

Sharing news, stories, and insight about the land we love



Morrow Creek Timbers, a recently protected property in Abbeville

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Where have all the
grand old trees gone?

by Richard Carr,
Land Conservation Specialist

Almost every day, I set out from my house near Converse University in Spartanburg to take a run with my dog, Cooper. Our usual route leads us down N. Fairview and up Blue Ridge into the back entrance of Oakwood Cemetery. Oakwood is one of Spartanburg's oldest cemeteries that sits atop a large ridge overlooking the confluence of the Chinquapin and Lawson's Fork Creeks. >>

200-year-old Tuliptree in
Spartanburg's Oakwood Cemetery



View of Oakwood Cemetery

>> On the backside, the cemetery is a park-like open space with winding paths and grassy fields full of family headstones. Yet, with the exception of an old water oak and a few young maples, the trees are virtually absent, which means on those typical summer runs, it can get downright hot.

As we make our way towards the front, however, the scenery changes dramatically. The headstones increase in size and grandeur as their dates move farther back in time. And the trees are older, too, and much more abundant. Majestic old southern red oaks (*quercus falcata*) with their dark gray trunks and waxy green leaves. Branchy northern catalpas (*catalpa speciosa*) with their huge heart-shaped leaves and beautiful white blooms. Antique-looking cedar of Lebanon (*cedrus libani*), which as a child I always thought were mountain trees that must have gotten lost. Here, under their large crowns and thick canopies, Cooper and I always find relief from the summer heat.

Nestled into a hedge of holly at the front entrance, however, are two of the oldest trees in the cemetery. One is a sycamore (*platanus occidentalis*) with a bifurcated trunk extending from a base as large as a mid-sized SUV. The other, a tuliptree (*liriodendron tulipifera*), more commonly called poplar, which has a trunk circumference that measures 18 feet at chest height! I know, because I recently took a 20-foot piece of rope and scratched my way through the holly to measure it out. Then, using a calculation that estimates a tree's age by multiplying its radius with a species growth factor, I discovered the tree is right at 200 years old. At some point in the 1820s, that tree began its life. Then, the US was only 24 states, John Quincy Adams was President, and Spartanburg had yet to be incorporated. My assumption is those two trees just happened to be in the right spots when the cemetery was originally planned.

On a recent trip to the Black River Cypress Preserve near Andrews, SC, UF's Glenn Hilliard Director of Land Conservation Scott Park, Executive Director Andrea Cooper, and I had the pleasure of paddling into a cypress swamp to see a bald cypress (*taxodium distichum*) that is verified to be at least 850 years old! Needless to say, there were no such things as States and Presidents when that tree was just a sapling. It can be hard for us to grasp the scope of life for a living thing of that age — that tree's lifetime extends so far beyond our own, it's difficult for us to relate our own experience to its.

But there is a catch. As rare and unique as these trees may seem to us, they are actually just average. The maximum lifespan of a tuliptree is 450 years with an average lifespan of 250. For the bald cypress, they can live up to 1,800 years with an average lifespan around 600. The unfortunate reason these "average" trees seem so spectacular now has to do with human activity. It has been estimated that only 1/2 of 1% of our old growth forests remain. Old growth is defined roughly as trees in a forest stand reaching at least 1/2 of their maximum lifespan. >>



Catalpa tree

>> There is a balance here, of course. Trees also provide. They have always provided for our housing, our furniture, our paper, our winter fires. Modern, well-managed timber stands are a marvel to behold — efficient and abundantly productive. And the cutting of loblolly pine plantations actually takes harvest pressure off of our remaining natural stands. But if you are like me, you would love to see the return of some older forests in the Upstate. Stands of grand old trees that are not just isolated to remote and rarely visited river bottoms or inaccessible drainages on steep hillsides, but ones that actually thrive right out our backdoor. As you can see, that would require decades, even centuries, of protection.

This spring, I attended a webinar that featured a land trust in Virginia called the 500-Year Forest Foundation. They are using no-cut conservation easements to protect mature forests, which they define as 100+ acre stands of native timber that contain a significant number of trees 70 years or older. Their easements offer these forests the protection they need to live into their maximum age, thus giving the forest ecosystem time to reach its full potential of natural succession and biodiversity.

