

# CONSERVATIONIST

GEORGIA-ALABAMA LAND TRUST - 2022



Grady Wilson, "High Cotton" Deerfield Farm, 2020

Acquiring Land That Already Has  
a Conservation Easement On It

Page: 10

Eastern Wild Turkeys  
Announce Spring

Page: 8

How the Economics of  
Conservation = Societal and Ecological  
Gains

Page: 20



I love the winning image from our photo contest this year because, in one picture, it embodies all we hope to accomplish in our work here at GALT. It shows two youngsters playing in a cotton field on land we have protected. Their joy in the outdoors is obvious and contagious. This image captures how we want to protect land, including working farmland, so that it will be here to support the next generation and so that future generations will learn to love the earth as we do. I hope everyone reading this issue of the Conservationist catches their enthusiasm and utter happiness in the land. GALT has accomplished much this year, and I hope, with your shared support and love, to continue our efforts for many years to come.

Katherine Eddins  
Executive Director

## Features



### Page 4

**When? Where? Why?** by M. Ann Phillippi

*The very best way to save the natural world is to save it ourselves.*



### Page 8

**Protecting Harbingers of Spring** by Drew Ruttinger

*Turkeys thrive in many forested and agricultural landscapes. What they need most is space. GALT can help.*



### Page 10

**Second Gen Land Owners** by Michael Heneghan

*For some, property protected by a conservation easement presents a buying opportunity.*



### Page 16

**GALT Photo Contest**

*See some amazing photos of what protection means to our conservation landowners, staff and friends.*



### Page 20

**Big Land, Big Impact** by Ben Mimbs

*The role private land conservation plays in our states' long-term economic outlook cannot be overstated.*



### Page 26

**Saugalock Forest Reserve** by Cindy and Ralph Mirarchi

*Saugalock Forest Reserve is the result of a couple's dream to share their lives with all things wild and free.*

## Contents Departments

- 2 The Team
- 6 Steward's Corner
- 14 Landowner Spotlight
- 19 What's New
- 23 New On Board
- 24 Event Sponsors
- 28 Thank You
- 29 Why Donations Matter

The images on the front and back cover of this issue are two halves of the winning photo contest entry "High Cotton", taken by Grady Wilson on Deerfield Farm in Greene County, AL.

*A thing of beauty is a joy forever: Its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness.*

- John Keats



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- Lisa Compton, Project Coordinator
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- J. Alex Robertson, Director of In-Lieu Fee Program & Staff Attorney
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GALT protects over 1,200 properties covering over 430,00 acres of conservation land.

# When? Where? Why?

## My Conservation Easement

By M. Ann Phillippi, Ph.D., retired Biologist

I cannot remember a time I was not completely enamored with the natural world. An early memory was visiting Mamma and Pappaw Rhodes in Alexandria, Louisiana. On the side of their tiny house was beat-down, dark 'dirt' that was crawling with doodle bugs (a.k.a. roly pollies). I spent countless hours playing with them having no other cares in the world.



Rosa and F.M. Phillippi, Ann's grandparents, originally purchased the farm in 1929. Photo courtesy of Ann Phillippi.

Later, I recall spending time under a large shrub in my parent's front yard in Beaumont, Texas, just gazing out from under the low branches, thinking I had the most wonderful view in all the world. It was grand. Still later, my parents bought a house in the suburbs for our growing family. Beside that house was "the empty lot," where we let our imaginations run wild; my brother Dan once saw an elephant's tail switch through the brush! Our short street also had 42 baby boomer children and many spent enchanting times building forts out of brush, leaves, palmetto fronds, and other riches from the "woods."

Summers were spent in another heaven, Possum Bend (Wilcox County, Alabama), where my grandmother, Rosa Cook Phillippi, lived in a large farmhouse on acreage my grandfather, F. M. Phillippi, purchased in 1929. There was no end to the adventures I had at Rosa's with my cousins,

two sisters, and brother. Digging worms for fishing in "Bud's Pond" was always an adventure unequalled since. Along the way, my mother, father, grandmothers and grandfather nurtured my love of the natural world never causing me to fear it but to see it as a source of adventure and beauty.

Beginning in 1969, when I was a senior in high school, I was often called an "environmentalist," despite preferring the terms "conservationist" or "biologist;" environmentalist had an adversarial connotation.

In college, I never considered pursuing any subject other than biology. My love of the natural world governed my very being. So, while at Auburn University I had the wonderful privilege of studying under some of the best biologists to have roamed the southeast. George Folkerts, whose knowledge of critters knew no bounds, loved to take students on field trips including six-weeks in the western United States. One night around the campfire, I saw him spend hours identifying a very odd wildflower growing along a California road. He wanted to know its name and share its wonder with his students. You could bring Robert Mount, another biologist I studied under, a salamander from anywhere in the state and he could correctly tell from which county you had caught it. And, James Dobie knew fossil and contemporary vertebrate morphology like the back of his hand. Many helped me learn about the natural world



An Indigo Dyeing class at the Phillippi farm, photo by Ann Phillippi

throughout my life. Graduate school and my subsequent career gave me a more intimate knowledge of relatively undisturbed forests, streams, and wetlands.

As time wore on, I sadly bore the burden of seeing parts of our beautiful world destroyed, degraded, disrespected, and denigrated. My affiliation with various conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, Heartwood, Wild South, Wild Alabama, and others has been a great source of inspiration. And, joining others in protecting and saving what is left throws one with the most wonderful people in the world. Those people are the most selfless, dedicated, and motivated people one could ever hope to have as friends. Unfortunately, many battles we fight are losing ones, despite most believing the natural world needs protecting. Even so, folks justify reasons why this or that place or species need not be saved or protected. Conservationist have come to understand that people can be incredibly wasteful of our precious natural resources. We understand this truth. The very best way to save any part of the natural world is to save it ourselves.

I did not deserve to inherit part of my grandparent's farm, but I did. In turn, it is my responsibility to save it from the destruction happening all around us. Prime farmland is paved over due to urban sprawl. Watercourses are dammed and polluted. Native forests are replaced with

pine monocultures. We must save what is ours! We cannot leave this duty to others for after we are gone! We must utilize conservation easements now so that some of our natural world remains!

Who can save the oak-leaved hydrangea? You! Who can save the green salamander? You! Who can save the beech-magnolia forest community? You! What about the green tree frog? What about common blackberries? What about garter snakes? Name the critter you love most; who will save it?



