

# OCONEE RIVER LAND TRUST

# news

*Preserving natural areas in our region since 1993*

*Fall 2018*

## From Austria to Georgia: *Protecting Critical Habitats in Meriwether County*

By Denise H. Horton

**In 1977 Ferdinand Seefried** moved with his family from his native Austria to the United States with the goal of becoming a successful real estate entrepreneur.

In the 40 years since that move, Seefried Enterprises has become one of the nation's largest industrial warehouse development companies – providing space for Amazon.com, Mercedes-Benz, Home Depot, PetSmart and many other Fortune 500 companies in 11 different states.

As his company has grown, Seefried – a descendant of Emperor Franz Joseph, who ruled the Austrian Hungarian Empire from 1848-1916 – has taken on other challenges, including serving in the voluntary position of Honorary Consul General for Austria to Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama.

He also began acquiring property that allows him to recall his youth in Austria.

“In Austria, my family owned a great deal of forest land in the state around Vienna, south of the Danube River, that is known as Lower Austria,” he recalls. “I grew up going hunting with my father and grandfather.”

In Austria, the rules governing timber harvesting are incredibly strict, according to Seefried.

“You cannot do a clear cut of more than 5 acres,” he says. “Then you have to replant in the following year. Every 10 years you have to produce a study for the government with a detailed description of your timber inventory, acre by acre.”

Seefried says his first land purchase in the United States was 150 acres that he bought from a friend who owned land on the Flint River near Gay.

“Once I bought that, the economies of scale in timber management made it sensible that I buy more,” he says.

Today, Seefried and his family own 5,000 acres of contiguous property in Meriwether County, much of it timberland that was once owned by large paper-processing companies like Weyerhaeuser.

As the timber has matured and been harvested, Seefried has consulted professionals to determine how best to replant in a way that combines both wildlife management and a diversified forest.

“I had a forester from Austria here who said we should mix it up,” he says. “He said we should at least introduce a hardwood that has commercial value.” With that in mind, Seefried plans to include yellow tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) into the replanting.

“After World War I, much of the timber in the South was planted in pine for use as pulpwood,” he says. “That sort of monoculture is not particularly good for wildlife.”



*Ferdinand Seefried on his property in Meriwether County.*

Laura Hall

*... continued on page 6*



## DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

### According to

environmental psychologist Ming Kuo of the University of Illinois, humans fundamentally need nature, not just as an amenity that makes life prettier, but for our physical, psychological, and social wellbeing. Seeing or smelling some part of the natural world creates real, demonstrative benefits in humans and their communities, from lower blood pressure and lower crime rates to higher levels of cooperation and happiness.

It's nice to have data back up what anyone who participates in land conservation knows intuitively: nature is good for us, and, more than that – essential. Walking on protected greenspace is one way to fully experience nature and experience its benefits.

By organizing walks on land protected by a conservation easement, ORLT's new director of development and outreach, Caroline Johnson-Hall, is determined to make sure members and others can learn about our work and experience the benefits of nature. We are delighted to have Caroline on staff and hope to put all her knowledge and experience to good use.

We hope you can join us on one of the walks, not just for its measured benefits, but so that you can see for yourself the beauty to be found just a short ways off a paved road, like the surprising Blackland Prairie with its Prairie coneflower and Dakota vervain, or when looking skyward, the sun-filtering canopy of a majestic white oak.

Thanks to our easement donors and supporters, ORLT is protecting not just natural habitats for plants and wildlife, but people's natural habitat, too. This fall, we hope to protect almost 5,000 more acres of greenspace, and offer opportunities for you to walk in nature.

—Steffney Thompson  
Executive Director



## Caroline Johnson-Hall Named Director of Development and Outreach

**When it comes to building** coalitions, Caroline Johnson-Hall understands the importance of reaching beyond the obvious.

During her master's studies at Carnegie Mellon University, Johnson-Hall spent a year as an apprentice for the Humane Society Legislative Fund.

