



OUR ELECTRONIC OUTREACH

Our land trusts' presence on the world wide web has been expanded through the addition of a Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Alabama-Land-Trust-Georgia-Land-Trust/115133924304>) and a blog (<http://algalandtrust.wordpress.com/>.) These "Web 2.0" vehicles should help us get our name out to a wider audience and hopefully bring in new supporters to the organization. We hope you will visit the sites, "friend" us on the Facebook page and help increase our organizational relevancy to search engines, which in general drive traffic on the internet.

Highlights of the Facebook page are photo galleries of properties that we have under conservation easements, including aerial photography from recent annual site visits conducted via airplane and others taken in the course of performing terrestrial annual site visits. The eye in the sky and boots on the ground views of our protected properties gives an enhanced appreciation of the work the organization performs.

We have also been working to make sure that the web site is freshly and consistently updated, reasonably easy to navigate and has plenty of links to useful materials, including some handy basics of conservation easements. So, please visit www.galandtrust.org and wander around a bit.

We would appreciate your feedback regarding the various sites, suggestions for their improvement, ideas for blogs and other thoughts. Full contact information for our Land Trusts is on each of our web site's pages and below this article. We are trying to grow our email list (another idea for electronic outreach is emailed news "blasts," but our current mailing list is strictly limited to "snail mail," i.e., postal addresses, so please email us soon and often regarding our sites or just to get your name onto our electronic distribution list.

www.galandtrust.org



C H A T T O W A H O P E N L A N D T R U S T

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C H A T T O W A H O P E N L A N D T R U S T
ALABAMA LAND TRUST  **GEORGIA LAND TRUST**
 FALL 2009
PROTECTING LAND FOR PRESENT & FUTURE GENERATIONS



The Georgia Land Trust, Inc. and the Alabama Land Trust, Inc. operate under the direction of the board of the Chattowah Open Land Trust.

PERFECT STORM OF PROTECTION

Uncertainty to some extent seems to be good for the land trust business. We are receiving a great number of inquiries regarding possible land protection activities; much of this seems to be driven by several common currents of doubt:

- The economy, which reportedly now at least has a pulse but is not off the critical list yet;
- The intentions of the new administration toward tax incentives—there seemingly being a prevailing fear that if not actively hostile toward incentives neither will it support them;
- The uncertain future of the current level of tax benefits, which are scheduled to sunset at the end of 2009.

While we can't make any accurate predictions regarding the first two points above or whether Congress might decide to preserve the current incentive levels, it is important to remember that if the sunset does take place, incentives will remain in place for the donation of conservation easements, only at a reduced rate. They will revert to pre-2006 levels allowing deductions up to 30% of adjusted gross income (AGI) in the year of donation plus a five year carryforward.

At present and through the end of 2009 at least, the incentives are up to 50% of AGI in the year of donation with a fifteen year carryforward. The effort to make the incentive permanent has a great deal of support in Congress—242 representatives, including majorities in both parties, a majority of the Alabama congressional delegation, and 32 Senators, including both of Georgia's—have signed on as co-sponsors to legislation supporting a permanent land protection incentive. (A map showing sponsors by state is available at <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/policy/documents/cosponsor-map.pdf>.)

The last year the incentives sunset was 2007. That year we put over 35,000 acres into permanently protected status. In this current year of impending sunset, we have already placed over 4,000 acres into protected status and the ongoing projects list has nearly 40,000 acres of pending easements. Not all of those will make it to the Promised Land, but we will certainly reach our strategic plan's goal of 125,000 acres protected (and that was to be achieved by the end of 2011.) If we close two thirds of what is on our list now, we would top 150,000 acres protected by year's end.

This much work requires a lot of bodies and a lot of equipment. As has been said, "A+ results require A+ equipment." We have added staff and improve our technological capabilities almost daily. We are using GIS mapping on a much larger scale, as mapping



tied to the language of the conservation easements is ever more critical to the effective stewardship of protected properties.

The fourth quarter of each year is make or break time as far as our fundraising goes. Donations from our friends help finance much of our new gear, pay for additional staff and fund our new programs and initiatives. We hope you will include us in your end of year giving plans by using the envelope accompanying this newsletter, responding to our year end letter or going to our web site and using the link there to give via GuideStar, a secure, on-line giving service.

