



GEORGIA-ALABAMA Land Trust

CONSERVATIONIST

2020



If you will stay close to nature, to its simplicity, to the small things hardly noticeable, those things can unexpectedly become great and immeasurable. ~ Rainer Maria Rilke

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25-Years of Conservation

Conversations with some of GALT's first conservation easement donors about how they have helped others understand the benefits of land protection.



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Black bears are symbolic of GALT's efforts to protect natural environments while supporting human communities, traditional ways of life, and strong economies.



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Cover photographs by Julie Clark on Lookout Mountain:

- Front Cover - Eastern Red Columbine
- Inside Cover - Jack in the Pulpit
- Back Cover - Pink Lady Slipper

When Julie is not busy in her blacksmith shop on Lookout Mountain, she can be found roaming around the world with a camera in her hand.



GEORGIA-ALABAMA LAND TRUST, INC.

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25 Years of Conservation



Twenty five years passes quickly. Many of us who were barely out of school in the early days of the Land Trust now have children and grandchildren. Although time passes so quickly from generation to generation, GALT continues to stand with you, our supporters, to ensure the protection of conservation lands for present and future generations. For GALT, this commitment includes providing a strong and financially stable organization that is professionally managed and accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. As of this publication, GALT stewards over 1,000 perpetual conservation easements, as well as directly manages numerous conservation properties owned by GALT. And, GALT continues to help landowners protect a significant number of additional properties, adding to both the impact we will have for generations to come, as well as our perpetual stewardship responsibilities. This important work is only made possible due to the generous donations of conservation easements and direct financial contributions from our supporters. Thank you to everyone who supported GALT over the past twenty-five years. We could not have done it without you! We hope you will continue to support GALT in its efforts to protect more land, water, habitat, and wildlife over the next twenty-five years.

Katherine Eddins

Executive Director

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GALT Founders Reflect on the First 25 Years By John N. Felsher

Many people claim to see “signs” that prompt them to do great things. Dr. Chip Reed, an endocrinologist from Fulton County, Georgia, saw a sign that changed many lives, both human and animal. “One day, I was driving by a farm with live oak trees growing on it,” Chip recalled. “I saw a sign saying, ‘Coming Soon! The Oaks!’ I thought they were going to save the trees. Soon, all those mature trees were cut down. My wife, Roberta, and I talked about that. I was very frustrated by it.”

Most people would just gripe, but not the Reeds. Always passionate about conservation, Chip grew up playing in the woods near his Gainesville, Georgia home and later became an Eagle Scout. The Reeds decided to try to save as many wild places as possible. Chip read an article about how landowners protected their land with conservation easements and began inviting people to meetings and discussions.

“In our first meeting, only three people showed up -- Roberta, me, and a patient of mine,” the doctor said. “On the flyer, we put ‘North Fulton Land Trust,’ but it didn’t get incorporated. We finally combined the Native American words for the Chattahoochee and Etowah rivers, into Chattawah in recognition of the areas we initially wanted to focus on protecting. This was the beginning of the Chattawah Open land Trust, or ‘COLT’.”

COLT, secured its first easement on a 189-acre property in Towns County, Georgia. The Burrell family owned this land since 1840. “The first easement was the hardest to do,” Chip admitted. Later, the Georgia Land Trust and the Alabama Land Trust were instituted, under the COLT umbrella, with each separate land trust focusing on its own geographic area. In 2015, however, the Alabama Land Trust and COLT were merged into the Georgia Land Trust, which was subsequently renamed the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust, Inc. (“GALT”).

Since 1995, GALT has protected more than 400,000 acres with perpetual conservation easements. That figure includes about 240,000 acres within the range of the threatened gopher tortoise and approximately 74,000 acres of ecologically critical wetlands.

“Looking back over the past 25 years, what makes me most proud is that we were persistent,” Chip remarked. “Many land trusts have come and gone and we absorbed many of them. It takes a commitment of time, passion, energy, and resources to do this. I’d like to see us connect more green spaces together. I’d also like to focus on permanently protecting more wildlife management areas vulnerable to development.”

The first quarter century is just the beginning. The Reeds, and the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust they founded, will continue to conserve as much natural land as possible for future generations.



Chip and Roberta Reed, photo by Christy Lee photography

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Granite Outcrops of Georgia By Caelia Wysocki



photo by Andy Hug

Georgia is home to a diverse community of natural features known as granite outcrops. In fact, more of these outcrops occur in Georgia than in any other state. What gives these communities such great ecological importance are their large expanses of exposed granitic rocks that host a wide variety of rare and endemic plant and animal species. Granite outcrops can differ greatly in size, shape, and mineral composition. They can be dome-shaped, such as Stone Mountain, or they can be relatively flat and known as “flatrocks.” While this community is referred to as granite outcrop, the mineral composition can vary within the granitoid family. Because conditions on outcrops can be extremely harsh, they have the unique ability to foster micro-environments. Temperatures on the bare rocks can reach up to 131 degrees fahrenheit in the summer. Additionally, the high evaporation rates and rapid rainfall runoff create hot, dry conditions known as micro-environmental deserts. Maintaining and conserving granite outcrops is essential to the preservation of an even broader fragile and important ecosystem.

One unique feature of granite outcrops is the shallow depressions that fill with soil over time, which are where most plants and animals reside within the outcrops. These soil-filled depressions, or soil islands, are perfect examples of primary succession. In these successional soil communities, bare rock transitions over time into a habitat that can support a variety of plant communities. The process can be very slow, and disruptions can cause the vegetation to revert back to an earlier stage. There are four stages within the successional soil community, each determined by the soil-depth of the outcrop. Differing plant species take root at each stage. Vernal pools are also significant occurrences within the outcrop community. These temporary pools of water provide habitat for distinctive plants and animals. On granite outcrops, they occur in shallow depressions that have rims, which prevent them from draining water. Vernal pools are present in the winter and early spring and then completely dry out during the late spring, summer, and fall months.

Rare and endemic species of plants and animals make use of the varying microenvironment conditions on the granite outcrop. Adaptation is key to survival in the dry, hot conditions. One example of such an adaptation is the reflective whitish hairs on plants that reduce evaporative water loss. Among the endemic species is the elf-orphine, a bright red succulent plant that forms on shallow granite substrates. Exposed rock communities on granite outcrops are typically coated with microscopic lichens that darken the rock. Interestingly, lichen can have the distinctive ability to survive in even the harshest environments. Other significant plant species include black-spored quillwort, mat-forming quillwort, and snorklewort. Animal species found on the outcrops also have adaptations that allow them to survive difficult conditions. The endemic lichen spider and rock grasshopper both have cryptic coloration, which helps them blend into the lichen.

Unfortunately, many granite outcrops have been degraded over the years through human activity. Traditionally, these areas have been used as dumping grounds, loading decks for timber harvests, sites of off-road vehicle use, camping and picnicking areas, parking lots, and mining locations. Such activities can destroy these fragile habitats that are home to a significant number of rare and globally important species, making conservation efforts even more critical. Many granite outcrop sites are protected by local, state, and private entities; Arabia Mountain, Stone Mountain, Panola Mountain, Heggie's Rock, Rock and Shoals Outcrop, and Camp Meeting Rock are all examples of protected granite outcrops in the state of Georgia. In partnership with The Nature Conservancy, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust helped protect approximately 110.6 acres of Camp Meeting Rock. The continued and concerted effort to protect such vulnerable sites containing these natural communities remains invaluable to the future of Georgia's land preservation efforts.

