



Oconee River Land Trust Newsletter

The Oconee River Land Trust:
Preserving Land Forever in the Oconee River Basin

www.orlt.com

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The Oconee River Land Trust is a private, nonprofit organization based in Athens, Georgia. Our mission is to conserve natural lands to protect water quality, preserve wildlife habitat, and enhance the quality of our lives and those of future generations.

Incorporated in 1993, the Oconee River Land Trust protects land in many ways, most importantly through the use of conservation easements. We currently hold twenty nine conservation easements, protecting more than 2,200 acres of open space.

Upcoming Events:

April
*Monitoring
Showcase*

June
Spirit of the Land

Traylor Conservation Easement by Walter Cook A Change of Pace

Each one of the 28 conservation easements held by the Oconee River Land Trust is unique in some way. Our most recent easement is different from the others in several ways. The 72-acre Traylor tract is the first area that is not in the Georgia Piedmont – it is in the Sand Hills, also called the Fall Line, in southern Hancock County. The Traylor conservation easement is also the furthest from Athens; at 80 road miles, it is about as far as we want to go to do our annual monitoring. But the many attractive features of this property more than make up for the long trip.

The Traylor easement is the first to have saw palmetto, swamp chestnut oak, and blackjack oak. It is also unique among all our easements in NOT having any Chinese privet. In the little stream valleys, where we would have impenetrable thickets of privet, instead there are thickets of attractive American holly. But among the 25 species of trees and shrubs we counted on the Baseline Survey, longleaf pine is the most important. Owner John Traylor has been planting longleaf pine to supplement the natural seedlings provided by the mature longleaf pine trees present on the land.

For those unfamiliar with the growth habits of the species, a little explanation is in order. Longleaf pine seeds germinate in the normal manner, but the seedling does not develop a stem. For the first three to six years, it stays in the “grass stage.” The seedling looks like a small tuft of grass, but all the while, it is sending down a large taproot. When the stem does begin to elongate, it shoots straight up three to five feet the first year, and continues to shoot up with minimal branching the second year. During the grass stage, the tree actually benefits from wild fire. Its hardwood competitors – oak, sweetgum, red maple, etc. – are killed back, the fire releases nutrients for the surviving longleaf, and the brown spot needle disease of the pine is held in check.



Story continued on Page 3

Have you been hearing our name more recently?

It's probably because of the wonderful help we received from a talented young group of UGA Students that worked with us from August – December 2009. Here at ORLT, we would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Ruthann Lariscy's Fall 2009 Public Relations Campaigns Class: Carrie Chappell, Maggie Clark, Mary Conroy, Allison Einsiedel, Ellen Greenwell, Jessica Henry, Katie Kutzli, Katie Lawrence, Audrey Lewis, Chelsea Morgan, Jina Park, and Danielle Sender.

We were so lucky to have had their help. These talented students were able to give us great insight on ways to improve our public relations efforts and reach members both current and new. They created new brochures, a new informational tri-fold and Powerpoint presentation, updated our web site, created social media outlets, created a new student membership program, hosted numerous special events and gave us great ideas to continue their work in the future.



The group hosted and supported many special events that raised much needed funds for our conservation work. These included, a night with the Athens-Clarke County Library, a Barberito's Percentage Night, Celebration of the Land, a bake sale, A Night for Unity, and Music at the Farm. ORLT much appreciates their hard work and their semester-end contribution of \$550!

One result of their work is that we now have a volunteer Public Relations Intern. She works twice a week in the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9am-12pm. This intern will help coordinate our outreach efforts and special events. Mackenzie Madden: a senior Advertising major at UGA, pursuing a Certificate in Environmental Ethics, has done various PR work in her past. Her experience includes Creative Consultants, a student-run PR firm; an internship with All the Hits Q100, an Atlanta radio station, in their Promotions Department; and she completed an externship with the Environmental Protection Agency.



