

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

DONNIE SMITH

Dr. Donnie Smith grew up on a farm in Coffee County, Ala. that his father worked until age 85. He says, “farming was kind of like a marriage to my father. He didn’t last too long after he finally had to stop working the farm; people die pretty quickly when they lose a spouse.”

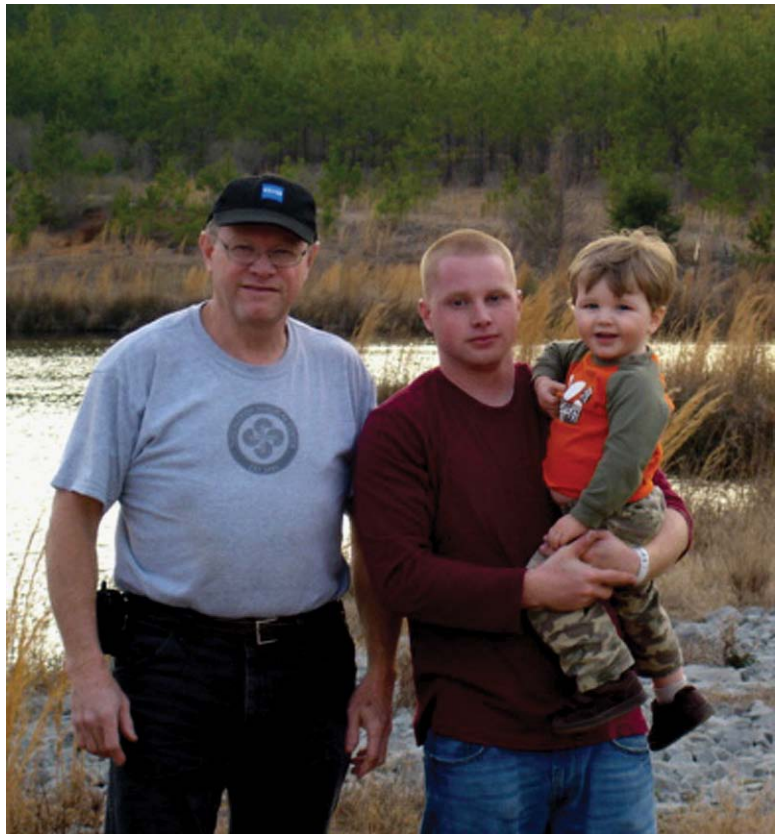
A sister now lives in the home place that they grew up in and the original 400 acres is back in the family after being sold. “I worked real hard on that, and I’ve made sure it can never leave the family again,” Smith says.

Smith has protected some 1,000 acres in Fayette and Tuscaloosa counties in Alabama with a conservation easement held by Alabama Land Trust.

Hunting was a luxury growing up in that very rural setting, but Smith has been drawn to hunting his whole life. And hunting drew him to want to own land. After finishing medical school “and I finally had some expendable cash, I started buying properties. As land became available I would purchase it—80 acres here, 80 acres there. It adds up. I now own properties from Montana to Florida. I just enjoy looking for a new place to visit.”

Hunting also provides him an opportunity to share his love of the land. “We carry kids up who have never had a chance to hunt. A lot of kids—they mainly come from my church—have been up and killed their first deer or turkey on this land.”

Smith thinks it is important to make sure youngsters learn these skills. “They’re ten times smarter than we were as kids—the weekly visit of the Bookmobile is all the information I had, three books a week. But you need to direct their minds, and hunting is good for that. And we need to have more hunters. Game management people say there are fewer and fewer people capable of self-sufficiency and the number of licenses issued keeps going down.”



Donnie Smith, his son and grandson

Smith’s 2008 conservation easement is land that is predominantly managed for timber but features intermixed hardwoods and two lakes. Smith reports the land is good for wildlife viewing, noting sightings of quail, wood ducks (15-20 mating pairs, some drawn to duck boxes around the property), foxes, and bobcats. The lakes even draw transient ospreys.

Beyond the connection with the land and hunting, Smith says, “land is still a good investment. It’s not too liquid, but right about now I wished I’d put my 401k in it.

“Another of my favorite pastimes is making money. Land, particularly land protected through a conservation easement, is a very effective method of preserving wealth for children and grandchildren—and not just financial wealth. The land is a great place to learn about life.”

Smith backs up his words regarding easements with action—he and a partner donated a 900-acre easement in Sumter County, and he has “probably referred 15-20 people to Katherine (Eddins, executive director). She’s been a great helping us realize our mutual goals.”



Lake on Smith easement property

He is planning future easement donations and says that he doesn’t “envision selling any of the places I have put into easement. I want a place for my kids and grandkids to be able to go to.”

The preservation of natural environments is important to Smith, too, noting that “we want to see some things kept in a natural state. What would be happening to a place like Yellowstone had it not been protected? I would hate see what might have happened.”

And then there is another benefit of land ownership. “It is a relief valve,” Smith says. “Some people go see a psychiatrist; I go up and work the land. I enjoy managing the land for turkey. I enjoy maintaining the road and fire lanes—just running the equipment.

“I work pretty hard when I’m out there. Maybe not as hard as my dad, but pretty hard.”