Conservation in the time of COVID-19 By Lesley Hanson

It was March 13 when President Trump announced a National Emergency in the United States as the World Health Organization officially declared the Coronavirus a global health emergency. Amid social distancing restrictions and stay-at-home directives, Georgia-Alabama Land Trust acted quickly to find creative ways to continue our land conservation work and remain engaged with our landowners. Conferences such as the Southeast Land Conservation Conference and the Thrive Regional Partnership were attended by Land Trust staff through online platforms such as Zoom. Staff remained connected to one another through regular virtual meetings and collaborative sessions using Microsoft Teams. Continuing education classes offered by the

Land Trust, typically held in-person across Georgia and Alabama, will be hosted virtually this year by the Land Trust (see galandtrust.org for more details!). In addition, annual site visits to our easement properties were also able to continue unimpeded through the use of Lens satellite imagery software. New to the Land Trust, this software provides recent imagery of our easement properties, allowing us to complete our visits remotely, limiting the need for ground or air travel during the quarantine. The Land Trust is grateful for innovative and flexible landowners, board members, and staff that have blazed the trail for our conservation work to continue.



A view of the new Upstream Tech Lens software interface

I do not think the measure of a civilization is how tall its buildings of concrete are, but rather how well its people have learned to relate to their environment and fellow man.

~ Sun Bear, Chippewa

25-Years of Conservation

A chat with some of GALT's first donors.

By John N. Felsher

Over the past 25 years, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust grew from the initial desire of its founders to protect land within a few counties, into one of the largest regional land trusts in the country. As of this publication, GALT protected land exceeds 400,000 acres, primarily in Georgia and Alabama. This accomplishment resulted from the focused efforts of GALT's founders, staff, and, most importantly, our conservation-minded donors who desired to protect land for future generations.

GALT's donors are strong advocates for land conservation, often educating other landowners about how conservation easements can help them achieve their own land management and conservation objectives. Over the years, people like Bert Watts and Dr. Ken Davis, as well as their families and friends, have shared their own conservation stories with others, often resulting in new conservation easement donations. Word of mouth has been the primary mechanism that helped turn the initial vision of GALT's founders into reality. Personal stories significantly increase the rate of private land conservation and often leads to a dense cluster of easement-protected lands. Clusters have the added benefit of creating larger wildlife corridors and areas of protected habitat while also reducing

habitat fragmentation, both of which are key themes in habitat and species preservation.

In 2000, GALT completed the first of many conservation easements with Bert Watts, his brother, Clifford Watts, and his sister, Virginia A.W. Hoyt. The three siblings considered donating their first conservation easement after they acquired land on the biodiverse Conasauga River in northwestern Georgia. In addition to adjoining the river and containing significant amounts of ecologically important habitat, the property also had cultural significance; it contained a barn dating in the 1800's. Bert started the search for a way to conserve this property, and eventually learned about GALT. Since their initial donation over twenty-five years ago, Bert and his family have continued to conserve land along the Conasauga River and in its watershed.

In addition to protecting family property, Bert has joined forces with friends Steve and Tammy Herndon working together to "protect more than 3,500 acres in easements with GALT, all in Georgia. This land has all different types of habitats and land cover - timber, pasture, row crops, but all of them have either a creek or river running on the edge or through them."

According to Steve, "Easements make a lot of sense if you plan to keep the property generationally. I want to make sure the land is passed down to my family and used in certain ways. My grandfather had a farm that he passed down, and I was able to grow up with that farm. I want future generations to enjoy and grow up like I did having a farm. With the easement, it is more likely to stay intact for the next generation. The next generation will not be bickering about splitting it up."

On one easement, Bert and Steve joined with members of a hunting club to protect land. Bert encouraged friends Murray Bandy, Jules Crawford and Tom and Bryan Peeples

to donate a conservation easement on a hunting club located along the Ogeechee River within Jefferson County, Georgia.

Later, two of Bert's friends involved in the donation of the Ogeechee River easement, Bryan and Tom Peeples, as well as their father, Shelby, donated two more conservation easements. One protected their homeplace in Northwest Georgia, and the second protected timberland in the Greater Chattanooga area. As word spread from friend to friend around the Dalton area, others protected land as well, contributing to a protective buffer along the Conasauga, while also adding to protected land in the Greater Chattanooga area.

"Easements are a very good way to maintain open space and farmland," Bert said. "We must keep something for future generations. If we don't do something now, there's going to be a lot less open land in the future. Some people mistakenly think an easement means the public can come onto their property. However, the land still remains private property, and the public is not allowed access - unless of course the landowner specifically desires to grant access. Conservation easements can often be tailored to meet the landowner's needs and usages, while also protecting the conservation purposes, and, it will stay that way for future generations. I live on my easement-protected 130 acres with a creek running through part of the property. There are probably 40 or 50 acres of farmland and the rest is trees."

Another example involves Dr. Ken Davis, a thoracic surgeon from Rome, Georgia and his wife, Laura. Since 1999, the Davis' have done much to help GALT in achieving its land protection mission. After running a private medical practice for years, and later serving as the CEO of a multi-specialty medical group in northern Georgia, Ken decided to also become involved in Conservation. "For me, it was personal," Ken stated, reflecting upon his desire to protect a nearly 350 acre property in Chattooga County, Georgia. "It was just a gorgeous spot with old growth forest and some of the most incredible wildflowers. The forest has a north-facing slope along a ridge which creates a habitat for a wide array of native wildflowers. Even the Georgia Botanical Society found some things that they had not seen in other places within the state. That property became very important to me. I loved this place so much that I just did not want it turned into a golf course or some type of community with houses everywhere over the creeks and streams in that area."

Ken started researching how to protect his property and learned about conservation easements. He contacted the Chattowah Open Land Trust, the forerunner of GALT, and began the easement donation process. "I was so concerned that my two children would not find the property as important to them as it was to me and might consider turning it into something else after my death," Ken explained. "The Land Trust appeared to be exactly what I had wanted to protect the land. I

felt we had the same vision as to what needed to happen. When someone has a vision like that, people tend to understand it."

Ken subsequently purchased and protected another nearby property, which coincidentally belonged to his wife's family, the Harbin's, for nearly a century. "My wife's family asked me to make sure that farm was protected because they were not spending as much time there. I fell in love with that property and realized it was an incredibly special spot. It was also about 350 acres. I purchased it and also protected it with a conservation easement."

