

# CONSERVATIONIST

GEORGIA-ALABAMA LAND TRUST - 2023





GEORGIA-ALABAMA  
LAND TRUST

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This year we changed our mission statement from “Protecting Land for Present and Future Generations” to “Enriching Life Through Land Protection.” I am so proud of this change because it underscores the fact that conservation affects more than the people who own the land now and in the future; land protection impacts wildlife, air quality, food production, water quality, open spaces, scenic beauty, and natural enjoyment for all. The benefits of land protection are vast, far reaching, and they are immediate as well as long term. I think the new mission correctly places more emphasis on how land conservation enriches and protects life itself. One simple example of how land conservation benefits everyone, whether or not they own land or even live near conserved land, is the impact conservation has on pollinators. Without a healthy ecosystem for pollinators, food production diminishes and consequences are negative. Land conservation can have a major impact on pollinators. Read on to learn how the work of GALT has an often overlooked but incredibly important value for our pollinating friends.

Katherine Eddins  
Executive Director



# GALT HAS PROTECTED

437,000 acres

1,202 properties

234,000 ac forestland

93,000 ac cropland and pasture

62,000 ac wetlands

38,000 ac grasslands

## STAFF

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Laci Smitherman, Regional Stewardship Manager

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Hannah Wilson, Regional Stewardship Manager  
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### Newest Board Member



#### Tamra Mitchell Herndon

Tammy was born and raised in Dalton, Georgia. She graduated from the University of Georgia with a Bachelor of Science in Consumer Economics. Tammy and her husband, Steve, started Herndon Properties LLC in 1992. Herndon Properties is a vertically integrated extended stay hotel company that owns and operates extended stay hotels throughout the southeast. They also own multi-family housing. Tammy and Steve have been married for 30 years and have four children, Chase, Mitchell, Ellis, and Mary Margaret. Tammy currently serves on the Whitfield Healthcare Foundation Board of Trustees and on the United Way of Northwest Georgia Board of Directors. Tammy and Steve participate in the land conservation easement program and believe in conservation of land through the Land Trust.

# POLLINATION AND CONSERVATION

It's all about the choices.

By Hal Robinson and Sadye Robinson

This 2023 Issue of *The Conservationist* focuses on pollination – the process by which grains of pollen are transferred from one flower to another (or, in some cases, to another part of the same flower). This process is necessary for most plants to reproduce through the production of seeds. As you will read, the pollination process varies greatly in form and, it is of critical importance to wildlife and, especially, human society. Nearly 35% of our food crops depend upon animal pollination! The process of pollination, including the organisms – and sometimes even inorganic mechanisms – that transfer pollen, is an integral part of a well-functioning ecosystem. It is the linchpin of our food supply.

As we developed this Issue of *The Conservationist*, it occurred to us that the pollination process is also a suiting allegory for the critical decisions underlying a decision to conserve land. Land conservation inherently involves a considered and deliberate choice – over many other possible options. The choice may be between realizing a significant economic benefit by not engaging in land development or, instead, placing great value on the important long-term, but often unapparent benefits conserved land provides to wildlife, fauna, and human life. Said another way, choosing land conservation often involves valuing underappreciated benefits and cherishing subtle differences, despite the perceived “sweetness” of another, more immediate and visible option, such as indiscriminate development.

The many species of pitcher plants, and the few discerning insects that pollinate them, exemplify this parable. Pitcher plants are typically found within wet, low-nutrient soils, such as along bogs, swamps, and other wetlands. And, because pitchers do not extract nutrients from their soil and typically do not produce seeds for at least five years after germination, pollination after this waiting period has even greater importance. And yet, the

success of its delayed pollination is further complicated by the fact that pitcher plants attract many insects with the sweet and fragrant nectar within a pitcher's tube. Despite what appears as an easily found meal, pitcher plants trap insects (potential pollinators), including wasps, flies, and beetles within their tube. When unsuspecting insects venture inside the pitcher's tube in search of the nectar, countless downward facing hairs prevent escape and instead, further directing the insect into the pitcher's digestive juices at the bottom. Yes, the allure of such sweet and seemingly obtainable nectar is too much for many potential pollinators to resist.

For the discerning bumble bee, however, this fateful choice is an easy one. The bumble bee – somehow – recognizes the sweet nectar within the tube of certain pitcher species involves more than it appears. The bumble bee, unlike most other insects, has an affinity toward a certain pitcher's less fragrant, and rather unassuming flower, dangling just inches above the deadly, but sweet and visibly attractive hood and tube. As a result, the bumble bee actively avoids the deadly tube and its own demise, and instead pollinates the plant. In effect, the bumble bee chooses to pollinate the rarely occurring flower over the allure of sweet and ever-present nectar.

In deciding whether to conserve land or to engage in other non-conservation land uses, keep the bumble bee's decision in mind. A non-conservation option, which initially appears “sweet” and purports to yield significant benefits, may not necessarily be the best option, or even as it initially appears. Like the discerning bumble bee, we believe those who value, appreciate, and engage in land conservation, tend to be well-aware of other available and tempting options, yet they still favor long-term, sustainable options that only land conservation can provide.