Scarlet King Snake on the Phillippi farm, photo by Ann Phillippi

What childhood adventures will your easement secure for your progeny or for others? Isn't a bald cypress swamp worth saving? Shouldn't we work to save our dogwoods? Isn't a gravel-bottomed, crystal-clear stream worth protecting? To these, the answer is yes! Where will future parents take their children to share the natural world? Must it be to some distant National Park? No! Please let it be near YOU! Let it be in your stomping grounds! Let it be where you learned to love the natural world! We cannot leave a world without cricket frogs calling after spring rains! We cannot leave a world without beautiful blue jays! We cannot leave a world without metallic tiger beetles!

To those who established conservation easements, you are among my heroes. I thank you for helping to save a part of this beautiful place. As another hero of mine said, "If not us, who? If not now, when?"

## Steward's Corner

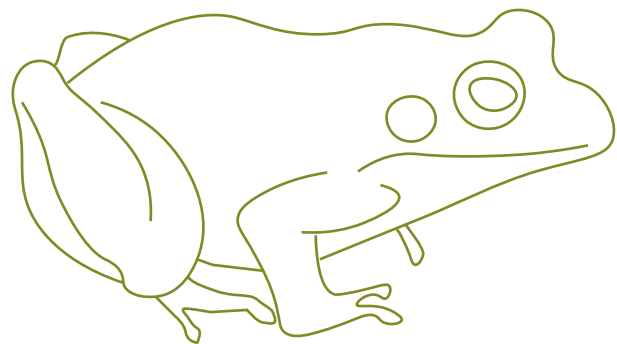
### The Frog with a Superpower

By Lesley Hanson

Admittedly, frogs are not the most eye-catching of creatures. Frogs are not fuzzy and cute like a puppy, nor are they imposing and strong like a large predator species. They do not wag tails or interact with their young in a particularly endearing way. And in the southeast, most frogs are not even colorful as are many other native animals (picture the stunning male indigo bunting, summer tanager, or American redstart bird). Nevertheless, frogs, as an Order, are amazingly diverse and some species possess very unexpected abilities – even superpowers, you might argue.

Enter, the wood frog. In the western hemisphere, these little guys are the only frogs living north of the Arctic Circle. In the northern forests of Alaska and Canada, winter temperatures can reach minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Amazingly, wood frogs adapted the ability to nearly freeze their bodies over winter, in order to survive this cold climate.

How is a species able to survive being frozen? Dr. George Cline, a Professor of Biology and herpetologist from Jacksonville State University explains “Wood frogs, along with spring peepers and upland chorus frogs, have several mechanisms to survive freezing temperatures. One mechanism is to dump water from their tissues as temperatures drop. With relatively more material dissolved in the water inside their cells, it's less likely for that water to freeze. A second method is to dump molecules into cells and the water outside their tissue. These molecules include chemicals similar to the anti-freeze that we use in cars. Finally, evidence shows wood frogs can tolerate up to 16% of their tissue actually freezing, and still be able to recover. All of this



is controlled by genes in the DNA.” Research also shows wood frogs can stop breathing and even their heart beats during freezing temperatures; and, they can stay in this suspended state for up to eight months. As temperatures rise, the frogs thaw and resume normal activities.

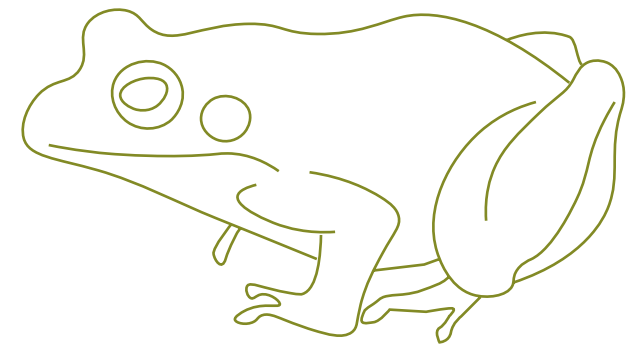


Photo by: Brian Holt

The way this frog protects itself from freezing may also provide insight into human health. Glucose in the wood frog's blood prevents freezing; this molecule is also the blood sugar found in humans. During winter, wood frogs can tolerate blood sugar levels 100 times higher than

normal without damage. In contrast, humans can suffer harm when blood sugar levels are only a few times higher than normal. Efforts to further understand how wood frogs tolerate high glucose levels could provide insight into the management of diabetes in humans. Researchers are also interested in understanding the mechanism allowing the wood frog to reduce, or even cease, its blood circulation for extended periods of time. A better understanding of this process could lead to improved treatments for humans suffering from an event involving altered blood flow, such as a heart attack, stroke, or trauma. Much can be learned from this small frog!

What is even more awesome about this living, frozen frog without a heartbeat? Not only is it adapted to thrive within Arctic Circle-conditions, it also lives much further south – even in Alabama and Georgia! In Alabama, researchers documented it in the eastern Ridge and Valley, the upper Piedmont, and from Mount Cheaha, in Talladega County, to Horseshoe Bend, south in Tallapoosa County. In Georgia, it is restricted to the state's northern mountain region. The wood frog can usually be found in moist, deciduous forests with plenty of leaf litter and often under logs. While it can be found in Alabama, it is believed that population numbers are declining. These frogs breed early – around December and January in our region – potentially before any ice melts. A distinguishing feature to identify wood frogs is the presence of a dark mask running through their eyes (think “The Lone Ranger”, as Dr. Cline says). While there may not be a caravan of cars desperate to capture a colorful photo of a wood frog, this species does possess amazing adaptive abilities –though their super powers are of the more subtle variety.



# Protecting the Harbingers of Spring

## Eastern Wild Turkeys

By James (Drew) Ruttinger



Photo by Dr. Ken Davis

There are many signs in the fields and woodlands of the southeast that Spring has come, and different people look for different signs. Your favorite migrant birds may have returned to sing their songs, the Eastern redbuds and azaleas start to bud and bloom, deciduous trees begin sprouting their new leaves for the year, or maybe just the fresh new yellow tint added to your vehicle seemingly overnight. For me though, there is only one true indicator that Spring has officially sprung, and it warms my blood with enthusiasm and delight the same every year as it has since I first heard it—the gobble of a wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*).

