In wildness is the preservation of the world.

“Henry David Thoreau

Photograph: Larry Wills

Over 345,000 acres of protected wildlife habitat, prime farming soils, productive forests, and freshwater coastal ecosystems.

Georgia & Alabama Protected Lands

20% Freshwater & Coastal | 30% Forests & Tree Farms | 50% Farms & Plantations

PUBLICATION NOTES

Lorrie Stafford
Director of Development & Communications

Betsy Crosby
Editor & Communications Manager

Larry Wills
Contributing Editor

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE:

Katherine Eddins, Amy Gaddy, Andy Hug, Lesley Hanson, Katerina Fullen

www.galandtrust.org

Facebook: AlabamaGeorgiaLandTrust

@ALTGLTrust

CONSERVATIONIST | FALL 2017
People often ask me, “How do people find out about conservation easements and the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust?” My response is, “Mainly through word of mouth, and we have many repeat easement donors.” This issue highlights examples of families adding more acreage to their easements, and otherwise deepening their connection with their protected property through restoration and outreach.

The Pearson-McGehee family—pecan and peach farmers—are featured in this issue and recently donated their sixth conservation easement. Farm families like the Pearsons and McGehees are devoted to conservation: maintaining a farm-friendly environment and economy, and an intergenerational way of life and land ethic. This trend continues this year: we are working with a row crop and cattle farmer to conserve five additional farms, bringing the family total to 12 conserved farm tracts with significant wildlife buffers along wetlands and rivers. Another example comes from Board member Chop Evans and his family who are adding another pecan orchard to their multi-farm conservation efforts, protecting thousands of acres of pecan orchards. When you see these farms on the map, you can see an economy of scale forming—enough farms geographically concentrated to ensure a permanent market base for crops like pecans and peaches.

We also see families repeating conservation easement donations as part of an effort to protect or restore sensitive and important ecological treasures. Ron Martin, his wife Michelle Nunn and their family have twice added additional protection layers to their original conservation easement in southwest Georgia and have worked with the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service to restore wetland habitat property through restoration and outreach.

Many of these families have reached out to their friends, neighbors and community members about their conservation easements and commitment to protecting the land. The new landowners have followed up with us, and many have donated conservation easements on their farms and forests, as well. Through these conversations, families are making a significant contribution to the protection of farm, forest and wildlands in their communities.

Katherine Eddins, Executive Director

A Spiritual Connection

Kenwood C. “Kerr” Nichols says he had a typical Alabama farm boy upbringing, working on the family farm and in the family’s country store. A sixth generation Alabamian, his roots are in Dallas County, where his parents Lila Mae and Edwin Nichols began farming acreage along Ocmulgee Creek near Selma in 1938. Ken’s childhood there spawned his interest in agriculture and forestry, leading to his long and successful international career in the forest products industry.

This homeland also became the reason he and his wife Joanna returned to Alabama from Connecticut. When International Paper Company took over Champion International Corporation in 2000, he retired from his position as Vice-Chairman and Executive Officer, where he had been responsible for all of Champion’s timberslands and manufacturing operations in Brazil and Canada and for the timberlands and wood products businesses in the United States.

The Dallas County farm holds for him what he describes as almost a spiritual connection, prompting his decision to purchase it from his parents in 1977. To ensure that it would never be developed for non-agricultural use, he placed 447 of its acres in a conservation easement (CE) in 2012.

One hundred of the easement acres are in pine trees that Ken himself planted when he was 14. In 1957, he used the results of his forestry project to win an award, and he won the first place in a state-wide contest sponsored by the Future Farmers of America. The award led to a scholarship to Auburn University where he obtained a degree in Forest Management, followed by a full scholarship to Duke University, where he was awarded a master’s degree in Business Management.

Early in his career he was transferred to British Columbia. “British Columbia was like being in Heaven for a forester,” says Ken. It was there that he met and married his wife Joanna, who’d grown up in Northumberland, England. She and Ken have two daughters and five grandchildren. An accomplished water color artist, Joanna is the current President of the Selma Art Guild.

For the past 11 years Ken has demonstrated his dedication to land conservation by serving on the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust (GALT) Board as Vice-President and Chairman of the Finance Committee. He also continues to support the advancement of the forestry profession through the Auburn School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, where he established the Kenwood C. Nichols Endowed Scholarship. His contribution to the school was recognized by the creation of the Kenwood C. Nichols Family Library.

Ken believes that too many farms are ruined by subdivision developments and poor land use planning. “The conservation easement alleviates my concerns about what might happen to my property in the future,” he says. “I believe in land and water conservation and I want to live in a good environment for my grandchildren. I have always been attracted to the land and I want future generations to have the same opportunity I had to experience the fields and woodlands of Alabama.”

-Kenwood Nichols with the pine tree he planted at age 14

On Board

“I want future generations to have the same opportunity I had to experience the fields and woodlands of Alabama.”