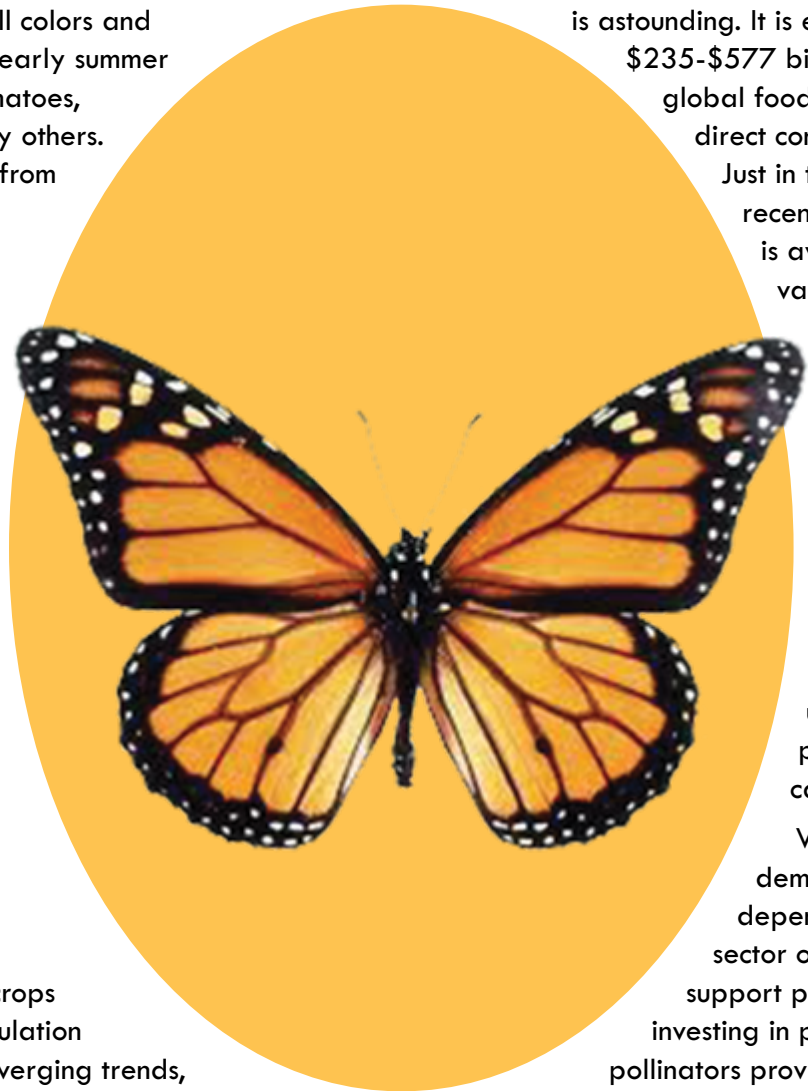
# THE VALUE OF POLLINATORS

By Ben Mimbs

When many of us think of agriculture, we picture fruits and vegetables of all colors and sizes - fields of soybeans, early summer peaches, fresh garden tomatoes, squash, beans and so many others.

Agriculture is inseparable from the human life cycle. It is the basis of food security and nutrition, providing us with one of the most important elements of human existence. And, at the heart of this critical element, though often overlooked, are the pollinators that make most crop production possible. Bees, beetles, bats, birds, moths, butterflies, wasps, midges, and thousands of other pollinators form a cornerstone of agriculture.

Globally, pollinator populations have faced challenges, while demand for pollinator-dependent crops has risen sharply with population growth. In light of these diverging trends, researchers have sought to quantify the economic value of pollinators, both within the United States and across the world.



The value of this important ecological service is astounding. It is estimated that between \$235-\$577 billion (USD) of annual global food production relies on direct contributions of pollinators.

Just in the US in 2012 – the most recent year for which data is available – the economic value of insect pollination is estimated at \$34 billion.

Within this huge yearly economic value is over \$300 million worth of honey – over 160 million pounds – generated by managed honeybee populations. Globally, approximately 75% of food crops depend upon animal-mediated pollination in some capacity.

While these massive figures demonstrate the continuing dependence of the agricultural sector on pollinators, they also support protecting and even investing in pollinator services. Clearly, pollinators provide us with numerous valuable ecosystem services. In practical terms

however, pollinators' true value is arguably near infinite. By ensuring habitat for pollinators, we can protect this critical component of human existence.

# PUBLIC ACCESS

By Drew Ruttinger and Hannah Wilson

Although protection of private land often takes much of the spotlight, another important way GALT furthers our mission of “Enriching life through land protection” is through increasing public access to nature.

Because not everyone owns land, it is important that public access to nature exists to allow all people the opportunity to appreciate the beauty and significance of natural, open space. Three examples of how GALT promotes public access and appreciation include the Chatham County Blue Sky property and its many trails, the Nancy Natoli Memorial site, and the Lightning Point Shoreline.

Chatham County Blue Sky is a county-owned property protected by a GALT conservation easement which affords public access to land along the Ogeechee River. The property contains several important habitats including examples of planted and natural pine forests, mixed pine-hardwood forests which are a staple habitat of southeast Georgia, and other ecologically significant habitats, such as bottomland hardwood forest and forested depressional wetland. GALT and

Chatham County have worked together to form multiple walking trails throughout the property with benches along important and scenic habitats, often with trail signs pointing out interesting facts about the habitat and its ecological importance. Creating these trails and promoting public access to view and learn about these habitats affords all people an opportunity to appreciate and enjoy this important place.

GALT intends to dedicate the Nancy Natoli Memorial in early 2023. The Memorial will be situated upon 2 acres of a larger tract owned by GALT pursuant to its work with Fort Stewart on the installation's Army Compatible Use Buffering (ACUB) program; GALT is also engaged in restoration efforts on the property. Once

established, the site will include a path leading to the granite memorial which will continue to wind through young restored native longleaf pines. There will also be a bench nestled under a large shady live oak tree in an ecotone transition between the native upland longleaf pines and a bottomland hardwood forest. This memorial



Blue Sky trails



Lightning Point, Bayou La Batre, AL

will honor Nancy Natoli, who, prior to her passing in 2013, championed the Army ACUB and other Department of Defense buffering programs and led them to the successful land conservation and military readiness protection tools that they are today. The site is in Bryan County, Georgia just south of the city of Richmond Hill and will permit managed access to the memorial site while also providing an opportunity to view the positive impacts of conservation and restoration, something Nancy championed.