"I did a million different things, including coordinating lobbying efforts like the Faith and Farmers Fly-in," she says. Faith and Farmers? Yes, indeed.

Johnson-Hall says it's a matter of capitalizing on existing interest within those communities, even, and especially, if they seem like unlikely allies.

In her new role as ORLT's director of development and outreach, Johnson-Hall hopes to build new coalitions that are as passionate about conservation as she is.

An Athens native, Johnson-Hall laughs about her decision to earn her undergraduate degree in her hometown.

"Most kids go away to college and leave their parents behind," she says. "In my case, I decided to attend the University of Georgia and my parents moved away!" (She hastens to add that the move was a coincidence – her father accepted a position at Presbyterian College in Clinton, S.C., just as Johnson-Hall was beginning her freshman year.)

After completing both a bachelor of arts degree in sociology and a bachelor of sciences degree in psychology at UGA, Johnson-Hall traveled to Pittsburgh to begin work on a master's degree in public policy and management. The degree program required her to spend her first year on campus and her second year in Washington, D.C., where she worked with the Humane Society Legislative Fund.

Johnson-Hall earned her master's degree in May 2018 and immediately began looking for positions in Georgia.

"I knew I wanted to come back to Georgia," she says. "I wanted to help my home state."

Given her educational background and experience in land stewardship and environmental education, Johnson-Hall is a natural fit for ORLT. She's helped refugee families connect to farm land in Clarkston through Global Growers, led biodiversity tours on UGA's campus in Costa Rica, and conducted entomology education programs for after-school programs in the Athens area.

An avid hiker and canoeist, Johnson-Hall says she looks forward to introducing more people to ORLT's mission.

"There are a lot of people who are interested in conservation, but who don't know how to be involved," she says. "I look forward to introducing them to some of the lands ORLT has protected through hikes and other activities. I'm particularly excited about the ongoing work on the Tallassee Project because I grew up very close to it."

She also looks forward to building new coalitions for conservation enthusiasts.

"In the future, I think we're going to start seeing an organization that brings together a holistic community of people who care about the land."



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# Blackland Prairie Hike a Great Success!

By Dan Crescenzo

**O**n July 14, ORLT joined the Georgia Botanical Society to tour rare Blackland Prairie habitats at Oaky Woods Wildlife Management Area and ORLT's own Flat Creek conservation easement in Houston County.

The journey began at Oaky Woods, where Tom Patrick, a Georgia Department of Natural Resources certified state botanist, led attendees through the prairies, pointing out various species as he went.

Two species of wildflower characteristic of the of the prairies dominated the landscape: gray-headed coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*) and rose pink (*Sabatia angularis*). Patrick also described the unique combination of chalky soils and frequent fires that maintain the prairies and the role fire suppression has played in making these habitats less common than they once were.

After a quick brown bag lunch in the field, braving heat and scattered thunderstorms, some of the Georgia Botanical Society's and ORLT's members traveled onward to the Flat Creek conservation easement.

Owing to somewhat better, more moisture-retaining soils, Patrick noted that the Blackland Prairie on this easement was particularly colorful and contained a high diversity of species.

Boykin's milkwort (*Polygala boykinii*) and Dakota vervain (*Glandularia bipinnatifida*), both classified as rare in the state of Georgia, were observed, as well as three species of native milkweed (*Asclepias viridiflora*, *Asclepias verticillata*, *Asclepias veridis*), growing in the space of a few acres. Patrick also drew attention to a large patch of southeastern bold goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*), the only known population of the species in that part of the state.

Members of the Georgia Botanical Society said they'd like to come back out to Flat Creek in the fall when the goldenrod is blooming. As Patrick noted, every month or so new species are coming into bloom and the best way to not miss any of them is to be there when they're blooming. ORLT is already planning a return trip to the Blackland Prairies Flat Creek conservation easement in the fall of 2019.