Whether you are a hunter, hiker, farmer, biologist, or really any category of outdoor enthusiast or operative throughout North and Central America, nothing sends chills of excitement down your spine quite like the gobble of a wild turkey beginning its day with the rising of the sun on a cool Spring morning. Follow that up with a glimpse of a tom strutting in a field for a group of hens—displaying his large striped tailfeathers and puffing out his iridescent back and breast feathers to look as large as possible—and anyone who appreciates the outdoors will have their day made. Today, these charismatic birds can be glimpsed or heard in most forested and some farmland habitats in the

southeast, but that was not always the case. Wild turkeys nationwide were mostly extirpated throughout their ranges due to overhunting. As recently as the early 1970s, populations were almost down to 1 million birds left in the country, and less than 20,000 turkeys were estimated to remain in Georgia. These captivating native birds that seemingly all outdoorspeople today know and expect to be in every wooded area of the southeast were almost lost for good, until major efforts were made to protect and reestablish them. Harvest limits set by state agencies and restocking programs have bolstered those numbers back up much closer to where they should be. Continued work by state and federal agencies to promote adaptive management and use scientific data to set hunting regulations such as seasons and bag limits that allow us to enjoy the pursuit of these captivating birds while still promoting their population growth has largely resulted in a success story for the wild turkey, but now another issue is causing the eastern wild turkey (*M. g. sylvestris*)—the subspecies with the largest distribution and the one found throughout most of the southeastern U.S.—numbers in the southeast to plateau or even decline in some places. Similar to most other wildlife species in the southeast and beyond, eastern wild turkeys are being impacted by habitat loss.

Eastern wild turkeys are a habitat generalist, using a variety of environments throughout their range from old-growth forests to mixed hardwood and pine forests or forest



Photo by Dr. Ken Davis

“I enjoy photography, and one of the many benefits of conserving the land is the abundant wildlife around the property. I call in the wildlife as if I was hunting and then use a camera instead of a gun.” - Dr. Kenneth Davis

openings, and even plantation forests and agriculture sites. Their main needs are roost trees and places to find food—be it open pine or hardwood forests with abundant understory greenery to eat or agriculture fields with edible row crops, pasture grasses, or good bugging habitat which is available in most farm fields and forest openings and is especially important for growing poults. Essentially, these turkeys can thrive in most forested and agricultural landscapes. What they need is space. In some states there is an abundance of publicly protected land to supply turkeys and other wildlife with all their habitat needs. However, in states like Georgia and Alabama, the majority of the landcover is privately owned. This, added to the rapidly increasing and expanding populations within these states, only furthers

the importance of what we at the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust, Inc. (GALT) do. Through our Conservation Easements, we have protected in perpetuity over 400,000 acres of open forest and agriculture land in Georgia and Alabama—most of which can or already does support populations of eastern wild turkeys—from conversion to non-suitable landcover. The continued efforts of GALT and other similar organizations as well as state and federal agencies to protect and promote quality habitat and adaptive management will all help in writing a happy ending to the success story of reestablishing the true harbingers of spring in our forests and fields, the eastern wild turkey.



Photo by Dr. Ken Davis

# Second Gen Landowners

## Acquiring Land Already Protected by a Conservation Easement

By Michael Heneghan



Photo by Ben Brown

The Georgia-Alabama Land Trust (GALT) protects land to benefit both natural ecosystems and human communities. With these two objectives in mind, it is easy to see why conservation easements are the primary land protection mechanism GALT utilizes. Conservation easements can help landowners achieve their land management and other objectives while simultaneously protecting critical habitat, high-priority species, important soils, and other conservation values. And each property is unique, just as each landowner's conservation objectives are unique. Thus, conservation easements are unique and specific to each protected property. In turn, landowner motivations for protecting a property may include a desire to protect inter-generational family land, to see high-priority species retain needed habitat, to guide

future generations as part of an estate planning tool, and to potentially receive certain tax benefits pursuant to federal and state law.

However, there is another aspect of owning a conservation easement property that is less obvious but equally beneficial. By default, conservation easements are perpetual, meaning the easement exist in perpetuity ("runs with the land"). As a result, when an easement property is sold (or gifted, or inherited), the conveyance is subject to the conservation easement. Second generation landowners, as we refer to them, are those who acquire land that is already protected by a GALT conservation easement.

Because the conservation easement runs with the land, the new owner needs to understand the easement's terms and be willing to manage the land consistent with those

terms. Fortunately, many buyers view the easement terms and restrictions as already compatible with their own intentions and uses for the land. Though second generation landowners are removed from any potential tax benefits the original donor of a conservation easement may have received, a property protected by a conservation easement may present a buying opportunity.

As GALT enters its 25th year of land conservation, we are seeing many easement-protected properties change hands, with a new batch of (often first time) landowners becoming the next generation of land stewards. Though we typically think of a legacy property as land which has been in one family for generations, all land has the potential to become legacy land, and many of these new second generation landowners have a vision of making their new property a place for their families to enjoy for generations.

### Learning as You Go

Chattooga County, with its impressive natural resources, may be the embodiment of rural North Georgia. Located at the southern end of the Cumberland Plateau, just north of the metropolitan region of Rome, and far enough south that it isn't yet affected by the expansion of Chattanooga, nearly a quarter of Chattooga County land is in agricultural use; another fifty percent is in natural forest cover. The eastern half of the county contains nearly 20,000 acres of the Chattahoochee National Forest, including portions of Johns Mountain, Little Sand Mountain and Taylor Ridge, and nearly 20 miles of the increasingly popular Pinhoti Trail. The James H. "Sloppy" Floyd State Park, a popular camping and fishing destination just off of the Pinhoti, is located minutes from downtown Summerville, the County

Seat, with its population of less than 5,000 people. On the western side of the County, atop Lookout Mountain, is the small community of Cloudland and the East and Middle Forks of Little River, which snake across the Alabama line before converging and flowing through Desoto State Park and Little River Canyon National Preserve.

Ben Brown is a business owner based out of Summerville who was born and raised in Chattooga County. Though he moved around the tri-state area as a young man, spending some time living in Rome and Chattanooga, he eventually returned home to Summerville in 2003.

In 2017, while Ben was living on a 10-acre property in the small community of Gore, he was contacted by Dr. Steven Morganstern, a former work client who became a close friend, who was trying to sell his nearby land. Dr. Morganstern was an early donor to GALT, placing a conservation easement on his 230-acre farm in 2001; this was the 24th easement that GALT – then known as the Chattowah Open Land Trust – acquired. Though Ben wasn't actively looking for something like this at the time, the idea of owning a large piece of land was something Ben had often considered, and the easement-protected property presented a purchase opportunity Ben didn't want to pass up. Ben was somewhat familiar with conservation easements and didn't find the easement's restrictions inconsistent with his goals and intended land usage. After reviewing the easement documents with his advisor, Ben made the choice to move forward with the purchase. "Finding this was such a blessing. I never could have bought this farm unencumbered." Ben said.

