section **ONLY** if you are applying for a Conserve Georgia grant or loan to fund Local Parks and Trails projects, otherwise skip this section.

Question 12 – Economic Development

Max Points 15 points

Criteria Question Will this project create opportunities to enhance the regional and/or statewide economy?

Criteria Details Applicant must demonstrate how the project will create growth within the *regional, and/or statewide* economy. To support this claim the Applicant may provide the following to show the positive impact of this project *beyond the local or host community*: current comprehensive plan; current recreation master plan; current county or regional master plan; current trail system plan; State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; current capital improvements plan, current regional water plan and/or land use management plan; recorded public hearing minutes; supporting documentation from the Chamber of Commerce; letters from local business(es) or economic development organizations; etc.

NOTE: The purpose of this questions is advance **regionally significant** economic growth. Applicants may submit local planning documents as proof, but only if they can show *specific reference(s) to regional or statewide economic impacts*. Economic impacts which are only locally anticipated should not be included.

Scoring Metric Applicant will be awarded up to 15 points based off the regionally significant economic impact, provided *specifically by the project scope only*. This must also be supported through the provided material.

Projects will not accrue points for elements which are collateral components of a larger project, the economic impact of the larger project itself, nor any economic impacts that are felt locally. Only the economic impact of GOSP funded elements shall be considered for point awards.

Question 13 – Recreational Access and Connectivity

<i>Max Points</i>	15 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Will this project provide access or a connection to other outdoor recreation facilities or areas?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Applicant must describe all accesses and connections made possible by this project.
<i>Required Documents</i>	Conceptual map of the proposed project, highlighting the outdoor recreation facilities connected and/or access created by the project scope. All elements to be funded or used as match MUST be depicted on the conceptual map.
<i>Scoring Metric</i>	Applicant will be awarded up to 15 points based on the number of new access points and/or facilities connected as supported by the provided conceptual map.

Question 14 – Stewardship

<i>Max Points</i>	5 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Will this project promote the stewardship of natural resources?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Applicant must demonstrate how this project will promote effective conservation and sustainable practices, protect the scenic or unique natural features present and visibility of such; assist the property in remaining relevant to the community; and encourage visitation and participation by providing a safe recreational experience for future generations.
<i>Scoring Metric</i>	Applicant will be awarded up to 5 points based on level of stewardship identified.

Question 15 – Water Access

<i>Max Points</i>	10 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Will this project add new water access points where none is currently available?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Applicant must demonstrate how the project will improve water access.
<i>Required Documents</i>	Conceptual map of the proposed project, detailing the location of the new water access opportunities.
<i>Scoring Metric</i>	Applicant will be awarded the full 10 points if new water access is provided and documentation is provided. * If a project involves land disturbance to a buffer (i.e., building a boat ramp or viewing platform), the Applicant must upload a certification of buffer variance.

Question 16 – Public Support

<i>Max Points</i>	5 points
<i>Criteria Question</i>	Is there documented public support for the project?
<i>Criteria Details</i>	Applicant must demonstrate public support of the project.
<i>Required Documents</i>	Documentation may include but is not limited to: letters of support from elected officials, citizens, or user groups; public meeting minutes; proof of a public comment period posting; petitions that articulate this specific project as a needed or supported project.
<i>Scoring Metric</i>	Applicant will be awarded up to 5 points if documentation shows public support of the specific project.

Point Potential for Local Parks and Trails of State and Regional Significance Applications

	Ranking Criteria	Max Points
1	Matching Funds	5
2	Project Need	25
3	Recreational Opportunity	25
4.a	Water Quality and Quantity Protection - Location	0
4.b	Water Quality and Quantity Protection - BMPs	25
5	Historical and Culture Value	10
6	Ecological Value	25
7	Maintenance, Management, and Security Plan	15
8	Project Impact	25
9	Partnerships	10
10	State SWAP Goals	20
11	State SCORP Goals	5
12	Economic Development	15
13	Recreational Access and Connectivity	15
14	Stewardship	5
15	Water Access	10
16	Public Support	5
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS		240

Additional Criterion for State Stewardship

Complete this section ONLY if you are applying for a Conserve Georgia grant or loan to fund State Stewardship, otherwise skip this section.

