

Rule 391-5-13-.11. GEORGIA OUTDOOR STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Department 391. RULES OF GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Chapter 391-5. HISTORIC PRESERVATION
Subject 391-5-13. STATE AND FEDERAL GRANTS PROGRAMS

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(1) Definitions. As used in this Rule, the term:

- “Qualified Local Government” means any county or municipality meeting the definition found in paragraph 18 of subsection (a) of Code Section 50-8-2.
- “Constituted Recreation Authority” means any recreation authority registered with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.
- “Nongovernmental Entity” means nonprofit organization primarily concerned with the protection and conservation of land and natural resources, as evidenced by its organizational documents.
- “Natural-resource recreation” means recreation in the form of boating, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, jogging, biking, walking or similar outdoor activities.
- “GADNR” is the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.
- “GEFA” is the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority.

(2) Key Provisions. The intent of this chapter is to provide stewardship for state parks, state lands, and wildlife management

areas; support local parks and trails; and protect critical conservation land.

Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund. O.C.G.A. 12-6A-2 authorizes up to 80 percent of all moneys received by the state from the sales and use tax collected by outdoor recreation equipment establishments classified under the 2007 North American Industry Classification Code 451110, sporting goods stores in the immediate preceding fiscal year to be dedicated to the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund for the purpose of funding the protection of conservation land.

Board of Trustees of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund. O.C.G.A. 12-6A-7 establishes the Board of Trustees of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund. The Board of Trustees shall accept applications for project proposals for eligible funding and shall evaluate and approve these proposals pursuant to the priorities established in this 12-6A-10(d) and any other priorities established by the Board of Trustees.

Administrative Authority. O.C.G.A. Chapter 6A of Title 12 provides the statutory basis for GADNR to administer this grant program. This chapter is enacted pursuant to Article III, Section IX, Paragraph VI(p) of the Constitution.

- (3) Eligible Applicants. All qualified local governments, constituted recreation authorities, state agencies and nongovernmental entities may apply for grant funds under this program.
- (4) Use of Funds. From within the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund, moneys shall be made available each fiscal year for:

- Grants to any qualified local governments, constituted recreation authorities, state agencies and nongovernmental entities of this state having a project proposal with a primary purpose of one of the conservation objectives listed in O.C.G.A. 12-6A-6;
- Grants as authorized in O.C.G.A. 12-6A-12;
- Costs incurred by the State in administering the program.

Moneys may be available each fiscal year for loans to any city, county or nongovernmental entity to defray the cost of conservation land or of conservation easements placed upon property to ensure its permanent protection as conservation land.

Before funds from the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund can be disbursed for grants for project proposals for conservation objectives, applications for project proposals must be approved by the Board of Trustees, the Board of Natural Resources, and the appropriations subcommittees of the House of Representatives and Senate maintaining oversight authority over GADNR and GEFA. As set forth in O.C.G.A. § 12-6A-8(f), GEFA is responsible for the disbursement of funds following final approval of project proposals.

(5) Eligible Projects. All eligible projects must take place in the state of Georgia. Eligible project activities fall into three categories:

- Local Parks and Trails of Regional Significance, for local governments, constituted recreation authorities

and nongovernmental entities to acquire and/or improve parks, trails and conservation lands.

- State Stewardship, for state agencies and nongovernmental entities for maintenance, restoration or improvement projects to enhance public access, use, or safe enjoyment of permanently protected conservation land and currently owned state parks.
- State Land Acquisition, for state agencies and nongovernmental entities to acquire critical areas for the provision or protection of clean water, wildlife, hunting, fishing, for military installation buffering, or for natural-resource based outdoor recreation.

(6) General Terms and Conditions. Each funding cycle will begin with a funding cycle announcement. The funding cycle announcement will be posted at <https://gadnr.org/grants>. Each funding cycle announcement will include deadlines, specific requirements, and procedures for submission of the pre-application.

Funding opportunities involve a competitive pre-application process followed by an invitation only second-level application process. The detailed pre-application process and second-level application forms, instructions, deadlines, format, required forms/documents, required drawings/maps, and project ranking criteria are available at <https://gadnr.org/grants>.

Grant Cycle. Funds will only be made available for grants or loans to eligible recipients during the grant cycle. The grant cycle timeline will be included in the funding cycle announcement each year. To receive funding, applicants must submit an application before the pre-application deadline.

Project Timeline. All selected applicants will have 24 months to complete the project from the date of the signed Project Agreement.

Match Requirements. Applicants must provide at least 25 percent of the total project cost as match. Match may include cash, in-kind goods and services or volunteer labor. Applicant must document availability of the required 25 percent match for each application. State agencies will be required to provide a 25 percent match, pending appropriations. Exceptions can be made at the discretion of the Board of Trustees.