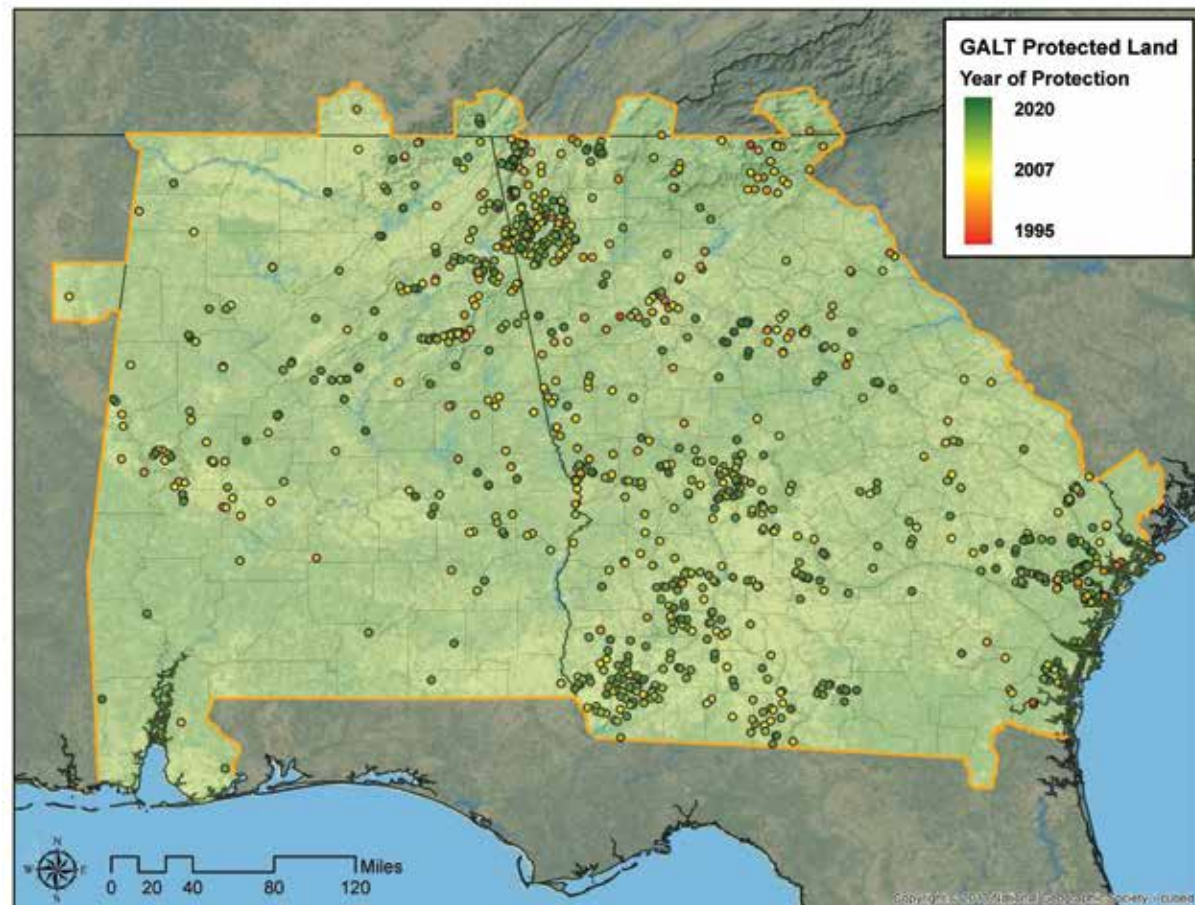
Ken recently located a Native American site on the property with stone arrowheads dating back to 6,000 B.C. Looking that far back into the past prompted him to look forward into the future, "I often envision what this world would look like in 500 to a thousand years." Finding the arrowheads made me start thinking about what my land will look like in 6,000 years. An old growth forest with native wildflowers and animals is just something incredibly beautiful. If I had to do it all over again, under no circumstance would ever I consider not putting the land in an easement."

Ken currently serves on GALT's Board of Directors and as the Board's secretary. Ken remains very active in the conservation effort and over the years has influenced others to protect their property. "Sometimes, when Katherine Eddins had a potential donor and they wanted to talk to a prior easement donor, she would give them my number," Ken explained. "On numerous occasions, I discussed the Land Trust and donation of conservation easements with other people. Hopefully, I helped them with their decision."

When asked Ken's advice for landowners considering the donation of a conservation easement, he responded: "To have an easement, a landowner must first have a vision to protect the land. Then, read and understand everything in the conservation easement so that there are no surprises for you, your children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren. Easements often work well with the landowner's land usage and the conservation vision. No matter how many people populate this earth, there will still be some green space that GALT has preserved that will be there for the future."

After twenty-five successful years, the work has just begun. GALT remains dedicated to protecting land for present and future generations. And, with supportive donors who frequently share their conservation stories, achieving that mission becomes more likely.

Between every two pines is a doorway to a new world. ~ John Muir



Preserving Land for a Large, Charismatic Southern Native

By Mike Heneghan, GALT Stewardship Director



Black bears, photo by Karin Harms

All living things need to move. That may seem obvious when it comes to individual animals moving within their habitat, but the ability to move over large distances intergenerationally is also a key concern for conservation. Movement of breeding individuals from one area of habitat to another helps ensure population stability by enhancing reproductive success, maintaining genetic diversity, and maximizing resiliency against changing environmental conditions. Even plants, which travel via pollination and seed dispersal, benefit from the ability to move. The degree to which a landscape facilitates this movement is referred to as connectivity, a concept which has come to be one of the most important measures of effective habitat conservation.

In an ideal world, we could preserve vast, contiguous, interconnected networks of habitat, allowing for relatively unimpeded movement. In reality, habitat conservation is typically most feasible in patchwork mosaics that protect a little bit here and a little bit there. This is particularly true in the eastern United States where large uninhabited swaths of

land do not exist the way they do in some western states.

Georgia-Alabama Land Trust's portfolio of protected lands contains more than 1,100 individual properties, ranging from less than an acre to more than 8,500 acres. At an average of 350 acres, these individual parcels of protected land can provide suitable habitat for many species over their lifetimes, but the true value must be measured beyond just number of acres. Strategic conservation planning and partnerships with other organizations can help create effective networks of protected land over large landscapes, maximizing the ecological benefit of each piece.

Conserving for a Charismatic Megafauna

Black bears may be the most complicated wildlife species in North America. Often classified as a keystone, umbrella, or

flagship species, (see sidebar) the charismatic animals occupy large geographic ranges and contribute to nutrient cycling, seed dispersal, and soil aeration. In addition, they are perhaps the universal symbol of wilderness appreciation in North America. The tourism industry in many areas of the United States is largely based on their presence, and they play no small part in making the Great Smoky Mountains the most visited national park in America. Though bears can certainly cause conflicts with people as well, they don't carry the political firestorm that a species like the gray wolf often does.

"Everyone wants them, but nobody wants them in their backyard," says Dr. Todd Steury, a professor at the Auburn School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences and one of the leading bear researchers in the southeastern United States.

Black bear populations are well known in wilderness areas like the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Okefenokee Swamp, but sightings are not entirely uncommon throughout many other parts of Georgia and Alabama as well. A sighting between Auburn and Alexander City northeast of Montgomery, Ala. seems to make the news every year or two. Even in the relatively metropolitan suburbs north of Atlanta, Ga., black bear sightings are a possibility.

These occasional sightings are almost always transient males, who will travel long distances from their birth place in search of a mate. As with many wildlife species, the onus tends to fall on males to find females, so there is much less of a natural tendency for female bears to wander. Female bears need to migrate to, settle down in, and successfully reproduce in an area before a population can truly be established. Therefore, a black bear sighting is not necessarily indicative of the presence of a black bear population.

Black bears were historically found throughout the diverse forests and swamps of Alabama, but by the early 1900s most of the bears in the Cotton State had been eliminated by humans. A small remnant population remained living within the cypress swamps and lowlands of the Mobile Bay area of southwestern Alabama. Despite a 1939 *Status of Game Birds and Mammals*

in Alabama report that the black bear was nearly extinct from the state and recommended management action, populations in Alabama remained relatively stagnant for the remainder of the 20th century. That is until a new, potentially growing population was identified near Fort Payne and Little River Canyon National Preserve roughly a decade ago.

Dr. Steury has been leading research on black bears in Alabama for nine years and is committed to learning more about the populations in the state.

"We want to know where bears are in Alabama, how many there are, and if these populations are viable."

