



March 3, 2010

Dear Legislative Committee Members:

I urge you not to eliminate funding for The State Botanical Garden of Georgia at the University of Georgia in Athens. The scientific and educational excellence, student resources, innovation, and leadership for plant sciences and conservation developed in this beloved institution have never been more needed for the University and the state than they are now. The dynamic programs, cohesive staff, productive collaborations and community connections cannot be easily replaced, and the loss to the University and the state would be far greater than any short term savings. The Center for Plant Conservation (CPC) knows it will be a loss for the nation as well.

CPC regards the State Botanical Garden of Georgia as an educational, natural, and cultural treasure. We were pleased to admit it into our national conservation network. For the University, it assists in recruiting and retaining horticultural, forestry, ecology, environmental sciences, and related plant science faculty. It is a productive resource for the teaching mission across multiple departments from the sciences to communications and education. The Garden is an excellent ambassador, helping recruit new University supporters as alumni and the public make memories and personal connections, and observe dynamic learning in ways that are vital to growing the University's private support.

Our files show that plants, through agriculture, horticulture, and forestry contribute more than 20% of the state's economy, and that nature tourism in parks and preserves contribute significantly as well. All these plant dependant activities support high quality, sustainable jobs for the state and the Garden directly helps educate and provide the workforce sustaining all of them!

The Center particularly is concerned that the legislature and the University recognize and consider the value of the Garden as a conservation asset. The State Botanical Garden of Georgia is a nationally recognized focal point for the state for cost-effective stewardship of natural resources and landscape productivity. The very real threats to vegetation and agronomic resources climate change presents to the economy is an area where the University must remain engaged to maintain its standing, and to serve state needs. The garden is a vital tool to meet these challenges. It will also help capture related opportunities for the University in education, research, response strategies, restoration, and land management work to address vegetation degradation and potential related species losses.

Georgia is particularly rich in plant biodiversity. I have long held the State Botanical Garden of Georgia up as a leader in building cost-effective, broad based collaborations to get real work done, and to provide ongoing stewardship.

You may be unaware of the Garden's innovation and leadership over the last 15 years in creating the statewide Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance. They have brought together the resources and work of multiple partners in a coordinated way to set priorities, develop approaches, and implement the conservation and restoration needed to sustain Georgia's unique plants. This work across the state and in the garden has built an understanding of the connection between wild biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, and prosperous economies in communities and classrooms across the state.

This is no time to close this institution. As current habitat threats and future climate challenges stress Georgia's ecosystems, the conservation of plant biodiversity has never been more critical. The unique plants of Georgia have incalculable value to buffer storms, hold soil, and sustain other vital landscape processes. Plant breeders will need the raw genetic material of locally adapted native plants to maintain productive landscapes and sustainable agriculture as we work to respond to changing weather, hydrological cycles, pollinator availability, and plant disease and stress.

The best approach to the uncertainties of climate change is to securely seed bank material, develop propagation methods, learn as much as possible about these species' ecology and biology, and develop workable restoration techniques. These are the very programs that the State Botanical Garden of Georgia has been steadily building in a cost-effective way. Thanks to the Garden, Georgia is well ahead of other states that are just beginning to realize the importance of this work. The Garden's years of effort have been effective and are bearing fruit. To retreat just when the wisdom of your investment is becoming apparent would be a significant loss to the state.

Plant restoration is a long- term process involving inquiry, experiment and implementation. It is perfectly aligned with the mission of University gardens. Conservation action to date is only one of the benefits to the University and the State. The partnerships formed, the recognition for the State, the scientific excellence promoted, and the practitioners attracted and nurtured are all invaluable conservation assets for the future. The Garden's work has helped avoid conflicts, and prevented a larger regulatory burden for the state. .

The Garden's partnerships have advanced research and restoration practice. They have drawn together noted experts in multi-disciplinary groups of collaborators from across the nation. Investing taxpayer dollars in this program has leveraging state funds resulting in more work and public cooperation statewide. The state has gained invaluable services and focused work teams giving managers of state lands and resources important support and expertise. CPC has been proud to help provide funding and technical support to the Garden.

Terminating this funding would mean these partnerships and efficiencies will be lost, with long lasting negative repercussions for the environment and the citizens of Georgia. I urge you to continue support for the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, and your shrewd investment in problem solving for agriculture and sustainable economies.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Kennedy, Ph.D.
Executive Director
The Center for Plant Conservation

By email