A lifelong hiker and outdoorsman, Ben is a naturally conservation minded individual; a land ethic was a part of



Photo by Ben Brown

his life from early on. Ben's father, Jerry Brown, was a local businessman who founded the Coosa River Basin Initiative (CRBI), an environmental non-profit based out of Rome, in 1991. Though Ben's father then had a 100-acre property in the area, and Ben had helped at that property for some CRBI events during his younger years, now actively managing his own land for conservation was a new endeavor. "My father became passionate about conservation and started

mental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which provide technical and financial assistance to landowners like Ben to improve certain natural resource systems. Through these programs, Ben has been able to begin addressing erosion issues on the property, run controlled burns, eradicate nearly all of the privet and kudzu, and plant a number of pollinator species and native grasses.



Photo by Ben Brown

CRBI, which is something to be very proud of, but he was a businessman, and I don't think he ever had the time or resources to really manage that property himself. Most of the management there was hired out to someone else."

Ben, however, wanted to immerse himself in management of his property, including getting his own hands dirty. "When I bought this land, I had absolutely no clue. I didn't know what a harvestable pine was. I couldn't identify a White Oak. I didn't imagine myself being involved to the level that I am, but I love it. I've become very passionate about it and immersed myself in it and learned from as many people as I can. I've had state foresters out, had private consultants out, aquatics guys, I've worked with GALT. I've really tried to tap into all of the resources that are available to help me with this."

Working with foresters and biologists and keeping in regular contact with GALT, Ben has been able to identify the areas on the property most in need of management intervention. Among the outside resources he speaks of are the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Environ-

It is clear that Ben is a guy who likes to leave things better than he found them, and his work has generated impressive results, both ecologically and aesthetically. A selective harvest and prescribed fire in the previously overstocked pines created a beautiful traditional savanna. Prescribed burns and mechanical treatments in the higher elevation hardwoods brought sunlight to the forest floor, increasing native groundcover and improving growth of the most desirable tree species such as oaks and maples. Erosion control measures were also implemented.

Ben and I have walked the farm many times since he purchased it in 2018, and every time he has seemed excited to show off these new projects. Last year it was the dam work and timber harvest. This year it was his newly finished home nestled at the edge of the open pastures and upland hardwoods (the conservation easement reserved the right to build this residential dwelling). I visited in April with few enough leaves on the trees that we had a perfect view of West Armuchee Valley, with Taylor's Ridge to the West and John's Mountain to the East. It's not hard to see why Ben has



Photo by Ben Brown

put so much into this place, and why he plans to stay here long term.

"When I bought the Property, I thought maybe I'd like to live out here but I wasn't 100% sure of that. The more I've gotten involved, the more I love it. I'd like to live here as long as I am physically able to do it."

That will give Ben plenty of time to see through his long-term visions for the place.

"I'd love to see these forests begin to look like what we think they looked like 300 years ago and see more native wildlife as we keep improving the habitat. Having wood ducks here year-round would be amazing and I think that is achievable."

Some of these goals are already taking shape. A newly consolidated pond has improved the erosion issues and enhanced aesthetic and scenic values. It also created quality habitat for many of the wildlife species which were specifically targeted in the original easement. Ben recently spotted a bald eagle on the property for the first time since his purchase!



Photo by Ben Brown

Though purchasing a property already encumbered by an easement requires a thorough understanding of the existing terms and restrictions, Ben says his experiences working with GALT and owning the property have been positive. In fact, he recently purchased an adjacent parcel that he plans to protect with a GALT conservation easement in the coming months.

Before leaving, we sat on the stone wall at the northwest corner of his home, overlooking the nearby mountains, and I asked Ben if he had any final thoughts that he would like included in the article. He thought for a minute before responding:

"George Doster started farming this place around the 1930s. He lived in the white house right across from my entrance. He hand-sprigged the bermuda. He did a lot of the terrace work that has really held up in the fields. At no point did he go and clearcut the property. He may not have had a word for it, but I feel like there was a conservation ethic there. Dr. Morganstern made the decision to put it into conservation easement 20 years ago; he could have come in and cut all the pines before selling it to me, but he didn't. Of course there were the Native Americans who were out here long before them. There may have been some not so good management decisions over the years, but there were a lot of good ones too, and I think that deserves recognition. I'm certainly not the first one who has cared about this land."

Ben can take comfort in knowing that he will not be the last person to care about the farm either. The GALT conservation easement will ensure that Ben's property – as well as Dr. Morganstern's original desire to place the easement – will be protected in perpetuity.



# Landowner Spotlight

## Royce Cornelison

By Julia Anne Pentecost

Royce Cornelison wears many hats in his everyday life. He's a pastor, a chairman/CEO, a family man, an avid hunter and fisherman, a cattleman, a landowner, and the list goes on. His dedication to success for himself and his family is truly contagious.

Royce grew up in North-West Indiana along with his siblings and parents. After moving to Jackson County, Alabama, where he now happily resides, he met his wife. Her dad was a potato farmer, cattle farmer, chicken farmer, and carpenter with large amounts of land. Royce credits his passion to own and care for his own land from getting to know their way of life, and the appreciation for nature through his Native American descent. For his family, it all started with five acres, then inheriting 20 acres, then the construction business took off, and even more land became available. It came through buying, looking for properties, and going to auctions, but mainly, the dedication they have had along the way. Now, they have land in Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Since 2008, they have accumulated significant acreage.

P & C Construction is where Royce spends many days out of his week. Though, what some people may not know, is he is also behind the scenes helping to clear land that needs it, and cleaning up. His family also helps and works with him in the construction business, while also still maintaining a close family relationship. He started his construction company in October of 1993. It started off with only two people, and then grew to what is now 60 employees. They are licensed in every state and jurisdiction from Maryland down to Florida over to Texas and up to Oklahoma, with work in all of those places. After Royce's partner retired in 2008, his sons bought into the business. Shortly after, they started buying land and cattle.

