

**PROFILES OF CONSERVATION EASEMENT DONORS
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ALL PROFILES WRITTEN BY FRANK MCINTOSH

AL PEARSON

Al Pearson's father once told him, "If you're ever going to make any money, you'll make it off a tree."

Pearson, whose family has been working large landholdings in the Crawford County area since his great grandfather's days in the late 1800s, took that good advice to heart, and he and his son operate large peach and pecan orchards. Pearson says his land occasionally sees some row crops when it is time to rotate out an area in peach cultivation (commercial peach trees tend to play out over about fifteen years) but that generally he sticks with his trees.

The 400-plus acres that Pearson and his sisters put into a conservation easement in Crawford County, Ga. in 2008 has been in the family since "at least as far back as my grandfather" and was at one point extensively forested in longleaf pine. A good deal of volunteer longleaf and wiregrass continue to show themselves around the property, around three quarters of which is now in slash, loblolly and sand pine. (Pearson notes that the sand pine is virtually unmarketable and is in the process of switching out those areas.)

At the center of the easement is an older pecan orchard that because of its age and location really isn't commercially feasible any more.

"Because these pecans come along more slowly, we used to harvest all our other pecans first and then try to get over here to harvest these. They'd generally managed to fall off by that time and one thing you discover in the pecan business is that pretty much everything eats pecans."

Pearson leaves the orchard in place because it has become a great spot to watch all the different animals on the property avail themselves of the bounty provided by the trees.

"This place is a pressure relief valve for me," he says. Turkey, deer, pigs, and raccoons are among the frequent diners at the site. But Pearson's favorite critters to watch are the fox squirrels.

"I'll let folks hunt the grey squirrels and we hunt some of Stand of old pecan trees on easement property the other animals a bit, but I won't let them touch the fox squirrels. They're just too much fun to watch." Pearson's love of the fox squirrels is undiminished by an episode in which one visited the lake cabin on the property via the chimney and more or less gnawed to pieces all of the woodwork and most of the mantelpiece before its unfortunate demise.



Al Pearson



Stand of old pecan trees on easement property

The property also has a couple of watering holes that Pearson reports never run dry but never really flow either. These spots, particularly the one in proximity to the old orchard, also provide excellent wildlife watching on the property.

Pearson, who says there is “something in me that drives me to own land,” says that he still worries about landowners who seem to measure success simply by how much land they own. He feels that success stems more from how you manage the land and what you manage it for. This philosophy is borne out by the conservation easement property, which has large bottomlands that will remain undisturbed and providing habitat for a variety of species that shelter within them.

As of 2010, the Pearson and his family protect more than 800 acres with conservation easements held by Georgia Land Trust

