

# Oconee River Land Trust

*Preserving natural areas in our region since 1993*



## Winter 2014 News



### **OVER 1,200 ACRES PROTECTED IN 2013**

The Oconee River winds through Georgia for over 217 brown and blue and green miles of river birch, water oaks, sycamore, otters, and eagles, joining with the Ocmulgee River south of Dublin to form the wide Altamaha. The Oconee River Land Trust protects land in more than just the 5,330 square mile Oconee watershed (in fact, ORLT holds easements in the Ocmulgee and Broad watersheds too), but this watershed continues to be the center of our work. In 2013, ORLT worked with two landowners to protect 979 acres of forest, pond and creeks in the Oconee watershed and with one landowner of 282 acres in the Ocmulgee. That makes three parcels of brown and blue and green that will stay that way forever. We couldn't be more pleased.

These three new projects are located in Jones County, about midway on the Oconee River's run to the Ocmulgee River. Two of the conservation easements are adjacent to each other and will amplify each other's conservation benefits. They border the residential community of Little Creek and protect Wolf and Commissioner's Creek, which are major creeks in the Oconee watershed. The third conservation easement completed in 2013 protects 282 acres that buffer the Piedmont Wildlife Refuge. This easement will enhance and contribute to the benefits found on the Refuge's 35,000 acres that are set aside for wildlife and study.

All three projects protect a mix of working forest land and natural habitat, reflecting a common Piedmont combination. The 100 foot buffers on the streams and the bottomland hardwoods provide important natural habitat for native species, while the working forest land will be carefully managed. ORLT is grateful to these three landowners who wanted to make sure their special properties continue to be places that thrive and delight.



**ORLT holds 38 conservation easements, and owns two properties in fee simple, protecting a total of 5,756 acres.**



### **TALLASSEE FOREST UPDATE**

The Tallassee Forest conservation easement in Athens Clarke County protects 310 acres along the Middle Oconee River. Athens Clarke County, now the landowner, has begun the process for developing a master plan for the property. This process will lead to an ecological management plan and a plan for public use, keeping in mind that the property can only be used for low impact natural resource based recreation and is protected by a conservation easement. ORLT, thanks to a grant from the Newland Family Foundation, will be involved in this process.

### **LAND DONATION**

ORLT also received in 2013 a donation of a 23 acres parcel adjacent to McNutt Creek in western Athens Clarke County. McNutt Creek is an important tributary of the Middle Oconee River and keeping an undisturbed intact buffer on the creek is of paramount importance. Thank you to the landowners who wanted to provide substantial support to ORLT and its mission.

### **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

**Federal:** Congress recently passed an appropriations bill that includes funds for conservation projects in Georgia (Okefenokee Swamp, Paulding Forest and Broxton Rocks). They also passed the 2014 Farm Bill with over \$1 billion for farm and ranchland conservation over the next ten years; some of that money should come to Georgia to protect agricultural land.

Congress did not pass legislation to extend the enhanced tax incentives for the donation of easements and/or land. There are still incentives – donors may deduct up to 30% of their adjusted gross income and have six years to do it in – but they are not as generous as they have been in recent years. The Land Trust Alliance –of which ORLT is a member – and others continue to promote legislation to make last year's enhanced incentives permanent.

**State:** Governor Deal's FY2014 budget includes a request for an estimated \$10 million in bond money for land acquisition by the GA Department of Natural Resources.

The restrictions imposed by the Tax Reform Act of 2012, including requirements that donations meet at least two conservation purposes (out of five) and that the State Properties Commission approve the appraisal, have resulted in only three donations making it to the appraisal review stage in 2013 and all three were turned down. Further action may be needed to ensure the tax credit works.

Legislation to create the Georgia Legacy Program as a framework for the state's land conservation program was introduced last year (SB 210) and passed the Senate. It is now before the House Natural Resources Committee.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Monitoring Hike in 2014:** Watch for an invitation to help monitor one of ORLT's 38 conservation easements. This will be a chance to see what ORLT does: both the beautiful land it protects and the annual work of making sure each easement is complied with.

**TRAIL SUMMIT:** Watch for information about the first statewide trail conference in 15 years: the Georgia Trail Summit, April 11th and 12th in Athens.

**Rally:** Hosted by the Land Trust Alliance, the national land trust conference is in Providence, Rhode Island, September 18-20. This conference is a great introduction to the land trust world and a wonderful opportunity to meet fellow conservationists.

## NEW INTERN BEN SCUDERI



ORLT's newest student intern is Ben Scuderi, an Ecology student at the University of Georgia. Ben will help ORLT with all aspects of its mission, including membership, outreach, project management, and field work. According to Ben, "I am excited to have this internship opportunity with ORLT because I am very interested in environmental law and the creation of conservation easements, as well as interdisciplinary approach to land conservation issues. I am currently earning my B.S. in Ecology from the Odum School at the University of Georgia, as well as a minor in Environmental Economics and Management.

I am an avid fly-fisherman, hunter and outdoorsman." Welcome Ben and thank you!

### Oconee River Land Trust Board

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*“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 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 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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Athens GA 30601