Dr. Robert Zahner, former professor of forest ecology at Clemson University, once wrote, “Old-growth forests have rightly been characterized as ‘the key’ to biodiversity. The invaluable roles they play include making unique contributions to the gene pool; harboring natural species; demonstrating natural processes; and serving as cores for future wilderness areas and as nodes for biodiversity linked corridors.”

If you are interested in learning more about the characteristics that make up a mature forest and how to identify them, I encourage you to visit the 500 Year Forest Foundation website at 500yearforest.org and click on the heading “Old Growth.” There, you will learn more about how to recognize a mature stand of timber on your own property through characteristics such as standing snags, pit and mound topography, uneven age canopy structure, and tell-tale signs of plant and animal diversity. I also encourage you to take the time to learn how to estimate the age of different tree species by measuring their circumference at chest height (just Google it and you can find ample resources). This is a phenomenal activity that allows you and your family to get out and get to know the age of the timber stands on your property, and to cultivate an understanding and relationship with the natural ecosystems that exist right out your back door.

In the meantime, Cooper and I will continue our runs through Oakwood, admiring the stature of the grand old sentinels that guard the front gate, but most of all, enjoying the cool shade they offer us during the dog days of our summer runs.



Cooper in front of a Tuliptree

Funding Options to Help Reach Your Conservation Goals



by Caitlyn Gendusa,
Land Conservation Specialist

It is no secret that maintaining an active farm can be not only time consuming, but also costly when factoring in the expenses of farm equipment, machinery, and labor. However, there are several programs in place to allow farmers to reach their conservation goals for their farms while providing financial incentives.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP is a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) program aimed at conserving natural resources by providing financial and educational assistance to farmers and landowners for installing structural, vegetative, and land management practices. A few common EQIP practices include cover cropping, nutrient and irrigation management, and fencing. Cover cropping in particular is an excellent way to allow the regeneration of land and soil nutrients, which, as a result, improves crop production.

The 2018 Farm Bill included a \$1 billion increase in funding for EQIP programs, making it even easier for farmers and landholders to participate. Furthermore, EQIP reimbursement rates are now up to 90% of the total cost of implementing these conservation practices. In tandem with the increased consumer demand for organic fruits and vegetables, funding for conservation practices related to organic production nearly doubled, reaching a maximum of \$140,000 over a six-year period.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Another USDA program, CSP provides financial and technical assistance to farmers for maintaining, improving, or adopting new conservation systems. To receive funding, farmers meet a “stewardship threshold” for a specific priority resource concern upon applying. Once the “stewardship threshold” is met or exceeded, participants receive annual payments based primarily on the performance of their conservation initiatives. With a minimum payment of \$1,500 for successful applicants, CSP is a program worth considering.

To learn more or take advantage of EQIP or CSP program funding, please visit: bit.ly/USDAprograms



Culbertson Mill, a UF conservation easement, implements rotation grazing practices on their farm.

Additional Resources

There are other funding programs outside of USDA available for implementing best management practices to protect water quality. Landowners interested in placing conservation easements on their properties or expanding an existing easement may be eligible for funding through Upstate Forever’s Clean Water Team. Best Management Practices (BMPs) include installing exclusion fencing, water sources, cover crops, and more to protect and/or improve water quality. Currently, grant funding is available for properties located in the South, Middle and North Tiger River watersheds and the Three and Twenty Creek Watershed.

For more information, please contact Upstate Forever’s Land Conservation team at landtrust@upstateforever.org

Easement Spotlight: Bicycle Botany at Stumhouse Park



by Lauren Muller,
Land Stewardship Associate

Adventure tourism is on the rise and travelers are increasingly seeking new places to connect with the natural world. The City of Walhalla's Stumhouse Mountain Bike Park is an outstanding example of how state-of-the-art trails can draw in visitors with a thirst for adventure. Upstate Forever is privileged to hold Stumhouse Mountain's conservation easement, which ensures that visitors from near and far will be able to enjoy the park's world class trails and rich biodiversity for many generations to come.

