

The State of Georgia wants everyone to go fishing - and is willing to give \$115,000 to Laurens County to promote it.

Last week, Governor Sonny Perdue announced East Dublin's Buckeye Park Landing on the Oconee River was among eight locations in the state to receive funding from the 'Go Fish Georgia' program. That brings to total 18 ramps statewide to be funded by the program.

"I am pleased to be able to announce the additional 'Go Fish' sites," said Governor Perdue. "All of the communities involved have committed to a 100 percent match for construction, there are good fisheries resources at each location, and there is adequate state 'Go Fish' funding to complete all eight sites. This is a win-win situation for everybody involved."

County commissioners met Tuesday to approve a resolution that will ensure the county gets that money to enhance the boat ramp at Buckeye Park.

County Attorney Billy Kight told the commission that the county could get grant funding from the state's 'Go Fish Initiative,' however the money would be allocated to the county, rather than the City of East Dublin, which maintains Buckeye Park.

So a special called meeting was necessary in order that the commission could create and approve a resolution for an intergovernmental partnership between the county and the City of East Dublin. Kight said as soon as the resolution was signed, he would overnight the document to Atlanta in order to meet a deadline for the funding to be released.

East Dublin Mayor George Garnto and City Administrator Larry Drew assured the commissioners that the city will continue to manage the property according to requirements mandated by the initiative project; i.e.; police, security, and maintenance.

Both local governments must contribute to the project; the County's share is \$2,500 annually and the City of East Dublin's is \$5,000. The local funds may be used as fishing tournament prize money or to advertise and promote the events. Mayor Garnto said the city's portion will be generated by the East Dublin motel tax, which is already in place, so no revisions to the city's budget would be necessary.

Drew said the funds will be used to improve the boat ramp, construct restrooms and paving to the area.

Go Fish Georgia is a \$30 million initiative that will leverage \$19 million in state funds with private donations and financial support from local communities in order to promote the state's boating and fishing tourism, and to boost economic development in communities receiving the funds.

One of the initiative's requirements is that at least four fishing tournaments be held annually. Garnto said the city is already considering a catfish fishing tournament in conjunction with the annual Summer Redneck Games held at Buckeye Park. Garnto assured the commission that other tournaments, such as bass tournaments, will be scheduled. Garnto said the city is also considering increasing revenue by offering event sponsorships to area businesses.

Work is expected to start on the improvements to Buckeye Park as soon as the funds are received.

"This is great for Laurens County. The Oconee River is one of our greatest recreational resources and this will enhance the access and enjoyment for everyone,"

said State Representative Dubose Porter. "Last year we improved with DNR, the Shady Field Landing in lower Laurens County. Buckeye Park Landing will improve access to the river for the upper part of Laurens County."

"We have two wildlife management areas, Beaver Dam and River Bend, and a public fishing area, Gillis PFA, managed by the Department of Natural Resources. This is a logical next step for outdoor recreation for our area of the state."

Fishing contributes approximately \$1.5 billion to Georgia's economy annually. The DNR (Department of Natural Resources) estimates more than 10,000 jobs in Georgia are related to sport fishing, which generates \$15 million in state income taxes and \$19 million in state sales taxes. A major bass fishing tournament can have as much as a \$5 million economic impact on a local community - a championship event can generate as much as \$27 million according to Go Fish Initiative estimates.

"As Chairman of the Senate Natural Resources Committee, I am very excited about Laurens County being part of the Go Fish Initiative," said Senator Ross Tolleson. "I want to thank Governor Perdue and DNR Commissioner Noel Holcomb for working with me to bring this boat ramp to Laurens County."