*Members of the Georgia Botanical Society and ORLT photograph wildflowers at the Oaky Woods Wildlife Management Area.*



*Prairie at ORLT's Flat Creek conservation easement.*



*Rose pink (Sabatia angularis)*



*Carla Frances*

*Dan Crescenzo*



# Notes from the Field

By Laura Hall



*A protected granite outcrop in Heard County.*

**ORLT visits each** of our protected properties at least once a year as part of our role in holding conservation easements.

These visits are about more than checking in on the technical details of the easement – they provide a history of the land and the people who live there.

This summer, I traveled west to Heard and Meriwether counties to visit with several landowners who have conserved land along a band of granite that runs through a portion of Georgia.

One 200-acre property has extensive granite outcrops filled with clear creeks, small waterfalls, and vernal pools. These outcrops host several critical granite outcrop species including elf orphin, prickly pear, and haircap moss. The topography greatly varies, and from the top of the granite outcrop I can look out over the forested valley below.

While the family also has more than 50 acres of working forest land, they've also made sure to preserve wide buffers along Hillabahatchee Creek to provide riparian habitat for native plant and wildlife species.

As I sat at the dining table looking over property maps, the landowner happily told me that all 23 of her grandkids gather on the outcrop for their annual Christmas photograph.

One of my favorite things is hearing stories like this from landowners about how their lives connect to these properties. People talk of hunting and hiking with their kids, grandkids, brothers and fathers, passing down knowledge and traditions, and sharing their love of the land with others.

Earlier this month, a landowner called from Effingham County to confirm a land visit for later in the fall. Before I hung up he told me about his teenage neighbor who called recently to ask if she could take her senior photos down at “that blackwater creek you love so much.” He explained how the water was low so the sandbar was accessible for the photo shoot, and that he would show us the photo when we come for our visit.

I love visiting this 1,500-acre property with its blackwater creeks, wetlands where thick inkberry and Indian grasses grow, and Sphagnum moss covering the ground in the low wet shady spots.

On a previous visit, the landowner told me more stories while we drove around in his pick-up truck, about how he used to ride on horseback around these trails following his uncle, grandad and father, back when the long leaf pines were huge.

Landowners' stories are about families' connections and love of the land, reminding me of this quote from Aristotle: “*You love what you know. You protect what you love.*”



Dan Crescenzo

*Bright red clusters of Diamorpha (Diamorpha smallii) are found on this granite outcrop in Heard County. This rare plant is active in fall and winter, flowers in March, and then dies.*



Laura Hall

*Blackwater creek in Effingham County*



Laura Hall

*Sphagnum moss (Sphagnum sp.)*



# Protected Properties Large and Small

By Caroline Johnson-Hall

**N**ear the city of Milton, the Perryton easement is ORLT's second smallest property protected by a conservation easement established by Perryton Properties. Though this property is small, it is incredibly biodiverse, containing several high priority habitats like oak-hickory-pine forests, bottomland hardwood forests and wetlands, mesic hardwood forests, and streams.

This 13-acre forest in Fulton County, a part of the Etowah River watershed, is awash with persimmons, blackberries, hardwoods, and colorful wildflowers, including a collection of pink lady's-slippers (*Cypripedium acaule*).

These rare and unusual flowers, featuring pouch- or slipper-shaped petals, grow only in soil with a specific fungus, making them extremely difficult to cultivate in home gardens.

Though pink lady's-slippers contain no nectar, their bright color attracts bees that become trapped inside the petals. The bees exit through a small opening near the back of the plant, collecting pollen that fertilizes the next flower they visit. Because bees learn to avoid these nectar-less plants, only 10 percent of pink lady's-slipper plants produce fruit in a year.

A few walking trails wind through the property, allowing guests of the landowners to hike, cycle, and fish.

Though no buildings currently stand on the Perryton property (a house was removed several years ago), local rumors contend that a moonshine still once operated where a dozen large rusted iron support beams are located, close to the remains of an old stone wall and two wells.