Funding Amounts. Projects for Local Parks and Trails of Regional Significance must have a grant or loan request between \$500,000 and \$3,000,000. There are no minimum or maximum grant amounts for State Stewardship or State Acquisition projects. Exceptions can be made at the discretion of the Board of Trustees.

Financial Workshop. All selected applicants are required to attend a financial workshop prior to executing the Project Agreement.

Project Agreement. Grant and loan recipients must execute a Project Agreement with GADNR and comply with all its provisions, including maintaining complete financial records for all activities and submitting quarterly progress reports.

Inspections. GADNR Staff will conduct site inspections for all awarded projects before the project begins and after the project's completion. GADNR Staff may conduct site inspections during the project timeline.

Acquisition Projects. All projects involving acquisition or conservation easements shall place protective language provided by GADNR on the deed for the property.

(7) Application Timeline. The calendar for an annual funding cycle:

May – Funding cycle announcement of the upcoming grant cycle

September 1 – Pre-application period opens

October 31 – Pre-applications due (specific deadline assigned each year in the funding cycle announcement)

November - December – Staff reviews, evaluates and ranks pre-applications

January – Board of Trustees prepare and approve proposal of projects; Board of Natural Resources approves proposal of projects; Appropriations subcommittees of the House of Representatives and Senate maintaining oversight authority over the GADNR and GEFA approve proposal of projects

February – All pre-applicants are notified and selected pre-applicants are invited to submit second-level applications

May 30 – Second-level applications due

June - July – Selected applicants attend required financial workshop and sign Project Agreements

(8) Pre-Application Process: The pre-application can be found online at <https://gadnr.org/grants>. All aspects of the pre-application must be completed online.

All eligible pre-applications shall include:

- Responses to each of the evaluation criteria
- Cover letter on official letterhead signed by the chief elected official/executive director/president/agency official
- A resolution adopted by the governing entity of the applicant authorizing the application and committing or verifying all matching funds required to complete the proposed project
- A narrative description of the proposed project
- Estimate of cost
- Preliminary site plan
- Plat and/or legal description of the property proposed for purchase and/or development
- Location map

Pre-applications must be submitted by the deadline stated on the funding cycle announcement or the application will not be eligible for review.

(9) Review of Grant Applications. All pre-applications received from eligible applicants are reviewed by GADNR Staff. Specific criteria are used to evaluate projects.

Upon completion of the review and ranking process, GADNR Staff will present pre-applications to the Board of Trustees at the first calendar meeting of each year. The Board of Trustees shall prepare and approve a proposal containing approved projects. Upon approval of the proposal, the Board of the of Natural

Resources shall review and approve the proposal of the Board of Trustees.

Each year's initial proposal shall be submitted by January 31 to the chairpersons of the appropriations subcommittees of the House of Representatives and Senate maintaining oversight authority over GADNR and GEFA. Upon approval by the appropriations subcommittees, the proposal of projects shall be deemed approved.

(10) Second-Level Application Process. Approved pre-applicants will be invited to submit a second-level application.

Second-level applications shall contain the following:

- Signed application cover sheet
- Detailed project budget
- Environmental Assessment Package
- Property Deed Copy
- Signed statement from landowner expressing support (this is applicable if the applicant are not the same)
- Approvals to cross a public highway or a public utility right-of-way (if applicable)
- Maps: Property Boundary Area Map, Preliminary Site map, site location map
- Detailed Project Development Budget
- Local Program Implementation Schedule

The second-level application can be found at <https://gadnr.org/grants>. Second-level applicants who are unable to meet all requirements for a complete application by the deadline may be granted an extension by GADNR Staff.

(11) Awarded Projects. Funds will be available to successful applicants following the financial workshop with GADNR Staff and the execution of a Project Agreement between GADNR and the grantee. The date the Project Agreement is signed is “Day 1” of the project timeline. The grantee will have 24 months to complete the project from “Day 1.”

Land Acquisition Projects. For projects involving the acquisition of real property or conservation easements, grantees must submit the following to GADNR no later than seven days before the scheduled date of closing:

- the final closing statement, which shall reflect the sources and amounts of matching funds and the proper commitment of the grant or loan proceeds to the acquisition of the project; and
- the final draft conveyance instrument and all exhibits thereto that will be used to convey the project to the Grantee.

If the closing statement is satisfactory to GADNR and if all terms and conditions are met, GEFA shall wire the grant or loan proceeds to the Grantee.

Reimbursement Requests. For non-acquisition projects, all grant funds will be made via reimbursements. Grantees cannot be reimbursed for work that is done prior to the Project Agreement. Grantees may make reimbursement requests at any time for costs incurred after “Day 1.” Reimbursement requests will be submitted at <https://gadnr.org/grants>. All reimbursement requests will be reviewed and approved by GADNR Staff and forward to GEFA for payment.