—Kenwood Nichols with the pine tree he planted at age 14

2 CONSERVATIONIST | FALL 2017

On Board

“I want future generations to have the same opportunity I had to experience the fields and woodlands of Alabama.”

—Kenwood Nichols with the pine tree he planted at age 14

On Board

“I want future generations to have the same opportunity I had to experience the fields and woodlands of Alabama.”

—Kenwood Nichols with the pine tree he planted at age 14
The Land Trust in Action

West Blocton, AL

Land Stewards (right to left) Lesley Hanson, Andy Hug, Mike Heneghan and Stewardship Intern Laci McGinnis visit a colony of Cahaba lilies in the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge near West Blocton, Alabama. The prime blooming period for these rare but spectacular lilies is between Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Also known as the shoals spider lily, the lily requires a specialized habitat including rapid shoals to survive. Our affiliate, the Chattahoochee Valley Land Trust, has been part of the restoration efforts to restore the shoals spider lily along the Chattahoochee River in Georgia.

Heflin, AL

Our team is growing! In the past year, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust added several new faces, bringing our permanent staff to twenty. We gathered in July in Heflin, Alabama at the Cleburne County Mountain Center for three days of workshops and team-bonding. Welcome to Mike Heneghan and Caelia Wysocki, our new Land Stewards; Warner Kenyon, CVLT Program Manager and Staff Attorney; Betsy Crosby, Communications Manager; Kelly Ingle, Administrative Assistant; and Laci McGinnis, our Stewardship Intern, who is currently working on her Bachelor’s Degree of Science at Jacksonville State University.

Chattahoochee Hills, GA

RayDay at Serenbe in Chattahoochee Hills, Georgia last September offered the Land Trust an opportunity to educate the public about its mission to preserve open land for present and future generations. The annual RayDay celebration, in honor of the late Ray C. Anderson, founder of Interface, Inc., brings people together to foster connections and spread the word about sustainability. In 2002, the late Ray Anderson worked with the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust to place a conservation easement on 80 acres nestled in the Appalachian Highlands of Macon County, NC. Shown here is the beautiful Serenbe countryside where this year’s RayDay will be held on October 15, 2017.

Savannah, GA

The Georgia-Alabama Land Trust has joined forces with 11 other nonprofit organizations to form the Georgia Coast Collaborative (GCC). The purpose of the collaborative is to unify efforts for project advocacy, policy advocacy, land conservation, and legal issues specific to the Georgia coastal area. Kat Nelson, Director of Land Protection and Staff Attorney based in our Savannah office, represented the Land Trust on May 8, 2017 at the GCC’s formation at the New Ebenezer Retreat Center. Here Kat holds a gopher tortoise, a threatened species in Georgia, found in a coastal habitat in Chatham County, GA.

Augusta, GA

Katherine Eddins, Executive Director of the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust, and Dr. Harry Haney, Jr., a renowned specialist in forest economics, discuss conservation easements at our Conservation Easement Workshop in Augusta, GA in 2016, held in conjunction with UGA’s Warnell School of Forestry. They both will be presenting at this year’s workshop beginning September 19, 2017 at Mercer Law School in Macon. For more details, see our Upcoming Events page.

In the Air and on the Ground

Land Steward Caelia Wysocki takes to the air as part of her annual monitoring responsibilities. Each year, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust strives to complete the Annual Site Visits (ASV) of its conservation easements in a timely manner. The seven-member staff of land stewards, including Stewardship Director Amy Gaddy, has a goal of completing the job for all 934 easements by August 31. The stewards monitor conservation easements by ground or air. As of August 1, 2017, 97% of their ASV Fieldwork was complete.

To be monitored by ground: 414 Properties
To be monitored aerially: 520 Properties
Taking the Long View

An agricultural easement protects the family farm for future generations

By: Betsy Crosby

ike their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers before them, Al Pearson and Bill McGhee are orchard people. “Peaches and pecans are what we do,” says Al Pearson, the spokesman for Pearson Farm in Fort Valley, Georgia. “My father once told me that if I were ever going to make any money, I’d make it off a tree.”

Hundred-year-old pecan trees still grace the farm, but both men’s ancestors were primarily peach growers. The McGhees trace their peach connection to a relative who developed the Elberta peach, the first that would survive transport to the Northeast. When Bill McGhee married Ann Pearson, Al’s sister, the families joined forces. It was as much a business decision as a personal one. The 1980s saw an uptick in federal reporting and food safety laws; consolidation made it easier to handle the administrative responsibilities.

Part of that success comes from taking seasonal migrant labor. “If you don’t pick them up today, you can pick them up tomorrow,” says Al. “They say old men don’t plant peaches. Peach trees give me pause.” The short two-month harvest season requires a huge investment of resources and manpower. That investment can come to naught when Mother Nature sends a late freeze and hail storm as she did this year, resulting in the loss of a majority of the crop. The pecan market is more forgiving, Al explains, and is less dependent on scheduling seasonal migrant labor. A peach has to be picked the day it’s ready, but pecans can be harvested over a number of days with local labor. “If you don’t pick them up today, you can pick them up tomorrow.”