Question 12 – Stewardship

Max Points 20 points

Criteria Question Will this project promote the stewardship of natural resources?

Criteria Details Applicant must demonstrate how this project will improve, rehabilitate and/or maintain an existing property, increase use at an existing property; or make significant improvements to the safety of an existing property.

Scoring Metric Applicant will be awarded points based on level of stewardship identified.

Point Potential for State Stewardship Applications

	Ranking Criteria	Max Points
1	Matching Funds	5
2	Project Need	25
3	Recreational Opportunity	25
4.a	Water Quality and Quantity Protection - Location	0
4.b	Water Quality and Quantity Protection - BMPs	25
5	Historical and Culture Value	10
6	Ecological Value	25
7	Maintenance, Management, and Security Plan	15
8	Project Impact	25
9	Partnerships	10
10	State SWAP Goals	20
11	State SCORP Goals	5
12	Stewardship	20
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS		210

Additional Criterion for State Land Acquisitions

Complete this section ONLY if you are applying for a Conserve Georgia grant or loan for State Land Acquisition, otherwise skip this section.

Question 12– U.S. Military Protection

Max Points 10 points

Criteria Question Will the acquisition of this property help to protect lands, water and/or habitat as to ensure the sustainability of U.S. Military missions?

Criteria Details Applicant must select project characteristics that apply:

- A. Acquisition of land surrounding any military base or military installation
- B. Acquisition will protect habitat on non-military land that is designated as threatened or endangered candidate
- C. Acquisition will protect underlying low-level U.S. Military air corridors or operating areas
- D. Acquisition will protect clear zones, accident potential zones or air installation compatible use buffer zones

Required Documents Supporting documentation, such as but not limited to maps or a narrative to show specific examples.

Scoring Metric Applicant will be awarded the full 10 points if property supports the sustainability of U.S. Military missions and documentation is provided.

Point Potential for State Acquisition Applications

	Ranking Criteria	Max Points
1	Matching Funds	5
2	Project Need	25
3	Recreational Opportunity	25
4.a	Water Quality and Quantity Protection - Location	0
4.b	Water Quality and Quantity Protection - BMPs	25
5	Historical and Culture Value	10
6	Ecological Value	25
7	Maintenance, Management, and Security Plan	15
8	Project Impact	25
9	Partnerships	10
10	State SWAP Goals	20
11	State SCORP Goals	5
12	U.S. Military Protection	10
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS		200

Consistency with Georgia's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and State Wildlife Action Plan

The State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is developed by GADNR and typically contains an inventory of existing outdoor recreation facilities, an analysis of outdoor recreation needs, and projects that may be implemented to address unmet recreation needs. The Criteria Questions in the Pre-application focus on the three Primary Goals in the Conclusions and Recommendations section of the current SCORP.

Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is a statewide strategy to conserve populations of native wildlife species and the natural habitats they need before these animals, plants, and places become rarer and more costly to conserve or restore. Criteria Questions addressing in the Pre-application focus on critical priorities specifically addressed in the current SWAP.

The Georgia's SCORP and SWAP are extremely important documents which have great relevance to the GOSP review and ranking process. Since nature-based outdoor recreation, protection of our critical areas, and preservation of our cultural and historical resources are the cornerstones of the program. These publications play a critical part in understanding the priorities, needs, and direction of our efforts in conservation.

3.5 Second-level Application Process

Applicants who are selected as potential Grantees through the Pre-application process will be invited to submit a Second-level Application. Applicants who submit a complete and accurate Second-level Application will receive funding. The Second-level Application can be completed online at www.gadnr.org/gosp.

Second-level Application:

The Second-level Application serves as a mechanism in gathering more detailed project elements, detailed surveys and reviews, and items that only apply to Applicants who qualify for funding.

Items submitted in the Pre-application may not be updated or amended without contacting the GOSP Grant Specialist, due to the competitive nature of the program. If an item must be revised, the GOSP Grant Specialist will determine if a Project Agreement Amendment or a resubmission of a new Pre-application would be required.

