

# OCONEE RIVER LAND TRUST *news*

*Preserving natural areas in our region since 1993*

*Fall 2015*

## DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

**W**e are beginning a number of terrific conservation projects, some close to home, including a project in Oglethorpe County, while others are farther afield, such as Meriwether County.

These projects will preserve large areas of important habitats along Georgia's streams and rivers, including the Broad and Flint rivers. We are working with great landowners to help protect local farms, working forests, and granite outcrops that can be passed down to future generations with their ecosystems intact.

While new projects take a good deal of time, we also are continuing to participate in the Tallassee Park Master Planning effort. The Oconee River Land Trust holds the perpetual conservation easement for the Tallassee project, which protects 310 acres for public open space along the Middle Oconee River. Athens-Clarke County purchased the property several years ago with the use of Special Purchase Local Option Sales Tax funds and a grant from the Riverview Foundation. ACC is working with planning consultants to create a park plan that preserves the sensitive areas while allowing for hiking trails and limited recreational activities.

We are excited about the future park. To understand the importance of protecting this property, please read the article included in this newsletter on the butterflies Jim Porter has documented in the Tallassee Forest.

Jim is an ecology professor at UGA and the husband of ORLT Board Member Karen Porter, who spearheaded the effort to document the property's natural features.

This urban forest goes a long way in improving public health, not just by providing much needed natural lands for recreation but also in terms of the ecological services the forest provides because of its proximity to a small city.

The U.S. Forest Service has calculated that trees in the United States prevent 670,000 incidences of acute respiratory symptoms a year by removing air pollution (nitrogen dioxide, ozone, sulfur dioxide, and particulates).

According to one of the study's authors, Dave Norwalk of the U.S. Forest Service Northern Research Station, "We found that, in general, the greater the tree cover, the greater the pollution removal, and the greater the removal and population density, the greater the value of human health benefits." (For more information, see [www.nrs.fs.fed.us/news/release/trees-save-lives-reduce-air-pollution](http://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/news/release/trees-save-lives-reduce-air-pollution).)

The extensive mature forest of Tallassee, located in the heart of a highly urbanized county, is cleaning the air that we breathe, and the conservation of this forest along our river will ensure this benefit will continue forever.

—Steffney Thompson



Mark Huber

*One of many mature oaks preserved at Tallassee Forest.*

## Oconee River Land Trust Earns Continued National Recognition Renewed Accreditation

**The Oconee River Land Trust** has achieved renewed land trust accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance.

"This achievement demonstrates our commitment to permanent land conservation that benefits the entire community," according to Steffney Thompson, ORLT executive director. "Our land trust is a stronger organization today having gone through the rigorous accreditation renewal process."

Established in 1993, Oconee River Land Trust has protected nearly 12,000 acres with more than 50 conservation easements. ORLT conservation easements can be found in 18 counties

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# Butterfly EFFECT

By Denise H. Horton

**J**ames Porter began collecting butterflies as an 8-year-old growing up in Ohio. Those early experiences led him to major in entomology at Yale. But then, his career took a turn.

"I had a summer job with a marine biologist and, after that, I didn't think about butterflies for 40 years," says Porter, whose career in the University of Georgia Odum School of Ecology has included documenting the decline of coral reefs in Florida and around the world.

That early passion returned to the forefront a few years ago, however, when Porter was selected to teach an ecology course at the UGA Costa Rica campus.

"I knew I wouldn't be teaching marine biology up in the rainforest," Porter says with a chuckle. "So, I made butterflies the focus of the labs and lectures I gave in Costa Rica."

That return to collecting and identifying butterflies and moths continued even after Porter returned home to Georgia. Although he has collected specimens in many areas, Porter describes the butterflies he has found in the 310-acre Tallassee Forest property as a "collection of superlatives."

"You can find the largest and smallest butterflies in North America (the giant swallowtail and pigmy blue), as well as the fastest and farthest flying (the zebra swallowtail and monarch), and the longest living butterfly in the world (the mourning cloak)," according to Porter at the beginning of a recent annual monitoring visit on the property by ORLT, which holds the conservation easement on the property.

Tallassee Forest was purchased by Athens-Clarke County using SPLOST and grant funds a few years ago. Plans for the tract are still being considered, but will likely include public walking trails and environmental education programs. In keeping with its conservation easement, these projects will have a low environmental impact.