Steury's research verified that the Mobile region still has the largest bear population in the state, but that this population has shown almost no growth in the past 30 years. The population near Little River Canyon on the other hand has been steadily increasing, doubling from 2012 to 2015 and quite possibly doubling again in the years since. His lab also found that the Little River Canyon population was from the same genetic stock as bear populations in northern Georgia, indicating that this new group of bears was likely sourced from bear populations near the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Little River Canyon Preserve seems like a natural destination for migrating bears. According to Dr. Steury, traveling bears tend to follow the ridgelines at higher elevations and avoid large valleys. Between Little River Canyon and the Chattahoochee National Forest is the aptly named Ridge & Valley region in northwestern Georgia, which contains relatively natural forested mountain tops intersected with highly developed valleys linking Atlanta to Chattanooga. Bears that make it across the developed valleys can find plenty of suitable ridgelines from northern Floyd County up to the Tennessee border. They probably also follow the meandering east and west forks of Little River from atop Lookout Mountain north of Mentone, Ala. and Cloudland, Ga. before ending up at the roughly 15,000 acres of protected habitat extending south to Weiss Lake. While this journey may not be uncommon for a young male, founding a viable population in Little River Canyon

Species Classifications

- **Flagship species** – A species chosen to raise support for biodiversity conservation in a given place or social context.
- **Keystone species** – A species that has a disproportionately large impact on its environment relative to its abundance.
- **Umbrella Species** – A species whose protection indirectly protects the habitat of numerous other species, usually due to large minimum area requirements.

required at least one traveling female as well.

“Whereas the males are going to be a little more adventurous and more likely to cross inhospitable land because they think there might be something on the other side, the females are going to be really careful about how they move,” Dr. Steury says. “Females will typically have small home ranges and occupy little pockets of great habitat. The fact that there’s a population at Little River Canyon at all is somewhat of a miracle, because a female bear from North Georgia had to decide she was going to go really far away and that just doesn’t happen often.”

20 percent of the total acreage of properties protected by GALT fall within that space between bear populations in northern Georgia and northeastern Alabama. By focusing on clustering easements in close proximity to one another and to other protected areas we can help establish corridors that facilitate wildlife movement and provide long term suitable habitat. For example, by placing conservation easements on 47 individual properties averaging 270 acres each along Lavender, Pigeon, Weisner and Lookout Mountains in northwestern Georgia and northeastern Alabama, we have been able to permanently protect four large contiguous swaths of mostly forested areas ranging from 2,700 to 4,500 acres. When combined with other



photo by Karin Harms

Those adventurous young males may be more willing to cross unappealing terrain to reach suitable habitat, but they aren’t completely fearless either. Each interstate, county road, housing development and industrial park will lessen the chances that a bear chooses to take that long journey – and the developed corridor between Atlanta and Chattanooga continues to grow every day. Maintaining the natural corridors and habitats that remain, particularly along the mountaintops and slopes, will be paramount to conserving these populations. Dr. Steury’s research has highlighted this point.

“The Little River Canyon area population still has fairly low genetic diversity,” Dr. Steury says. “That’s probably because of what we call a ‘founders effect.’ A limited number of bears came and formed the population, and they only brought a limited number of genes with them. We are still relying on connectivity with North Georgia to beef up the genetic diversity of that population.”

The highly parceled landscapes make it unlikely that much of this land will end up in state or federal management. This is where private land conservation can play a major role. Nearly

state, federal and privately protected properties some of these contiguous areas exceed 75,000 acres, an adequate size to support any of the forest dwelling species in the region.

Habitat conservation at GALT can also help preserve key landscape features, such as forested riparian buffers, which are sometimes the last remaining forested linkages through highly developed areas and agricultural valleys. Dr. Steury believes that the primary limiting factor for bear populations in the Mobile area may be a lack of quality denning habitat due to the loss of large cypress trees in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and other swampy places.

More traditional denning sites like caves and rock outcroppings are plentiful in sandstone- and limestone-rich DeKalb and Cherokee counties. This abundance of safe protection for mother bears and cubs may explain why the Little River Canyon bear population has been growing so well. Protecting these features ensures denning sites for bears while also providing suitable habitat for numerous other wildlife species. As state designated priority habitat in Alabama and Georgia,

such rock features and riparian buffers are often designated as preservation areas on easement properties and given particularly strong protection within conservation easements. This ensures that they will forever remain in their natural state.

Some properties already protected by GALT easements have proven to be valuable bear habitat. On these properties, landowners have noticed bear population changes. Dr. Rob Shaffer, a gastroenterologist in Birmingham, Ala., owns a roughly 500-acre property along Little River, just a few miles north of the preserve. Dr. Shaffer and his brother Casey Harp, who lives on the property, have been allowing Dr. Steury and his associates to assess the land for their research.

Harp says he saw the first sign of bears on the property in 2016 when he caught a glimpse of one crossing through a powerline easement. Only a few weeks later, his sons, while riding an all-terrain vehicle, saw a female with two cubs. Since then, his personal experiences help confirm Dr. Steury’s findings.

“I believe there are several bears in the area because we see scat and other signs in scattered locations, such as rocks turned over and rotten trees that have been scavenged through,” Harp says. “We have had a total of six bear sightings so far this year, which is a big increase from the last few years.”

Although Harp has had some minor conflicts with the bears, which caused him to relocate a few apiaries that he keeps on the property, he remains excited about the newer inhabitants on his property.

“We enjoy having them around and look forward to the population growing,” Harp says. “I believe the bears are a great addition to Lookout Mountain.”

At GALT, our goal is to protect natural environments while supporting human communities, traditional ways of life, and strong economies. In this sense, black bears are symbolic of what we aim to achieve. A species whose presence sparks public interest and excitement, whose conservation both directly and indirectly protects countless other species (95 percent of cave dwelling species are considered vulnerable or imperiled), and preserves some of the most breathtaking natural scenery in the region’s most popular tourist destinations is a perfect example of our multi-benefit perspective.

Maybe we should think about making the black bear our official mascot. Just don’t tell the gopher tortoise!

Your Donation Matters

How much impact does your donation have in terms of what the Land Trust can do with the funds it receives? On average, for every \$35 donated to the Land Trust, GALT can protect the equivalent of one acre of conservation land. Conservation easements protect land from future development so it can continue to be used in perpetuity for agriculture, forestry, wild life habitat, wetland environment or outdoor sports and recreation. Whether your passion is for passing down a family farming tradition or for promoting miles of trails for sports enthusiast, conservation efforts can support your goals. You can help us continue our efforts by making a donation. Large or small, every donation has an impact.



Buck Wiley and his sons

There are many ways to make donations in addition to giving cash. For example, you can:

Shop on Amazon Smile: Designate the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust as your charity of choice, and Amazon will send us 0.05% of every purchase through Amazon Smile.

Donate Stock: Stock transfers to a non-profit like GALT, can often be done without incurring capital gains taxes (seek professional advice for guidance)

Purchase Land: Why not buy a beautiful property and protect it forever? Not only will you have land to enjoy, but you will also be creating a legacy for the future. In some instances, there can be tax savings as well (seek professional advice).