Second-level Applications shall contain the following additional items.

- **Responses to each of the Second-level evaluation criteria**
- **Second-Level Application Cover Letter** – This official letter is the instrument denoting support and authority to submit a Second-level Application, signed by a ranking authorizing representative of the entity (Board Chairperson, Commissioner, Mayor, etc.). It must be on official letter head.
- **Detailed Project Budget Worksheet**– This budget shall include all items depicted in the Project Budget Worksheet submitted during the Pre-application stage, although a higher level of detail is required. It should show units of measure/piece count estimates, cost per unit, proper names of materials, etc. Only items and values depicted on this budget will be considered for reimbursement.

(This is a downloadable template to be completed and uploaded into the application portal. This can be found at www.gadnr.org/gosp)

- **Project Description** – This is a detailed narrative describing the entire scope of the project, including location, acreage, purpose, need, and all GOSP funded project elements. Applicants should focus on describing the elements and activities receiving funding, rather than convincing narrative content.
- **Project Plans (Stewardship Projects Only)** - Stewardship projects require an electronic version of site engineering plans, depicting locations of elements within the site and distances to scale, and uploaded to the application where requested.

*(This is a document of the Applicant's own creation and uploaded into the application portal. **Note: All plans must be submitted in .pdf format**)*

- **Project Implementation Schedule** – A schedule outlining the timeline and occurrence of each major project milestone and limited to an allowable 24-month project period.

(This is a downloadable template to be completed, signed by the authorizing representative, and uploaded into the application portal. This can be found at www.gadnr.org/gosp)

- **Photos and Photo Key Map:** Applicants are required to submit various photos of the key components of the project receiving funding for the DNR Cultural Resource Review. A map of the Project Site must be included showing the relative location of each photograph taken. Each location is to be numbered corresponding to the photograph's number, and an arrow pointing in the direction of viewing from the photographer's perspective. All sides of buildings are to be photographed as well as any area being affected by GOSP funding. No more than 2 photo's per page are to be uploaded to the online application.
- **Environmental Review Documents** –The environmental review ensures that any impact upon any GOSP assisted site is in accordance with GOSP good stewardship principles. The complete environmental requirements are referenced in section 3.6 of this manual.

3.6 Environmental Review Requirements

The environmental review process is a key component of this program. It requires that all Applicants consider the impact that their project may have upon Georgia's natural resources. All applicants will be required to submit the following documentation during the Second-level Application stage, if invited:

- Georgia Environmental Policy Act (GEPA) Environmental Checklist available at www.gadnr.org/gosp
- Phase 1 Environmental Assessment by a qualified and licenced contractor. This function is not provided by GADNR and should be sought after by the Applicant.

Note: Phase 1 checklists and surveys previously completed, and less than 5 years of age measured from the Pre-application deadline are acceptable to fulfill this requirement.

State agency reviews to be completed by GADNR on behalf of the Applicant:

- Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) Review
- Cultural Resource Review

- Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Review
- Floodplain Encroachment Review

3.7 Maps

Project Location Map – A unofficial map depicting the relative location of the Project Site to local towns and cities. GADNR staff will utilize this map in order to visit the Project Site for GADNR required inspections. Websites such as Google Maps, Rand McNally, etc. will suffice in being the basis for this map.

Property Boundary Map – This map shall depict the official boundary, as committed to by the applicant, that shall be considered the Project Site. All GOSP funded elements must reside within the Property Boundary Map. For acquisitions, it is the entire parcel(s) receiving GOSP funding. For Stewardship projects, it may be only that portion of an existing parcel(s) in which GOSP funding is awarded.

Preliminary Site Plan and/or Conceptual Plan – This may be an artist’s or engineer’s rendering and visual representation of the proposed project. All elements receiving GOSP funding should be conspicuously identifiable on the plan. Any prominent features, such as rivers, streams, roads, densely forested areas, etc., should also be represented as practicable as possible.

Photos and Photo Key Map: When Applicants submit various photos of the key components of the project receiving funding, an unofficial map of the Project Site must be included showing the relative location of each photograph taken. Each location is to be numbered corresponding to the photograph’s number, and an arrow pointing in the direction of viewing from the photographer’s perspective.

