

# OCONEE RIVER LAND TRUST *news*

*Preserving natural areas in our region since 1993*

*Fall 2016*

## ***Banjoist, Blues Singer and Indigo Girls To Perform At ORLT Benefit***

By Denise H. Horton

Grammy Award-winning banjoist **Alison Brown** and bluegrass singing sensation **Claire Lynch** will headline this year's inaugural Oconee River Belles concert. Making a special appearance will be the iconic indie folk rock duo the **Indigo Girls**.

The concert, set for Thursday, Oct. 20, at The Foundry in Athens, is named for the rare Oconee bell wildflower and benefits the Oconee River Land Trust, which is on track to have 26,000 acres with protected status by year's end.

"I love the South and am a great supporter of land conservation efforts to keep natural treasures intact for future generations," Brown said of her decision to perform. "To have the chance to support the Oconee River Land Trust and get to make music with Claire Lynch and the Indigo Girls – it's the best of both worlds for me!"

"This concert comes at a crucial time as more and more landowners contact us about permanently protecting forests, waterways and agricultural property," according to ORLT Executive Director Steffney Thompson. "Not only are we excited about the increased visibility the concert will provide, but the funds raised will enhance our ability to protect more of Georgia's unique landscapes."

The Chattanooga-based Riverview Foundation is the chief underwriter for the concert.

"We are inspired by the efforts of the Oconee River Land Trust to accelerate the pace of its conservation activities by broadening its base of donors and partners," said Bruz Clark, executive director of the foundation. "The combination of a compelling conservation message and a stellar lineup of musical talent is a formula for a memorable evening, and a shot in the arm for the conservation of key watersheds, forests and farmland across the state of Georgia."



*Grammy winner Alison Brown*

Brown, the show's headliner, began playing the banjo at the age of 10 and has been acclaimed as one of today's finest progressive 5-string banjo players. In addition to being a Grammy winner, she has received multiple awards from the International Bluegrass Music Association, including receiving its 2015 Distinguished Achievement Award. Brown and her husband, Garry West, are the founders of Compass Records, an independent label that has produced more than 600 albums.

Claire Lynch has been named Female Performer of the Year three times by the International Bluegrass Music Association and in 2014 earned both Song of the Year and Recorded Event of the Year awards for "Dear Sister," and "Wild Montana Skies," respectively. Her newest album, *North by South*, was produced by Brown.

Atlanta-area natives Amy Ray and Emily Salier have performed as the Indigo Girls for 25 years. Rolling Stone magazine has described them as "ideal" duet partners. "Their voices soar and swoop as one, alternately raucous and soothing. When they sing together, they radiate a sense of shared purpose that adds muscle to their lanky, deeply felt folk-tinged pop songs," according to the magazine.

The Indigo Girls will join Brown on material they've recorded together, including songs from Brown's newest album, *The Song of the Banjo*, as well as several of their own songs.

The Oconee River Belles Concert will open with Sans Abri, featuring Josh Erwin, Michael Paynter and Troy Harris of the Packway Handle Band. Tickets are \$35 prior to the concert and \$40 at the door. They are on sale through The Foundry website, [www.thefoundryathens.com](http://www.thefoundryathens.com).



*Sans Abri*



## DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

**G**eorgia aster, golden rod, Atamasco lily, bee balm, pink lady slipper, turtlehead, Jack-in-the-pulpit, blood root, crested iris.

These are just some of the wildflowers, common and rare, that can be found in the Piedmont and on properties protected by the Oconee River Land Trust.

I'm definitely not the plant person on ORLT's staff, but I am learning, and I've had plenty of opportunity to increase my knowledge this year as we work to protect more than 10,000 new, amazing acres.

Using our precious rivers as frames, these properties can be found in a broad swath extending from the Flint River to the Ogeechee River and from the Broad River to the Ocmulgee River.

These new properties include a 190-acre farm that has been in one family for almost 200 years and a 14-acre property in Athens along the Middle Oconee River that we hope will become the newest part of Athens-Clarke County's greenspace program.

We are thrilled to have these varied land conservation opportunities—opportunities that wouldn't have been available without the essential support of our current members and easement donors.

On Oct. 20 we will have an exciting opportunity to raise awareness about land conservation at the inaugural Oconee River Belles benefit concert, featuring both local and nationally known artists who will come together to celebrate good music and the good work of land conservation.