GALT: Protecting land for present and future generations

Landowner Spotlight

Steven and Janine Moses

By John N. Felsher



Steve and Janine Moses, photo by Laci Smitherman

Steve and Janine Moses were first inspired to protect a forested property they owned in Talladega County, Alabama, which adjoined the Talladega National Forest. They frequently hiked the property, marveling at its mature hardwood forest and water features, and also observing its wildlife-- geese, ducks, egrets, herons, turkey, and other birds, as well as deer. "The forest and its wildlife, particularly its water birds, are the reason we became interested in conservation," Steve recalls. And, that inspiration moved us to contact Chattowah Open Land Trust (the predecessor to Georgia-Alabama Land Trust, Inc.) to begin the process of protecting land. The Moseses, along with a few other individuals owned that land, and all agreed to put it into a conservation easement. "That property had such beautiful old hardwoods that we didn't want to see cut," Steve recalled. After we protected the property with a conservation easement, we did sell it to a conservation-minded buyer who appreciated that the property was forever protected.

A few years later, the Land Trust approached the Moses family about a conservation project along Choccolocco Creek, which would involve placing a conservation easement on a portion of their 40-acre homeplace also located in Talladega County, Alabama. That property forms a long, skinny rectangle near Oxford, Ala., fronting Choccolocco Creek and across from the Anniston Regional Airport. According to Steve, "The easement calls for a 150-foot riparian protection zone along both sides of

the creek. We're just leaving it natural so it grows back wild. The rest of the property is limited to sustainable agricultural use."

Since that project about 10 years ago, GALT has worked to protect many other lands along Choccolocco Creek, a unique feature for not only Alabama but also the county. Steve explains, "Choccolocco Creek is the longest creek in the United States that does not become a river and is one of the most biologically diverse creeks in the nation."

With the Moses' easement in place, Steve, a self-described "conservation evangelist," began talking to his neighbors about protecting their properties with easements, especially lands bordering the creek. Although some neighbors were hesitant, most seemed receptive to the idea. "Most of our neighbors were very family focused," Janine says. "They wanted to preserve their lands and keep them natural for their families and future generations. We have a lot of deer, birds, fox, beavers, and other wildlife in the area and the Creek is so unique. On this property, we're thinking of doing some habitat enhancement for wildlife, such as fruit tree planting."

According to GALT Director of Monitoring, Lesley Hanson, "Now, GALT protects approximately 1,430 acres along Choccolocco Creek, conserving more than 29 miles of the

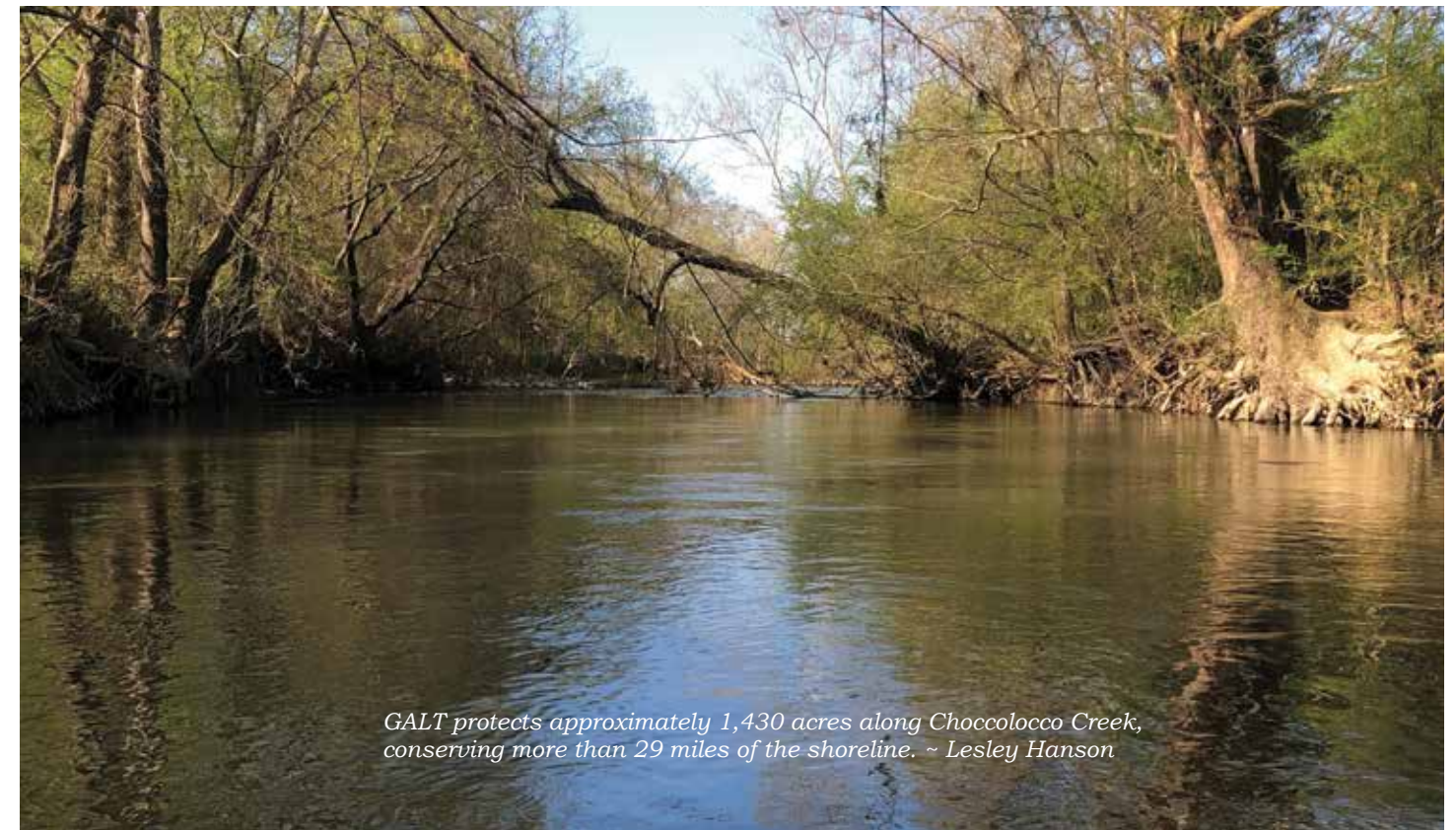
shoreline. Approximately 780 of those acres sit within about four miles of the Moses' house." Similarly, Steve noted that "by partnering with all of these neighbors, we all now have a much bigger piece of land that's protected for wildlife habitat than any of us could have done alone."

Steve and Janine continue to be involved with the Land Trust as contributors and as volunteers. In addition to their passion for land conservation, the Moseses have a passion for children and serve as foster parents, particularly for those with hearing and other disabilities. The Moseses have blended their passion for helping children with their passion for land protection by taking children on conservation hikes and exposing them to the natural world. Katherine Eddins recalls, "I remember one hike with Steve and Janine in the upper reaches of Choccolocco Creek. It was raining and we were all learning about plants from a naturalist. The children, particularly the deaf children, were having so much fun with the rain and experiencing all the beauty of the forest and abundant wildflowers." The Moseses also serve as volunteer land stewards, helping GALT steward conservation easements in their community.



Heron, GALT file photo

"Choccolocco Creek is the longest creek in the United States that does not become a river and is one of the most biologically diverse creeks in the nation." ~ Steve Moses



GALT protects approximately 1,430 acres along Choccolocco Creek, conserving more than 29 miles of the shoreline. ~ Lesley Hanson

Choccolocco Creek, photo by Alex Robertson

Passing it on

The Family Legacy of Environmentalism

By Philip Beidler



The Anderson family at Serenbe, photo by Ben Rose Photography

One of the foremost questions for property owners contemplating environmental preservation in the form of long-term natural conservation easements is that of “perpetuity.” How will such commitments affect or be received by immediately ensuing and eventually future generations? Here is the vivid story of one Georgia family about how environmentalism itself became a generational legacy, both material and spiritual.