Thank you for your support in the past and we hope in the future. We look forward to updating you on the success of our year-end efforts.

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MOE & GAY GILL

Long before Fort Stewart and ACUB, the Gills were working the land in the area. Indeed, some of the Gills' land became a part of Fort Stewart (then Camp Stewart) when it was created in 1940 to provide a site for training in anti-aircraft gunnery.

Much of the family land was amassed by Gill's grandfather and was in turpentine production from the 1920s through the 1960s. When turpentine and other elements of "naval stores" eventually became unprofitable, the Gills got out of the business. After they went out of that business they harvested the "face" trees (so called because of the distinctive V-shaped "cat faces" notched into a tree to draw forth the resin that was distilled into turpentine.)

Gill's property retains the old turpentine still shed and the copper pot used to boil down the resin. After the pot's top was stolen, the family filled the pot with

resin which they let set up, rendering this artifact too heavy to steal..

Gill's grandfather worked a herd of around 500 cattle. At that point cattle were raised under "no fence" rules, roaming freely throughout the area. The roundup would stretch from Fleming, on the edge of Hinesville over to Dixie, well to the east in Bryan County, where the cattle pens were. The cattle also roamed well into the core of the Fort.

Moe notes that a prime function of the roundups, in addition to sorting out cattle for market, was to brand the herd. In addition to the brand (an "under 7" on one herd and an "over 7" on another), the cattle's ears were notched and split in distinctive ways. "Folks can change your brand but it's a lot harder to change a cow's ears," Gill notes.

The family land—eventually divided up among Grandfather Gill's seven children (Moe's father being the only son)—has now been out of the cattle production for a good while. The land that Moe's father received is worked for timber and game management. The timber is a mix of slash and loblolly pine, with well-managed game plots located around the property planted with headed out rye, wheat, oats, millet ("anything that attracts bugs") to encourage dove, quail, turkey and deer. Gill reports that they practice Quality Deer Management Association practices on the property (limiting take on bucks to "8 points outside the ears and controlling does") and are members of the Wild Turkey Federation.

"One of the things most satisfying about owning land is sharing it with other families and friends. I love my cabin here and love to share it." Still, asked what is one of the least enjoyable aspects of land ownership, Moe, like many landowners, responds, "It's keeping your privacy. You can post it all you want and then you look out your window and they're out there sitting in your yard. You really have to know your boundaries and manage your land."

Knowing your boundaries and making sure others did was one of Moe's first jobs on the farm. By the time Moe came along, fencing the land had become more common and each summer, Moe and Paul Davis, one of the hands on the land, would "head out with a croaker sack full of staples and a hammer and go out and put the wires back up where they'd gotten knocked down over the past year. I knew the land real well at an early age and I've made sure my boys do, too."

Gill would like all the family land to remain in the family and his sons, Joe and Jay, have taken to land management. "I'm almost surprised how much," Moe reports. "I couldn't do it without them—it looks like they'll be the next stewards of the property. And, of course, we couldn't any of us do it without their mother, Gay."

ACUB CREATES CONSERVATION COMPOUND NEAR FORT STEWART

Before Moe Gill and a co-owner of a piece of land on the perimeter of the Fort became the first landowners to sell development rights in the Fort Stewart ACUB program, they may not have realized they were helping launch what has become an impressive conservation compound.

Gill reports that when he first heard about the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program, "my first thoughts were not altogether nice." However, he "got some education on it, met some of the people running the program and realized they had an open mind regarding land management. They're trying to achieve their goals but they understand that you need to achieve yours and to be able to work the land profitably."

ACUB's essential goal is to preserve training and deployment capabilities on the Fort. The conservation easements that result from ACUB protect the Fort's lands from high density development that can produce conflicts over noise, smoke and other issues that crop up when you have people on foot, in tanks and aircraft discharging all manner of ordnance at all times of day.

The program also helps meet goals established under the federal Sikes Act that requires military installations protect habitat important to threatened and endangered species on their land among other components of an integrated management plan. Prescribed fire, critical in maintaining the old growth pine and grass understory habitat for the threatened Red Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW), is another activity that can be jeopardized by high density development on the perimeter of the Fort. As people pile up near land that is burned, so do the complaints. The ACUB program, and the buffer it creates, helps mitigate these issues. One evidence of the success of Fort Stewart's land management is that its over 300,000 acres are home to the largest concentration of RCWs east of the Mississippi.