Luckily for the Cornelison's, a young man was getting out of the cattle business around this time. They bought all of his herd, which was around 20 head. They continued to add on to this herd, while still buying and selling. Right now, their herd is around 1600 head of cattle. In addition to selling cattle at local auctions, they have registered



Royce Cornelison, photo by Julia Anne Pentecost

Brangus beef. The genetics for this are sold all across the world, from Australia to Brazil to Mexico. They have their own USDA stamped beef that they are able to sell nearly anywhere. While also selling beef by the pound through a local processor.

I asked him what he would say is the key to success, he answered "Early on I heard a statement that stuck with me, and ever since I've tried to live by that. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the things you have and need will be added to you. I try to keep God first in my life, I treat people with respect, and use my morals in the things that I do. There's a lot to be said about being honest and being ethical in the things you do. There may not be short term rewards but there are long term awards." This has proven to be the best method for the Cornelison's, as 80% of their construction company customers are returning customers. In the cattle business, at least 70% repeat customers.

Being busy is what Royce thrives on. Even with the great amount of workload, he, along with his family, enjoy many hobbies together. They hunt, fish, ride horses, go to church and church outings, play music, and his grandchildren

have even shown cattle in the past! Royce expresses his appreciation of the cowboy culture, but says "I haven't gotten into wearing a cowboy hat. I bend over and they fall off. I just wear my ball cap a whole lot." Proving you don't need a cowboy hat to be a cowboy.

Every piece of property this family has bought has been improved immensely. In 2012, after their first easement with the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust, they were working on helping these properties after the terrible storms of April 2011. The next several years were spent trying to restore the land. The last easement done was on the Leroy Property. These properties are named after the families they are bought from, to keep their spirit alive on the land. Several months before the land was placed under the conservation easement, the Cornelison's were approached by a mineral company. They wanted to mine all of their limestone and sandstone and make a quarry there. That could have been a retirement plan. After considering it, the family decided they couldn't live with that. They couldn't turn a beautiful piece of land into a quarry, so they opted to put it into an easement, and intend on doing 3-4 more in the near future.



Photo by Royce Cornelison

# CONSERVATIONIST

photo contest 2021



Grady Wilson, "In High Cotton", Deerfield Farm, 2020

**Grady Wilson:**

The boys in the photo are my first two grandkids, Liam 4 years old and Levi 2. They will literally spend hours a day, morning and evening, on the tractor or any machinery I run on the farm. This day they happened to be in overalls and they had never been in the cotton fields, so we couldn't resist taking the picture. I grew up working with my Grandpa on the farm and wouldn't trade that time spent with him for anything. I love the passion these two have for being with their "PawPaw" when coming to the farm.

## Honorable Mentions



Burton "Chip" Chandler  
Native Azaleas, Chandler Farm Pond  
Carlton, GA  
2021



Grady Wilson  
"Sunset", Deerfield Farm  
Greene County, AL  
2019

Ben Mimbs  
Charlie & Tracy Bridges easement  
Terrell County, GA  
2021



Thank you for your submissions!

We love to see the beauty on protected lands. It reminds us all of the value of conservation.

Laci Smitherman  
"Peace and Happiness"  
DeKalb County, AL  
2021



# Honorable Mentions



Dr. Ken Davis  
"Wild Turkeys", Rocking R Ranch Farm  
Floyd & Chatooga Counties, GA  
2021



Michael O. Adair,  
"Snowfall on Hatchet Creek"  
Clay County, AL  
2020

Royce Cornelison  
"Sunrise"  
Jackson County, AL  
2021



## How can you submit your photos?

Send your favorite photos to your land steward or to [icompton@galandtrust.org](mailto:icompton@galandtrust.org). Next year we want to highlight pollinators, so be sure to send any photos of your property and birds, insects, bats, butterflies, or flowers, etc. Share the joy of the land you love. We all want to see it!

# FOREVER FUND

keeping it pretty as a picture, forever

Perpetuity is a long time. And, unlike most everything else in a seemingly disposable world, Conservation Easements exist in perpetuity – they last virtually forever, ensuring beautiful habitat and productive land remains for our children and future generations to enjoy.

But this "forever" time frame presents a special challenge for funding. The obligation of a land trust to monitor and enforce a conservation easement in perpetuity requires yearly site visits and staff time to report on the status of the protected property and compliance with an easement's terms. And, at times we also use drones and satellite imagery to monitor protected land. Meeting these obligations also requires storing reports on the monitoring, and, in the rare instance when a violation warrants action, utilizing staff attorneys to defend the easement and resolve the matter. These are real costs that occur over the course of "forever."

That is why GALT created a Forever Fund. We want to ensure GALT has sufficient resources to continue operating and last as long as the land will. We want to build a fund to confidently meet our operational and land protection needs in perpetuity. Our initial goal for this fund is One Million Dollars.

GALT also utilizes other donations, grants, and investment income to operate and engage in land protection. And, we will continue to seek and carefully steward these resources. However, perpetuity is a long time and involves an inherent amount of uncertainty, such as changing donation levels, population trends, tax law and regulations, and economic outlook. A Forever Fund to supplement our other fundraising efforts will provide additional security over the long term.

GALT has already allocated over \$400,000 to initiate the Forever Fund utilizing existing general donations and bequests. We are asking you to help us find additional donations to meet our Forever Fund goal of One Million Dollars. If you would like to contribute or discuss a potential donation or bequest, please contact [katherine@galandtrust.org](mailto:katherine@galandtrust.org).

*\*The Forever Fund is governed by GALT's written investment policy established by the Board of Directors. Furthermore, the Board oversees fund expenditures to ensure uses are consistent with and in furtherance of organization resiliency. Resiliency includes short term operational shortfalls, unforeseen circumstances/expenses, long term stewardship expenses, and unique land protection opportunities. Please visit [www.galandtrust.org/ForeverFund](http://www.galandtrust.org/ForeverFund) to learn more.*

# Big Land, Big Impact

## How the Economics of Conservation = Societal and Ecological Gains By Ben Mimbs

With over 400,000 acres protected across 1,100 properties, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust (GALT) is one of the largest land trusts in not only the southeast, but also nationwide. From wetlands, to caves, to southeast plains, land protected by GALT conservation easements provides habitat for a host of significant flora and fauna.

While many immediately recognize the benefits protected land provides wildlife, there are many other associated benefits that are quantifiable and very important. For instance, land protection supports valuable ecosystem services, such as water filtration, storm surge suppression, and hydrological recharge. Conserved land also supports countless agriculture-related jobs, and timber and crop production, which all significantly contribute to our states' economies. And, there are also the intrinsic aesthetic and recreational values which flow from land conservation.

