

Oconee River Land Trust Newsletter

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

FALL 2007

ORLT Update

2007 has been a full and busy year. We hired a new Development Director, Katherine Hinson, to help ORLT keep in touch with its members and find ways of funding our conservation work. Katherine moved to Athens this year with her husband, Alex, and their two-year-old son, William. Katherine and her husband come from families with a keen appreciation of our natural landscape, and she is excited about using her expertise to save land. Katherine received her Bachelor's degree from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and her Master's degree from The University of Oxford in Oxford, England. She has a professional background in fundraising and event planning, and is full of optimistic energy. We are so glad she is able to help us do our good work.

ORLT has completed three conservation easements this year, protecting one small wetland in Clarke County at the request of the Army Corps of Engineers, and 50% of two conservation Subdivisions, Rolling Oaks and the Reserve at Rogers Mill, in Madison County. ORLT now holds 22 conservation easements which protect 1,700 Acres.

ORLT currently has ten conservation easement projects that are at various stages in the easement process. Some of ORLT's projects are in the beginning stage, with the land trust working with the land owners to learn about their plans and their land, and to determine together the important conservation values that we will work to protect. Some are at the point where we are writing the easement and collecting the baseline information. Other projects are nearing the end, hoping to finish by the end of the year. The projects range in size from 11 to 300 acres, and vary from working ranches and timber land, to forested habitat and riparian buffers. We have projects in Madison, Clarke, Walton, Greene, and Oglethorpe counties. We hope in the next newsletter to be able to give more details about the wonderful projects we will have completed in the intervening time.

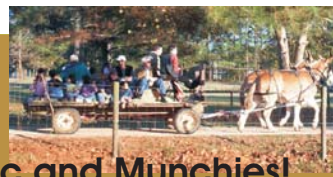
**Mark your calendars
for our next**

Membership Event-- Mules, Music and Munchies!

November 4

**Mule-Drawn Hay Rides, Face Painting, Children's Drawing Contest,
Marshmallow Roasting, Homemade Cookies and Cider And much more!!!**

Look for an invitation in the mail!



L to R: Madeline Van Dyck, Dan Hope, Steffney Thompson, Walter Cook, Larry Dendy

By Larry Dendy

The Oconee River Land Trust was recognized this year for its work to preserve land and natural resources with the 2007 Alec Little Environmental Award, one of this area's top environmental honors. The Alec Little Award was established in 1991 as the first major prize that recognizes outstanding efforts by individuals and organizations to improve environmental conditions and expand awareness of environmental issues in the Athens area. First presented in 1992, the award is named for the late John A. (Alec) Little, who worked closely with many environmental organizations in Georgia.

ORLT was recognized for helping preserve more than 1,700 acres of natural areas including forests, wetlands, farmland and wildlife habitat in seven Northeast Georgia

ORLT Receives Alec Little Environmental Award

Counties. Most of the lands are protected under 22 conservation easements held by ORLT. An Alec Little Award was also presented to Russ Page, a leader in several farmland preservation projects in Oconee County.

The awards were presented during the GreenFest Awards Ceremony held in April as part of annual GreenFest activities in Athens. Dan Hope, chair of the ORLT board of directors, accepted the award.

Many leading environmental activists and educators and environmental organizations have received the Alec Little Award over the past 15 years. Among the individual recipients are several members of the ORLT board including Walt Cook, Al Ike, Dan Hope, Smith Wilson and Larry Dendy, and former board member Sigrid Sanders.

SUMMERTIME SUPPER AT GROTON PLACE

A warm summer evening at Groton Place, the country home of ORLT conservation easement donors Rob and Carol Winthrop, provided the lovely backdrop for an informative session on conservation easements for several local land owners on June 21st. Given the time sensitivity of the enhanced Federal incentives for placing a conservation easement on one's land--the enhanced incentives will expire on December 31st, 2007, unless Congress extends them--the Oconee River Land Trust joined forces with the Winthrops to spread the word on the virtue of preserving one's land for future generations.



Rob formally addressed the approximate 45 guests on the Winthrops personal passion for their family land, Groton Place, and urged others to consider placing easements on their own land in an effort to preserve water quality, local wildlife, and the pristine open spaces they know and love. Marti's at Midday provided a delicious summer fare for all the guests and cocktails

clinked on the deck overlooking the Winthrop's serene lake at sunset. A good time was certainly had by all, and the Oconee River Land Trust is truly grateful to the Winthrops for their unwavering support and generosity toward the land trust's cause. ORLT hopes to use this informal format for future events in an effort to further educate other local land owners on the importance and urgency of preserving our regions' special land.