Another project with public access GALT works on is Lightning Point, situated on the coastline in the historic city of Bayou La Batre, Alabama (circa 1786). This seafood capital of Alabama is an active community with French and Southeast Asian influence, iconic landscapes, and tasty seafood! Yet the area is under threat from development and loss of shoreline. Since 1916, the shoreline near the mouth of the Bayou has retreated approximately 200 feet. The shoreline receives daily wave action, boat traffic, and severe weather events, such as Hurricane Nate in 2017. Many conservation partners have had a hand in ensuring the restoration and protection of this American landmark including the City of Bayou La Batre, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources,

Mobile County, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy. Through a partnership with The Nature Conservancy, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust is now also taking part in protecting the historic and biodiverse Lightning Point through a conservation easement. The restoration goals along the coastline include protecting the shoreline, providing managed access for the public, utilizing dredge material for thin-layer deposition that will build and nourish the marsh from the inside out, and sustaining the marsh, tidal creeks, and upland habitats that support a wide range of fish, shellfish, and birds. The access areas will provide opportunities for both visitors and locals to enjoy bird watching, boating, fishing, sightseeing, as well as a place for families to watch their loved ones return from a long voyage of harvesting shrimp and oysters at sea.

Projects like these, which incorporate managed public access, are an increasing area of GALT's work. By providing access and education opportunities, everyone – even those who do not own land – will have a chance to enrich life by enjoying Georgia and Alabama's open spaces.



Long Leaf Pines at the Nancy Natoli Memorial site

## LANDOWNER SPOTLIGHT Dean Buttram, Jr.

By Katherine Eddins

“Like Pigeon Forge two hundred years ago” is how Dean Buttram describes his 311 acres of “Paradise” near Centre in Northeast Alabama. It took Dean 35 years to assemble the Property which includes a dramatic waterfall where Yellow Creek tumbles from the Property’s cliff into Weiss Lake. Dean says “This land belonged to the Native Americans before me. I am just lucky to be the current steward of the land and when I go, I want the land to be as close as possible to how it was while the Native Americans were here”. Located in an area developed with lake houses, Dean says, “It would be a subdivision if I did not purchase and protect it.”

A native of Gadsden, H. Dean Buttram Jr. is an attorney practicing in Centre, AL, and a former U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Alabama. An animal lover and owner of cattle, horses, donkeys, dogs and cats, Mr. Buttram maintains pastures in the Property’s valley where he keeps his cattle, donkeys, and horses. An escarpment creates a circle around the Property and is dominated by a mature hardwood forest, designated as “key terrestrial habitat” by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Mr. Buttram says that the conservation easement has not affected his use of the Property but enables him to carry out his goal of keeping his beloved land intact and permanently protected.



# STEWARD'S CORNER: SURPRISE! I'm a Pollinator too!

By Lesley Hanson

Years ago, as I sat on my porch in southern New Mexico, a large moth was hovering over some old barrels being used as planters. Despite it being near dusk at the time, the moth spent a great deal of time over the flowers. "It is almost dark," I thought. "What is it doing?" What I did not realize was this moth was playing a critical role as a pollinator! As it turns out, long after butterflies have disappeared for the day, moths remain active in our gardens, quietly pollinating. As a local example, the Plebian sphinx moth is a key pollinator in Georgia and Alabama to the shoal lily (or Cahaba lily), which we enjoy in late spring.

It is estimated that more than 200,000 animal species serve as pollinators, and about 75% of the food sources in the world depend upon pollinators. The National Wildlife Federation estimates that one in every three bites of food you take come from a pollinated source. The moth I witnessed that night had me curious - beyond our commonly known pollinators like honeybees and butterflies, what are other species that serve as unexpected pollinators?

Slugs are one likely unexpected pollinator. Although they have a reputation for eating plants and grasses and causing damage to crops, snails and slugs actually play an important pollinator role because they typically only pollinate during the night or on rainy days, a time when most other pollinators are inactive. One study found that on a rainy day, a snail successfully pollinated more flowers than a bee. As with insects, a flower's nectar lures snails and slugs in, and pollen grains sticks to their bodies and shells. They then transfer pollen as they travel from flower to flower. These small creatures further benefit the plants they pollinate by providing nitrogen to the soil as part of the nutrient cycle.

Bats are another example of an unlikely pollinator with a big role. It is estimated that bats assist in the pollination of about 530 species of flowering plants worldwide, many of



Long-nosed bat with pollen on his face, photo by J. Scott Altenbach/Bat Conservation International

which are important both economically and ecologically. Examples of these plants include agave (which are used in the multimillion-dollar tequila industry), bananas, carob, cloves,

durian fruit, and balsa trees. The relationship between bats and agave is so strong that bat population numbers fluctuate relative to the growing success of the agave plant each year.

During bat pollination, pollen from an agave sticks to the hair on the bat as they drink nectar from an agave's flower. When a bat visits another plant, it transfers the pollen from its body to the new plant. Nectar-feeding bats, which are found in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Southern California in the United States, are capable of long-distance flights and move pollen great distances to plants that are unrelated to the initial host plants. By eating insect pests and assisting in pollination, bats save farmers and forest managers billions of dollars each year. Bat pollination is definitely a win-win for the plants and the bats.