Because high-density development of open space increases in step with population growth and urban sprawl, land conservation is a necessary tool. And, while landowners may have their own internal reasons for wanting to see their land protected, land protection also results in numerous "external" benefits to society. Thus, it is only by evaluating the host of external ecological and societal economic benefits of land conservation, in conjunction with more internal factors, such as land management strategies, tax considerations, and generational planning, that one can gain a more full understanding as to why more natural spaces should be conserved.

Of GALT's over 400,000 protected-acres, approximately 70,000 acres are wetlands. Wetland ecosystems are a unique space where aquatic and terrestrial habitats converge. They are home to a host of important native species. There are

also numerous "benefits people obtain from ecosystems," as explained within the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Such ecosystem services are often divided into four main categories including "provisioning services" (food and raw materials), "regulating services," (air and water purification), "supporting services," (soil creation and nutrient cycling), and "cultural services" (recreation and historical experiences). As examples of regulating services,



Photo by Ben Mimbs

wetland habitats serve as natural purifiers, removing heavy metals and other pollutants from groundwater. Similarly, wetlands mitigate floods and storm surge, and sequester carbon. And, clearly there are supporting services such as recreational opportunities and cultural value.

A 2012 report from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sought to estimate the value of key ecosystem

services provided by 4 major U.S. wetlands, including the Okefenokee Swamp located in southeastern Georgia. Researchers estimated the Okefenokee Swamp provides approximately \$4 billion in the form of 3 key ecosystem services, including \$1.5 billion in water-quality provisioning benefits, \$900 million in storm protection services, and \$1.7 billion in carbon storage benefits. Without this functioning ecosystem, billions of dollars of infrastructure would be needed to replicate what this wetland does naturally. These figures offer a glimpse into the huge economic benefits of wetlands. And, these figures did not even consider additional benefits of recreation opportunities, cultural

significance, scenic value, or the role the wetland plays in biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and scenic value. While not all wetlands are as grand as the Okefenokee, they all provide important ecological services.

Wetlands are not the only type of land in need of conservation, however. Timber and agriculture are some

of the most profitable and beneficial land uses in the southeast. Many of GALT's protected lands contain "prime farmland" soils and "farmland of statewide importance". The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines prime farmland as "land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops . . ." Approximately 35% of GALT's protected land consists of prime soils. Protecting such farmland ensures important soils are available for productive agriculture and silviculture.

The University of Georgia's Ag Snapshots 2021 estimates food and fiber production and related industries contribute over \$70 billion to Georgia's economy, while also sustaining approximately 360,000. In turn, Alabama's food and fiber production is estimated at nearly \$55 billion while supporting 234,000 jobs. And, it is estimated that the majority of productive farmland and timberland in these states is privately owned. Thus, the role private land conservation plays in our states' long-term economic outlook cannot be overstated.

Unfortunately, recent land use data from the USDA shows cultivated cropland in Georgia decreased more than any other land use in the state between 1982 to 2012. Cultivated cropland once accounted for nearly 6.2 million acres; that number has now decreased to about 3.6 million acres. Developed land has doubled over the same time span. Due to these land use changes, over 550,000 acres of prime farmland is no longer able to contribute to food supply and food security, or to agriculture-related jobs and their associated economic output. Clearly, the protection of prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance is a critical conservation component to support our states' economies.

Protected lands also provide additional economic value through recreation and aesthetic value. And while nearly all conservation easements do NOT permit public access, there are certain examples, such as those along trails, that can. For example, one GALT easement in Atlanta contains a section of the Atlanta Beltline system, an urban trail system. A

study conducted by the University of Alabama found that similar urban trail systems provide a needed place for exercise and outdoor enjoyment, resulting in medical savings of \$21-\$43 million annually. And, even a typical easement which does NOT permit public access can still contribute indirectly to other economically beneficial recreational activities such as bird watching and fishing by providing habitat for sought-after species and improving water quality in the surrounding area. Considering that bird watching and fishing together contribute nearly \$140 billion in economic output in the U.S. each year, the protection of riparian buffers and associated ecosystems that support these sports makes sense ecologically and economically.

Protecting these important ecological services are part of why GALT seeks to protect land for present and future generations. Land protected through conservation

easements can help landowners achieve their own land management and other objectives, while also generating numerous, and important, external benefits. The importance of ecological services provided by high-priority habitat, native species, and productive forests and agriculture lands will only continue to rise as surrounding areas are developed. And, while the ecological service of a wetland or habitat for a rare species may not be at the front of one's mind when deciding to protect a family's beautiful farm or forestland, it is an important societal benefit resulting from private land conservation. In a way, every conservation easement can potentially support food security, local and state economies, agriculture-related jobs, clean water, and recreation and, by so doing, allow private landowners an opportunity to create their own conservation legacy.



Photo by Ben Mimbs on the Mary Jones easement, Terrell County, GA

## Newest Board Members



Tia Bohannon is a Land Engineering Manager for Georgia Power's Environmental and Natural Resources organization. Tia possesses a wealth of diverse experience from her career in both the utility industry and from consulting. She began her career in the chemical industry as an engineer focused on process optimization. She transitioned to environmental roles in hazardous waste remediation and compliance. She later worked as an environmental and public relations manager at a cement manufacturing facility where she managed all environmental compliance, pollution prevention and community outreach programs. Prior to joining Georgia Power, Tia developed her career with AECOM, a global consulting firm, where she held numerous leadership positions, including operations manager with responsibility for managing staff in the Southeast across multiple environmental practice areas. Most recently, she served as the environmental health and safety consulting department manager for AECOM, supporting clients with compliance programs for air, land and water issues. Tia earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering with an environmental engineering specialization from Northwestern University. She is an alumnus of the Institute for Georgia Environmental Leaders and a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. Marietta-Roswell Alumnae Chapter. Tia developed her appreciation for the environment as a little girl growing up in Alton, Illinois, a small town on the Mississippi River. She and her family often fished and camped along the riverbank. Tia and her husband, Kenny have two children.



Kevin Stump is the founder and CEO of Interconn Resources, a natural gas marketing company head-quartered in Birmingham, AL. He earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from Birmingham Southern College where he was BSC's first All-American tennis player and was inducted into the BSC Sports Hall of Fame in 2004. However, his most rewarding accomplishment is convincing his wife, Jane Templeton, to marry him in 1983. Together they have raised three wonderful children, all of whom own their own businesses. They also have two precious young grandchildren. Kevin is a conservationist and avid upland bird hunter and fly fisherman. He has served on several boards and is currently a member of the Board of Overseer of the Hoover Institution, the Board of Trustees of Birmingham Southern College and the Board of Advisors for Tauber Oil Company.