Moe Gill believes enough in the program that in June, he concluded another sale of development rights on 250 acres, to match an earlier sale of rights on 250 acres the previous summer. The land, lying in both Liberty and Bryan counties, appeared destined for development, but now will hold no more than a few homesites and will continue to take advantage of prime timber growing conditions along the Fort's southern rim. The conservation easements securing protection of the land also protect the bottomland hardwoods on the property from future logging, as Gill donated these rights to Georgia Land Trust, which holds and enforces the CE.

"I'm real glad those areas will never be logged again," Gill said. "Those bottomlands, particularly along Saddle Swamp Creek and up in the property's northeast corner have not been touched in a long time and have some beautiful trees."

With the recent purchase of development rights on a 1600 acre tract, also in Liberty and Bryan Counties, ACUB has already created a minimum-development



RCWs have been sighted on GLT's ACUB protected property



Protected wetlands along Saddle Swamp Creek.

corridor of over 3000 acres and over five miles of protected boundary. The program has also protected several significant tracts north of the Fort along the Canoochee River in Evans County. Other large transactions in the pipeline could raise the protected lands acreage to over 5,000 acres and seven miles of protected border in total.

Thanks to another donation by Gill, the Georgia Land Trust now also owns 70+ acres adjacent to a tract that it previously owned. The land trust's property is under an ACUB conservation easement that received grant funding from the Georgia Land Conservation Partnership that helped retire a low-interest loan provided by the Open Space Institute to purchase the property. "It made financial sense for me to give that land to the trust and it looks like it will help them by expanding their property and giving them better access."

Another contribution ACUB makes is to help ensure the continuation of one of the area's largest employers and a huge contributor to the local economy. By some estimates, the combined economic impact of Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field is around \$3 billion annually.

Gill's contributions to the ACUB program by his willingness to protect his land have made a huge contribution to the effort. "Before Moe and his partner agreed to undertake that first deal, we had worked two years without much tangible progress toward the program's goals," says Frank McIntosh, who worked during the program's startup as the Georgia Land Trust's local boots on the ground. "After we got a bellcow—particularly folks well known and respected in the area—our list of possibilities began to grow and now we have projects in a queue. At this point the prime impediment to protecting even more land is budget—it really is a great deal for the Fort and for landowner's willing to help us protect land along the Fort's perimeter."

If you are a landowner along the perimeter of Fort Stewart (the program is also currently at work on conservation easements in Chatham, Bryan and Evans counties) and would be interested in discussing the ACUB program, please contact: Scott Wiggers, ACUB Coordinator, Georgia Land Trust, (912) 598-1855, swiggers@galandtrust.org.

JACK AND LINDA FOUNTAIN

When Dr. Arthur "Jack" Fountain's grandfather built his cabin on beautiful rolling land near Reynolds, Georgia in 1904, his pride of place and sense of the value of craftsmanship led him to insist that all the lumber in the cabin be clean—there is not a knot to be found anywhere in the home, which is still impeccably preserved today. Two generations later, Jack and his wife Linda decided to protect the family home place and they put the 817 acre property into a conservation easement with the Georgia Land Trust.

As with most conservation easements, the Fountains, as donors, retain ownership of their property. This allows them to continue to use the land as they and their family before them have in the past. The Fountains and future owners of the land can farm it, manage the timber on it, maintain and to some extent upgrade roads and other improvements to the property.

The easement protects the property from future residential and commercial development that would erode its core conservation values and the aspects of the land that the Fountains cherish and wish preserved in perpetuity. Donors of easements can achieve tax benefits awarded because of the valuable conservation contributions they make.

The Fountains' donation ensures that the rich soils that comprise much of their land—over 300 acres of the property are state or federally recognized productive soils—will remain in productive use and not join other "house farms" that have been appearing in this area. The easement also requires management plans regarding how agriculture and silviculture will be undertaken on the land helping ensure that these uses don't incidentally degrade the property's significant environmental values.