The account begins somewhat surprisingly with the realization of a major international industrialist, Ray C. Anderson, at the height of an extraordinary entrepreneurial and manufacturing career, that his nearly one billion dollar floor coverings business, was mortgaging the lives and livelihoods of future generations. Hard dollars were irreparably depleting what he came to call “God’s currency” - the ultimate natural worth of the planet. Ray Anderson’s story of re-inventing his company, Interface, Inc., as a

model for large-scale sustainable business can be found in his fascinating book, *Mid-Course Correction: Toward a Sustainable Enterprise: The Interface Model*.

At the time of his death in 2011, it was discovered that Ray Anderson had made a significant bequest to be devoted to the formation of a family-administered Ray C. Anderson Foundation in order to continue his business and industry environmentalist work. Rather to his family’s puzzlement, however, he left no instructions on the creation of such an entity or the focus of its work. “We pouted for about six months,” recalls his daughter Mary Anne Lanier; and then we sat down and went to work. With a small advisory board of experts in the field of major philanthropy, joined with trusted former Anderson associates, they had the foundation up and running in a year. When they solicited proposals for funding on their first cycle, they received three hundred. Fortunately, one stood high above all the others. It was from Ray C. Anderson’s

alma mater, Georgia Tech—where he had no doubt gotten a good bit of experience in practicing determination as a runner back under revered Coach Bobby Dodd. By 2015 the Scheller College of Business had formed and set in operation the Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business.

It should be no surprise that during Ray Anderson’s world-heralded devotion of the second half of his career to recreating Interface as a total environmentally sustainable corporation and formulating the theory and real-world modeling contained in *Mid-Course Correction*, he practiced rewarding innovative personal stewardship in preservation of the natural environment. He was active on boards of organizations such as the National Wildlife Foundation and the Georgia Nature Conservancy, and, close to his beloved hometown of West Point, Georgia, the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. Informally, he also held regular gatherings in Atlanta of what he called the Georgia “eco-mafia” to discuss current concerns and new ideas. Every year to the present, the family gathers conservationist and members of environmentalist organizations to a celebration of their collective work at Serenbe, an experimental community in sustainable living south of Atlanta. It is called Ray Day.

Surely Ray Anderson’s most beloved late-life personal project in green thinking and living, and of inculcating such ongoing commitment among his descendants, was Lost Valley, the property at Highland Gap, on the Western North Carolina and North Georgia Lines—called thereabouts, “Scaly Mountain.” Creating a Conservation easement, through the Chattowah Open (shortly to become the Georgia-Alabama) Land Trust, on a tract of woodland still remote from commercial development, he specified that three sites could be devoted to building lots, with the rest being devoted to natural preservation. Then, true to form, he undertook a signature Ray Anderson: he conceptualized and engineered a dwelling for himself and his



Ray Anderson, photo by Lynne Siler

extended family to this day totally off the energy grid.

By now, involvement extends from two daughters, Mary Anne Lanier and Harriet Langford, to their sons and daughters, whom they collectively call “the next-gen.” John Lanier, an attorney, is currently the keeper of the foundation. Jay Lanier, a sales representative for Interface, is the keeper of the land. Their brother Patrick and their cousins McCall Langford and Melissa Langford Wells join them several times a year to play an active role in assessing and ranking new grant applications. Meanwhile, family members stay further involved in imaginative ways in which Ray Anderson would have delighted.

As part of his directorship of the Ray C. Anderson Foundation, John Lanier has published a revised and updated version of his grandfather’s groundbreaking book and regularly writes a thoughtful and informative current affairs column he has entitled the “Ecocentricity” Blog. When Jay Lanier joined the Interface sales force, like his grandfather he set for himself a demanding challenge. He proposed to create a new market in western Appalachia, centered on the developing region around Asheville, North Carolina, where he also manages the Lost Valley property and studies professional forestry. Today it flourishes. McCall Langford pursues graduate studies in Biomimicry, a new area of environmental design. Several of the cousins, as parents of young children, are already envisioning a new NextGen Committee to succeed and continue the work of the current NextGen Committee.

Nor is inventive environmentalist thinking just a current NextGen pursuit. When a section of Interstate 85 near West Point was named for her father, daughter Harriet Langford had a typical Anderson bright idea. The nearby Georgia Welcome Center was modified and enlarged to include an experimental station focusing on issues of highway sustainability, where drivers, for instance, may check factors such as tire pressure and tread depth in their relation to optimal usage. Following this initiative, the Ray C. Anderson Foundation created The Ray as an independent nonprofit, empowering it to catalyze this corridor into a global model for regenerative transportation.

At the corporate level, it should probably come as no surprise that through Ray Anderson’s inspiration, his original company, Interface, achieved its goal of total sustainability in 2020. Addressing the most serious planetary environmental crisis of our time, it now has undertaken as part of its corporate mission an initiative entitled “Climate Take Back.”

At Ray Anderson’s death in 2011, the Washington Post called him “the greenest CEO in America.” In turn, his family continues to honor his legacy. “Service rather than Privilege,” says Jay Lanier, remains a collective motto. They are doing their best in passing it along.

Private Land, Public Use

Landowners Sharing Conservation

By John N. Felsher



Rising Fawn Gardens Sunflower Field

Many landowners who made the commitment to permanently protect land also wish to share the beauty of that land with others: family, friends, and co-workers; clubs, such as Cancer Navigators or Cub Scouts; caving groups and others. Here are some stories of our landowners sharing their conservation.

Rising Fawn Gardens

Steve and Karen Persinger share with others the beauty of their conserved 570 acres located in Rising Fawn, Georgia. Their land sits on the banks of Lookout Creek very close to the famed Lookout Mountain, where it climbs up the side of the mountain. They have hoop houses for crops, an herb garden full of fragrant plants, and a peaceful yoga retreat with views of a large field and mountain wilderness. They call this beautiful and special place Rising Fawn Gardens.

“It’s a very natural surrounding that’s pretty undisturbed,” Karen says. “About 500 acres are just woodland. We have some fields cultivated for crops, including food plots for animals, but it’s primarily very native. Lookout Creek runs north to the Tennessee River. Lookout Mountain is part of our landscape. We put the land in an easement with the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust to ensure it was conserved for generations to come and its habitat would remain as diverse as it is now.”

The Persingers don’t just sit on their porch and admire the view. They constantly work to improve their innovative farm

uses and to be good stewards of their land. Karen explained, “Part of stewardship is sharing and making the property available, to some degree, to the public. We promote wellness and education here, but we also always try to protect the footprint of the property and preserve as much of the raw beauty and naturalness as we can.” The Persingers periodically host wildflower and nature walks where they identify different plants and species to participants. Through Rising Fawn Gardens’ social media platforms, they further offer virtual tours and photography, and teach people about herbs, wellness and the native plants and animals of Southern Appalachia. Sharing this space helps communities come together to learn about, share and enjoy the benefits of both nature and wellness.



Rising Fawn Gardens yoga retreat attendees

In addition, Rising Fawn Gardens also operates as a working farm. The Persingers grow berries as well as medicinal herbs such as turmeric and ginger—both herbs considered by many

to be helpful in promoting wellness.

“As part of our interest in wellness, we want to teach people about different plants,” Karen said. “Many of the plants are native to this area, but we also cultivate non-native herbs here. We process the turmeric and ginger to create spicy blends, ground turmeric, and herbal tea. We also do programming regarding the herbs that we grow.”