Annastacia (Stacey) Watts has worked in a Chief Operations Officer capacity in the real estate field for over 17 years. She has extensive experience managing and overseeing all aspects of business operations related to real estate acquisition, disposition and analysis both nationally and internationally. She also assists in the management of the family farming business which includes agricultural, environmental and livestock endeavors. This has fueled her passion for land conservation and protection for our future generations. Ms. Watts holds a Bachelor of Science in Interior Design from University of Tennessee Chattanooga. Her greatest pride and joy are her two beautiful daughters who attend Christian Heritage School and are involved in several school and sports activities.

# EVENT SPONSORS

Thank you for supporting us.

## CONTINUING EDUCATION



## 2021 TOWER SHOOT



Kevin Stump

Thomas Hamby

David Blanchard

Steve Stutts



## WING NIGHT



## THANK YOU SPONSORS!

We can't thank our event sponsors enough for their support! This year, your event sponsorships helped us provide continuing education to more than 100 conservation industry professionals and allowed us to host *Wing Night* where participants watched Alabama Wildlife & Fisheries count threatened and endangered bats in Weaver Cave on GALT protected land. This was exciting conservation in practice. Event sponsors also helped us host our annual Tower Shoot, which is our single largest fund raising event of the year. This year our event was located at the WC Bradley Farm - a special thanks to the WC Bradley company for supporting GALT and land conservation!

# Saugalock Forest Reserve Born of Childhood Dreams...

By Cindy and Ralph Mirarchi

Saugalock Forest Reserve (SFR) was born of the 1950s childhood dreams of a young Virginian (Cindy) and Pennsylvanian (Ralph) to share their lives with all things wild and free. Those dreams were finally realized some 30 years later in distant east-central Alabama. In 1984, Cindy and Ralph were residing in Opelika, AL. Their childhood dreams materialized in form of a tract of land in rural Lee County just outside nearby Auburn. The tract was landlocked, abandoned and unmanaged, and the main access road was impassable. However, they saw the potential to turn that rough diamond into a gleaming ecological jewel they could enjoy as a family. Fortunate to purchase the property at a good price from absentee landowners, they christened it with a name reflective of the joining of the two great creeks between which it lay (i.e., the Saugahatchee and the Loblockee).

Cindy and Ralph planned to follow Aldo Leopold's prescription to improve the land's health through proper stewardship, and by eventually living on it with a light "foot print." That first required some historical research. Prior to European colonization, what was to become SFR was relatively undisturbed woodland bounded by the two major streams named by the local indigenous people (the Creeks) as Saugahatchee or Rattling Creek (for the sound of its rapids) and Loblockee or Big Cane Creek (for the cane thickets along it). Because of its higher elevation, the indigenous people used the land primarily for hunting and gathering for 4000 to 7000 years BP. The flatter, lower elevation terraces along Saugahatchee Creek served as concentration points for village sites as those people also began to farm. At that time, the vegetation likely was a mixture of short-leaf and long-leaf pine forest on the xeric ridgetops. This forest type was maintained by lightning-caused fires, and those set by the indigenous people to improve hunting and visibility. This resulted in open park-like pine stands with scattered, patchy mid-stories, and a dense and highly diverse herbaceous ground cover of grasses and leguminous forbs. Such fires normally died out once they infiltrated the wetter upland sites and the more mesic hardwood coves. The hardwood coves were dominated by an oak hickory-tulip-poplar and oak-beech-maple overstories, luxuriant mid-stories, and a diverse wildflower ground cover, depending on slope, aspect, and soil moisture. Loblolly pine probably existed only as scattered single trees on the first terrace just

off creek flood plains where their seedlings were protected from fire. Similarly protected, sweet gum also was confined to those moister sites.

From the 16th through the 18th centuries, Creek tribal lands served as buffers between competing European powers (Spain, England, France) colonizing southeastern North America. Treaties kept relative peace until the late 1700's. During this time, many of the Creeks interacted, inter-married, and lived in settlements with European colonizers, and escaped slaves. The land remained relatively undisturbed except for occasional tree cutting for housing and fencing, and a minimal amount of land clearing for subsistence farming and cattle grazing. However, once the United States formed in 1776, pressure grew to violate the treaties and colonize those lands. Armed conflicts between the Creeks, squatters, and local militias ensued. Political pressure forced the U.S. Army to subdue any Creek resistance. This culminated in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814, 26 miles northeast of SFR, and ended the formal Creek resistance. Lands of Creeks involved in the uprising were confiscated. The last Creeks in the vicinity of SFR were assembled by the U.S. Army and force-marched to that Territory along The Trail of Tears in the 1840's, and re-settled in what is now Tulsa, OK. Only Creeks that married into European families, or were willing to comply with the newly established laws of Alabama and the United States remained. The last documented Creek "owner" of the land containing what is now SFR, was Chis-co-me mikko, who traded the land to the first European "owner" for 16 bales of cotton during the 1840s.

Once in European hands forested lands were heavily logged, and naturally and intentionally-set fires were suppressed. As a result, longleaf pine was eliminated from the xeric ridgetops and loblolly pine and sweetgum, no longer restricted to their wetter sites, quickly volunteered into the upland areas. By the early 1900's agriculture dominated the area, and the land was cleared, terraced, and farmed primarily for cotton. On SFR, hydraulic ram pump systems were used on two of the permanent tributaries flowing to Loblockee Creek to irrigate and provide water for livestock. For approximately 30 years, beginning in 1902, the land was farmed by the Dowdell family. Two houses were eventually built, each with a hand dug well. The farm apparently was either abandoned or sold during the Great Depression. By this time the soils had been exhausted by poor farming

techniques. The land exchanged hands at least two times thereafter, and was used primarily for timber production. In 1954, it was purchased by the Lapp family, primarily for outdoor recreation. Before and during the Lapp ownership an impressive stand of timber re-grew on the property, and the main farm house burned down. By the early '70s, timber was once again cut off of all but the steepest slopes to help pay for family medical expenses. The Lapp children eventually inherited the property, dispersed to Maryland and Michigan to pursue their careers, and became absentee landowners. The main access road became impassable. The ridgetops became dominated by 13-year-old, dog-hair thick stands of short-leaf and loblolly pines, interspersed with thick stands of sweetgum and sourwood. The hardwood stands consisted of dense, pole-sized stands of various hardwoods. Following purchase of the 176 acres in December 1984, the Mirarchis had the access road re-graded to allow normal vehicular traffic. In ensuing years, they also re-opened old logging roads, several log landings, and fire lines to allow easier access. They began a burning regimen in the pine stands using hand raked fire lines. They also began pre-commercially thinning the pine stands. Once the pine stands began to reach merchantable size, commercial thinnings and mechanically prepared fire lines also were created. Log landings were planted as wildlife food plots. As a result of these initial improvements, the property was designated as an Alabama Treasure Forest during the 1990s. Thereafter, the primary focus of the property became wildlife habitat management, outdoor recreation, and light timber production.