Section 4: Grant Recipient Requirements

4.1 Grant Term

Grant recipients will have 24 months to complete the project from the date of the mutually signed project agreement.

Note: Any variance or extensions must be requested via a Project Agreement Amendment, Extension Request, or project resubmission (see section 2.3D). All formal requests will be reviewed by GADNR staff and approved by the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. Written notice of the project extension shall be immediately provided to the Chairperson of the Appropriations Subcommittees of the House and Senate maintaining oversight of GADNR and GEFA. Project dates may be subject to alteration by GADNR due to fund availability.

Start Date: Once an executed Project Agreement is in place, Grantees are authorized to begin work. This marks “Day 1” of the project timeline/timeframe.

End Date: Projects must be completed within 24 months of the signed Project Agreement. No additional costs may be incurred after the project end date.

4.2 Reporting Requirements

The following reports are required for projects:

- Quarterly Progress Reports
- Reimbursement Requests
- Final report once the project is completed

4.2A Quarterly Progress Reports

Once a Project Agreement is signed, the Grantee shall report to GADNR on the progress of the project, on a quarterly basis as follows:

- Period beginning January 1, ending March 31: Report is due April 30.
- Period beginning April 1, ending June 30: Report is due July 31.
- Period beginning July 1, ending September 30: Report is due October 31.
- Period beginning October 1, ending December 31: Report is due January 31.

Grantees are required to submit Quarterly Progress Reports to GADNR to ensure that GADNR is aware of the project’s progress. Quarterly Progress Reports can be accessed and filled out on the GOSP Application portal. The progress report summarizes the work accomplished to date, any issues that may be arising with the project, an estimated percentage of project completion, and

an estimate of funds to be expended over the next quarter. Photos or other documents are required in communicating the status of your project.

4.2B Reimbursement Requests

Payment of grant funds is primarily on a reimbursement basis. Accurate and comprehensive documentation of project costs is critical. Applicants will be required to submit to GADNR a Reimbursement Request as well as detailed documentation (e.g. proof-of-purchase, proof-of-payment, force account details, etc.) prior to reimbursement. Where required by law, intergovernmental agreement, or budget policy, etc., state agencies may be allowed funding draws, requiring approval of GADNR. All reporting responsibilities must still be adhered to throughout the entirety of the project.

Costs eligible for reimbursement vary by grant program and project type. Refer to sections 2.3A through 2.3C for further instruction.

Prior to final reimbursement, Grantees also need to demonstrate that the property title does not contain any issues which may impact the legal authority of the Applicant to conduct the proposed stewardship project or acquire the property. Applicants are encouraged to conduct a title search as early as possible in the project development process.

Grantees may request reimbursements at any time, although it is recommended that requests are submitted at least quarterly. The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) will generally make payment in less than 30 days after a Reimbursement Request has been approved. Reimbursement Requests are based on actual project expenditures that align with the Grantee's Project Agreement, including the approved project application scope and budget.

Adequate supporting documentation for all expenses is required with each request, including but not limited to:

- Proof of payment, including payment for match items
- Invoices
- Donation and in-kind documentation
- Eligible equipment purchase documentation
- Documentation of procurement/bidding process
- Photos (optional)

GADNR or GEFA may request additional supporting documentation to process a reimbursement as needed.

Note: Quarterly Progress Reports must be up to date to submit Reimbursement Requests.

Partial Billings

Partial billing refers to reimbursement requests submitted before the project is fully completed. The total of all partial billings may not exceed 75% of the total grant amount.

25% of each reimbursement request will be withheld as retainage until the cumulative retainage equals 25% of the total approved grant.

Final Billing

A final billing is made when the project's scope of work is complete. All required documentation has been submitted and approved, and the project is open to the public, if applicable. Grantees must submit a Final Reimbursement Request and identify any remaining unneeded surplus balance via an attached memo.

Project Agreement Amendment Requests submitted to GADNR in an effort to utilize surplus funds shall not be considered for approval. Only those items as submitted in the original budget and scope are eligible for reimbursement, per the Project Agreement.