While honeybees are the traditional model of what most identify as a pollinator, there are other insects that act as a pollinator by mimicking a bee. The flower fly is a harmless insect that is a remarkably convincing mimic of bees, wasps, and yellowjackets. Their coloration usually involves yellow, orange, or red along with black or brown, often with stripes or other patterns to mimic the warning coloration of bees or wasps. This fly pollinates flowers such as violet (*Viola*), thistle (*Cirsium*) and hedge nettle (*Stachys*). Not only are these flies important as pollinators in farms and gardens, but they also play an important role in controlling pests. About 40% of the world's species of flower fly belong to groups with larvae that eat aphids, scales, and other soft-bodied pests that damage our gardens and crops. And lastly, regarding bees, it is also important to remember that there are many bee species other than honeybees that are critical pollinators; this includes many solitary bees, such as sweat bees, native bumble bees, and mason bees.

So, this summer as you sit on your own porch watching the bees and butterflies diligently feeding and pollinating in your yard, farms, and gardens, keep an eye out for unexpected creatures that may also be there quietly pollinating.

# A RETURN TO THE PAST

## the importance of native grasslands in the southeast

By Hannah Wilson



Native Grasses on Tom Hamby's farm in Georgia, 2021, Photo from Tom Hamby

Native grasses, sedges, and wildflowers are a frequently undervalued part of an ecosystem. As a result, more effort and resources are often directed to saving our forests, waterways, and coastlines than to restoring native grasslands. Yet, loss of native grassland habitat is the greatest conservation issue North American biodiversity currently faces. Southern grasslands, such as prairies and savannas, having persisted for centuries and once prevalent within our region, are now nearly nonexistent due to habitat loss.

It is a myth that when Europeans first arrived in North America thick unbroken forests stretched from the East Coast to the Great Plains. Instead, ecological and historical research shows the land of the eastern United States was a complicated and diverse mosaic of millions of acres of wetlands, grassy woodlands, forests, and

grasslands, such as savannas, dunes, glades, and prairies. Since the early 1800s, nearly all this habitat has been lost. Today, only a few dozen acres of native grasslands and prairies remain.

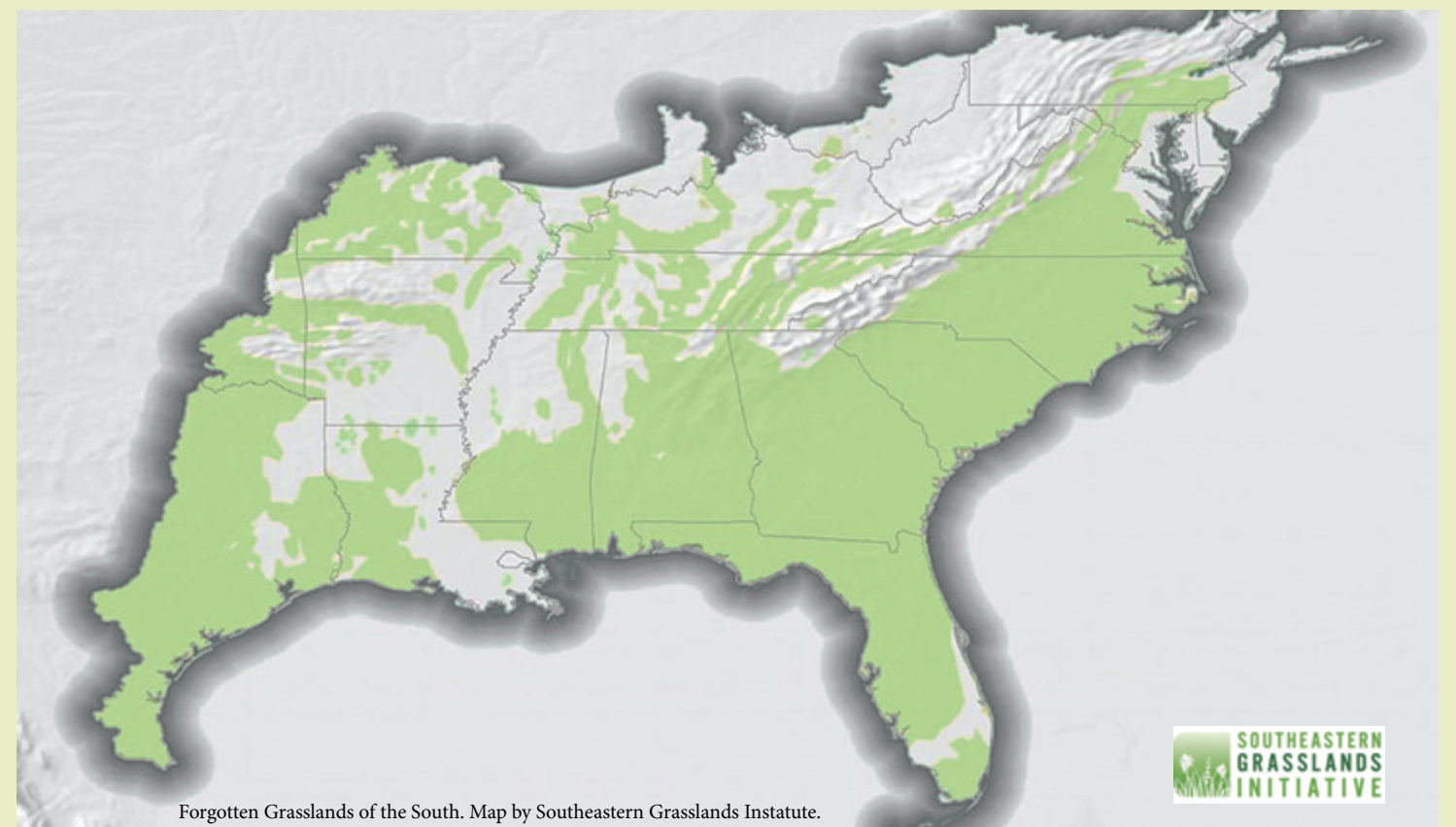
Grasslands thrive when there are active disturbance elements. Herds of keystone herbivores, such as the North American bison once roamed freely over these grasslands causing some of this necessary disturbance. They grazed, consumed the woody vegetation, and wallowed in the soil. Another form of disturbance was from wildfire. Many wildfires occurred naturally, but some were started as a land management tool by the indigenous tribes across the landscape. Even today, the primary disturbance supporting grasslands is the use of prescribed burning, which stimulates native grass regrowth, removes other unwanted species, and returns nutrients back to the soil.