In the Spotlight

"Get To Know Your Board Members"

We have such an interesting and hardworking board that we wanted all of our supporters to know about them! With each newsletter, we will share two brief biographies of current board members. We hope you enjoy reading about them as much as we enjoy having them on our board. For the entire board's biographies, please go to our website at: www.orlt.com

Daniel Hope III, Ed.D., CPRP (Certified Park and Recreation Professional) — One of ORLT's founding board members, Dr. Hope is retired from the University of Georgia where he worked in Public Service and Outreach, directed the annual Executive Development Program for Recreation and Park Professionals, and was a decision conference facilitator. He was also an adjunct professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies and a member of the faculty of the College of Environment & Design. As superintendent of parks for the City of Athens, he proposed the idea of a nature center in 1973 and was the founding president of

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LOTSANOTTY by Walt Cook

The first property protected by an ORLT conservation easement in 2000 is titled simply "Cook". The owner, Walt Cook, a retired UGA Forestry School professor, prefers to call it Lotsanotty. Lotsanotty has 41 acres and includes nearly a quarter mile of frontage on the Middle Oconee River in southern Jackson County. In addition to the river, the forested tract has two small streams, and borders a larger branch.

Cook bought the property in December 1981, just because he always wanted to own a woods. He decided to donate a conservation easement because he wanted to keep the property from being "cut up" by some future owner.

The entire tract is forested, but there are five different forest types. The first type is found on about 10 acres in an old field that grew up to loblolly pine and also contains a small group of very large, old dogwoods. Most of this area is succeeding to mixed oak and hickory. The second forest type is found on the access strip off of Ford Road. Formerly part of a large wheat field, it has since succeeded to loblolly pine. How quickly the forest recovers if we just let it alone! A third type is found on a one-acre triangle that was also part of the wheat field. It succeeded first to blackberries, and the owner spent many enjoyable hours picking (and eating) the berries. But it, too, has succeeded into scattered pine, cherry, plum, and, unfortunately, Chinese privet.

The fourth type is found along the river front. There you will find a substantial stand of American holly quite attractive, as well as beech, sycamore, river birch, at least one basswood, and an understory of mountain laurel and hornbeam (ironwood to Southerners). The dominant and fifth forest type is

mixed oak. The feature species of the entire 41 acres is white oak, *Quercus alba*. Some individuals are over two feet in diameter, and are tall, straight, and clean-boled specimens. They "make" the forest in Cook's eyes. Other species include northern red oak, southern red oak, sourwood, loblolly pine, black cherry, dogwood, and eastern hophornbeam (ironwood to Northerners).

The Conservation Easement is written so that 11 acres that slope down to the river and the two branches are permanently protected from any intrusion except for a narrow foot trail. The remaining 30 acres may be divided once, with a residence on each division. Each residence may have up to an acre for typical residential use that will not detract from the conservation value of Lotsanotty. No exotic plants may be planted. Outside the residential area, the owner may harvest timber in a very limited manner that is described in a written management plan approved by ORLT. The plan's objectives must emphasize the protection of the forest's natural beauty.

Cook likes everything about Lotsanotty, even the disappearing blackberry patch. He is especially fond of white oaks and likes to watch and listen to the river. Cook has found that there is an Indian fish trap on the river that makes a good sound, especially in low water. There are azaleas, mountain laurel, and Georgia buckeye to decorate the woods in the spring and delight the visitor. But of special value to him are two things -- the natural beauty of the forest, and the quiet, peaceful environment that it provides. According to Cook, "It soothes the mind."

Walter Cook is a member of ORLT's Board of Directors

**Third Annual Spirit of the Land:
Another Smashing Success
March 31, 2007**



The Oconee River Land Trust and the Athens Land Trust joined forces to hold the third annual Spirit of the Land, a wine and art benefit in the name of land conservation. The Botanical Garden Women's Garden Club was the lovely and atmospheric backdrop for the occasion. Gosford Wine and Donderos Kitchen provided delectable hors d'oeuvres and beverages for all in attendance, and the lively tunes of Tin Cup Prophette entertained everyone throughout the evening. The strong and varied art for

the art exhibit and sale was much admired, and it was all curated seamlessly by Rene' Shumaker. Our signature artist, Alan Campbell, who is well-known throughout the country for his ability to illustrate the natural heritage of the southeast and other parts of the world, provided great name recognition for the exhibit. With each land trust netting over \$4,000, all involved were pleased with the funds raised as well as with the feeling of common cause and good cheer of the evening. These essential funds will go toward the operating budgets of both land trusts, enabling them to continue their ever-expanding, invaluable conservation work.