His attitude changed when son Lawton and nephew Will McGhee admitted that they saw an opportunity for growth with the locally sourced food movement which began around 2008. Peaches used to be sold like corn, as if they were a fungible commodity, says Lawton. “Now you see consumers want to know more about their food, and we’re dying to tell our story. We’re bringing back heirloom varieties, and our customers and our brokers are learning about them and rediscovering seasonality.”

Today, Lawton and Al manage the farm operations, while the McGhees manage the marketing side. Both fathers credit their sons for the bright future they see in the peach market, despite this year’s setback. “We’ve really grown under the energy of Lawton and Will,” says Al. His brother-in-law Bill McGhee echoes the sentiment. “We have tons more confidence in the market today, despite this year’s setback.”


Forever is a long time. But I really believe we need to preserve our farmland for our rural health.

— Al Pearson
Taking the Long View (continued)

In Nashville, it’s not unusual to see 200 people lined up on a Saturday to get Pearson Farm peaches from their local farmer’s market. There’s an equally strong demand in Wisconsin, where a group of ladies have made them their choice for canning and preserving. “Those ladies will let you know if their peaches are great—and if they’re not,” says Al. “We are such better suppliers because we know our customers better.”

It’s a long way from what was once known in the commercial peach industry as “The Other End,” the place where peaches went after they left the farm. Explains Bill McGehee, “You got a check, and that’s all you knew about it. It could have been failure this year. But Al Pearson is quick to point out that the tax deductions afforded farmers for conservation easements also play a big part in Pearson Farm’s relationship with Kroger, helping to ensure that its food safety program will be in place and sustainable in years to come.

Every year, the peach crop needs to pass critical weather barriers, explains Lawton Pearson. “We never know who we are until April 15.” Bill McGehee chimes in. “This year we called our brokers and told them we got hammered. They said ‘We did?’ It’s a ‘we’ deal, not a ‘me’ deal.”

The tax deductions afforded farmers for conservation easements will be a welcome offset to the peach crop’s failure this year. But Al Pearson is quick to point out that the monetary incentive for putting land in a permanent easement is not sufficient motivation for him. “Forever is a long time. But I really believe we need to preserve our farmland for our rural health. We are blessed to have this heritage.”

Thanks to the efforts of Al Pearson and Bill and Ann Pearson McGehee, it is a heritage made safe for their children, grandchildren and generations to come.

History Made Permanent

An Atlanta family preserves Civil War history on the banks of the Chattahoochee

By: Betsy Crosby

On Saturday, October 21, 2017, supporters of the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust will have an opportunity to enjoy a fall evening overlooking the Chattahoochee River, thanks to the generosity of hosts Bo and Eileen DuBose. The DuBose home, close to the heart of Atlanta, features a hilltop view of the river and adjoins forested land placed under protection by Bo’s mother, the late Frances Woodruff DuBose. In keeping with her wishes, Bo and his sister, Diane DuBose Smith, donated the 8.6-acre conservation easement on behalf of their mother to the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust in 2015. It is one of a growing number of urban easements held by the Land Trust.

The easement property covers an area that played a role in Sherman’s march to Atlanta. A military entrenchment curves around one side of Bo and Eileen’s house, built by Confederate forces intent on defending a river crossing by Union troops. Following Confederate General Hood’s retreat from the Battle of Atlanta, a number of Union soldiers returned to this strategic point with a four-gun battery and built their own entrenchments, anticipating that Hood might sweep around and try to re-enter the city from the north.

A highlight of the fund-raiser will be the opportunity to view Bo’s Civil War collection of “dug relics,” including those found on the easement property. Bo was named after his father, Beverly Means DuBose, Jr., who not only shared his name with his son, but also his passion for history. The two men became Civil War experts and, over several decades, amassed a significant collection of war relics. The majority of the collection was donated to the Atlanta History Center.

At the time of the Battle of Atlanta, most of the easement property was open farmland. Bo surmises that the fields began the transition to woodland in the late 1880s, based on the loss not long ago of a pine tree dating to that time. Carved through the forest today are carefully framed views of the river. While all looks tranquil now, it’s easy to imagine a Confederate infantryman in July of 1864, perspiring in his woolen gray uniform as he crouches in the dirt trench and peers anxiously across the river.

“Mama always had a love for the land,” says Bo. Frances DuBose also held a reverence for the history of this wooded oasis near Atlanta, and in her later years discussed the best way to preserve it with her son. The uneven terrain made it untenable for an open public park. Development into too many lots would have carried the configuration of the Union trenches. Bo and his mother agreed that a conservation easement would best preserve the property, allowing the family to preserve what they had for the next generation, or sell to those who would treat it with the reverence it deserves.