Through conservation and restoration efforts, southeastern grasslands are making a small comeback. And what they lack in size they make up for in astounding biodiversity, even when compared to their much more prevalent midwestern counterparts. Approximately 90% of southeast grasslands are currently located within rights-of-way. The few old-growth grasslands remaining might look like a patch of weeds to the untrained eye, but upon close inspection contain a variety of native grasses, sedges, wildflowers, shrubs, birds, insects, and mammals all working in partnership to create a thriving ecosystem.

There are several GALT conservation easement-protected properties with natural or restored native grasslands. Deerfield Farm, located in Greene County, Alabama, is one such property. When that area experienced severe damage from a tornado in April 2011, landowner Reggie Lancaster was at a crossroads as to whether he should replant timber or attempt restoration of the Blackbelt Prairie that existed upon it years ago. After discussing options with Claude Jenkins, a Wildlife Biologist with the Alabama Wildlife Federation, Lancaster decided to revert

a significant portion of the property into prairie using native plants such as switchgrass, big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian grass, and a native wildflower mix. As to the possibility of additional, similar restoration, land manager Grady Wilson had the following to say: "After seeing what converting the land back to its natural state did for the wildlife, we are thinking about expanding our acreage of native grasses. We have seen an increase in rabbit, small mammal, and squirrel populations, and there are more raptors monitoring the fields as a result. The grasses also provide bedding grounds for our whitetail deer and nesting habitat for turkeys."

Tom Hamby, President of the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust's Board of Directors, also has experience with restoring native grasslands. Mr. Hamby's farm is located outside of Atlanta, Georgia. The property's prior owners used it for growing cotton. Cotton was not the most suitable crop for the property's specific soils and, not surprisingly, erosion was occurring. To fix the erosion issue, crab grass and fescue were initially planted. Erosion stopped, but these newly planted, nonnative grasses



Forgotten Grasslands of the South. Map by Southeastern Grasslands Institute.



were not providing adequate nutrients to the cattle now grazing the land.

Mr. Hamby read about native grasses and decided to reestablish them in locations throughout his property. After much research and many conversations with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Extension agents about planting methods, soil bed preparation, and equipment, he planted a mix of switchgrass, big bluestem, and Indian grass. While he uses prescribed burning on his native grasses, he also grazes his cattle on it, both of which provide needed disturbance and help return nutrients to the soils. Grazing on native grasses requires an understanding of their growing cycle, including when the plants will have adequate nutrients for the animals. The rule of thumb Mr. Hamby sticks to is, "When the grass is as high as the top of your boot, but not as high as the top of your knee, the grasses will provide enough nutritional value to the cattle." Grazing is also better for the grasses than cutting them with a bush hog, and it provides suitable habitat to many songbirds that have moved into the area and are thriving under the native grasses' protection of cover and food resources.

It seems like it would be an easy process to convert some of the forests that now blanket the landscape back into native grasslands. However, with the habitat loss has also come the loss of native species to regenerate a thriving ecosystem. Seed sources for grassland restoration are hard to find and require special planting techniques. When planting native grasses, sedges, and wildflowers, factors such as seed quality, site selection, seedbed preparation techniques, and proper planting method influence the success of the native grass growth. Organizations such as the Southeast Grassland Initiative, the Alabama Wildlife Federation, and local NRCS offices are all resources that educate landowners and the public on the importance of conserving and restoring native grasslands. The Seeds of Success Program is a national initiative that collects wildland native seeds to create a seed bank that can serve as a source of native seeds that are specific to the ecoregion for restoration projects. It is essential that research is conducted to ensure the proper technique, equipment, and species are available when establishing a native grassland.



Prescribed burn on native grasses in the spring. Photo by Hannah Wilson, Deerfield Farm, Greene County, AL 2002

# FOREVER FUND

## PROTECTING LAND PERMANENTLY

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, defending the easement to resolve the matter. These are real costs that occur over the course of “forever.”

That is one of the reasons 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 involves an inherent amount of uncertainty, such as changing donation levels, population trends, tax law and regulations, and economic outlook. The Forever Fund will also supplement these other fundraising efforts to provide additional security over the long term.

GALT has already allocated over \$570,000 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 GALT’s executive director Katherine Eddins at (404) 861-8567 or [katherine@galandtrust.org](mailto:katherine@galandtrust.org).



# POLLINATORS ON GALT-PROTECTED LANDS

## bees, bats, and butterflies

By Laci Smitherman



Dr. Mickey Moore, Photo by Laci Smitherman

The Georgia-Alabama Land Trust has the unique privilege of protecting land and the plants and animals associated with it. By way of protecting land, we can protect several plant species that are essential to pollinators.

Several of our landowners keep honeybees, but perhaps the most enthusiastic of them is Dr. Mickey Moore. Although he considers himself a novice, he has raised bees for approximately eight years in Cherokee County, Alabama. His property is just off Bogan Mountain and contains plenty of wildflowers to support the bees, including black-eyed susans, white aster, butterfly weed, blackberry, and clover. The bees have about a mile radius in which they collect pollen. Although Mickey uses a puff of smoke to calm the bees, the bees are completely docile. They allow visitors to steal a quick taste of honey straight from the hive. The

Moore's have two hives which together weigh between 60 and 70 pounds and yield about four gallons of honey each year. They jar the honey and give it away as gifts. Although the honey is delicious, bees are far more valuable to humans as pollinators than strictly honey manufacturers. The commercial production of over 90 crops, including watermelon, blueberries, almonds, squashes, cucumbers, and several fruit trees is reliant on bees for pollination. The FDA values the agricultural benefit of bee pollination at about \$15 billion. The work Dr. Moore and other beekeepers do is vital to the protection of the species.

