

Oconee River Land Trust Newsletter

The Oconee River Land Trust: Preserving Land Forever

Winter 2008

1,800 green acres are now protected by conservation easements

By Steffney Thompson, Executive Director, ORLT

I am happy to report that ORLT completed five conservation easements in 2007, three of them in the last three months of the year. This means that over 1,800 green acres in our region are now protected by conservation easements. I would like to thank each of our new conservation easement donors for their commitment to their land and to our shared future. These landowners, for their own strongly held reasons, agreed to take a bold step into the future by permanently limiting what can be done on their land. This could not have been an easy decision for them since it has implications for their families as well as their pocketbooks. Yet, they decided to place their deeply felt tie to their land ahead of other concerns and donate a conservation easement to ORLT. Our conservation easement donors, with ORLT and its members, are all part of an effort to shape our future for the better. The three most recent conservation easements we worked on are described below. Note that each of these properties is visible from busy roads, and will preserve a visual heritage as well as provide habitat and protect the water quality of our region's streams.

Dr. David Allen, a retired Atlanta oral surgeon and enthusiastic outdoorsman, and his family, have protected 124 acres of meadow and timber land in Walton County. This land, located partially within the city limits of Social Circle, lies squarely within the path of Atlanta's ever-expanding growth. The Allens felt a strong desire to do something that was right for their land, their family, and the rest of their community. Now the property will remain a green oasis for future generations.

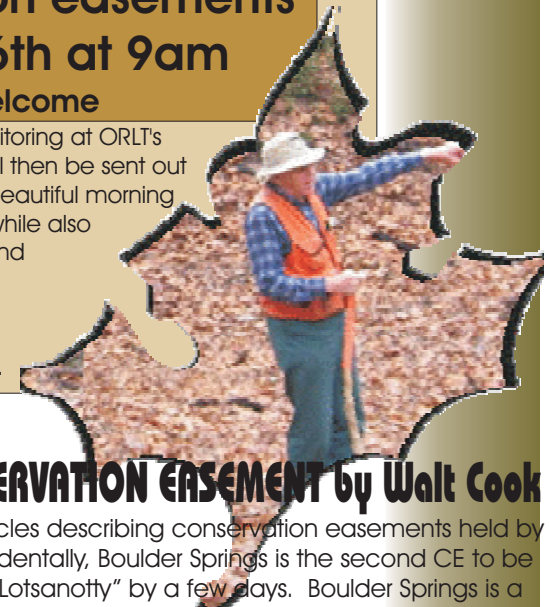
The Goldthwaite sisters (Lerea, Cindy, and Patricia) of Walton County have protected their 74-acre property, which borders Hard Labor Creek State Park. This land, a mix of meadows and forest, will provide a buffer for our state park, protect the water quality of Hard Labor Creek, and provide habitat for piedmont plants and animals. The Goldthwaites felt that the woodland experiences and views they grew up with were rapidly disappearing, and that this absence of green areas constituted an intolerable loss.

Walter and Susan Wellman of Walton County, who had previously placed a conservation easement on 111 acres, have protected an additional 55 acres of land with a conservation easement. This property, which borders the Alcovy River and is near Alcovy Mountain, includes a wide forested buffer along the river, as well as meadows and forested slopes. The Wellmans' continued commitment to our green heritage is much appreciated.

Annual Monitoring of our conservation easements on February 16th at 9am Volunteers welcome

Following a brief introduction to monitoring at ORLT's office on 380 Meigs Street, teams will then be sent out to each easement. Come enjoy a beautiful morning outside walking our protected land while also helping ORLT's good cause! Lunch and refreshments provided.

For more information, contact Steffney Thompson at 706-552-3138.



BOULDER SPRINGS CONSERVATION EASEMENT by Walt Cook

This is the second in a series of articles describing conservation easements held by the Oconee River Land Trust. Coincidentally, Boulder Springs is the second CE to be obtained by ORLT, following Cook's "Lotsanotty" by a few days. Boulder Springs is a large conservation subdivision between Watkinsville and North High Shoals. It lies on both sides of New High Shoals Road and, important for the CE, on both sides of Big Robinson Creek.

The creek, its main tributary being Little Robinson Creek, and their bordering forests are the ecological and scenic highlights of the 145-acre easement. Little Robinson enters the subdivision near its northeastern corner and immediately begins its rocky, rippling and rushing path westerly to join Big Robinson. The easement includes the enclosing hillsides, clothed in mature hardwoods, so that one can see few if any bordering residences; but one can, in April and May, enjoy a natural wildflower garden on the slopes.

