Without a significant and active effort to conserve and protect our land and resources, the Georgia we know will radically change over time. Investing in our land today will ensure Georgia is still a place where we want to live, work and play in the future.

To move forward this effort, the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Coalition came together in 2010 for one simple goal: to secure a vibrant and healthy future for our state, one that balances the needs of our environment and our economy, through a dedicated source of funding for conservation. This coalition is comprised of The Conservation Fund, The Georgia Conservancy, Georgia Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, Park Pride, and The Trust for Public Land.

The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act (HB 332) brings to the November ballot the option to dedicate a portion of the existing state sales and use tax on outdoor recreation equipment for land conservation in Georgia. No new tax will be levied. The legislation calls for the dedication of roughly $20 million of those dollars annually, with the option to double that figure in future years.

Currently, Georgia lacks a dedicated funding mechanism to ensure that critical lands can be protected, conserved and managed. Instead, Georgia’s current land conservation program relies on annually appropriated funding, which makes multi-year acquisition plans difficult to execute and often precludes the state’s ability to leverage additional private and philanthropic investment. Funds set aside through the newly passed legislation would provide our state with the financial resources necessary to acquire lands identified as critical in the most recent Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan.

In addition to providing land acquisition dollars, dedicated conservation funding may also be allocated to better protect and manage existing public lands, waters and parks. This legislation also calls for the use of matching dollars for local greenspace projects statewide.

To ensure these dollars will be used as intended, companion legislation (HR 238) allows for the Georgia Constitution to be amended through a ballot referendum. If passed by Georgia voters during the November 2018 general election, the fund established by this legislation would be constitutionally locked and those dollars could only be used for their intended purpose.

In addition to overwhelming support for GOSA in the Georgia General Assembly, recent local conservation referenda and statewide polling suggest that both sides of the political aisle favor dedicated conservation funding. Nearly 80 percent of Georgians have responded that they support dedicated conservation funding in Georgia.

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