Support the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust by joining us Saturday, October 21, 2017 for a special evening of drinks, dinner and music overlooking the Chattahoochee River.
Upcoming Events

August 11, 2017
FALL LINE FORESTRY WORKSHOP
Talbot County Chamber of Commerce
12 East Madison Street
Talbotton, GA 31787
8 AM-4 PM
This workshop, co-hosted by the Talbot County Chamber of Commerce and the Georgia Forestry Commission, offers CFR hours and addresses topics of general interest to landowners, industry professionals and forest-based business owners. Topics include forest health issues, forest resources, and tax planning. To register, call 706-665-8079 or 706-570-1966.

August 26, 2017
4TH ANNUAL DUCK DERBY
Terrapin Outdoor Center
Piedmont, AL 36272
11 AM-2 PM
A favorite for kids--and grown-ups--of all ages. Adopt a rubber duck for $5 and watch it race down Terrapin Creek. Among the great prizes available is a 10-ft Tarpon 100 kayak, provided by W oodmen of America, WM Grocery and the Gadsden Service Guild. Adopt a duck online by visiting our Facebook page. For more information, call 256-447-1006.

October 15, 2017
5TH ANNUAL RAYDAY
Serenbe Inn Meadow
Chattahoochee Hills, GA 30268
3-6 PM
The Ray C. Anderson Foundation sponsors this day of discovery about sustainability in a Serenbe country meadow. This fun-filled, family-oriented event includes delicious offerings from food trucks, as well as hay rides, hot air balloons, children's activities and learning booths. Come meet our GAL T representatives, make new connections, and join in the conversation about sustainable living at this zero waste event. Find tickets for Rayday at Serenbe at https://www.eventbrite.com.

October 21, 2017
AN EVENING ON THE RIVER
3rd Annual Open Space Event
At the Home of Eileen and Bo DuBose
2100 Garraux Road
Atlanta, GA 30327
6:30-9:30 PM
Join us for an evening of drinks, dinner and music at our 3rd annual fundraiser in support of the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust and its mission of Protecting Land for Present and Future Generations. Tour the DuBose family’s private collection of Civil War relics while enjoying the natural beauty of a Land Trust conserved riverside retreat, close to the city center.
Tickets $100 • Sponsorships from $1,000
www.galandtrust.org
For more information, contact Lorrie Stafford at 404-668-3780 or lstafford@galandtrust.org.

October 26-28, 2017
RALLY 2017: THE NATIONAL LAND CONSERVATION CONFERENCE
Colorado Convention Center
Denver, CO
The Land Trust Alliance hosts this annual gathering of nearly 2,000 land trust staff members, volunteers, and seasoned professionals from the US, Canada, and around the world who are dedicated to conserving cherished places in local communities. The rally offers field trips, networking opportunities, exhibits and more than 130 educational sessions on land conservation topics. To register, visit www.allianceraly.org.

November 9, 2017
CVLT TOWER SHOOT
W. C. Bradley Farms
Omaha, GA
Good Food, a 5-Stand for warming up, “money birds,” and prize drawings, all in support of the Chattahoochee Valley Land Trust’s conservation efforts. Wrap up the day with Omaha Brewing’s locally crafted beer. Register early for this annual sell-out event.
For more information, contact Marquette McNight at 706-660-9703.

Winter 2018
CRAFT BEER AND CONSERVATION
Service Brewery
574 Indian Street
Savannah, GA
Details TBA
Come spend some social time with Land Trust supporters and friends at Service Brewery in Savannah and learn more about our efforts and goals.

Spring 2018
LAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING WORKSHOPS
As part of our responsibility to protect conserved land in perpetuity, our Stewardship team meets with landowners to review and update land management plans to make sure they are in compliance with the terms of their conservation easements. Details on our upcoming 2018 workshops will be posted in December on our website, www.galandtrust.org, and on Facebook.

April 25, 2018
GALT CONTINUING EDUCATION WORKSHOP
Atlanta, GA
“Finding the Win-Win: Donated Conservation Easements”
Key topics: Working with the Land Trust, land use and associated easements, the process for developing and donating a conservation easement, conservation easement terms, ecological inventory of the property, stewardship of a conservation easement, appraisals and potential financial benefits. This workshop offers continuing education credits to attorneys, CPAs, appraisers and other real estate professionals. The location for this workshop and further details will be posted on our website, www.galandtrust.org, and on Facebook.

If you would like a member of the GAL T staff to speak at one of you events or are interested in participating in a Land Trust event as a host, sponsor, speaker or attendee please contact Lorrie Stafford at lstafford@galandtrust.org or 404-668-3780.
The Wish for Wisawee

A family’s quest to preserve coastal salt marshes in Georgia
By: Larry Wills

Ron Martin is a farsighted and thoughtful man. He currently spends a great deal of time thinking about land conservation and the salt marshes of Glynn County, Georgia.