The scene changes somewhat as the stream merges with Big Robinson. Now the stream is larger, but the hillsides are brushier, with pine visible above the hardwoods on the east side. Shortly before one encounters the high fill of the New High Shoals Road, an attractive small cove enters from the east. It is usually dry, but its broad mouth helps provide space and visual screening for the residences beyond. Actually, the cove is notable for an unusual feature, higher up on its south slope – a huge spreading white oak, nearly five feet in diameter. It likely marks the site of a

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP EVENT A BIG SUCCESS

On November 4th, the Oconee River Land Trust had their annual membership event on a lovely, sunny afternoon for a large crowd of faithful supporters. Current board member, Smith Wilson and his wife, Dianne Penny, kindly hosted the event at their scenic farm just south of Athens. The generous couple also provided a delicious autumn fare of butternut squash soup, hot cider, yummy muffins, and other assorted tidbits.

You could not have asked for a more fun-filled, family friendly gathering than the one shared by fellow members who value our land around the Oconee River. The day was full of meandering mule-drawn wagon rides, s'more roasting by an open fire, a scavenger hunt and drawing contest for the children, and lively Bluegrass music by Strung Jury. Chairman of the board, Dan Hope, gave an informal summary of the recent accomplishments made by the Oconee River Land Trust as well as briefly highlighted our plans for the future. In summary, a good time was had by all and we are already looking forward to the next membership event!



A special thanks goes out to Smith Wilson and Dianne Penny for their gracious hospitality!



Highlights from the Membership Event's drawing contest. Winning picture (on the far right) is by Lydia Jackson.



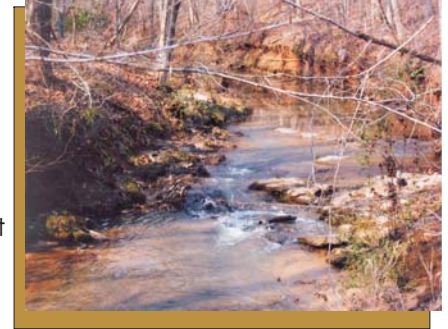
BOULDER SPRINGS CONSERVATION EASEMENT by Walt Cook

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long ago dwelling, as it is close to the original New High Shoals Road; the road is now part of the conservation easement.

Crossing the present road and following Big Robinson Creek, one soon encounters the old road again, this time in the form of an abandoned bridge, its concrete slab deck barely hanging onto its eroded abutments. As one moves on down the creek, the floodplain of the creek broadens on the east side. Now the forest is more typical of a bottomland, with river birch, sweetgum and yellow poplar in abundance. Some of the poplar are quite large, as is the scattered loblolly pine mixed with the hardwoods.

A small but deeply cut, vertically sided branch crosses the floodplain and enters Big Robinson, just before that creek leaves the property and enters a neighbor's pasture. The branch is actually the sum of two small branches flowing out of the subdivision. One is narrowly bordered by the easement, so that it is in a lot of people's back yards. Following up the other branch going easterly, nearly parallel with the south boundary of the subdivision, one comes to a small dam forming a two-acre pond. A clubhouse, swimming pool, and picnic area on the north side of the pond provide an attractive recreation facility for the use of the Boulder Springs residents. This area is not in the conservation easement, but the hardwood covered slope on the pond's south side is, as well as the hardwood glen following up the branch to a cul-de-sac in the subdivision.



The Oconee River Land Trust has several CE's in subdivisions, but none can come remotely close to matching the beauty and the sensation of being "away from it all" that one enjoys while walking through the Boulder Springs conservation easement. Thanks to the foresight and generosity of the Robert Fines, father and son developers, who gave the CE to the land trust, and who have been very good stewards of the land.

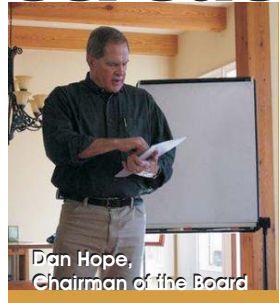
Walter Cook is a member of ORLT's Board of Directors



Annual Board Retreat

By Dan Hope, Chairman of the Board, ORLT

In 1982, land trusts from across America came together to create the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) and gave it their common mission of saving the places people love by strengthening land conservation. Like all partners in the Alliance, the Oconee River Land Trust (ORLT) seeks to accelerate the pace, improve the quality and ensure the permanence of land conservation. And, like all partners in the Alliance, ORLT has agreed to follow the Land Trust Standards and Practices established by the LTA.



In April 2006, in response to concerns of the U. S. Congress and the Internal Revenue Service, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission was established as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). LTA charged the Commission with operating a voluntary accreditation program that will build and recognize strong land trusts, foster public confidence in land conservation and help ensure the long-term protection of land.

The Accreditation Commission has spent the last two years creating a process and a ground-tested application for accreditation. 2008 marks the beginning of its full-fledged accreditation program. ORLT is one of 80 land trusts across the nation that chose to seek accreditation this year, 20 of these land trusts are from southeast, while 5 are from Georgia. We will be spending a good bit of time throughout the coming months assembling the application and all the required supporting materials.