The Fountains' easement places restrictions that protect from any disturbance the unique hardwood forests and natural areas along the banks of the streams on the property. These Special Natural Areas, running along two tributaries of the Flint River—Horse and Little Vine Creeks—help protect what has been called the most ecologically diverse river east of the Mississippi. Sherpa Guides says of the river, "Even though the river begins in urban Atlanta and crosses an agricultural landscape, streamside forests, swamps, and unimpeded river flow [flowing more than 200 undammed miles—one of only 40 such rivers in the U.S.] allow natural self-purification to occur. The Flint River and areas adjacent provide habitat for many interesting and



Jack, Linda, Jacqueline, Katherine and Caroline Fountain and Amber

unusual plants and animals." Of particular interest are some of the odd creatures known as troglobites that shelter in the river's "Blue Holes," including the blind cave salamander and the Dougherty Plain cave crayfish. Some of these creatures' ranges are as small as a single cave or spring.

The easement also helps preserve traditional viewsheds. When asked why he decided to protect his land, Dr. Fountain cited his desire to preserve, "some of the southern self-sustaining farm life as I knew it. It is important for me to be able to pass some of this down to my children. Once the traces of this past era are gone, there is no return." In addition to the family home, this beautifully preserved farmstead also features several historic agricultural structures that folks passing through on picturesque Mangham Road can see and get a sense of the history of the place and the lives that the original settlers lived. The structures include several barns, rustic livestock sheds, and a smokehouse.

The scenic property also offers vistas of pine stands, open pastures, peach orchards, wheat and cotton fields and highly valued bottomland forests filled with several varieties of oak, ash, gum, and hickory.

Linda reports that their daughters are deeply attached to the family home and all enjoy the family vacations to the property and there is general anticipation for

when this again becomes the family's central homeplace. There are also formative plans to use some of the property for vineyards.

With so much visual beauty, the property holds still other more sublime charms. When asked his favorite thing about the property, Dr. Fountain replied that autumn and spring there "are intoxicating," reflecting on the "overwhelming aroma of all the new flowers" and autumn's "marvelous smells in the woods with the crisp air and the rustle of wildlife."



The Fountain homeplace



John Bickley and Buddy

profiled in this issue, helped them decide, as did their accountant, who had himself done a conservation easement. Bickley notes, "There seems to be a growing awareness of the usefulness of conservation easements. Two years ago, it seemed like a vast majority of people in land didn't know about them, but more and more do now."

Marshallville lies within a particularly fertile belt just south of the Fall Line, combining rich soils with a location far enough north that its freezes come late but still gets enough "cold hours" to allow successful peaches cultivation. It is also very good land for growing pecans.

Like most landowners in this part of Georgia, Bickley enjoys hunting and managing land for game "although we don't actually shoot at too many of the animals on our property. I really just enjoy seeing them come along. We maintain a lot of hedgerows and fencerows, a good environment for quail. Mourning dove like to nest in pecans, so we have lots of birds on the property. Pecans are also very good for deer and small animals."

Naturally, I had to ask about the Fox Squirrel population (see Georgia's Most Popular Animal on our blog) and was told that it was a particular favorite. "You know, squirrel hunters won't even shoot at a fox squirrel. Nobody does." In addition to game, the area also supports many non-game species including a healthy population of hawks and is a stopover point for Sandhill Cranes.

About 250 acres of the 400 in the conservation easement are being moved from peaches and row crops into pecans. "It's a good seven years before you see fruit on a pecan. It sort of asks why a 60-year old plants trees. Nobody knows how long they'll live but it makes for a beautiful place just to look at. And when the fruit comes in, it's great to enjoy, too." Bickley noted pecan trees' less obvious benefits—ranking among the top carbon sequestering species.

The conservation easement donation helped make the transition to pecans possible, with the tax savings being reinvested in pumps and irrigation and to carry land costs until the trees begin producing. Bickley noted environmental economies of pecan cultivation versus row cropping such as the smaller wells (6" vs. 15") is used for a pecan grove's drip irrigation system than feeds large pivots for row crops. Far less water covers much more land.

An afternoon with Bickley is a primer in the subtleties of pecan growing. He explained how it was necessary to give the trees a gentle early season shake, to reduce the fruit load that can damage trees. "People look at you like you're a little crazy, shaking fruit off before it's ripe." He noted the variety of pecans in the groves and how each had its particular use; the choicest, of course, show up in fancy tins around Christmas.