New Outreach Effort

ORLT and the Upper Oconee Watershed Network, a watershed monitoring and advocacy group, were awarded a small pilot grant designed to encourage cooperation between these two types of organizations. The grant will be used to identify a high priority river segment in the upper Oconee watershed and educate the adjoining landowners about the environmental benefits of protecting riparian buffers, and how conservation easements can be used to aid this protection. The two non-profits hope to be able to replicate this effort in other parts of the watershed. According to Jesslyn Shield, "Raising public awareness about the important role of undisturbed buffers along our rivers is always a good thing. These buffers protect the water quality of our rivers and provide essential habitat for plants and animals. We hope folks will be reminded of some good, easy practices that will protect these buffers, and even consider making sure that critical land is protected from disturbance, forever."

Annual Celebration of the Land

Our annual Celebration of the Land membership event took place on Nov. 1 and thanks to all our members who participated, it was a huge success! Nick and Jane Bath generously shared their beautiful land for the day. There were mule-drawn wagon rides, creek-side hikes, homemade cookies and cider, and bluegrass music. We look forward to celebrating with you again next year! Pictured below is Smith Wilson with his mules and attendees.

ORLT's Board of Directors

*Chris Canalos
Robert Carson Jr.
Jane Cassady
Walt Cook
Larry Dendy
Daniel Hope III
Stephen Humphreys
Kenneth H. Jarrett
Clint Moore
Hans Neuhauser
Madeline Van Dyck
Davin Welter
John Willis
Smith Wilson*



A Change of Pace continued from Front Page

The rolling topography of the sand hills is a welcome attraction in the otherwise gentle slopes of the lower Piedmont. Keg Creek flows from the northeast to form part of the easement boundary. The creek broadens into a shallow pond and open marsh before it leaves the easement on its way to the Oconee River via several other named streams. Several good springs bubble up on the slope down to the creek.

A broad, open powerline right-of-way forms part of the easement boundary, before it enters the easement and crosses the extensive marsh. That opening, which some might decry as being an unnatural intrusion, actually is a positive element that provides habitat for small birds and mice, and provides lots of edge habitat for the benefit of turkeys and small mammals. Mr. Traylor added the information that the pond on Keg Creek and the adjacent marsh attracts migrating and domestic waterfowl. That wetland habitat is crucial to those populations. The sparse population in the area also favors black bear, which have been seen on the tract.

The land has few close neighbors and is on a dirt road several miles from Ga. 15, so it is in little danger of being crowded by development. Kaolin is mined in the general area, but Mr. Traylor steadfastly refuses to allow mines, and the Conservation Easement expressly prohibits any kind of mining. The relative isolation of his restored log house allows for a quiet get-away. This author is also going to enjoy the annual monitoring trips, if for no other reason than to see 72 acres without ANY privet.

New Monitoring Internship

Thanks to our generous donor, Theresa Perenich, ORLT has created a new monitoring internship program that it hopes will be a model for the future. ORLT is required to monitor its conservation easements every year, and has relied in the past on volunteers. According to Dan Hope, ORLT chair, while this method has worked very well, “We felt that it was time to expand our stewardship program to take advantage of the expertise at UGA.” ORLT’s first monitoring intern is UGA Warnell School of Forest and Natural Resources’ student Denise Bailey. Denise, a former member of the Coast Guard, has extensive experience walking properties looking for problems. She has a tall order in front of her – as there are 2, 200 acres that need to be monitored! As a result, Walt Cook, the Stewardship Chair, will supplement Denise’s efforts with a few monitoring visits done by volunteers.

**Don’t forget to check out the new website: www.orlt.com!
While you’re at it, become a fan of us on Facebook!**

Spirit of the Land 2010
5th Annual Event at the State Botanical Gardens of Georgia
Presented by Oconee River Land Trust and Athens Land Trust

Last year we raised \$10,000 in support of land conservation so be sure to join us again for a festive gathering with excellent food, wine, music, and art.

SAVE THE DATE!
Art & Exhibit Sale: June 4 – June 26, 2010
Opening Reception: Sunday June 6
Gala Event: Saturday June 26
Includes wine tasting, hors d’oeuvres, silent auction and art sale



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