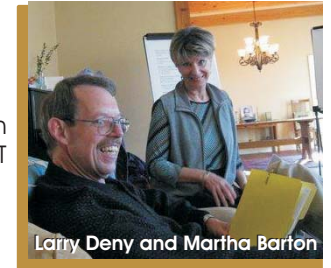
To be accepted into the accreditation program, a land trust must have completed, within the past three years, an organizational assessment to ensure it is operating in accordance with the Land Trust Standards and Practices. There are 12 Standards and 88 Practices. During the accreditation process, the Commission will verify that a land trust is carrying out 37 practices which it has identified as basic indicators of good operation and management.

On Saturday, January 12, the ORLT Board of Directors held a retreat to conduct its first organizational assessment since April 2002. We thank Phil and Madeline Van Dyck for offering their beautiful new home which overlooks the Middle Oconee River for the retreat.

While the primary focus of the retreat was a discussion of ORLT's compliance with the 37 Indicator Practices, board members had copies of "Assessing Your Organization," a workbook developed by LTA to guide land trusts in a detailed analysis of their progress toward implementing the Land Trust Standards and Practices. The workbook was prepared by members of the Executive Committee and contained an assessment of all 12 Standards and 88 Practices. Board members were encouraged to study the workbook carefully and to ask any questions about the remaining "non-Indicator" practices at upcoming Board meetings.

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As with all meetings of the Board of Directors, the discussions were lively and enhanced everyone's understanding of our mission and future direction. While there is much work yet to be done as we go through the accreditation process, the Board concluded that ORLT is a sound organization which is operating in accordance with all appropriate Land Trust Standards and Practices.



Larry Deny and Martha Barton

Tax Incentives for Land Conservation: Another Update

Hans Neuhauser, Georgia Land Trust Service Center

In the Fall 2007 issue of the Oconee River Land Trust Newsletter, I reported that legislative initiatives to increase the financial incentives for land conservation had stalled at both the federal and state levels. Now, things are moving again, albeit slowly.



At a federal level, on December 14, the U.S. Senate approved a version of the Farm Bill which includes a provision (Section 1220) to make permanent the increased tax incentives for land conservation that were included in the 2007 Pension Act for 2006 and 2007. The measure now goes to a House-Senate conference committee to iron out the differences in their respective bills. The House version does not include a similar provision. Russ Shay of the Land Trust Alliance calls both bills "big (1,500 pages), complex and very different," so final agreement will "probably take weeks to finalize." It's important to get the Georgia delegation behind the permanent incentives and to make the incentives retroactive to January 1, 2008. Georgia's Congressmen John Lewis, Jim Marshall and John Barrow are now co-sponsors but neither senator is. We need more support than that from the Georgia delegation, so contact your representative now.

Meanwhile, in Georgia, the governor has endorsed the expansion of the Land Conservation Tax Credit Act in four specific ways: (1) the gift portion of bargain sales would be eligible for the tax credit; (2) donations to the federal government would qualify; (3) donation values would be based on qualified appraisals (rather than the local tax assessor); and (4) the carry-forward of unused tax credits would be extended from five years to ten. Two additional improvements generally supported by the land trust community, allowing the tax credits to be transferable and increasing the cap from 25% to 50% of the donation, have not been supported by the governor and thus are unlikely to be included in this year's bill. At press time, the legislation has not been introduced but is expected shortly. For updates, call the ORLT office at 706-552-3138.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THE 4TH ANNUAL SPIRIT OF THE LAND EVENT

on Saturday, June 21st at the Botanical Gardens!

Hosted by ORLT and Athens Land Trust, this annual wine and art benefit for land conservation is going to be the best one yet.

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. Here is the latest installment of 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

Hans Neuhauser -- is the Executive Director of the Georgia Land Trust Service Center, a non-profit organization based in Athens. The Service Center works to increase private land conservation by increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of land trusts in Georgia, the southeast and nationally. Services include assistance to the land trust community as a whole (e.g., public policy formulation and advocacy) and to individual land trusts (e.g., funding for land conservation and stewardship, strategic planning, preparation for accreditation). Hans serves as the treasurer of the Oconee River Land Trust and he is a member of the Georgia Forestry Commission's Forest Legacy committee. He has served on the board of the Land Trust Alliance and chaired the board for two terms. Currently, he is a faculty member for the Land Trust Alliance's Southeast Regional Office.

John Steele Willis, Ph.D.-- was born and grew up in southern California. He earned his B.A. in Zoology at UC Berkeley and his Ph.D. in Biology at Harvard and received further postdoctoral training at Harvard Medical School and at Oxford University in England. He served for 29 years on the faculty of Physiology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He joined the University of Georgia faculty in Zoology and in Physiology/Pharmacology in 1991. He retired in 2001 and, apart from research, has devoted his time to community activities (Oconee Rivers Audubon Society, Broad River Watershed Association, Cedar Creek Civic Association, Oconee River Land Trust, and the Clarke County Democratic Committee).

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