Coastal marshes in Georgia are falling victim to land development, reduced freshwater flows and erosion. The Glynn County property called “Wisawee” owned by Ron Martin and his family, including wife Michelle Nunn, and her parents Sam and Colleen Nunn, is in one of the fastest growing areas on the Georgia coast. Nearby is Blythe Island, one of the county’s five Golden Isles, so named for their extensive marshes that in autumn turn to burnished gold.

Today the total land under protection measures close to 900 acres, of which marshland comprises approximately 500 acres. Within this conservation area are eight undeveloped islands, including Vis-a-Vis, Little Rough, Big Corn House, and Little Corn House. Four smaller islands are unnamed, and are dominated by loblolly pine, southern redcedar, live oak, and cabbage palm.

Ron relates that the family heard rumors that “Wisawee Island” was a Native American phrase for “beautiful marsh island.” After talking to some locals, they learned that there had been a German community in the area at some point and, since they tended to pronounce Vs like Ws, Vis-a-Vis Island morphed into Wisawee Island. “So much for Native American romance,” says Ron. “It’s a beautiful marsh island nonetheless.”

Ron Martin’s wife and father-in-law are influential players on the world’s humanitarian stage. In 2015, Michelle Nunn became the head of CARE USA, a global humanitarian organization. Sam Nunn, a U.S. senator from Georgia between 1972 and 1997, is a distinguished professor in the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Institute of Technology. He is a founder of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a charitable organization working to reduce the risk of use and prevent the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. He currently serves as its Co-Chairman, and recently retired as its Chief Executive Officer.

“Sam and Michelle are always on the move, attending conferences and responding to crises somewhere in the world,” says Ron. Michelle’s position with CARE USA often takes her to some of the humanitarian hotspots, such as refugee camps in Jordan and Turkey, where she focuses on the needs of women and children caught up in desperate situations.

The family’s Glynn County property offers a much-needed respite. “It is easy to get lost in all of the international turmoil, but our two children and family gatherings on the coast keep us grounded,” says Ron.

Salt marshes are coastal ecosystems frequently flooded by seawater. They are considered vital to the fishing industry and important scenic and recreational resources. Coastal marshland was formed by the advance and retreat of former sea levels that left shoreline deposits parallel to the present coastline.

The property contains some of the few remaining undeveloped islands in the Turtle River Estuary. The 17.6-mile-long estuary joins the Brunswick River near Jekyll Island and is a unique water feature on the South Atlantic Coast. It is made up entirely of saltwater inlets from the ocean, and the chloride content of its water is nearly that of seawater.

Data suggests the Turtle River Estuary may have been an outlet for a large freshwater river that was captured by another stream or changed direction due to land subsidence. Buried below sea level in the estuary are 3,000-year-old cypress tree stumps which support the cut-off stream theory. It is also exceedingly large for a drowned estuary into which almost no fresh water flows.

The Turtle River is not without its water quality issues. In 2006, state and federal officials began studying chemical contamination in area dolphins and discovered many had highly elevated levels of PCB contamination. One possible source of the pollution is a 550-acre Superfund site located adjacent to the Turtle River marshland.
In 1991, nearby waterways were closed to fishing and seafood consumption. Today, remediation of the Superfund site is still ongoing, and closures and warnings remain in effect until toxicology tests are completed and new guidelines for consumption are published. State and local officials identify conservation easements as an important tool for the restoration of the Turtle River Estuary. The area of Glynn County where the conservation easement is located is known from the Colonial period as the Hopewell Tract.

Most of the land granted in the 1750s and 1760s was located along the coast, either on the mainland or islands. By 1760, Governor Wright reported to London that all of the good coastal land between the Savannah and Altamaha rivers had been granted as far inland as the Indian boundary.

Plantation agriculture on the coast began with cotton and rice, and Sea Island cotton was one of the original coastal crops. This cotton strain was introduced in 1786 and grew best within a 30-mile radius of the Sea Islands and on the islands themselves.

As part of his restoration efforts, Ron Martin has selectively cut the planted pines to provide a more natural-looking landscape and intends to remove a section of the causeway to improve water circulation in the marsh. He wants the upland areas to rejuvenate naturally and continue to evolve and become a haven for a wide range of plant and animal species.

The Wish for Wisawee (continued)

It originally flourished in the sandy uplands, but also grew on drained sea marshes. Hopewell and Radcliff tidal creeks provided water access to the plantations, and the last person to farm Vis-A-Vis Island was a woman, Virginia Tison Scarlett.

Virginia Scarlett lived on the family plantation all her life, and a 1914 plat map identifies old fields on her largest islands. She was probably an heir of John F. Scarlett who owned Bonaventure Plantation in 1866; one of the five parcels carved out of the original Hopewell Tract, identified on an 1869 map of Glynn County.

After the 1920s, the plantation and surrounding area changed from agriculture to timber management, and a 1911 soil survey map identifies a “Timber Landing” on Hopewell Creek.

Today, a dirt fill causeway built by a timber company connects Vis-A-Vis Island to the mainland, and rows of planted loblolly pines cover the old agricultural fields.

