



House Budget and Research Office

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2020 SESSION: NATURAL RESOURCES AND GAME, FISH, & PARKS HIGHLIGHTS

The state of Georgia has more than one million acres of public land for wildlife management and research efforts and over 60 state parks and historic sites. State parks attract over 11 million visitors annually, while providing the state with an economic value of \$1 billion and over 10,000 local jobs. The state is also home to more than 500,000 acres of public waters and 16,000 miles of streams and rivers.

Georgia's hunters, anglers, and boaters generated over \$18 million in license revenue in FY 2019, and when combined with \$32 million in federal funds partially tied to purchased licenses and \$29 million in other funds, allows the state to invest over \$44 million in game management, \$17 million in fisheries, and \$10 million for wildlife conservation. The state's hunters and anglers give more financial support towards conservation efforts in the state than all other conservation groups combined. Georgians also support the state's efforts to preserve our natural resources by purchasing specialty license plates, of which \$2.4 million is going directly to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Budget

- FY 2021 budget provides nearly \$1.7 million to the Department of Natural Resources to maintain state park operations and support the agency's law enforcement. Included is \$500,000 in the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) for two environmental engineers and third-party testing to safeguard the state's environmental quality as well as \$200,000 for marine biologists to work on the state's oyster aquaculture program.
- The General Assembly provides an inaugural \$16 million in the FY 2021 budget to implement the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program in accordance with HB 332 and HR 238 (2018 Session). This program provides dedicated funding to state agencies, local governments, and certain nongovernmental organizations for parks, trails, and conservation efforts statewide.
- The budget provides over \$4.5 million in new revenue to fully fund the Hazardous Waste and Solid Waste Trust Funds, maintaining the integrity of programs that mitigate hazardous sites, collect scrap tires, and safely manage abandoned landfills. In FY 2021, the trusts combined trusts have over \$11 million for these activities.

Georgia takes pride in maintaining the state's environmental resources, including Georgia's water resources. The FY 2021 budget directs the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority to use existing funds for contracts with the Resource Conservation and Development Districts, the Georgia Rural Water Association, and the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District. The Metro North Georgia Water Planning District is responsible for developing the state's five-year water plan update. The FY 2021 budget includes \$550,000 to complete the plan.

- The FY 2021 budget includes nearly \$17 million in 20-year bonds to invest in park projects and improvements for recreation and facilities; Georgia state parks employ 775 individuals, attract 10.9 million annual visitors, and have a \$1.1 billion economic impact.
- Forestland Protection Grants were appropriated \$25 million in AFY 2020 and no reductions were made to the \$14 million base funds for Fiscal 2021.
- The amended FY 2020 budget restores nearly \$1.8 million to the Law Enforcement, Parks Recreation and Historic Sites, and Wildlife Resources programs of the Department of Natural Resources for operating expenses, equipment purchases, and facility maintenance. The amended budget also includes \$250,000 in one-time funds for the Southwest Georgia Railroad Excursion Authority for maintenance of the Historic SAM Shortline Railroad. The historic railroad attracts more than 22,000 visitors annually, supports 25 jobs in the surrounding area, and has a \$2 million impact on the local economy.

Legislation

HB 833 by Rep. Ron Stephens (164th) defines "long-term anchoring" as anchoring a vessel within a 5,280-foot radius of a documented anchoring point for over 14 cumulative days in a calendar year. Anchoring a vessel within a 5,280-foot radius of a documented anchoring point for up to 14 cumulative days is considered short-term anchoring. "Anchorage restriction areas" are defined as any location in the state within 300 feet of a marina, 150 feet from a marine structure other a marina, or within 500 feet of approved commercial shellfish growing or public harvest areas.

The bill prohibits any person from long-term anchoring a vessel in state estuarine areas without a permit issued by the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources. Short-term anchoring is not affected and the commissioner may make exceptions.

HB 857 by Rep. Alan Powell (32nd) requires permits issued for biomass boilers to prohibit the burning of railroad ties treated with creosote or naphthenate compounds for the purpose of commercial electricity generation. Boilers that provide steam or electricity to a co-located forest products processing plant are exempt.

HB 901 by Rep. Mike Cheokas (138th) allows the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority to provide loans or loan commitments to local governments and non-governmental entities for projects that protect land or water with at least one of the following conservation purposes: water quality protection at rivers, streams, and lakes; flood or wetlands protection; erosion reduction; protection of riparian buffers; protection of agricultural and forestry lands; protection of cultural or heritage sites; scenic protection; recreational activities; or the connection of other qualifying projects.

The bill allows the State Treasurer to invest in mutual funds.

HB 998 by Rep. Trey Rhodes (120th) aligns implied consent language regarding boating or hunting while under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or other substances to acknowledge that submitting to a chemical test is optional. The effective date of any rules and regulations regarding criminal violations promulgated by the Board of Natural Resources is changed from January 1, 2019 to January 1, 2020.

The bill designates the shoal bass as the official Georgia state riverine sport fish.

The use of an air gun for hunting big game is allowed until July 1, 2025, at which time the General Assembly shall review the statute.

The Lake Lanier Islands Development Authority shall exist for an additional 40 years past its initial 99-year term.

House Bill 998 eliminates the requirement for the Department of Natural Resources to annually report the number of deer killed to the General Assembly.

SB 123 by Sen. William Ligon, Jr. (3rd) raises the required local government surcharge on a municipal solid waste disposal facility operated by a private enterprise from \$1.00 per ton to \$2.50 per ton. The bill removes an exception for the same facilities that accept coal combustion residuals and raises the required surcharge from \$1.00 to \$2.50 per ton of coal combustion residuals. The percentage of surcharges collected by local governments specifically designated to offset repairs is lowered from 50 to 20 percent.

The bill allows for any permitted municipal solid waste landfill operating by July 1, 1997 to expand its operation within two miles of a federally restricted military air space used for a bombing range.

SB 123 removes language to lower the surcharge on the disposal of waste at a solid waste disposal facility from \$0.75 per ton of solid waste to \$0.51 per ton. The surcharge's sunset date is June 30, 2025. The bill strikes language to lower the fee on all new replacement tires from \$1.00 to \$0.38 per tire sold. The fee's sunset date is June 30, 2025.

SB 426 by Sen. Brian Strickland (17th) requires any permittee of an operation that includes the emission of ethylene oxide to report a spill or release of any amount of ethylene oxide to the Environmental Protection Division within 24 hours of discovery. The division must make the report publicly available on the division's website.

SB 445 by Sen. John Kennedy (18th) allows for a water or water and sewer authority to issue land disturbance permits if the authority has been certified by the director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division and authorized by local law. All applicable counties or municipalities must approve an intergovernmental agreement to allow the authority to operate as a local issuing authority.

SB 473 by Sen. Tyler Harper (7th) transfers the Historic Preservation Program, including all grant, tax credit, and site designation responsibilities, to the Department of Community Affairs.

SB 474 by Sen. Tyler Harper (7th) extends the ability to construct and operate welcome centers to the Department of Natural Resources. The agency may also operate vending machines and install automated teller machines in assigned welcome centers.