Several pollinators that are on lands protected by GALT are often overlooked. Honeybees only represent a fraction of all pollinating species. More than 90% of bee species are considered "solitary bees", meaning that the female constructs and maintains her nest without the help

of others. Many solitary bees, including several species of bumblebees, spend time underground then emerge in the spring to pollinate flowers while they feed on pollen and nectar. They may use that nectar to feed their larval worker bees, but do not store honey long term like honeybees.


Wasps, although known for their nasty stings, are also important pollinators. Wasp is a catchall term that is used to describe several species, including hornets, yellowjackets and paper wasps. Many of these species look like bees from a distance, but a closer look shows that their bodies are smooth and do not have the fuzzy hairs that bees have along their bodies. As a result, wasps are less efficient pollinators than bees. Despite the lack of fuzzy hairs, wasps are the sole pollinators for some plant species. The fig wasp is the only pollinator for fig trees and is the only reason we can enjoy the fruit.

Hummingbirds are another lesser-known pollinator. Their long, pointed bills and tube-like tongues are specifically adapted to drink nectar from long tubular flowers such as Red Cardinal Flowers and Trumpet Honey Suckle. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds prefer red- and orange-colored flowers. These tiny birds make an annual migration each spring from Mexico and Central America to the Eastern United States and Southern Canada. They must double their weight to make the journey. As they travel, they pollinate.

Populations of bees and other pollinators are declining worldwide due to habitat loss, human development, climate change, disease, and the use of pesticides. Some of our landowners are fighting back. The Partlow family in Greene County, Alabama has been working for over a decade to create habitat for pollinators. They started by planting several diverse types of pear trees, each of which bloom at slightly different times. More recently, they have been working with experts to restore native grasslands on a portion of their 1300-acre farm. Since implementing a burn and spray regimen, the Partlow's have seen several wildflowers come back to this native grassland, including rattlesnake master, a host plant for the Eryngium stem-borer moth (*Papaipema eryngil*), a candidate for the endangered species list. Planting and cultivating native plants are the first steps to increasing pollinator species.

All types of pollinators are facing one challenge or another. The easiest way to help them is to first do no harm. We can greatly increase pollinator populations by limiting our use of pesticides and herbicides. We can increase habitat for pollinators by planting native plants that may serve as host plants in our cities and backyards. And, of course, it helps to preserve land using conservation easements.





**Building on our Mission**  
**ENRICHING LIFE**  
**THROUGH LAND PROTECTION**  
BY MIKE HENEGHAN

There's an old parable about a banker vacationing in a fishing village. He notices a local man docking his boat with a modest haul of fish. The banker, with his keen business sense, inquires about the local fisherman's practices and, upon hearing of the lackadaisical methods used, suggests that with the fisherman's aptitude and a little business advice and hard work, a fishing empire could be built. This leads to a back-and-forth exchange between the two men, with the fisherman repeatedly responding, "Why?" to the banker's statements:

You should stay on the water longer to catch more fish.

Why?

So you can make more money.

Why?

So you can buy a bigger boat.

Why?

So you can build a business and move to the city.

Why?

So you can make millions of dollars.

Why?

So you can retire and move to a small village and spend your days fishing.

Many of us with children know how frustrating "Why?" questions can be. I often catch myself wanting to tell my kids to quit asking why and to instead focus on "what" and to get it done. But this nice, funny little parable contains a deeper truth that my kids apparently know better than I do. Before focusing on what we need to do, we should instead ask ourselves why we need to do it, and that answer should form the basis of our decision making and the justification for our actions.

Organizations often want to present themselves not just as providing quality goods and services, but also as

doing good and making positive impacts on people, communities, and the planet. They strive to be, or at least claim to be, driven by a mission beyond profit. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization we are, by definition, created and operated in order to provide a public benefit and are held to a high standard on this charitable purpose. The decisions we make as an organization are driven by a mission for public benefit. Our mission (our why) is the foundation upon which everything we do is built. With the purpose of public benefit in mind, it is essential that we continuously revisit and reevaluate our mission to ensure that our work aligns with our values and our purpose. This is exactly what we did at our most recent Strategic Planning Meeting.

The enrichment of life from healthy land comes in many forms, from economic to ecological and from spiritual to physical. The first step in the process of every one of our easements begins with identifying important potential conservation purposes on a particular property. Our employees are literally asking why this land should be protected, and the answer could be to protect or promote important wildlife habitat, productive soils for agriculture or forestry, food security, water quality, species preservation, aesthetic characteristics, recreational opportunities, or even important cultural significance. Protecting a property with a conservation easement is inherently tied to improving or enhancing the quality of life for people, as well as the natural communities around us.

Georgia and Alabama together contain over 45 million acres of forestland, over 90% of which is privately owned, and 14 million acres of cropland and pasture. Georgia also has one of the fastest growing populations in the country, meaning that our forest and farmland is regularly at risk of conversion. Agribusiness in these two states combined has an economic impact of over \$140 billion per year and employs nearly 1 million people. And, the land also provides other valuable benefits in the form of ecosystem services like flood prevention, water filtration, climate regulation, carbon storage, and

aesthetics. While it is difficult to put a dollar value on these services, researchers from the University of Georgia estimated the economic value at roughly \$40 billion per year – in Georgia alone. The recreation and tourism industry also depends on these natural resources, and the health of our most popular recreation spots, from Jekyll Island to the Blue Ridge Mountains, are dependent on the state of our connected private forests. A conservation easement means a fisherman along the sloughs of Guntersville Lake, one of the best bass fishing locations on earth, can look up and see natural hardwood forests – not housing developments – along the overlooking plateaus. The value of conservation easements on private land directly benefits the public in many ways.