The concert will raise awareness for land protection while giving ORLT supporters, landowners, and community members a chance to meet and enjoy world class music. This is a new endeavor for the land trust and we appreciate the outpouring of support from the ORLT community in planning and preparing for the concert.

Between the 10,000 new acres we're working to protect and planning our first-ever benefit concert, ORLT is staying busy—but when it comes to land conservation, being busy is a good thing.

We look forward to seeing you on Oct. 20 and in the outdoors.

—Steffney Thompson,  
Executive Director



Jack-in-the-pulpit



Atamasco lily

## New Interns Join ORLT

ORLT is happy to welcome two new interns this fall.

**Anna Watts** is a public relations undergraduate at UGA as well as a student in the university's Music Business Program. As part of her senior coursework, Anna is helping plan, promote and implement the upcoming Oconee River Belles benefit concert.

A native of LaGrange, Anna has served on the executive board for UGA's Relay for Life and is a member of Sigma Kappa sorority.



**Hunter Leigh Jones**, a 2015 graduate of the UGA School of Law, is currently working as ORLT's first legal intern.

In her new position, Hunter is assisting Executive Director Steffney Thompson and ORLT staff in reviewing and preparing documents for current conservation easement projects.

Prior to ORLT, Hunter worked with the Georgia River Network and the Southern Environmental Law Center.

Hunter is a board member of the Upper Oconee Watershed Network and an advocate for the Upper Oconee Watershed Trail. She is also an associate at Herdscapes, an Athens business that rents goats as a way to sustainably manage land.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Learn To Monitor Conserved Property

In early 2017 ORLT will train volunteers to help with annual monitoring visits to each of our 72 properties. Watch our website for dates and times, or email Carla Francis, ORLT outreach and development coordinator, at [carlamfrancis@gmail.com](mailto:carlamfrancis@gmail.com), and we'll make sure you're on our list!

### OLLI@UGA Walk

ORLT will sponsor its second walking tour for members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in spring 2017. Nick and Jane Bath will lead a tour of their Oconee County conservation easement. This tour is limited to OLLI members, an organization that is open to anyone age 50 or older. To learn more about OLLI or to register for the walk, visit [olli.uga.edu](http://olli.uga.edu).

### Oconee River Land Trust Board of Directors

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## **The Landowner Perspective: An Interview with Russell Bennett**

**S**ince graduating from the University of Georgia in 2000, Russell Bennett has focused much of his time and energy on twin goals – establishing sustainable commercial farms and protecting property through conservation easements.

Last year, Bennett worked with ORLT to establish a conservation easement that protects 600 acres of land and water along the Alcovy River. By the end of 2016, he hopes to protect an additional 1,500 acres with ORLT.

Russell Bennett was interviewed by Carla Francis, outreach coordinator.

### ***What experiences led you down this path of conservation?***

My dad bought 100 acres in Walton County when I was 12 years old and it became a place we went and vacationed every weekend. I learned how to hunt and fish out there, so that's where my love of land developed. As for the conservation part, I got a degree in biology at UGA. When I figured out there was a way to work in the field of biology through land conservation, my interest peaked. To find a way to work on the land, to work with landowners, and use my biology degree in a business-land conservation was kind of the answer.

I grew up in Stone Mountain, Ga., where we were on the edge of suburban sprawl. There were probably a thousand acres of woods behind my neighborhood where we used to ride bikes and play. Those woods now are a neighborhood and a golf course.

### ***What do you love about the land you've conserved?***

Every piece of land that I've worked on has a unique feature or habitat or species or creek. Being able to preserve those places in perpetuity, especially having children now, means that the next generation will be able to experience the same thing that I've experienced. Whether it's pitcher plants or gopher tortoises, streams or tributaries to the Apalachicola River system, rock outcroppings or cliffs along the Cumberland River where there are bat caves and ancient fossils.



*Pasture-raised beef donated by Five Arrow Farms served as the basis for ORLT's entry in the Sept. 9 Chili Cook-Off at Terrapin Brewery to benefit the Athens Area Humane Society. The farm is owned and operated by Russell Bennett and is located on his 600-acre conservation easement in Walton and Newton Counties.*



### ***Is there any feature that you keep going back to?***

I really like protecting the stream buffers, which I think ORLT does a really good job on, because they tend to get crushed by timbering and development. To have intact, beautiful, hardwood, mature forests is the habitat that I like the most. Those are the kind of environments that I love, personally, and that we've saved a lot of.