As part of his restoration efforts, Ron Martin has selectively cut the planted pines to provide a more natural-looking landscape and intends to remove a section of the causeway to improve water circulation in the marsh. He wants the upland areas to rejuvenate naturally and continue to evolve and become a haven for a wide range of plant and animal species.

Among the eight distinct wildlife habitats on the conservation easement are several that have the potential to sustain plant and animal species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered or threatened in Glynn County. The islands provide potential habitat for bald eagles and wood storks, while the surrounding tidal waters and marshes are suitable for the manatee, whose increasing appearance off the Georgia coastline has made it vulnerable to injuries and deaths from boat strikes.

The marsh wetlands, freshwater wetlands and coastal hammocks within the easement have been designated Special Natural Areas (SNA), which protects them from future timber, agricultural, and construction activities.

Ron is proud his family is contributing to the rehabilitation of the Marshes of Glynn, and that future generations visiting the conservation easement will experience a natural environment not unlike the one that greeted the first settlers to the Golden Isles.

The Martin/Nunn Family at Wisawee

From left, Michelle Nunn, her husband Ron Martin, their children Elizabeth and Vinson, and her parents Sam and Colleen Nunn.

Photograph: Larry Wills

James Massie owned Bonaventure (Tract in the early 1800s. The Scarlett family obtained Bonaventure from Massie’s heirs and farmed Vis-a-Vis Island until the 1920s. 1869 map of Glynn County, courtesy of the Georgia Archives.
Bill Bates wants to make sure 405 acres of the Dougherty Plain is retained forever in a natural state. He and his wife, Jo Ann, purchased the property, located 22 miles from their home in Albany, Georgia, over a 20 year period. In 2002, they placed it in a conservation easement.

Since then, they have amended their easement twice with the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust to add additional layers of protection. Their goal is to enhance the property’s migratory bird habitats and restore its former wetlands. Bill says he and Jo Ann established the easement because “the guy that comes behind us might do stuff to the land we do not want done.”

A retired school administrator with the Dougherty County School System, Bill is an avid birder and original member of the local Audubon Society. He considers his conservation easement a bird sanctuary and visits it at least once a week. The cabin he and Jo Ann maintain on the property allows overnight stays and gatherings of friends and family.

Originally, a large part of the property was wetland containing bottomland hardwood species such as cypress and water tupelo. The cypress and pines growing over Bill’s property were first cut in the 1920s. About 1960, the land was cut over again and then drained for agricultural purposes.

In keeping with the couple’s desire to return the property to a more natural state, they enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), a federal conservation easement program administered by the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The WRP was rolled into the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) in 2014.

Bill’s wetlands easement entitled him to be reimbursed by the federal government for most of his restoration costs. The long-term drought, however, has not been much help to these efforts. The wood duck population has dropped precipitously over the last 10 years, in part because of the drying trend. His big swamp went down to two little puddles during the most recent dry spell, leaving his cypress trees with their knobby knees exposed.

A palustrine forested wetland originally dominated the Bates easement property. It is variously described as a marsh, swamp, bog, or fen. The main feature of this type of inland wetland is that it lacks flowing water.

The property also contains two ponds, home to Albert the Alligator. Bill admits that Albert may really be Alberta, as he has never taken a real close look and never intends to. Albert/Alberta earns his or her keep by patrolling the ponds and keeping the otter and snake population under control.
Nevertheless, Bill is very pleased with the conservation easement process and encourages anyone who wants his property to remain in a natural state to look into it. He predicts that in the not-too-distant future, his conservation easement will be a little island of nature surrounded by pecan orchards, small farms and pine plantations.

Bill Bates’s big wish is that he could be around for the next 100 years to watch his property return to a more wild and natural state.

WANTED: PINE SNAKE

There is a good chance some landowners in the Land Trust community may have seen this snake on their property. They might even feel compelled to report it to the proper authorities. There is no cause for alarm, however. The presence of this harmless heavy-bodied snake may instead be an indication of a healthy natural habitat.

The Northern pine snake (Pituophis m. melanoleucus) ranges in size from 48-66 inches in length, with a maximum length of 83 inches. Not much is known about this elusive snake because it prefers to spend much of its time underground, surfacing only occasionally between May and October.

Northern pine snakes have a patchy range from New Jersey to South Carolina, and Georgia westward to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. Although this snake has received state protection in both Alabama and Georgia, its numbers have been decreasing rapidly. Many of the reasons Northern pine snakes are in decline are the same reasons many specialized wildlife species are in decline: anthropogenic influences such as habitat loss, habitat fragmentation due to roads and related road mortality, and habitat degradation.

Habitat preference for these snakes includes open-canopied areas, such as fire-driven shortleaf and longleaf pine communities. The decline of fire-maintained southern pine ecosystems is closely related to the decline of this beautiful snake. It is estimated that the longleaf pine forest type has declined 96% from historical estimates, with models predicting most of the private forest land being lost to urbanization in the future. Restoration of these natural, open-canopied, fire-driven communities would provide big gains in natural habitat for use by these snakes and many other species.

