

For Immediate Release

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CEREMONY WAS HELD FOR WETLAND RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT IN CLINCH COUNTY – CONGRESSMAN JACK KINGSTON SPOKE

ATHENS, GA, (August 8, 2012)— Chief Dave White of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and U.S. Congressman Jack Kingston of Georgia’s District 1 today announced that a partnership among the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) and The Conservation Fund will provide \$8 million in financial assistance for the protection and enhancement of Arabia Bay under the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP).

A ceremony was held just northwest of Homerville to celebrate the milestone. Speakers for this event included GFC’s Director, Robert Farris; The Conservation Funds’ Georgia State Director, Andrew Schock; NRCS’s Chief, Dave White and U.S. Congressman Jack Kingston.

The NRCS, The Conservation Fund and GFC formed a new partnership to accelerate wetland conservation in the area. Under this partnership, WREP has three primary goals: 1) hydrology restoration to reduce wildfire impacts; 2) reduction of wildfire impacts to stimulate local economy through timber revenue and job creation; 3) protection of rare and declining wildlife habitats, especially for federally listed endangered species.

Arabia Bay is a cypress/hardwood wetland depression comprised of approximately 6,000 acres of wetland and upland buffers in Clinch County. It is the second largest intact Carolina Bay formation in the state of Georgia. This naturally forested wetland is very rare for its size and scale and is of significant conservation value. The property is currently owned by a few family trusts and individuals.

This wetland has been negatively impacted over the years through ditching, draining, and reoccurring wildfires, which have altered the hydrology and resulted in lower than normal water levels. Arabia Bay contains a pond cypress and pine savanna that is a major rookery for the federally endangered wood stork and other wading birds, and provides significant habitat for the federally threatened flatwoods salamander. The pond cypress and pine savanna habitat is a high priority for conservation under the Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

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In 2007 and in 2011, wildfires that originated inside the bay boundary have escaped and threatened and destroyed considerable property. Wildfires have severely damaged trees, habitats and had a major impact on the local economy and availability of jobs. With the damaged trees, there is a loss of harvestable timber, which is a loss of revenue for the landowner and a subsequent loss of jobs in the timber industry and ancillary support for jobs in the local economy.

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