

# Oconee River Land Trust

*Preserving Natural Areas in our region since 1993*



## Summer 2011 News

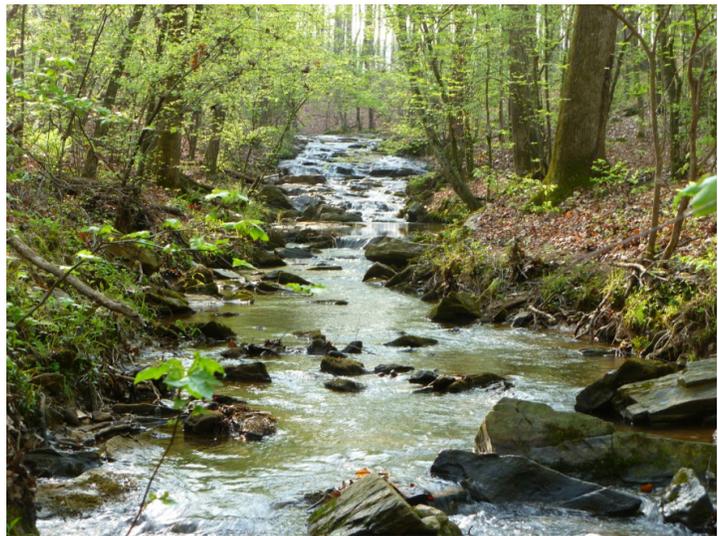
### State Conservation Tax Credit Made Transferable

Earlier this year, the General Assembly passed and Governor Deal signed into law House Bill 346 amending the state's land conservation tax credit program to make the credits transferable by either gift or sale. Starting next year, landowners will have a significantly greater financial incentive to donate conservation easements. Experts expect that this new provision may have a huge impact on land conservation in Georgia.

The Georgia tax credit program allows you to earn a tax credit of up to 25% of the value of your conservation easement donation, with a cap of \$250,000 for individuals (\$500,000 for corporations and \$1m for partnerships). The new amendment allows you to transfer any credits you can't use; you can give them away or you can sell them.

The transferable tax credit program has its set of requirements that have to be met. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources must certify that the donated land or conservation easement has demonstrable conservation value (e.g., land that protects water quality or habitat or land that supports working farms or forests). The recipient of the donation must also be certified by the state as "qualified"

(ORLT is a qualified land trust). There are other considerations that the land trust can help you navigate, or landowners can review the requirements at [gadnr.org/natural](http://gadnr.org/natural).



## UGA Graduate Student Conducts Annual Monitoring

This year, UGA graduate student, Graham Marsh, spearheaded ORLT's annual conservation easement monitoring. Marsh visited the majority of ORLT's easements with ORLT board members monitoring the rest. Marsh, who recently completed his MS in Forest Resources, has spent a good deal of his life outdoors in South Carolina and Georgia. Marsh's expertise and experience made him a natural for ORLT's monitoring program. He and his dog, Clovis (see photo at right), walked each property, looking for changes or concerns. As expected, he found a few minor issues that we are working with landowners to rectify.

ORLT was able to hire Marsh because of a grant from an anonymous ORLT supporter. This generous donor has funded ORLT's annual monitoring effort for the second year in a row, which has been a tremendous help. As part of its stewardship program, ORLT must monitor its 29 conservation easements every year. With over 2,200 acres to visit, we are so grateful for the opportunity to have dedicated, expert help.

## \$100,000 Challenge Grant

An anonymous donor, learning of ORLT's Sustainability Campaign, has issued a bold **Challenge Grant** whereby every single gift in 2011 to the ORLT of \$5,000 or more will be matched, up to a maximum of \$100,000 in matching funds. This exciting Challenge has the potential to generate an incredible \$200,000 in support of ORLT's land protection mission – crucial funds for our ongoing efforts to permanently protect vital green areas in our region. But ORLT will only collect from the Challenge Grant if we are successful in obtaining qualifying donations of either cash or stock. (Donations of stock are a tax-deductible charitable contribution and, in the case of appreciated stock, the donor will not incur capital gains tax.)

Funds raised will support current and future land conservation work. ORLT has protected over 2,200 acres, but much more good conservation work needs to be done. ORLT must look to its future responsibilities while continuing to create a green legacy of protected land. In light of these two imperatives, those who participate in the Challenge Grant may direct their gift to either ORLT's Endowment or to ORLT's current land conservation work.

**Success to date:** We are immensely grateful to the anonymous donor and to ORLT supporters who have gotten this grant off on the right foot, and have already pledged \$30,000. Their contributions will be doubled by the anonymous donor - creating \$60,000 for regional land conservation. As one of our donors observed, "It isn't often that I get to double my money so easily!" That leaves \$70,000 for ORLT to raise if we are to make sure we don't waste one bit of this opportunity.

If you would like to participate in meeting this Challenge Grant, please contact Steffney Thompson at 706-552-3138. Remember, with your participation, ORLT will continue to steward the 2,200 acres it has already protected, and work more effectively to protect even more green space.

The Challenge Grant kicks off ORLT's Sustainability Campaign. Just as the result of ORLT's work is permanent - protected green space including meadows, forests and farms- so must ORLT be permanent. The goal of the Sustainability Campaign is to raise \$400,000 that will provide the essential foundation necessary for ORLT's mission to flourish. This Campaign is being built on individual gifts and planned giving, with each gift playing its part. We will update you on our campaign's success in the fall 2011 newsletter

## Land Conservation Update

ORLT is currently privileged to be working with three landowners who want to permanently protect their land with a conservation easement. These three projects, totaling 430 acres, include beautiful hardwood bottom land, productive timber land, agricultural pasture, and thriving wetlands in Walton, Oconee, and Oglethorpe counties. Permanently protected, this land will benefit our region by providing varied natural habitat for Piedmont plants and animals, enhancing our water and air quality, and providing a green legacy for the future. ORLT is excited about these preservation opportunities.

## Other Legislative News

The enhanced federal tax deduction available for qualifying conservation easements ends in December of this year. Until the end of December, a landowner with a qualifying conservation easement may be able to take a charitable deduction of 50% of his/her adjusted gross income. The donor has up to 16 years to use up the fair market value of the easement in this way. In January 2012, the federal deduction returns to its former level under which a landowner can take a charitable deduction of 30% of his/her AGI and has up to six years to use up the value of the easement in this way.

## New Members Wanted

Know anybody who might be interested in land conservation, or who wants to make sure there are green areas for future generations to know and enjoy? ORLT welcomes new members who want to see our region retain the special landscape that we cherish. It is our green spaces that help to define our community and definitely make it more livable. Membership in the land trust is one way to help make sure we leave our community better off and provide our children with a green legacy. Pass this newsletter on to someone who might share these values. The most basic fact about our mission is that ORLT could not do its work without its members, and we are grateful for each and every one of them! More information for members can be found at [orlt.com](http://orlt.com).

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

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*“Let us leave a splendid legacy for our children. Let us turn to them and say, this you inherit: guard it well, for it is far more precious than money and once destroyed, nature’s beauty cannot be repurchased at any price.”*

— Ansel Adams

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 Level

Student (\$10)

Land Saver (\$30)

Land Steward (\$50)

Land Protector (\$100)

Land Conservator (\$500)

Trustee of the Land (\$1,000+)

Thank you for your support!

Mail this form (or join on line via Paypal at [orlt.com](http://orlt.com)) with your tax-deductible contribution to:

The Oconee River Land Trust  
380 Meigs Street, Athens, GA 30601



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380 Meigs Street  
Athens, GA 30601