In addition to riding or walking the land with Buddy, his English Cocker, Bickley reports "The thing I like best about owning land is that although I'm not a full-time farmer, when I get home I want to get out and do something productive for the land. It is a relief valve; I enjoy the work."

VIEWSHED FLOYD COUNTY, GEORGIA

Floyd County, Georgia has become the epicenter of our conservation easement activity. This is appropriate geographically; Floyd County is on the Georgia/Alabama border. We are glad to be so busy there, as some of the prettiest countrysides, richest soils, meandering rivers and streams, ridgelines are present in this part of Georgia. Parts of it, particularly around Rome, are growing like crazy and hence create an even greater imperative for protection.

Among the earliest easements recorded by our organization were in Floyd County, dating back to 2000. From that nucleus a critical mass has seemingly evolved: among the easements we have already

recorded in 2009 is our 35th easement wholly or in part in Floyd. This easement took the total acreage of our easements over the 6,500 acres. We have several more easements in process for 2009 in Floyd County.

Part of our success in Floyd County is due to the ongoing support of the Lyndhurst Foundation and the Open Space Institute (OSI). These organizations' focus on providing incentives to protect lands that contribute to the goals put forth by the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and adjacent to lands already protected. This increases the efficacy of protection in such areas as Wildlife Management Areas, National Forests, and state and national parks. We greatly appreciate the support and partnership of the Lyndhurst Foundation and OSI.

In our recent round of annual site visits, we surveyed Floyd County via aerial monitoring and came up with the arresting images shown in this Viewshed. There are also photos of viewsheds taken by our foot soldiers, showing some of the vistas protected that will help preserve the bucolic charm of this beautiful county.



KEN AND MARY JO BEVERLY

The Beverly family has been in the Ochlocknee area since the 1840s, when Ken Beverly's great grandfather established a saw mill. By the time the family had arrived, the land they eventually owned already had a stage coach line running through it and a station for coach travelers in its interior. The stage line through the Beverly property ran from the Gulf of Mexico to Albany, crossing through Creek and Seminole territory. The coach lines, as they generally would, followed pre-existing Indian trails, paralleling river bottoms and trails that game had worked in along them.

Some of the property in the easement is land that had gone out of the family for a generation or two. When Ken saw the land back on the market, he purchased it. Asked if he had seen it on the market for a good price and gone for it, he replied, "I'm not sure I ever bought anything for a good price, but I'm glad to have it." The land will now likely stay in the family for a long while. While Ken says that the hardest thing about putting in place a conservation easement is "deciding to do it," Mary Jo strongly believes in the value of protecting the land and Ken's sons both agreed with his decision to protect the land.

Another generation of Beverlys is definitely on board with the easement. Ken and Mary Jo's five grandsons, ages 4-9, love to come visit and ride or walk the property. "Sighting for dollars" helps create an extra keenness in the lads' interest in wildlife, as they get cash rewards for wildlife spotting. "One flock of turkeys set us back \$13," Mary Jo reports. A gopher tortoise living near the main entrance road is so regularly sighted he is simply known as Mr. Gopher.

They even found an emu on the property at one point, back when folks were raising emus. "We called around to see who might have lost one," Ken reports. "A lot of people said they hadn't lost one, but they'd be happy to give us a couple." There is good deal of discussion in the family regarding what an elephant sighting would cost, but so far none has been spotted. The grandsons are also beginning to enjoy the property's archeological richness and the hunt for arrowheads and shards adds to their interest.

Among the special natural areas that the property protects are bottomland swamps along the Ochlocknee. Walking into the woods along the creek's meanders, you understand how it got its name which means "Land of Crooked Water." The bottomlands are home to many large cypresses and they along with the rest of the property support much local fauna. There are many of the usual suspects like deer and raccoons, as well as foxes and some "huge" bobcats.

For a long while, the land was worked for turpentine and Ken has a fine collection of the terra cotta resin gathering pots that were prevalent earlier in the naval stores era and also the metal trays that followed them. When the naval store economy waned, the woods were generally cleared and oftentimes lost to fire as a forest of standing fat lighter is, as Ken notes, "bad to burn."