Protecting working lands, which comprise a significant portion of our conservation easement portfolio, means helping to ensure the roughly 100,000 acres of agricultural land and 200,000 acres of forest land currently protected by GALT easements are managed in a sustainable way. Perpetual conservation easements may also provide landowners with certain tax incentives to further motivate landowners to keep their land in current recreational, forestry, agricultural, or habitat preservation usage, despite the possibility of other potential uses that would threaten long-term ecological and cultural values that mean so much to our region.

These properties aren't just income producers, however, and most of our landowners have motivations beyond just dollars and cents. These lands are often where parents teach their kids to hunt and fish, where kids form lifelong summer memories with friends, where couples get married surrounded by family, where people go for worship, and where Native Americans once inscribed religious messages.

Some of our landowners' families have lived on their property for generations, and many are even laid to rest on their land. We are enriching lives by ensuring that these important lands are forever protected.

Of course, the land we protect also ensures a home for countless non-human lives, and our mission involves enriching that life as well. NatureServe, a non-profit group providing data on the status and distribution of biodiversity, ranks Alabama and Georgia as the 5th and 6th most biodiverse states in America, respectively. This makes them the two most biodiverse states east of the Mississippi. When evaluating properties, we closely follow our states' corresponding Wildlife Action Plans, which provide a framework and priorities for conserving the most important and threatened species and habitats within our states. Habitats identified as "High Priority" within these State Action Plans are given heightened recognition in our conservation easements.

During our recent Strategic Planning Meeting we changed our mission from "Protecting land for present and future generations" to "Enriching life through land protection." We wanted our focus to be not on just the metes and bounds on a survey, but also on the lives that protected lands improve. Whether it be through providing a black bear linkage between pockets of forestland, protecting core habitat for endangered bats, ensuring that a hunter can bring his grandsons to the same tree stand that he sat in with his grandfather, or providing people with timber products and some of the best produce on earth, we feel confident that lives are enriched from the conservation work we do.



August Photo Contest Winner: "Sunset over Cotton" Field by Joseph Wilson, Greene County, AL

## RELICT TRILLIUM

### a relict worth bringing into the future

By Caelia Wysocki

For those unfamiliar with trillium, this fascinating genus is native to North America and Asia and seen by many enthusiasts as one of the showiest spring woodland flowers. One of the more ecologically rare species is the *Trillium Reliquum*, better known as relict trillium. It was discovered near Augusta, Georgia in 1901 and later described as a new species in 1975 by John D. Freeman. While not the best smelling flower – it emits a foul carrion odor – fewer than fifty known populations exist (mostly in Georgia), and botanists and nature lovers greatly admire this perennial herb.



Relict trillium, photo by Ken Cheeks. Reprinted with permission from Project Noah.

Relict trillium has a short, curved, hairless stem with a single sessile flower in the center and a whorl of three strongly mottled leaves featuring a silvery streak through their center. The three upright petals range in color from dark purple to yellow and emerge mid-March to April. If you're looking for this rare trillium, your best bet is to search rich soils near streams, river bluffs, ravine slopes and bottomlands. There are scattered populations in Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina near the fall-line.

Ecological success of relict trillium is heavily dependent upon insects. In addition to pollinating by insects, relict trillium also rely upon ants to disperse its seeds. The hard seeds are surrounded by elaiosomes, a fleshy structure rich in fats and proteins that ants find attractive. After collecting these newly ripened, fatty seeds and- bringing them back to their nests, ants eat the elaiosomes and leave the seeds in their nests, protected from predators, fire, and competition.

Threats to the flower include residential development, timber harvesting, and invasive species. Further complicating conservation efforts is the fact that nearly all populations occur on privately owned lands. In light of these challenges, relict trillium now receives

official protection under the Endangered Species Act as a listed species. And, the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust has even protected a privately-owned property with an easement that is specifically tailored to conserving relict trillium. A first, for the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust, the permanently protected property occurs within the Ocmulgee River watershed, representing an important site near the geographic center of the species' range. We hope the protection of this and other relict trillium properties, will ensure this relict's place in the future!

# 2022 PHOTO CONTEST

This year GALT held a photo contest with a different theme each month. Monthly winners were announced on social media and won fun GALT swag. Check out our social media to see the next winners and be sure to visit [galandtrust.org](http://galandtrust.org) to learn more or to submit a photo.

- April: Flowers
- May: Birds
- June: People in Nature
- July: Insects
- August: Sprawling Landscapes
- September: Properties protected by GALT Conservation Easements



June: "The Inspector" by Grady Wilson, Greene County, AL 2022



May: "Great Blue Heron" by Nate Smitherman Daupin Island, AL 2022



April: "Mary Vivian" by Shae Orr, Tallapoosa, GA 2022



July: "Swallowtail on Blackberry" by Maria Gebhardt, Auburn, AL 2022

# 2022 FUNDRAISER



**SPONSORS**  
Thank you for supporting us.



Kevin Stump  
Thomas Hamby  
Will Bickerstaff



# OF BATS AND CAVES

Word is spreading about GALT's work with bat and cave protection! Some of this year's highlights are:

- In August, GALT hosted Wing Night at Weaver Cave in Anniston, AL where attendees enjoyed an educational talk on the cave's endangered bat population and then watched as tens of thousands of bats emerged for a night of hunting.
- GALT scheduled its first ever walking tours of Weaver Cave for October 15 and already filled all available spots. There will be two tours, one is an easy half-hour walk through Weaver Cave, and the other is a four-hour hike/climb/squeeze through both Weaver and Lady Caves. Watch our social media to join in next year's event!
- GALT received a \$10,000 grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Partners Program grant for interpretive signage at Weaver Cave.
- A landowner of a Privately owned cave in Lauderdale County, AL has asked GALT to help install bat gates to protect another endangered gray bat population. Thus, our outreach is expanding.