In addition to hardwood forests, Perryton also contains several water habitats, including a small wetland, streams, and a pond that feed into a tributary of the Little River at the Cherokee and Fulton County line.

Conserving this property helps preserve the water quality of the Etowah River, a primary water supply source for Bartow, Cherokee, Cobb, Forsyth, and Paulding counties. In addition to water resource protection, the streams and wetlands on the Perryton property provide essential riparian and hardwood habitats for many species. Fulton County protected an adjacent property, ensuring that both sides of the stream remain preserved.



Dan Crescenzo

*A two-acre pond on this Fulton County property feeds into a tributary of the Little River.*



*Turkey tail fungus (Trametes versicolor)*



Dan Crescenzo

*Southern lobelia (Lobelia georgiana)*



*Eastern box turtle (Terrapene carolina carolina)*



## Seefried . . . continued from page 1

But Seefried wants to do more than diversify his timber portfolio. That's why he and his son have established four conservation easements held by ORLT, protecting close to 400 acres from development.

"We have enjoyed working with such a conservation-minded landowner," says ORLT Executive Director Steffney Thompson. "We know he's always working and thinking of how to better steward his family's land."

In addition, Seefried has worked with several of his neighbors, who also have established conservation easements.

"We now have four property owners with approximately 12,000 acres that are being managed in a way that enhances the wildlife," Seefried says. "In fact, if there is reincarnation, I hope to come back as a white-tailed deer on this property, that's how nice it is now for the wildlife."

In addition to deer, Seefried also enjoys seeing a variety of ducks, quail, turkey, and fox squirrels thriving on the property.

"I enjoy driving through the food plots and seeing the game," he says. "Because there is very little hunting that occurs on our property, they stay longer and watch me as I watch them."

Among the many highlights on his conservation easements are outstanding granite outcrops and several springs. Hazel alders, river cane, viburnums, and glades of ferns are found growing along these springs.

"On one piece of property there is an old quarry operation that dates back to World War I," Seefried says. "But we'll never quarry there. Instead, we are giving that granite back to nature."

Although Seefried anticipates that some of his six grandchildren may someday enjoy hunting on the land he owns, for now he encourages them to carry cameras as they learn about wildlife.

"I encourage them to take their cameras, but to still develop their hunting skills," he says. "They need to be able to assess the age of a deer, to learn the discipline of standing still, to watch the wind so that the animals can't smell you."

In total, ORLT protects 3,572 acres of land in Meriwether County.



Photos by Laura Hall



*Seefried's property includes multiple incredible habitats, including granite outcrops, streams, and hardwood forests.*



## ORLT Supports GOSA

By Caroline Johnson-Hall

**The proposed** Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act (GOSA), proposed Amendment 1 on the November ballot, would create a dedicated fund for conservation efforts in the state of Georgia, including projects such as preserving clean drinking water, maintaining state parks and trails, and protecting habitats for game animals and other native wildlife. In order to go into effect, Georgia voters must approve an amendment to the state constitution.

Currently, the amount Georgia spends on conservation efforts varies from year to year making long-term conservation projects difficult or infeasible and hurting Georgia's ability to create new parks, reserves, and hiking trails, according to the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. To combat this, GOSA would set aside up to 80 percent of tax revenue already collected from outdoor recreation sales for conservation purposes.

If GOSA passes, approximately \$20 million in annual revenue will be available for both state and local projects.

"This funding will be used to protect invaluable natural resources while ensuring that children, families and outdoor enthusiasts have parks, wildlife management areas and other outdoor spaces to enjoy for generations to come," said state Rep. Sam Watson of Moultrie, the bill's primary sponsor.

Watson emphasized that GOSA is not an additional tax. Instead, it sets aside existing sources of funding for conservation purposes. It also is not necessarily permanent – it would require renewal every 10 years. Additionally, GOSA funds could only be used for conservation and could not be moved to other government spending accounts, according to Watson.