After the turpentine harvesting ceased, much of the area around Ochlocknee was given over to fields or pasture. Ken recalls that when he was coming along, "there weren't that many woods. It was all in fields and everybody had hogs or



Ken Beverly on portion of the old stage line.

That is certainly changing on the Beverly property now. The property is now managed for timber across much of its range, with areas capable of supporting longleaf being managed to encourage the restoration of this once prevalent cover; over 50 acres are enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Longleaf Restoration Program. Mary Jo says she "still gets cold thinking about the time we were out there in 17 degree weather planting pines." The family does much of the work on the property and Ken can wax poetic on the virtues of his John Deere 444D and its forestry package and root rake. Around 90 percent of the property is now in woodlands.

"That's my favorite aspect of owning land," Ken says, "Watching things evolve." The conservation easement crosses three separate parcels in various stages of management. Some of the land—held longer within the family—gives a good picture of the "desired end state" for working lands of this nature. Others are still being worked into shape.

"It's a huge, forever commitment," Ken says, "but we see the beauty of the place and get excited by the challenge."



Large oak at site of the stage coach station

CHOP EVANS

Charles "Chop" Evans' family has long been a presence in the agricultural community in this part of central Georgia where, since 2005, he has donated six conservation easements permanently protecting nearly a thousand acres. The easements protect productive farm and timber lands (one tract is 100% prime soils,) traditional viewsheds and natural areas providing habitat to a



variety of animals, including bald eagles. The easements allow the continued productive use of the land while extinguishing much of the development rights on the properties and protecting sensitive natural areas.

Chop's grandfather was a peach farmer with extensive holdings. Unfortunately, he fell victim to a "peach bubble," as his speculation in the future of peaches peaked just as the market for peaches imploded. He unsuccessfully argued his own bankruptcy case before the state Supreme Court, arguing that to deprive a farmer of his land is to deprive him of the wherewithal to recover from his financial misfortune.

Friends purchased back some of the lands that had been lost as well as his home place and reestablished him on the property asking only to be repaid at cost. Regrettably, Grandfather Evans died as he was working to rebuild his farm enterprise. The family's resilience and ongoing commitment to the central Georgia's agricultural economy came through after this as Chop's father pursued commodities brokerage and kept cattle (Chop reports that his father's goal with cattle was essentially to "grow them as big as he could" and notes that those who met these animals recall standing next to them "you were looking up at them"), and got the family back on good footing. Much of the land owned by Evans' grandfather was recovered by the family—including the family's Peach County homeplace, that having been recovered once, was sold out of the family again, and then regained once more.



Some of Chop's pecan trees—also doing fine

Chop's father also evidently did a good job of passing on the family's undying love of land and agriculture to him. "I always knew what I wanted and when I want something I pursue it. Pecans and peaches were what I was after. I have a great love of farming—I absolutely love it," Chop says. "I have been able to pursue it for 35 years, and do exactly what I want and make a living at it."

This love manifests itself in a seven day work week only occasionally interrupted by peaceful time spent at his Southern Lakes property ("my favorite easement—it's just a beautiful place") watching bald eagles take the occasional fish, hunting and enjoying a round of golf with his wife, Brenda, an avid golfer. Associates say they're a bit shocked to find Chop **not** working some aspect of his land and he adds, "People tell me they're surprised that I like to work so late every day."

Evans admits that his knowledge of agriculture doesn't extend too far beyond caring for his beloved peach and pecan orchards. "If it isn't a tree I'm not interested," he says. "When it comes to other crops I wouldn't know how to fill up a pot to plant them. About my only venture into row crops was raising pickles and every time the truck would pull away I'd wind up writing someone a check. " He says of raising timber, "Woods are to be enjoyed but if you're looking to make any money on it, that's another matter."

Chop defers to the next generation of Evanses to manage these operations. His two sons, Lee, 26, and Charlie, 30, love hunting, maintaining the timber and wildlife feed plots and "seem to have the urge to learn the business and come on behind me. I'm almost surprised but, of course, I'm happy."

Travelling the corridor from Macon to Columbus south of Warner Robins you see what can happen to farm land—with "starter castles" sprinkled over some of the most productive soils in the state. Contrasting those vistas of cul de sacs with the vistas Evans' easements provide—well-managed pecan groves on gently rolling land feeding down to protected bottomlands—reminds you why protection of working lands is so important.