## THANKS TO OUR WING NIGHT AND CAVE TOUR SPONSORS

**EASTMAN**



**Rayonier**

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Heather Carabalosa

Michael & Christina Dunbar

Horace & Donna Hanson

Adrienne Chandler

Lesley Hanson & Nathan Hatch

Debra Pitt

Jessica Anderson

Ivy Jones



# CONTINUING EDUCATION

Each year GALT offers continuing education for landowners and professionals engaged in land conservation, land management, and related activities. This year, we hosted two classes, one partnered with the Alabama Appraisal Institute and one with University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry. Over one hundred participants attended these online classes. Watch for announcements about next year's classes as we return to in-person meetings.

We would like to send a special thank you to Rayonier for sponsoring the 2022 classes.



# 2022

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS & HIGHLIGHTS:

- In 2022, GALT worked with multiple project partners to add 3,900 acres to the existing Canoochee Sandhills Wildlife Management Area (WMA), located in Bulloch and Bryan Counties. First, GALT reached an agreement with a private landowner to purchase the additional acreage. GALT then conveyed a perpetual conservation easement to the Georgia State Properties Commission and Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), allowing the property to be formally part of the DNR-managed WMA. Finally, GALT conveyed title for the protected property to Bulloch County. This project increased the size of the publicly owned WMA and, in turn, land available for certain public uses and enjoyment from just over 6,000 acres to around 10,000 acres! In addition to GALT, partners helping to fund this project include Georgia DNR, Open Space Institute, the Knobloch Family Foundation, U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Bulloch County.
- Thanks to Lyndhurst Foundation funding, GALT has protected now over 2,400 acres in the Cradle of Southern Appalachia region, which includes portions of northwest Georgia, northeast Alabama, and southeast Tennessee. Highlights include protected forested buffers along the Flint River in Madison County, AL (6,000 ft), the Little River in DeKalb County, AL (3,000 ft) and Rock Creek and Long Branch in Walker County, GA (2,300 ft and 3,900 ft, respectively), 380 acres of protected forest on Lookout Mountain including over one mile of designated public trail easement, and over 600 acres of protected agricultural land in Jackson County, AL. Additionally, GALT placed a 10-acre easement on the Manitou Cave site. Located a quarter mile from downtown Fort Payne, Manitou Cave holds considerable cultural significance as a place of early aboriginal shelter, ceremony, and Cherokee inscriptions. GALT is also protecting hardwood forests on over two miles of Tennessee River frontage and continuing our work with private and public conservation entities to identify conservation land and to cultivate landowner relationships to ensure continued success in this region.
- GALT is working with The Conservation Fund to protect around 6,000 acres along Beards Creek in Long County, GA. This major project will utilize both ACUB and Department of Agriculture NRCS program funding. This project also includes educational activities for underserved and coastal landowners.
- In 2022, GALT updated the Strategic Plan that will carry us through 2027. The revised Plan includes a goal to protect an additional 150,000 acres. This goal will require significant focus on our easement programs and land stewardship efforts. Another related goal is significantly increasing fundraising. Please consider giving to the Forever Fund – more on page 15.
- GALT continues to distribute River Keeper Bags. Several outdoor outfitters use the bags to promote clean-up activities in northeast Alabama waterways. GALT delivered bags to Choccolocco Kayak, Tooga Yaks, Redneck Yacht Club, and No Worries Kayak Rental. Litter in waterways can promote pathogens and compromise drainage during rain events, potentially exposing communities to flooding and unsanitary conditions. Funding for the bags is supported by a grant from the Stringfellow Health Fund of the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama.



GEORGIA-ALABAMA  
LAND TRUST

## DONATE TODAY!



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, wildlife 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 donating. Large or small, every donation has an impact. And, GALT now accepts cryptocurrency donations! Learn more about ways to donate at [galandtrust.org](http://galandtrust.org)!

Photo Contest: "Skipper on Black-Eyed Susan" by Joyce Hung



# THANK YOU

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

(List based on donations received Sept. 1, 2021 to Sept. 1, 2022).

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### IN MEMORY

## KENWOOD C. NICHOLS

This issue of the Conservationist Magazine is dedicated to Kenwood C. Nichols, who served as a leader of the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust from 2002 until his passing in June 2022. Kenwood served in various leadership roles, including board president. Before joining the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust board, Kenwood served as Vice Chair and Executive Officer at Champion, at that time one of the nation's leading domestic producers of paper with substantial plywood and lumbering operations. After retiring from Champion, Kenwood moved home to his farm and forestland in Selma, Alabama. He used his leadership, financial, land, and forestry skills to grow and develop the Land Trust. Kenwood was passionate about land conservation. He was particularly fond of the longleaf pine ecosystem and the Cahaba River watershed. He and his wife, Joanna, and family protected their homeplace farm and forestland with a conservation easement which included protecting a tributary of the Cahaba River. Kenwood hoped he would see the land trust protect 500,000 acres before his death. We were close at well over 430,000 acres and will likely be at 500,000 acres soon. We will miss Kenwood and are grateful that he imbued us with his lasting love of the land and impact on regional conservation.





# UNDERSTANDING CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

A conservation easement is an agreement between a landowner and a land trust 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 natural heritage and at-risk species by protecting high priority habitats and waters on private lands. The donation of a conservation easement may reduce estate, income, and/or property taxes for the landowner. Consult with your tax or legal advisor for specific information.



Alabama Croton, Bibb County, AL