In addition to ORLT, GOSA has been endorsed by The Nature Conservancy, The Georgia Conservancy, the Georgia Wildlife Federation, and several other state conservation and sporting groups.

More information and updates on the amendment can be found at [GeorgiaOutdoorStewardship.org](http://GeorgiaOutdoorStewardship.org).

## Resources for Landowners: Benefits of Burning

By Caroline Johnson-Hall

**Controlled burns** are one of the most useful and cost-effective measures a landowner can take to manage invasive plants on their property.

Conducted in the spring and, occasionally, fall, controlled burns clear invasive plant growth, allowing native plants and hardwoods room to flourish. By maintaining open areas and encouraging the diverse growth of native plants, prescribed burns also improve wildlife habitats, help control insects and disease, and improve the navigability of a forest for the landowner's use.

Beneficial plant species like broomsedge and native wildflowers particularly thrive in the recovery period after a fire, while the open habitat attracts turkeys and quail.

Habitat management plans (HMP) should be consulted before conducting a burn to ensure that the burn site is not vulnerable to opportunistic invasive plant species that may colonize a recovering forest. A HMP will list the species of invasive plants on the property, their location, and how they may affect fire operations. State law in Georgia requires a burn permit to be obtained prior to a prescribed burn, along with other requirements that can be found in the "Prescribed Burning Act" (OCGA 12-6-145 through 12-6-149).

To learn more about how to conduct a prescribed burn on your property, including the legal requirements to do so, Sandy Creek Nature Center will host a prescribed burn certification course on **Oct. 24-25**. More information and registration is available on their website, [sandycreeknaturecenterinc.org](http://sandycreeknaturecenterinc.org).

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

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THE OCONEE RIVER LAND TRUST  
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*“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.”*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*Put us on your calendar and check out ORLT's Facebook page for event updates and invites!*

### **Oct. 20, 8 a.m.–noon: Rivers Alive**

This annual waterway cleanup is expected to be 2018's largest single volunteer effort to beautify Georgia's water resources. Volunteer check-in will be at 8 a.m. at Sandy Creek Nature Center, 205 Old Commerce Road in Athens. A free breakfast, T-shirts, and live entertainment will be provided. Volunteer teams will relocate to their assigned cleanup sites shortly after the kickoff celebration. Parking is limited at Sandy Creek Nature Center, so carpooling is highly encouraged.

### **Oct. 24–25: Burn Class**

Learn how to effectively manage invasive plants with prescribed burns and the legal requirements in Georgia to do so. This is an excellent skill to have in your land management toolkit. Registration for the class, held annually, is available on the Sandy Creek Nature Center website. The cost is \$125, and includes breakfast and lunch each day.

### **Dec. 6, 10 a.m.–12:30 p.m.: Rocky Creek Ramble**

This property backs up to Hard Labor Creek, where all of autumn's colors will hopefully still be on display. ORLT will provide Jittery Joe's coffee and Ike and Jane's pastries as we explore the trails. More details to come.

### **Dec. 6, 6–9 p.m.: ORLT's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Come out to Ken and Joan Jarrett's historic home for delicious food and drinks and enjoy a photo slideshow that shows how far we've come since 1993. Look out for a postcard in the mail and announcements on social media for more details.

### **January, Date and Time TBA: Athens Wetland Hike**

Join Laura Hall as she leads us through the trails of this gorgeous property located in north Athens. Date, time, and additional details will be announced on our Facebook page.

### **Mar. 21, 9 a.m.–4:45 p.m.: OLLI Granite Outcrop Hike**

Come tour colorful granite outcrops on two local protected farms with expert Eloise Brown Carter, Biology professor at Emory University and co-author of *Guide to the Plants of Granite Outcrops*. Participants will meet at River's Crossing for a brief orientation before carpooling to see two of these unique habitats. The day will begin with the Cason farm visit, followed by lunch at a farm-to-table restaurant at Oxford College, and concluding with the Mitcham Family farm visit.