Still, mention how agricultural land is lost to development and you may catch a rare tone of regret from Chop. "I had a hand in putting some houses along the paved ways and I have to admit that I've never been happy with one. I'm enough of a businessman to know you have to make some money, but I always think, 'dang, I wish I were still raising peaches or pecans there.'"

About the only other down note you might catch from Chop is that as development encroaches on agricultural land, the newcomers tend to "love what farmers produce but not what they have to do to produce it."

But that will certainly never slow Chop down from doing what he loves best. To say that he is positive man is a serious understatement. If you ask Chop how he's doing, you can count on his answer. "I'm always doing fine."

S U P P O R T

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WALTER SHEFFIELD

Walter Sheffield's uncle had a simple land ownership philosophy: "I only want to own what touches mine." Not all of the family was quite that avid in their pursuit of land ownership, but from Walter's grandfather's first 70 acres purchased in 1888, they've been active landowners in Miller County. Walter's father's purchased a farm adjacent to Grandfather's holdings in 1914 and Walter and his three siblings acquired land adjoining their father's.



Earlier, much of the land was part of the Seminole nation. Andrew Jackson led an expedition to the area to effect a transfer of ownership to the new American nation. Jackson's troops notched trees along their route through the dense woods to guide them out. Many places in the area carry "three notch" in their names after Jackson's navigation markers.

It would have been tough going with the dense cover of cedar and pines. The cedar were logged off first with the pine later harvested for ties for the rail line that forms part of the boundary of the easement conveyed to the Georgia Land Trust. Grandfather Sheffield bought much of his land during this time, paying around two and a half dollars per acre.

The onset of World War II, brought an interesting benefit to the family. The many stumps on the land, some "too large to even reach across," turned out to have a tar useful in munitions manufacture. In 1943, the federal government removed all the stumps at no cost. (Sheffield served as a submariner in WWII. Originally headed for West Point, he was too young to use his appointment and wound up commissioned from the Naval Academy.)

Walter's father's farm was around 450 acres with about 150 acres in cultivation. In addition to Sheffield's family, three tenant families farmed around 25 acres each. They could draw \$21 a month from their lots' anticipated production.

After his father's death, Walter purchased a sister and brother's section of the farmstead and even acquired the land that eventually became the conservation easement from his Uncle. The easement protects rich soils; about two thirds of the easement's area is rated as prime soils, with another roughly 10 acres rated as significant. The balance of the land comprises bottomlands that protect and feed Aycock's Creek, part of the Spring Creek sub-basin, a tributary of the Flint River, identified as a Georgia High Priority Waterway.

This newsletter focuses on the joys of landownership but less happy tales have some value. A portion of the easement land was planted in "a bad batch of seedlings" that developed fusiform rust about 15 years after planting. The ravages of this silvicultural pest are extreme: much affected acreage had only 15-16 trees not beset with the rust. These areas are now being cleared for replanting.

It is important to note that conservation easements forest management provisions allow donors to undertake thinning and clearing to protect the health of their forests, including within Special

Natural Areas.

Like many who grew up in the area, Sheffield fondly relates experiences with hunting, bird dogs and some of the animals hunted. Walter's first shotgun was a reward for picking his first bale of cotton and he notes that "with lots of fence lines there were always quail. I don't hunt any more, but I always had five bird dogs down on the property. The last one—a wonderful German short-haired pointer—died recently. He was the second best dog I ever owned." The first best? "Another pointer. We had split rail fencing on the property and he would leap on top of those fences and hold a point. He was amazing."

The property's crown jewels for Walter remain his live oaks. Sadly, the trees have seen Grandfather Sheffield's home burn—"six rooms with a separated cooking wing"—and saw the land that held the old house leave the family, about the only part of the family's extended holdings to do so.

If the trees live another couple of hundred years, they may never see that again. Walter's three children share his affection for the homeplace and he reports that son John III's first question when visiting from Denver is, "When are we going to the farm?" We hope the oaks will always have some Sheffields to shelter and echo Walter when he says of the oaks, "I hope they are there forever."



Protected live oaks along Sheffield Road