Beyond this habitat loss, these snakes also prefer a large home range. One study in Tennessee found Northern pine snakes navigated an area of 148 acres on average, while a New Jersey study found these snakes regularly travelled almost a mile from their winter shelters in an effort to find appropriate habitat.

We can offer this snake a chance to survive by preserving undeveloped, un-fragmented land, and implementing and maintaining open-canopied shortleaf and longleaf pine ecosystems through the use of prescribed fire. So if you do happen to see a Northern pine snake on your property, make sure you report it—on Facebook. Visit Project Pine Snake: www.facebook.com/Projectpinesnake/. Biologists like me will be glad you did...And an unlimited reward will be provided to future generations.

Lesley Hanson, Regional Stewardship Manager for Alabama, earned a B.S. in Biology from Berry College in Rome, Georgia and an M.S. in Biology from Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, AL.
Almost Heaven Alabama

By: Larry Wills

Gulf Creek Canyon, a hardwood cove carved into the flank of Chandler Mountain in St. Clair County, offers some of the most spectacular scenery and rugged terrain in northeastern Alabama. Raptors and vultures soar above the mountain on strong updrafts of hot air from the canyon.

Thanks to the efforts of Clay and Cathy Ellis of Gadsden, Alabama, 196 acres of Gulf Creek Canyon are preserved in perpetuity for present and future generations to enjoy. The Ellis conservation easement adjoins a preserve maintained by The Nature Conservancy, protecting a total of 360 contiguous acres. Chandler Mountain is actually a rock-rimmed, boat-shaped plateau which rises approximately 900 feet from the surrounding land. Known as the Tomato Capital of Alabama, it is intensely farmed, for the sandy-loam soils of the mountain's summit grow tomatoes and beans to perfection.

In contrast to this agricultural landscape, the mountain's escarpment and Gulf Creek Canyon are marked by ravines, steep forested slopes, waterfalls, boulder fields, mature timber, and high velocity streams. The area is host to an expansive forest of mature hardwood and mixed pine that harbors large numbers of migratory birds.

Preserving a pristine canyon habitat

It also provides a suitable habitat for two threatened and endangered plant species—the decumbent trillium (Trillium decumbens) and the smooth veiny peavine (Lathyrus venosus), a climbing perennial herb with a purplish flower that blooms between late April and early June.

Smooth veiny peavine is rare in Alabama and grows on forested slopes and stream banks, often in large colonies. Decumbent trillium has been found growing on the Ellis conservation easement. Maintaining the integrity of the hardwood forest will help foster the recovery of these two species.

The property was purchased in 1979 by Cathy's father, Dr. Craig G. Cantrell, a native of Gadsden and a well-respected member of the medical community. He died in 2012 and the property passed to his daughter and son-in-law, who placed it in a conservation easement that same year.

The Ellis family members spend a great deal of time out of doors. Clay is an avid sportsman and manages the property almost exclusively for quail. He believes quail hunting is an art form that teaches youngsters self-control and respect for animals and nature. One of his reasons for establishing the easement was to make sure his grandchildren would have a place to bird hunt.

In 2015, Clay refurbished and modernized a circa 1940 barn located on the easement just in time for his daughter's wedding. Now the barn and the scenic Ellis property are routinely used for church Young Life picnics and Easter egg hunts, and by school groups for social events and dances.

Clay Ellis believes putting this property in a conservation easement was one of the best things he has ever done. "Future generations will be able to enjoy this scenic natural environment even if subdivisions develop all around it," he says.

The only thing he regrets is that it hadn't been done sooner.
population numbers become unstable and many animal and habitat. When areas of land are broken up by human interference, food sources or other resources are lacking in their core, important for allowing animals to move and occupy new areas and threatened species gain a foothold. Wildlife corridors are together, wildlife corridors grow in size, water quality improves. As connectivity builds, fragmented habitats are stitched back together, genetic diversity.

This ripple effect extends beyond the natural world to improvements we see in our own lives. Through the Land Trust’s affiliate, the Chattahoochee Valley Land Trust, 99 acres along the Columbus/Phenix City River Walk have been preserved, helping to make this public space a healthier and more beautiful recreation area, as well as a favorite tourist destination. In northwest Georgia, the protection of 9,295 acres in the Chattahoochee Trail area has contributed to its reputation as one of the most scenic places to run and hike, which has helped spur the outdoor tourist industry, bringing an economic boost to the area.

Connecting the Dots

Over the past 20 years, many of the easements donated to the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust and its affiliates have produced “offspring,” as neighboring landowners witness firsthand the beneficial effects of land preservation. Easement by easement, a consensus is building regarding land use in a number of areas in Georgia and Alabama. As connectivity builds, fragmented habitats are stitched together, wildlife corridors grow in size, water quality improves and threatened species gain a foothold. Wildlife corridors are important for allowing animals to move and occupy new areas when food sources or other resources are lacking in their core habitat. When areas of land are broken up by human interference, population numbers become unstable and many animal and plant species become endangered. By stitching back together fragmented habitats, migrating species can interbreed, increasing genetic diversity.