“We have two or three open farm days throughout the year that are free and open to the public,” Karen added. “We also have ‘you pick’ days where people can pick their own blueberries and elderberries. Our herb garden tours are held on the second Friday of every month from June through October. It gives us a lot of pleasure to see people come out and appreciate what being close to nature can be like. The satisfaction is knowing that it helps people. We all need nature in our lives and we all need places to go that help us replenish and fill our cups. We feel that across the board, nature seems to be the thing that people crave whether they know it or not.”



Rising Fawn Gardens turmeric greenhouse

People can reach the farm in about a 30-minute drive from downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee or Fort Payne, Alabama. For event schedules and more information, see risingfawngardens.com.

W. C. Bradley Farms

Years ago, most Americans grew up on farms. They raised their own meat, planted and harvested cash crops, and grew special items in their gardens. Now, when asked, “Where does your food come from?” most Americans would likely answer “the grocery store.”

The folks at W. C. Bradley Farms of Columbus, Georgia, want to change that perception. The property runs along the Chattahoochee River, which divides Georgia from Alabama. The owners put a 5,500 acre piece of the farm into a perpetual conservation easement in 2008.

“We have a lot of different projects going on at the farm,” advised Ashley Turner, a wildlife biologist on staff at W. C. Bradley Farms. “Some of the land is in timber. Some of it is in row crop agriculture. We also plant Loblolly pine for wildlife conservation. Recently, we ventured into certified organic farming, so we’re doing sustainable regenerative agriculture on the property. Not all operations are on land with an easement,

but some of the land is permanently protected.”

W. C. Bradley is not only focused on conservation, but also on sharing the benefits of nature. In one project, Bradley connects with River Road Elementary School in Columbus to read to the children in their classrooms and to attend career days. Near the end of the school year each spring, the W. C. Bradley folks invite all the fifth-grade students to the Sugar Hill area on their property.

“River Road Elementary is our partner in education,” Turner commented. “Sugar Hill is on another part of our property, separate from the conservation easement. It’s perched on a bluff high up above the Chattahoochee River. We can see for miles north and south along the river. We always see bald eagles in the Sugar Hill area because they’re nesting there.”

On the designated day, children board buses to take a 45-minute drive, which crosses into Alabama for part of the trip. For many students, this marks the first time they left Georgia in their lives. Many of them never traveled that far away from home before.

Turner or one of her coworkers also boards the bus. “I meet them at the school and guide two or three school buses on the drive to the farm,” Turner said. “I love visiting the buses before we leave because I get to give the children a preview of where we’re going and what we’ll be doing. While on the bus, I tell them to look for things along the way like osprey nests, alligators, or whatever else they can see. I tell them what poison ivy and fire ants look like and things like that. It’s a wildlife education tour with a bit of adventure to get them excited.”

At the farm, school representatives divide the children into smaller groups. Each group rotates through different activities involving nature, wildlife, and farm life. For instance, one group might participate in wildlife scavenger hunt looking for animal skulls, antlers, feathers, turtle shells, and other hidden objects, while another group might observe a quail dog demonstration.



Scavenger Hunt at Sugar Hill

“The heart of the property has been traditionally for quail hunting and has well-maintained quail habitat,” Turner said. “The quail hunting world really deserves a lot of credit for much of the habitat conservation going on today. When we promote quail habitat, that helps everything else at the same time.”



Quail, photo by Dr. Ken Davis

I also try to give the kids a quick history of longleaf pines. It’s shocking how many people grow up in places like South Georgia and never hear how the whole South was covered in longleaf pines long ago. I always try to point out the different kinds of trees to the children.”

Many of the participating children previously experienced very little of the natural world in their lives. With so much focus on electronic recreation, some rarely go outside.

“Years ago, many children grew up hunting and fishing, but so many kids today don’t have that opportunity,” Turner lamented. “They don’t have any idea what’s outside their bedrooms. A common thing I hear from the kids is, ‘My grandfather did that.’ It’s rarely, ‘My parents used to do that.’”

Hopefully, this program will give children an appetite to learn more about the outdoors and an enduring appreciation for the wonders of nature.

William Hubbard on the Cahaba River

Most people want to leave a legacy, something people will remember. The legacy Bill Hubbard created will keep enriching people for generations and help endangered plants and native animals survive. Hubbard placed a conservation easement on his property with the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust and also donated more than 2,000 acres adjoining the Cahaba River near Centreville, Alabama to the University of West Alabama, retaining a life estate in the property.

Hubbard and the University of West Alabama are now working together to ensure the property is an ecology laboratory where UWA students, faculty and others can learn about and appreciate the unique biological richness that defines Bibb County, Alabama, which is located on the fall line/ transition zone between the Ridge and Valley and Coastal

Plains of Alabama. As this is printed, dorms are being constructed in the barn for overnight stays connected to UWA field trips and research at the UWA Cahaba Biodiversity Center. UWA Botanist, Dr. Brian Keener has identified more than 600 species of rare and unique native plants and is still finding more. According to Dr. Keener, the land is “an incredible example of exposed ridge and valley bearing a large population of Alabama Croton among many other rare species.” Specifically, Alabama Croton is a rare semi-evergreen shrub that grows only in Bibb and Tuscaloosa counties of central Alabama. The rich soils growing in the Cahaba and Black Warrior river watersheds create the necessary growing conditions for this rare plant. “The limestone habitat along the river and in intermittent places harbors the Alabama Croton,” Hubbard explained. “It’s one of the rarest shrubs in the United States, and I have the biggest stand in the world. It’s very common on the property, highlighting a really biologically diverse county.”



Alabama Croton, photo by Robin McDonald

The easement on the property protects a large amount of frontage on the Cahaba River, with the property situated about seven miles from the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge. The longest essentially undeveloped and free-flowing river left in Alabama, the Cahaba flows through 194 miles of scenic and biologically diverse habitat, draining a watershed of more than 1,870 square miles in central Alabama. Accordingly, UWA will also utilize the property’s shoals and islands along the Cahaba to study its unique aquatic biology.



Bill Hubbard, photo by Robin McDonald



The Cahaba is the longest essentially undeveloped and free-flowing river left in Alabama.

Hubbard Property, photo by Robin McDonald

By Rachel Mingea

In addition to protecting wildlife habitat and other natural features, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust (GALT) protects working farm and forest lands. According to the *2020 Ag Snapshots* published by the University of Georgia, farm and forest lands provide \$76 billion in economic output and over 399,200 jobs to the Georgia economy. GALT works specifically in an area of southwest Georgia known as the farmbelt, an area characterized by highly productive agricultural soils. In some months, cotton borders the roads, and in other months lush green peanut vines abound. Livestock as well can often be found grazing amongst tall pines or watering in a pasture pond.



Peach farm, photo by Caleia Wysocki

The farmbelt is important to protect because it is an area rich in both federally recognized “Prime Farmland” and “Georgia Farmland of Statewide Importance”. Prime Farmland is defined by the office of the U.S Secretary of Agriculture as “land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses.” Georgia Farmland of Statewide Importance is defined as “land, in addition to prime and unique farmlands, that is of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oil seed crops.” The Georgia-Alabama Land Trust currently protects approximately 400,0000 acres, with around 34% prime soils.

While it is important to protect highly productive farm and forest land, for the state and for the nation, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust further works with landowners to preserve a way of life for future generations. By placing conservation easements on timber and agricultural working lands, one can ensure the land must be used for certain expressed purposes, that development is restricted, and that the productive soils remain available for agricultural and/or forestry use. Thus, GALT helps to preserve productive working lands in the farmbelt so that their valuable soils will be put to best use – producing food, timber, and other agricultural products while less productive soils elsewhere can be used for development.