Once a project has been closed, remaining funds are no longer obligated and GADNR cannot make additional payments.

Applicant will be held responsible for the match percentage committed in Pre-application stage. If the project is complete under budget, Applicant will receive GOSP funds based on the original GOSA/match percentage.

Public Information

All information and documentation submitted to GADNR is open to public review. GADNR requires that confidential or sensitive information, including home addresses, social security numbers, and personal bank account numbers, be removed or redacted from documents submitted to GADNR. **This applies to bank account numbers included on copies of checks.**

Proof of Payment

Payments are made on a reimbursement basis. Grantees must use a verifiable payment method and submit proof of payment for all project expenses with each request. Proof of payment may include a ledger or transaction report generated by the Grantee's accounting system, a bank statement, or a cancelled check. GADNR will not reimburse for payments made in cash, as this method does not provide a verifiable audit trail.

Documenting Goods and Services

Grantees must retain and submit a copy of the original invoice or receipt for all goods and services purchased for the project. All goods and services must be directly related to the approved scope of work.

Documenting Payroll (Force Account)

Work performed by many internal departments, such as Corrections, Public Works, etc. may be counted towards match for time worked directly on the project. An applicant's direct administrative staff are not eligible for reimbursement or match.

Time directly related to the approved scope of work and conducted on the Project Site may be reported as a project cost. Refer to 2.3B for requirements around eligibility of force account expense for reimbursement or match.

All payroll related costs must be documented on a timesheet that meets the following standards. Alternative reports generated by the Grantee's accounting system may be considered sufficient supporting documentation.

- Reflect an after-the-fact determination of the actual activity of each employee.
- Account for the total activity for which employees are compensated.
- Signed or authorized electronically by the individual employee or by a responsible supervisor having firsthand knowledge of the activities performed by the employee.
- Prepared at least monthly and coincide with one or more pay periods.
- Not be budget estimates or other distributions based on a percentage before the work was performed.

Documenting Donation of Items or Services

Donations are third party contributions provided at no cost. Items and services are considered donated when they are provided by a third-party organization at either a reduced or cost-free basis. Some examples include surveys, appraisals, and engineering services. You must retain a copy of the invoice and/or a letter from the organization acknowledging the donation and its value.

The value of donated items or services must be included in the Project Budget Worksheet. The value of donations cannot be reimbursed, cannot include items previously purchased with GOSP funds, and cannot be reported on more than one grant, even if it is unassociated to the GOSP

project. To be counted towards a project's match, donations must be documented on the **Donation / In-Kind Tracking Form**.

Documenting Donated or Volunteer Labor

Donated labor is time provided by a person without compensation. Labor donations are valued at an hourly rate of pay, excluding taxes, benefits and overtime.

Refer to policy 2.3B for volunteer or donated labor rates. Use the **Volunteer Labor Tracking Form** available at www.gadnr.org/gosp to account for donated labor.

Alternate documentation may be accepted at GADNR's discretion and must include the following:

- Individual's name
- Contact information
- Dates of service
- Worksite or location name
- Description of work performed
- Hours worked
- Individual or crew leader signature

Costs associated with food or beverages are not allowable for volunteers.

Documenting Donated Materials and Supplies

Materials and supplies are considered donated when they are given to the project at no cost. The reported value of donated materials is the fair market value of the materials or supplies at the time entered into the application. To document donated materials and supplied, submit the **Donated Materials Tracking Form** along with information to support the valuation determination.

Documenting Vendor Discounts

Normal vendor discounts and items "on sale" cannot be counted towards the match. However, discounts can be counted when provided to you from a vendor specifically for the GOSP project and documented as a donation. Discounts can be used as match if the following is provided:

- Invoice that clearly shows the retail price and discount provided **and/or**
- Letter from the vendor that states they have provided a discount as a donation and including the valuation of the discount.

Documenting Donated Real Property

Property acquired at less than its appraised market value may be considered donated real property. To be considered as donated real property, a statement of donation from the donor must be submitted for each property acquired. Appraisals from the time of donation must be provided.