### ***It's great that you invite people outside of your family to come to your property.***

We've hosted lots of classes, kindergarten all the way to seniors in high school, out to the farm. It's amazing how little some of them know about land and the outdoors, so it's cool to expose them to it.

I want to share what we do with everyone so that everyone can be more educated about the importance of land conservation, the importance of sustainable farming practices, and how all of it works together because it is a public benefit to have greenspace. No matter whether it's privately owned or publicly held, it is a community gem to have a conservation easement in your landscape.

### ***When you were deciding to protect these properties, what made you go with conservation easements among different conservation options?***

I started my career in this business working for the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust, doing the farm and ranchland protection program, which is funded by the USDA NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service). I got to see the inefficiencies of the federal government. When I saw the opportunity to work with a land trust and the ability to use the tax benefits that are generated, I gravitated toward them. Land trusts have the best financial and long-term stewardship type benefits that we're looking for with these land assets.

### ***What are your short- and long-term goals for the land?***

Our short-term goals are to get the land into conservation easements and make it a financially positive thing for the partnerships. Long term, most of our conserved lands are going to house some sort of sustainable farming practice. On some of these parcels, I think it's feasible that they could be sold at a discounted price to farmers.

### ***Do you imagine your children being a part of the vision?***

Absolutely. My kids already are developing a passion for the land. When we're riding around and I see a cool flower that Laura (Hall, ORLT land steward) taught me, I'm like, 'This is a spider lily, it's kind of rare to see in this environment.' We take them out and look at deer camera pictures. I want my children to be well rounded. I think the land helps that, so we're going to try to keep them involved.





Walt Cook reviews a document showing what his property might have looked like if he hadn't established a conservation easement.

## Lotsanotty Forest Forever Beautiful and Tranquil

By Walt Cook

**U**ntil I moved to Athens and had a reasonably secure job on the faculty of the Warnell School of Forest Resources, I considered myself to be an "itinerant forester."

We had never stayed in one place for more than four years. But in Georgia, we could put down roots—family roots and property roots.

As a forester, I had always dreamed of having my very own forest. In 1980, my dream became real. I bought 41 acres of mature hardwood forest on the Middle Oconee River in South Jackson County, a mere six road miles from our home in Athens.

Immediately, people, including my own family, asked me why.

I didn't buy it to live on.

I didn't buy it as an investment.

I didn't buy it to harvest the substantial oak forest.

I guess the reason was, I just liked its beauty and tranquility.

That is also the reason I gave a conservation easement on the land to the Oconee River Land Trust. I just couldn't bear to think about it being transformed into another rural subdivision, like so many similar properties on the Barrow County side of the river.

Although the easement does allow for limited timber harvesting on the 30 acres furthest from the river, that harvesting can be done only under the strictest, most conservative silvicultural practice. So far, no logger has been interested.

The forest remains as it was in 1980, and will forever—beautiful and tranquil.

The easement allows a residence, and one of my sons is interested in building a log house on it. I have my favorite site for a house, and I hope he chooses it when the time comes.

The population of the United States, including Georgia, is expected to increase by a third by 2050. All of those people will have to live somewhere, but it won't be on my 41-acre tract.

It will remain and will forever be an island of beauty and tranquility, even as the adjoining land is eventually subdivided and built on, UNLESS the current owners decide to allow their land to be protected forever by a conservation easement.

\*\*\*

Walt is a founding board member and was the first landowner to place a conservation easement with ORLT in 2000.

### Bird Checklist from the Lotsanotty Easement (Partial)

**Date:** Friday, April 22, 2016

**Observers:** Bill Lotz, Jim Hanna, Carla Francis

- 2 Great horned owl
- 2 Great crested flycatcher
- 14 Red-eyed vireo
- 9 Wood thrush
- 4 Ovenbird
- 4 Louisiana waterthrush
- 5 Black-and-white warbler
- 1 Pine warbler
- 10 Scarlet tanager
- 1 Red-shouldered hawk

**To see all 34 species, check out the eBird Checklist on ORLT's website.**



Jim Hanna and Bill Lotz

## Geographer, Photographer, Birder Kathy Parker Joins ORLT Board

**R**etired UGA geography professor Kathy Parker is the newest member of the ORLT board of directors, but she has a lifetime of applicable experience.