While it is sometimes the case that separate and individual farms in the region are initially protected, easements become even more effective, in terms of ecological value, when they are in close proximity to one another. We refer to these types of easements as “cluster easements”. In the farmbelt, cluster

easements create economies of scale that ensure the protection of the culture and livelihood of the community. By ensuring large contiguous tracts of productive farmlands will exist in perpetuity, conservation easements promote food security, a considerable component of the economy, jobs and employment, increased agricultural production, and infrastructure availability.

Greg Calhoun, a farmer of property protected by GALT conservation easements (www.greencirclesfarm.com), owns several tracts totaling about 12,000 acres scattered over about 40 miles. On these properties, the Calhouns typically grow corn, soybeans, oats, peanuts, and cotton. They also harvest pine trees and raise cattle. The Calhoun family put much of their property into easements “to keep the land in agriculture and preserve it for future generations.” Several other nearby landowners followed suit, with most initially conserving a single tract and then, over time, placing more of their land under easement, thereby creating a large cluster of protected land in the Seminole, Early, Miller, and Decatur County areas.

Albany, Georgia is another portion of Southwest Georgia with a large cluster of easements. One of our landowners, Barry Carr, initially bought a 2,500 acre farm consisting of agricultural land and upland pine forests with some hardwoods. Mr. Carr recalls that he initially “bought the property for recreation and investment,” but “the family fell in love with it and we decided to keep it.” Over time, Mr. Carr acquired a total of around 3,786 acres, with much of it being agricultural land. “Protection of this property is a gift to future generations. The property will be there for my grandchildren and their grandchildren.”

Although farming and forestry practices change, the land and its conservation values will forever remain intact. And when the next generation undoubtedly takes over, we will continue to ensure the preservation and responsible use of these fertile farmbelt lands that are so important to the people, culture, and economy of Georgia.



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Earn professional continuing education credit while studying conservation easements and topics related to conservation easements

FORESTERS · APPRAISERS · REALTORS · ACCOUNTANTS · LOGGERS · ATTORNEYS · LANDOWNERS

September

18

This 5 hour course emphasizes recent developments in conservation easement options and strategies. Discussions will address legal and ethical issues as well as accounting and appraisal considerations related to conservation easements. Steve Small, the nation’s leading authority on private land protection and author of the books *Preserving Family Lands: Book I, Book II and Book III* and *The Business of Open Space: What’s Next??* will be a featured guest presenter.

December

3-4

This is a two-day webinar with 12 hours of class time co-hosted by the Daniel B. Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resource at the University of Georgia. The class benefits landowners and the professionals who work with landowners. Professional credit is approved for Forestry, Loggers, Real Estate Agents/Appraisers and Attorneys (see website for credit hours and more information).

visit www.galandtrust.org to learn about more continuing education opportunities

Newest Board Member



GALT welcomes Ms. Carver Boynton to the Board. Boynton has over 25 years of experience in business, marketing, and commercial real estate management and currently serves as the General Manager for The Summit Shopping Center in Birmingham, Alabama – notably one of the largest and most exclusive centers in the Southeast. She is one of a handful of African-American women to hold the position of GM at a major center.

As a Selma, Alabama native, the granddaughter of renowned civil rights activist, Amelia Boynton- Robinson and daughter of civil rights activist and attorney Bruce Boynton, Esq., she developed a heart for people and service to the community. Through her professional experience she has been an active member of and chaired numerous not-for-profit and professional boards, including but not limited to United Way of Selma and Dallas County, United Way of Central Alabama, Big Brother Big Sisters of Northeast Alabama, Gadsden/ Etowah and Selma/Dallas Chambers of Commerce, Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama, and The Gadsden Commercial Development Authority.

Boynton holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication-Public Relations from the University of Alabama, a Master of Science degree in Business Management from Faulkner University and a Juris Doctorate from Birmingham School of Law. She’s also licensed Alabama Real Estate professional and holds a CSM designation as a certification in shopping center management. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta, Incorporated.



Weaver Cave

By John N. Felsher

GALT secures a Permanent Place for Endangered Bats

A cave with a storied past now offers a promising future for endangered bats. The Georgia-Alabama Land Trust bought the Weaver Cave complex from Seeds of Abraham Ministries Inc. on June 1, 2020 in order to permanently protect the property.

“We used some grant money awarded to us by Eastman,” said Katherine Eddins, GALT Executive Director. “We have been waiting for the right project to use the money. I give special thanks to Gayle Macolly, the Eastman Remedial Project Manager and community leader, and to Mack and Regina Crook of Seeds of Abraham Ministries for giving us the opportunity to purchase the cave.”

The cave sits on about 52 acres of Calhoun County between Anniston and the town of Weaver. The complex runs more than 5,000 feet underground with a creek flowing through it. Weaver Cave connects to Lady Cave, once considered a separate cave.

During the Civil War, people entered the cave to collect bat guano, a rich source of potassium nitrate, a key ingredient for making gunpowder. Also during the Civil War, the cave possibly housed a hospital. According to rumors, a speakeasy operated in there during the Prohibition Era.

However, the cave now holds a much more precious resource – endangered bats. At least two endangered species, gray bats and Indiana bats, visit the cave. The complex also attracts other bats, including rare tricolor bats. Various species visit the cave seasonally, but the cave attracts some bats all year long.

“The cave is special because it’s visited by thousands of gray bats,” remarked Jim Lofton, a caver from Piedmont, Alabama. “The bats are really sensitive to human disturbance and easily bothered.”

Gray bats don’t just roost in any cave. They require very specific conditions and found Weaver Cave to their liking. In recent decades, a disease called “white nose syndrome” devastated gray bat populations as well as other bat species.

“Since these endangered bats have chosen to use Weaver Cave in large numbers, that makes it important,” explained Nicholas Sharp, an Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources biologist in Tanner. “Many people wanted the cave to be protected for several years. Now that it’s happened, it’s a huge victory for the bats.”

Gray bats usually arrive at Weaver Cave in July and stay through September. In late summer, the cave could hold 12,000 to 15,000 bats that will now always have a home.



Eastman is proud to partner with Georgia-Alabama Land Trust in its conservation efforts. Conservation of natural resources is one of Eastman’s focus areas. ~ Gayle Macolly, Eastman Remedial Project Manager.

Weaver Cave, photo by John Felsher



Jim Lofton, a caver from Piedmont, AL, photo by John Felsher



Thanks to the Chattowah Conservation Council* Supporters and all other GALT supporters.

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Nature is not a place to visit. It is home. ~ Gary Snyder



Understanding Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a private land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of land in order to protect its conservation values.

Conservation easements typically allow landowners to continue to own and use their land for farming, growing trees, hunting, and recreation. They can also sell the land or pass it on to heirs.

Conservation easements are used as a tool to help safeguard our state's natural heritage and at-risk species by protecting high priority habitats and waters on private lands. The donation of a conservation easement may reduce estate, income, and property taxes for the landowner.

As a child, every spring my mother and I would gather our flower books and make our way into the woods to look for wildflowers. I have such fond memories of us sitting on the ground next to an unknown flower, each with a book in our lap, turning pages until one of us found what we were looking for. Photography reflects my love for nature. When I see something beautiful, I want to freeze it into the frame of a photograph. Isolating a single flower into a still image creates a level of detail that would most likely go unnoticed. Nothing slows the pace of a walk in the woods like a camera in one's hand. ~ Julie Clark