4.2C Final Report

Grantees must inform GADNR that their project is complete by submitting a Final Report and mark it as “final” prior to the expiration of the 24-month project period. The final report serves as notice that the Grantee has completed the project in compliance with applicable regulations and must include:

- Digital images of all completed project elements which received funding.
- Indication that the project is complete, accessible, and open to the public, if applicable.
- Documentation that all corrective items identified during the GADNR final on-site inspection have been completed. This may require an additional GADNR final inspection prior to close out.
- Official As-built drawings in .pdf format
- For acquisitions only - An updated property deed with required Protective Language and recording stamp from the local jurisdiction’s County Clerk’s office.
- Final reimbursement request submitted to GADNR, marked as “Final”.
- Authorizing officer’s signature

GADNR staff will inspect all completed projects. Final payments will not be made until final documentation is received and approved, and the project has been inspected and verified as complete.

4.2D Publicity

Grantees must make every effort to acknowledge and publicize that GOSP assisted in funding. Acknowledgement of participation in GOSP via a successful Conserve Georgia grant or loan shall be conspicuously placed at the project location for public viewing. Grantees may incorporate

acknowledgements onto existing or new signage at the project location. For projects which have received Conserve Georgia funding, the GADNR logo shall be included in this signage. An example of such is included below and also available at www.gadnr.org/gosp.

Sample acknowledgement of GOSP Participation: *This project [project title] was completed on [insert date] in partnership with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, through the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program, Conserve Georgia grant.* www.gadnr.org/grants

Additionally, any property receiving GOSP funding shall post the program's participation on the Grantee's web page.

4.2E Procurement

Grantees must follow their own internal required vendor/contractor bid and procurement policies currently in place.

4.2F Retention Requirements

Grantees are subject to a GADNR audit of their project file. Grantees must retain and keep accessible all books, documents, papers, and records that are directly related to the GOSP project **for a minimum of five years** following the close of the program agreement. These documents include but are not limited to:

- Invoices and receipts
- Timesheets
- Copies of payments
- Copies of internal transactions
- Procurement documentation
- Donation logs and statements
- All books, records, documents, data, and other materials relevant to the grant agreement.

The records must support all project-related costs reported to GADNR and be made available upon request. If any litigation, claim, or audit is started before the end of the five years, Grantees must keep the records until all litigation, claims, or audit findings involving the records have been resolved.

4.3 GOSP Rules and Regulations

The **Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program Rule 391-5-13-.11**. can be accessed at:
<http://rules.sos.state.ga.us>

Section 5: Grant Closeout

Grant closeout signifies the completion of the project. GADNR must ensure all agreed-upon work, as described in the Project Agreement, is completed by the project expiration date. GADNR will determine that all required work and applicable administrative actions have been accomplished. Any discrepancies will be returned to the Grantee to be remedied. Final payment will not occur until all required final reports and documents have been approved by GADNR to assure all aspects of the Project Agreement have been met.

No later than 45 days after work is completed or the project end date, whichever comes first, Grantees must submit a Final Report and final Reimbursement Request and denote them as such. Within 45 days of receiving the Final Report, GADNR staff will complete a final audit of all project requirements and submissions. GADNR Final Project Audit, which may include but not be limited to:

- Audit of all paperwork submitted by the grantee for accuracy and completion
- Audit of all expenditures against the total project budget amount
- Audit of all previous reimbursements and requests
- Verification of a total match submitted by the grantee
- Final site inspection conducted by GADNR staff

Once GADNR deems that all requirements of the Project Agreement have been satisfied, retainage will be disbursed to the Grantee per the Project Agreement. If total expenditures are less than anticipated, and payment of the full retainage amount would create a shortfall of the applicant's match, GADNR will adjust the payable retainage amount accordingly. In any instance where an overpayment of either reimbursement or retainage is realized, the Grantee is required to refund an amount back to GEFA equivalent to the overage.

Note: The information in this manual is subject to change without notice and should not be construed as the only source of information governing the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP). Potential changes to the policies and procedures herein may be necessary to properly administer the program during any particular funding cycle. GADNR staff will make every effort to assist Applicants in satisfying changes in criteria and requirements as they occur.