"I grew up in Columbus, Ohio, the youngest of four with three older brothers," she says. "I spent most of the summer outside exploring the natural world around me."

Professionally, Parker taught physical geography and biogeography courses for three decades and authored numerous journal articles and book chapters about animals and desert plants. More recently, she and her husband, Al, have traveled throughout the world, photographing landscapes and wildlife to share with others. Recent trips have included Antarctica, the Falklands, Patagonia, the Galapagos Islands, Iceland, Midway Atoll, Namibia and East Africa.

"I feel passionate about capturing images that depict the ecosystems we visit and sharing them with others who don't have the same opportunity to experience those places in person," she says. "If people don't have some knowledge of and interest in natural environments, they won't be motivated to preserve them. My goal is to help spark that interest."

Parker is a member of several conservancy organizations, including the Audubon Society, the Georgia Ornithological Society, the National Geographic Society and the National Resources Defense Council. As a birder, she shares data with the eBird database at Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology.

For many years, Parker was a competitive triathlete—in 2009 she raced her bicycle on the Nascar track in Charlotte, N.C., while representing the United States in the Duathlon World Championships. She continues integrating races with fund-raising for cancer-related

charities, a disease she has been diagnosed with on three occasions in the past 15 years. She also serves on the board for the annual In Their Shoes Walk, which raises money for the Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support at Athens Regional Medical Center.

The Parkers live on 11 acres of mostly forested land in Clarke County and maintain a large organic garden that includes blueberries, strawberries, raspberries and raised beds for growing seasonal vegetables.

When we looked for land in the late 1980s, I realized that some of the finest examples of Piedmont forest were in private ownership," she says. "I feel a strong commitment to preserving these unique habitats to maintain healthy populations of the flora and fauna—and ecosystem processes—that they support. The Oconee River Land Trust provides an excellent way to help preserve and protect these environments."



*Sagittaria in Tallassee wetland*

## TALLASSEE FOREST UPDATE

**Planning for public access** to Tallassee Forest, ORLT's largest conservation easement in Athens-Clarke County, is well under way.

Drafts of the concept plans are almost complete. Athens-Clarke County (ACC), which owns the property, is expected to host a citizen comment meeting in the near future. An online survey will be available on the ACC website at that time.

Tallassee is a significant natural area. This 310-acre, relatively undisturbed property contains eight of the 16 high priority habitats for the Piedmont area, as designated by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

These habitats include mature hardwood forests, wetlands, clear springs and streams, and 1.2 miles of frontage on the Middle Oconee River. A rare holly forest and canebrakes occur in the backcountry of the property.

These habitats support a high diversity of species that are threatened by habitat loss in our rapidly developing region, including, for example, the wood thrush, Louisiana waterthrush, green hairstreak butterfly, and queen snake.

Tallassee was purchased by ACC in 2014 with SPLOST funds and a grant from the Riverview Foundation. A conservation easement was immediately placed on the property through ORLT.

While not yet open to the public, the county has made the forest available for research efforts including bird surveys with the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society and annual easement monitoring visits with ORLT.

For those who would like more information on its habitats and species, *Tallassee Forest: Inventories, Baseline Data and Recommendations*, is an excellent resource and can be found on ORLT's website.

— Karen Porter





## OLLI "Tour of an Easement" a Success

Springtime was the perfect season to explore the Lotsanotty easement's forests, wildflowers, ferns, wildlife, and streams. More than 20 OLLI members toured the property while landowner, Walt Cook, shared why he protected his land with a conservation easement and how this ensures that the property will remain free of development forever.



## "Seize the Airwaves" Benefits ORLT

WUOG, UGA's alternative college radio station, chose ORLT as this semester's beneficiary of "Seize the Airwaves." In September, more than 50 community members rented live air time and hosted talk shows and played music of their choice. Carla Francis, her brother, Paul Francis, and ORLT member Brian Cooke used their air time to promote the Oconee River Belles benefit concert.



## ORLT Teams Up With Rivers Alive

ORLT joined the steering committee of Athens' 2016 River Alive, a waterway clean up that was held Sept. 24. Nearly 250 volunteers removed upwards of seven tons of garbage, recycling, metal and tires from Clarke County's waterways.