Perhaps even more important are the many rare butterfly species that can be found on the property, which also contains a huge variety of plant and animal life.

"We've found the Southern pearly eye and a lace-winged skipper, both of which eat the leaves of river cane," Porter says. "And, there's Henry's elfin, which uses American holly as its food source and the great purple hairstreak, whose caterpillars feed on parasitic mistletoe found in oak trees."

And one of the rarest butterflies in the Southeast, the gemmed satyr, can be spotted in the hundreds at Tallassee, but is much less common in the rest of Clarke County, he says.

"Of the 90 butterfly species found in Georgia, Tallassee Forest has at least 58 of them. After comparing lists with other local lepidopterists, I believe that there are more butterfly species in Tallassee Forest than anywhere else in Athens-Clarke County," Porter says, adding that 13 of 20 skipper species found in Georgia have been found in Tallassee, along with up to 1,000 moth species.



While there may be myriad reasons for the large numbers of Lepidoptera in the forest, Porter points to the relative dearth of unspoiled, contiguous piedmont forestland now found in the state.

"Not only is it a question of how many acres are protected," Porter says, "It's also the fact that much of this property has been undisturbed for 150 years. Many host food plants for butterfly and moth caterpillars grow in relatively undisturbed mature forest habitats, many of which are now rare or absent elsewhere."

In addition, the invasive species privet hasn't taken root in the bottomlands of the area, allowing river cane and other wetland plant species to thrive, plants that are sometimes the only source of food for particular insect species.

"The lay public needs a place to explore," Porter says. "Wilderness is a necessary part of the human experience. Our children need the opportunity to walk in the woods, catch a butterfly, and enjoy the natural world. Butterflies are both beautiful and important—what a great combination. Our existence is inextricably linked to environmental health—clear air, clean water. Whether from a purely utilitarian point of view or for aesthetic reasons, we all benefit from the natural world around us. Therefore, we all need to take care of it."

*(Editor's Note: James Porter is the husband of ORLT Board Member Karen Porter. This story first appeared in the Athens Banner-Herald Aug. 2, 2015.)*

## Author Provides Guidance on Going Native

By Jane Bath

**A**s a career plant nut and landscape designer—as well as the owner of a conservation easement of 250-plus acres on a river, stream and pond—I never believed that one book could turn me into a “Native Plant Believer.”

Author Douglas W. Tallamy’s profound conclusions in *Bringing Home Nature: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*, provide the elements that have eluded those of us who are familiar with his years of research regarding the importance of native plant materials.

To begin, Tallamy emphasizes the reality that the “cycle of life” is essential to life itself. While there are multiple elements Tallamy includes in the cycle of life, he emphasizes the sun’s energy as most important, closely followed by – bugs. (Did I just say bugs were the second most important element in the cycle of life!)

Humans, unfortunately, have tried to fight nature in these modern years with monocultures, alien pest-free plants, and mowed lawns and fields, culminating in a revulsion to insects.

Because people don’t comprehend the science of the cycle of life, particularly the pivotal role insects

play in this cycle, we have managed, in the past few centuries, to massively affect millions and millions of years of evolution and, consequently, nature.

Bugs are supported by native plants in their native surroundings. Bugs can’t be denied the food source they’ve learned to eat over millions of years and given something new. They just die.

For years, my primary question regarding plants for my customers and my own landscape was, “Is the plant tough?” After reading Tallamy’s book, that question is now, “Is there a proper balance and understanding to address this problem in a beautiful and productive way?”

Yes, there is. *Bringing Nature Home* addresses this issue in a way that provides an understanding of the whole picture ... and with beautiful results. Solutions can come but only when the problem is explained and accepted.

Get busy reading about the problem so you can get going on your own solutions.

*Jane Bath is a member and supporter of ORLT who has placed much of her land along the Apalachee River in a conservation easement. She also has more than 25 years of landscape design experience at residential, commercial, and public garden sites. She discovered the perennial that was eventually named for her, “Bath’s Pink” dianthus.*

## ORLT Hikes

**Hikes held this spring** were well-attended by ORLT members, as well as others who are interested in the work we do.

The first hike was held April 11 in the 310-acre Tallassee Forest conservation easement.

The second hike was on the Apalachee River conservation easement which preserves 800 acres of land along both the river and Hard Labor Creek in Morgan County. Hikers included ORLT secretary John Willis and his wife, Judy, (Right) who identified characteristic birds on the hike.