A special thank you is given to our major sponsors REM, Rob and Carol Winthrop, Gosford Wine, Donderos, and the State Botanical Gardens of Georgia for making this special evening possible. Along with all of our sponsors, we remain indebted to each and every one of the artists, donors, patrons, and contributors who made this successful event possible. Without such support, the event could not have taken place, nor could we continue our land preservation efforts.

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 23 conservation easements, protecting more than 1,700 acres of open space.

Board of Directors

Daniel Hope, III, Chair
Davin Welter, Vice Chair
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Executive Director - Steffney Thompson
Development Director - Katherine Hinson

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Tax Incentives for Land Conservation: An Update

Hans Neuhauser, Georgia Land Trust Service Center

The tax incentives for voluntary land conservation have never been as generous as they are now, but time is running out unless you help!



Federal incentives: Last year, Congress increased the tax incentives for landowners who donate conservation easements to government entities or to a land trust such as the Oconee River Land Trust. The deduction for a donation was increased from 30% of adjusted gross income (AGI) to 50% of AGI. The deduction for a qualifying farmer is 100% of AGI. The carry-forward for unused deductions was increased from 5 to 15 years. These increased incentives are only available for tax years 2006 and 2007, after which they revert to the lesser levels; that is, unless Congress extends the program. There are bills in both the Senate and House but neither has moved. Only one member of Georgia's Congressional delegation has endorsed the measures, Cong. John Lewis. The current Congressional break is a good time for you to speak to your Senators and Congressman about making the increased incentives permanent.

State incentives: In addition to state tax deductions that follow the Federal ones, Georgia has a new tax credit for landowners who donate land or conservation easements either to a government or qualified land trust like ORLT. The State offers a tax credit of up to 25% of the fair market value of the donation with caps of \$250,000 for individuals and \$500,000 for corporations. Unused credit can be carried forward for 5 years. The program is now up and running (see www.gadnr.org for details) but only a few people have taken advantage of it. This slow start is partly due to a slip-up in the enabling legislation: instead of the fair market value being determined by a bona fide appraisal, it's to be determined by the local tax assessor. Landowners are understandably reluctant to do that. Legislation was introduced in the 2007 session but failed to pass due, not to the measure itself, but to the war between the House, Senate and the Governor's office. This needs to change and you can help.

Local incentives: Permanent conservation easements can be compatible with the Current Use Valuation Assessment (CUVA), which provides significant property tax reductions for people who keep their land in agriculture or forestry for a period of 10 years. The Athens Banner Herald recently published a report on CUVA, "The Cost of Conservation". The article quoted various tax officials who decried the loss of revenue resulting from CUVA. The article did not mention that Georgia voters overwhelmingly supported the Constitutional Amendment that created CUVA and that development and its required infrastructure of roads, schools, etc., are often more expensive to local taxpayers than land conservation. While no legislation is anticipated, some preventive dialogue with members of the General Assembly are in order.

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In the Spotlight



Northeast Georgia Nature Centers, Inc. which became Sandy Creek Nature Center, Inc. He helped establish the Lyndon House Arts Center in 1973 and was the founding president of the Lyndon House Arts Foundation in 1993. In 2004 Dan received the Alec Little Environmental Award and the Distinguished Professional Award from the Georgia Recreation And Park Association.

Davin Welter-- was born in Augusta, Georgia and was practically raised on the Ogeechee River. He obtained a degree in Political Science at Furman University and worked for the United States Supreme Court and United States Senator Sam Nunn. Currently, he works out of his house in Athens, Georgia as a Senior Development Officer for Furman University working with Furman alumni and parents located in Georgia. He is past president of the Foundation for Excellence in Public Education in Clarke County; a former board member of Georgia Options in Community Living, former president of the Kiwanis Club of Athens, a member of the 2000 class of Leadership Athens, a member of the 2006 class of Leadership Georgia, and a member of Milledge Avenue Baptist Church. He enjoys being outside as much as possible in his kayak or fishing with his dad.

Yes! I want to help protect open space and wildlife habitat in our region.
Please enroll me as a member in the Oconee River Land Trust!

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____ Email _____

Membership Level:

- Land Saver (\$30)
- Land Steward (\$50)
- Land Protector (\$100)
- Land Conservator (\$500)
- Trustee of the Land (\$1,000+)

Thank you for your support!

Please cut out and mail this form with your check to:

The Oconee River Land Trust

380 Meigs Street
Athens, GA 30601



The Oconee River Land Trust
380 Meigs St., Athens GA 30601