Following the devastation of Hurricane Opal in 1995 and subsequent salvage cut, the Mirarchis started replanting the ridgetops in longleaf pine, as part of their restorative ecology management strategy. Subsequently, light commercial logging took place at roughly 10-15 year intervals, and consisted of thinnings in both pine and hardwood stands, and small clear-cuts (< 8 acres) in pine stands. Pine stands on the xeric ridge tops and southeastern facing slopes were either clear-cut, chemically treated to eliminate off-site hardwoods, and re-planted, or "under-planted" with longleaf pine seedlings in anticipation of eventual removal of all off-site loblolly pine. All predominately pine sites were immediately subjected to prescribed fire on a 3-year rotation. This re-introduction of longleaf pine and fire to the property was deemed necessary to restore the natural ecological integrity of the property. In 2009, following Ralph's retirement, a 2-acre pond site was created in the upper end of the heavily eroded,

southwestward facing hardwood hollow to slow the erosion and impound the waters flowing down the approximately 12-acre watershed. The pond site currently consists of 1.25 acres of water, the dam and water control structures, and a wood and compressed plastic dock. In 2010, the Mirarchis built an off-the-grid, earth-sheltered concrete home into the hillside above the pond, and currently reside there. It is serviced by a 14-kilowatt solar array, and a solar-powered hot-water system. A 3-stall pole shed was built adjacent to the home to provide housing for a tractor, implements, and supporting parts and supplies. In 2015, an additional 9 acres of land that contained the access road across the former Carroll Tract was purchased, and completed the current boundaries of the 185-acre property. In 2020, the Mirarchis formally entered SFR into a conservation easement with the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust to forever protect the land in the face of rapidly encroaching development from the city of Auburn.

Today, that easement protects the entire property and covers at least two Archaic-aged (4000-7000 years BP) nomadic hunter-gatherer campsites and artifacts, two historic-aged ruins of homesites and associated outbuildings and artifacts, the current earth-sheltered home and pole shed complex, the pond complex, a family and companion animal cemetery, several different forest habitat types and agricultural lands, the Saugahatchee and Loblockee Creeks within the property boundaries, the agricultural and forestry practices used to manage SFR, and all the plant and animal populations contained therein. The populations identified so far include 250 species of plants, 5 species of mussels and snails, 3 species of crayfish, 84 species of insects, 9 species of arachnids, 30 species of fish, 15 species of amphibians, 29 species of reptiles, 170 species of birds, and 30 species of mammals. Several of the animal species are considered species of high to moderate conservation concern by the state of Alabama. Thanks to the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust, the Mirarchis childhood dreams of stewardship of all things wild and free will continue on in perpetuity on Saugalock Forest Reserve!



Photo by Cindy Mirarchi, SFR old growth pine stand

# Thank You

## Thank You Chattowah Conservation Council\* Supporters and all other GALT supporters.

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\* Chattowah Conservation Council individuals, families and organizations give at least \$1,000 of support.

*Nature is not a place to visit. It is home. ~ Gary Snyder*

## Your Donation Matters

How much impact does your donation have in terms of what the Land Trust can do with the funds it receives? On average, for every \$35 donated to the Land Trust, GALT can protect the equivalent of one acre of conservation land. Conservation easements protect land from future development so it may continue to be used in perpetuity for agriculture, forestry, wild life habitat, wetland environment or outdoor sports and recreation. Whether your passion is for passing down a family farming tradition or for promoting miles of trails for sports enthusiast, conservation efforts can support your goals. You can help us continue our efforts by making a donation. Large or small, every donation has an impact. And, GALT now accepts crptocurrency donatins! Learn more about ways to donate at [galandtrust.org](http://galandtrust.org)!



## YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK

### 2021 Accomplishments & Highlights:

- At the end of 2020 GALT held easements on a total of 407,291 acres and held 8,102 acres in fee. We are on pace to protect 21,295 acres via conservation easement in 2021, bringing our total protected acreage to 436,688.
- Over the prior year, GALT protected 11 properties within the Fort Stewart compatible use buffer, furthering both military readiness and local land conservation.
- The Georgia-Alabama Land Trust In-Lieu Fee Program has received approval and has begun construction on the Blueberry Farms Wetland Mitigation Site in Whitfield County, Georgia, bringing the total number of approved In-Lieu Fee stream and wetland mitigation sites to four.
- This year GALT received our largest single cash donation ever from an anonymous cryptocurrency donor. The donation value was over \$400,000 and became the seed money for our Forever Fund campaign (read more about the Forever Fund on page 19).
- In October, GALT received a \$5 million dollar WREP grant from the Department of Agriculture to protect a 3,000 acre parcel near the Fort Stewart Army Installation as part of a 5,000 acre conservation easement project. This grant also helps us reach out to underserved, coastal landowners. We are grateful to be chosen for the largest such grant in the nation this year.
- In August, GALT successfully installed bat gates at Weaver Cave to protect the endangered bat populations from human contamination. Read more about this project here: <https://www.galandtrust.org/wing-night-2021>
- With over 100 online participants, GALT hosted our largest ever attendance at our continuing education classes. Our classes help educate land owners, prospective conservation donors, and professionals who work with landowners.
- Our staff met in person for the first time in 2 years to tour GA waterways and landscapes and for technical training on new ESRI software that helps track and map our protected land.





# Understanding Conservation Easements

A perpetual conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a private land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of 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 state's natural heritage and at-risk species by protecting high priority habitats and waters on private land. The donation of a conservation easement may reduce estate, income and property taxes for the landowners. Consult with your tax or legal advisor for specific information.