# ORLT Consultants

In order to help more landowners protect their land, ORLT has enlisted the assistance of professionals Nate Thomas, Vic VanSant and Jane Raikes to identify and map the conservation values and existing conditions of several new projects. We are grateful for their expertise!

**Nate Thomas** is the owner of Southern Photograph Services, which combines his interests and expertise in photography, conservation and hiking. Thomas' career in environmental and ecological work began in 2000 with The Nature Conservancy in Georgia and in 2009 he began work with the Lookout Mountain Conservancy. Thomas currently works part-time for the state of Georgia and contracts with land trusts to provide conservation easement monitoring, baseline documentation report services, land management plans, fire planning and prescribed burning, and site assessments.



**Vic VanSant** is a native of Georgia who earned degrees in wildlife management from the University of Georgia School of Forest Resources. Prior to retiring, VanSant spent 31 years with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Game Management Section where his work focused on wildlife habitat management and forest resources management. VanSant's hobbies include hunting, dog training, camping, fishing, hiking, bird watching, and plant identification.



**Jane Raikes** earned her bachelor of arts degree in biology and environmental science from Colby College and her master's degree in environmental management from Duke University prior to moving to Georgia and earning her master's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Georgia. She has worked with local landscape architecture firms in addition to freelance work in residential landscape design. Outside of work, Raikes enjoys spending time with her husband, Dan, and son, 11-year-old Ethan. She also enjoys sports, reading about history, gardening and interior design.



## Farewell to Claire

Summer intern **Claire Rasmussen** has taken on a variety of tasks, including editing baselines, providing technical and graphics support, and organizing file drawers. We will miss her assistance as she leaves for her freshman year at Oberlin College in Ohio.



Documenting the flora and fauna found on our conservation easements is an important aspect of our work. We appreciate **Mark Huber**, a professor in the UGA Terry College of Business, taking the time to help by photographing some of our protected properties. In addition, Mark has donated a Canon SLR digital camera to ORLT, allowing us to take higher quality photos.



# ORLT Accreditation



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throughout Georgia, including: Baldwin, Barrow, Bibb, Butts, Cherokee, Clarke, Effingham, Emanuel, Franklin, Hancock, Jackson, Jones, Madison, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, and Walton.

ORLT is one of 317 land trusts from across the country that are now accredited. Accredited land trusts are authorized to display a seal indicating that they meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent. The seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation.

“Oconee River Land Trust is one of the first land trusts to achieve renewed accreditation, a significant achievement for the land trust,” said Tammara Van Ryn, executive director of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. “They are an important member of the accredited land trust community that protects more than three quarters of the 20,645,165 acres currently owned in fee or protected by a conservation easement held by a land trust.”

To achieve renewed accreditation, land trusts must submit extensive documentation and undergo a rigorous review.

“Through accreditation renewal, land trusts are part of an important evaluation and improvement process, verifying that their operations continue to be effective, strategic and in accordance with strict requirements,” Van Ryn said.

According to the Land Trust Alliance, conserving land helps ensure clean air and drinking water; safe, healthy food; scenic landscapes and views; recreational places; and habitat for the diversity of life on earth. Conserving land increases property values near greenbelts, saves tax dollars by encouraging more efficient development, and reduces the need for expensive water filtration facilities.

“The mission of the Oconee River Land Trust is to conserve natural lands to protect water quality, preserve wildlife habitats, and enhance the quality of our lives and those of future generations,” Thompson said. “Achieving reaccreditation is a sign of our ongoing commitment to that mission.”

## Oconee River Land Trust Board of Directors

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■  
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## Bird Walk At The Tallassee Forest

ORLT is partnering with the Oconee Rivers  
Audubon Society for a bird walk on  
**Sunday, Sept. 27**, beginning at 8 a.m.



Participants should meet in the front parking  
lot of Burney-Harris-Lyons Middle School  
on Tallassee Road.



The five-mile hike will include  
the stream, wetland and  
floodplain portion of the forest.



Join us and Audubon members  
to learn more about the birds found  
in the Tallassee Forest.



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, to protect water quality, preserve wildlife habitat, and enhance the quality of our lives and those of future generations."*

***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:**

☐ Student (\$10)

☐ Land Steward (\$50)

☐ Land Conservator (\$500)

☐ Land Saver (\$30)

☐ Land Protector (\$100)

☐ Trustee of the Land (\$1,000+)



***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  
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