This preservation of 76,924 linear feet along the Choccolocco Creek Corridor in northeastern Alabama is assisting in the recovery of a long-neglected ecologically sensitive area, improving not only the creek’s water quality but also the future health of local residents. In the Greater Savannah Coastal Area, the protection of 17,647 acres along waterways, marshes and coastline is helping to sustain the local fish and shrimp industry and is assisting in the revival of the area’s oyster industry. Farm culture is being preserved on a large scale in both the Big Texas Valley near Rome, Georgia (15,500 protected acres), and the Southwestern Farm Region near Albany (81,511 acres). Farm easements help protect prime soils and prevent erosion but also help preserve a way of life in rural communities by attracting younger generations.

We urge you to help us Connect the Dots, and see firsthand how connectivity can not only make our natural environment healthier and stronger but our own lives as well.

You Can Help

Every day we work with individuals and businesses who want to make a positive difference and help us leave a valuable legacy for future generations.

Our pledge is to be there forever to care for the land conserved today. Your generous support helps us to continue to add new easements on a yearly basis, as well as monitor the easements we currently hold through annual site visits. It allows us to maintain a professional staff and provide them with the tools they need to do their job well. It also helps us conduct the planning, public information, government liaison, and other upfront work that leads to the conservation of significant tracts of land.

Whether you are a landowner, a donor or simply believe in our mission, here’s how you can lend your support to the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust:

ENGAGE: Attend our events and educational opportunities. Tell your friends and colleagues about the Land Trust. Follow us on Facebook and comment on—and share—our postings.

DONATE: Both monetary donations and in-kind support allow us to conserve and protect more land and expand our outreach to the general public.

CONSERVE: A donation of a voluntary conservation easement on your private land, working forest or farm makes an important contribution to preserving this legacy for future generations.

PLAN: Make a charitable gift part of your retirement or estate plan. A planned gift is a wonderful way to support the legacy of conservation and ongoing protection of conserved land.

www.galantrust.org
Facebook: Georgia-Alabama Land Trust
For more information contact Lorrie Stafford at 404-668-3780 or lstafford@galantrust.org.
Thank You

Supporters

**CHATTOWAH STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL**
(Individuals, families and organizations donating more than $2,500 of support)

Arthur Blank Family Foundation
Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga
Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama
Mark Drummond
Mr. & Mrs. Chop Evans
Evans Farms
Graphic Packaging
Tom & Wyona Hamby
Jeb Hughes
Laurie Johns

Dr. David & Mrs. Jennifer Kearns
Jeffrey Laze
Legacy, Partners in Environmental Education
The Lyndhurst Foundation
Jim & Sally Morgens
Dr. & Mrs. Matthew Mumber
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
Bayouier Forest Resources
Chip & Roberta Reed
Fred Robinson
Rock Stephens Family Farm
Betty Stephens
Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Stutts
Bill Thornton
Dan Watts
Phyllis Weaver
Wells Fargo Foundation
Mr. & Mrs. Buck Wiley
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Wood

**CHATTOWAH CONSERVATION COUNCIL**
(Individuals, families and organizations donating more than $1,000 of support)

Ellen Eddins Beidler
Anna Berry
Bruz & Julie Clark
Charles & Robin Conklin
Royce Cornelison
Mark Drummond
Katherine Eddins
Taylor & Elizabeth Fairman
Tom Harbin

Dr. Robert & Elizabeth Harbin
Ken Henson
Low Country Catering
Miller Coors
Jerome Moore
Mr. & Mrs. Kenwood Nichols
Painted Rock LLC, – Paul Rault, John Rault, Jay Young
Marguerite Paul
Bryan Peeples
Print Monkey Ink
R. Andrew Radford, III
Renee & Chris Raney
Victor Rosenfeld
SE Endocrine & Diabetes, OC
Scotto & Tess Seydel
Lorrie & Clay Stafford
State Mutual Insurance Company
C.S. & Joan Steed
SunTrust
John Turner
W.C. Bradley Company
Delos Yancey

Your support helps:
• Protect over 345,000 acres of land
• Monitor and enforce over 930 conservation easements
• Provide stewardship of protected land
• Educate landowners and the general public about the importance of conservation

We appreciate your support. Thank you!

Bates Conservation Easement, Calhoun County, GA
Photograph (front and back inside cover): Larry Wills
A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a private land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values.

Conservation easements typically allow landowners to continue to own and use their land for farming, growing trees, hunting and recreation. They can also sell the land or pass it on to heirs.

Conservation easements are used as a tool to help safeguard our states’ natural heritage and at-risk species by protecting high priority habitats and waters on private lands.

The donation of a conservation easement may reduce estate, income and property taxes for the landowner.