## Hoptomistic News: Terrapin Percentage Night Raises Funds for ORLT



Hundreds of beer drinkers and conservationists raised their pints at a Terrapin Brewery percentage night in March to benefit ORLT. Attendees were treated to live music, a food truck, and a delicious range of Terrapin brews. The sale of carnivorous pitcher plants raised funds and awareness for the Tattnall-Evans County Bog Protection Project.

**ORLT is currently fundraising** for the Tattnall-Evans County Bog Protection Project. We have raised nearly \$16,000 through a grant from the Turner Foundation and fundraising efforts by the Sarracenia Forum and The Georgia Botanical Society. The total cost of permanently protecting these threatened bogs and their rare inhabitants is \$55,500. To support this project please contact Outreach Coordinator Carla Francis at [carlamfrancis@gmail.com](mailto:carlamfrancis@gmail.com) or at 706-552-3138.



## Wildlife Spotting at the Sawtooth Easement

The Mark Ross family used a remote-controlled "wildlife cam" to capture this photo of a doe and her fawn feeding on the Ross' protected property in rural Jones County. ORLT is always interested in receiving nature and wildlife photos from its members and landowners. Please share yours with Outreach Coordinator Carla Francis at [carlamfrancis@gmail.com](mailto:carlamfrancis@gmail.com).





## Beautiful Annual Meeting and Hike at the Winthrop Easement

**Rob and Carol Winthrop**, ORLT landowners and longtime supporters, hosted this year's annual meeting at their 360-acre easement in Oglethorpe County. In April, members and staff mingled over a buffet breakfast at a site overlooking the scenic property, named Groton Place. The Winthrops provided opening remarks prior to a guided tour of the property's well-maintained forests, stream banks, and wetlands.

## Greenfest Award Winners

**ORLT board members** Karen Porter and Dan Hope were recipients of awards at this year's Greenfest Ceremony, held in April. Porter was presented the Alec Little Environmental Award in recognition of her deep involvement in efforts to protect the 310-acre Tallassee Forest woodland, as well as her work coordinating an inventory and mapping of natural resources on the Athens-Clarke County Greenway, including the historic Beech Haven property and a rare granite outcrop in southeastern Clarke County. Hope was presented the inaugural Oconee River Land Trust Outstanding Service Award in recognition of his leadership, dedication and inspiration as a founding member and longtime chair of the ORLT board of directors.



## Website Gets a New Look

**ORLT's website** has a new look but is still located at [www.oconeeriverlandtrust.org](http://www.oconeeriverlandtrust.org). Visit the website to stay up to date with land trust events, browse protected properties, or learn how to conserve your own property. If you've been to land trust events this year you may find yourself on the website!

***Yes, I want to help protect green space in our region!  
Please enroll me as a member of the Oconee River Land Trust.***

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Levels:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$10)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Land Protector (\$100)         |
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***Thank you for your support!***

Mail this form (**or join on-line at [oconeeriverlandtrust.org](http://oconeeriverlandtrust.org)**) with your tax-deductible contribution to:

The Oconee River Land Trust ■ 675 Pulaski Street, Suite 2300 ■ Athens, GA 30601

## Planning for the future?

If you are interested in Legacy Giving, contact **Steffney Thompson** at **706-552-3138** or **[steffney99@gmail.com](mailto:steffney99@gmail.com)**. Our tax identification number is 58-2108824.



THE OCONEE RIVER LAND TRUST  
675 Pulaski Street, Suite 2300  
Athens, GA 30601

*"The mission of the Oconee River Land Trust is to conserve natural lands,  
protect water quality, preserve wildlife habitat, and enhance the quality  
of our lives and those of future generations."*



Oconee River Belles  
— ❁ —  
A BENEFIT CONCERT FOR THE  
Oconee River Land Trust  
— ❁ —  
**ALISON BROWN BAND**  
with  
**CLAIRE LYNCH**  
and special appearance by  
**INDIGO GIRLS**  
also  
**SANS ABRI**  
*(Josh Erwin, Michael Paynter, Troy Harris of Packaway Handle Band)*  
**OCT 20<sup>th</sup> AT THE FOUNDRY**  
Doors at 6:00 ❁ Music at 7:00  
— ALL AGES EVENT —  
Tickets \$35, \$40 at the Door  
Tickets available at [www.thefoundryathens.com](http://www.thefoundryathens.com)

## Oconee River Belles Sponsors

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