Quarterly Reports. Grantees are required to submit quarterly progress reports throughout the project’s timeline. Quarterly

reports will be submitted at <https://gadnr.org/grants>. Quarterly reports should include any progress made during the quarter and a detailed description of all funds spent.

Extension Requests. Grantees may request timeline extensions if the project is expected to exceed the 24-month deadline. All extension requests will be submitted at <https://gadnr.org/grants>. All formal requests will be reviewed by GADNR Staff and approved by the Chairman 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. Extension requests shall be made at least 90-days prior to the project's completion date. If the extension request is granted, the grantee must sign an Amended Project Agreement.

Change of Scope. Grantees may request to change the scope of the original project. All formal requests will be approved by the Board of Trustees. Change of Scope requests must be made prior to the project's completion date. If the Change of Scope request is granted, the grantee must sign an Amended Project Agreement.

Project Completion Audit. A percentage equivalent to the grantee's match, as identified in the application and grant agreement, will be held in retainage by GADNR. Upon completion of the project, the grantee shall submit a final reimbursement request and identify it as such. Upon receipt of this request, GADNR shall conduct a final project completion audit.

This audit shall include, but may 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
- 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 dispersed to the grantee per the project agreement and final total expenditures. If total expenditures are less than anticipated, 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.

(12) Criteria. Specific criteria will be used to review applications. The criteria are designed to measure the overall concept of the proposed project. Because not all criteria are equally important, the criteria are weighted.

Administrative Criteria – Evaluation criteria in this section are required by all applicants.

- Matching Funds: Can the applicant provide matching funds greater than 25 percent?
- Project Need: Does this project satisfy priority needs as identified in a formalized planning document?
- Pre-Project Planning: Has the pre-project planning occurred and is the project ready to proceed?
- Leveraging Funds: Will these funds be used as leverage when applying for an external grant?

- **Recreational Opportunity:** Will this project provide nature-based recreational opportunities?
- **Water Quality and Quantity Protection- Location:** Is this project located in an area identified as high-priority by the Environmental Protection Division?
- **Water Quality and Quantity Protection – Best Management Practices:** Will this project protect or restore lands that will improve the quality and quantity of surface water, groundwater, or the flow of springs using best management practices?
- **Historical and Cultural Value:** Does this project include the acquisition or development of land with cultural or historical value?
- **Ecological Value:** Does this project include the acquisition or development of land with a significant ecological value?
- **Maintenance and Management Plan:** Can the applicant provide a plan or budget to maintain and manage this property after the project is complete?

Additional Criteria for Local Parks and Trails of Regional Significance – Evaluation criteria in this section are only required for applicants seeking a grant under the Local Parks and Trails for Regional Significance Category.

- **Project Completion:** Will this project be completed within a two-year timeline?
- **Americans with Disabilities (ADA):** Project must adhere to all required ADA guidelines.
- **Project Impact:** Is this project regionally significant?
- **Economic Development:** Will this project create opportunities to expand or enhance the local economy?

- **Recreational Connectivity:** Will this project provide access or connections to other outdoor recreation facilities?
- **Stewardship:** Will this project promote the stewardship of natural resources?
- **Water Access:** Will this project improve or expand water access?
- **Outdoor Recreation Demand:** Will this project fill a void for a specific nature-based recreation opportunity in the area?
- **Interagency Cooperation:** Was this project developed by two or more governmental entities or in conjunction with a nongovernmental entity?
- **Partnerships:** Will this project receive support from sponsors?
- **Public Support:** Can the applicant provide documented public support for the project?
- **Security:** Can the applicant provide a security plan to keep this area protected and secured following the completion of the project?
- **State Goals:** Does this project overlap with the goals and plans included in Georgia's current State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) or State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)?

Additional Criteria for State Stewardship – Evaluation criteria in this section are only required for applicants seeking a grant under the State Stewardship Category.

- **Project Completion:** Will this project be completed within a two-year timeline?
- **Stewardship:** Will this project significantly improve access, use or safety on an existing state-owned property?

Additional Criteria for State Acquisition – Evaluation criteria in this section are only required for applicants seeking a grant under the State Acquisition Category.

- U.S. Military Protection: Will the acquisition of this property help to protect lands, water and habitat as to ensure the sustainability of U.S. Military missions?

(13) Program Oversight. Following the close of each state fiscal year, GADNR shall submit an annual report of its activities and program administration expenditures for the preceding year, pursuant to this chapter, to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House, the chairperson of the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives, the chairperson of the Senate Finance Committee, the chairpersons of the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives and the Appropriations Committee of the Senate, and the chairpersons of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee of the House of Representatives and the Natural Resources and the Environment Committee of the Senate, and make such report available to the General Assembly.

(14) Program Information. Complete information on the, Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program including links to guidelines and complete application instructions, guidance, and required forms are available at: <https://gadnr.org/grants>

Authority *O.C.G.A. 12-6A-11*