Nestled within the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the 440-acre Stumhouse Mountain Bike Park is a must-see for the rider with an affinity for botany. The park boasts over 14 miles of trails which wind through a matrix of humid bottomland forests, ephemeral streams, moody tunnels of Mountain Laurel and dry upland stands of Loblolly Pine.

Riders will travel across damp coves blanketed in ferns, wild ginger, and fragrant hydrangeas. This opulent tapestry of understory plants is constantly in flux, each season revealing new wildflower treasures. Be sure to stop at the edge of the Walhalla Reservoir to see Littleleaf Sensitive Briar growing happily along the border of the trail. Petite and charming, this delicate vine adorned with pink powderpuff flowers appears to be straight out of a Dr. Seuss book.

Along the Palmetto Trail, gaps in the forest canopy provide abundant sunshine for Black-eyed Susan, Goldenrod, Phlox and Wild Quinine. In the summertime, fallen petals of Mountain Laurel decorate the Lake Loop Trail like delicate confetti.

Stumhouse Park is a true gem of the upstate that provides cyclists of all ages and skill-levels an excellent workout and a chance to experience of the wildness of the Blue Ridge Escarpment region.

To learn more about the park's history, trails and amenities visit visitoconeesc.com/stumhouse-park.



View of Stumhouse Mountain overlooking Walhalla Reservoir



Littleleaf Sensitive Briar (not to be confused with the invasive Mimosa) is a desirable native wildflower.



Blackeyed Susan is a wonderful native flower for pollinators.



New team member

**Please join us in welcoming
Land Stewardship Program Associate, Lauren Muller!**

Lauren Muller joined the land trust team this June as Land Stewardship Program Associate. She comes to Upstate Forever from the State Botanical Garden of Georgia and holds a Master of Science in Horticulture.

Lauren's experience with invasive plant management, ecosystem restoration, native plant identification and propagation, and public education and outreach makes her a great asset to Upstate Forever and particularly to the land stewardship department.

If you own a property with a conservation easement stewarded by Upstate Forever, you may be meeting Lauren soon. In the meantime, Lauren can be reached at lmuller@upstateforever.org.



Grant Meadow, a UF conservation easement, recently added protected acreage. Raleigh West, Director of the SC Conservation Bank, stressed the importance of state funding for land protection at a celebratory event.

Add acreage to your existing easement

Considering putting more of your property under a conservation easement? Sometimes an existing easement can be amended to add more acreage without the need for an entirely new easement process. Adding acreage to an existing conservation easement may offer additional tax benefits beyond those provided by the initial easement. Funding may also be available to offset the costs to landowners. If you are interested in adding acreage to your easement, contact Caitlyn Gendusa at cgendusa@upstateforever.org.

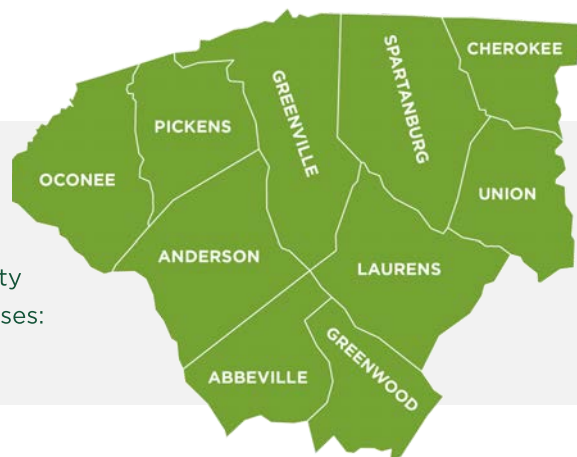


Stay in touch

Follow @UpstateForever on social media and sign up for our email lists at upstateforever.org/email

Newly Protected Properties

Upstate Forever protects nearly 28,000 acres in the ten county Upstate region. See below for our recent conservation successes:



Spring Park Inn

Greenville County



White Tract

Greenville County



MROS Preserve

Abbeville County



Morrow Creek Timbers

Abbeville County

Help protect more Upstate land

Do you know someone who owns land in the 10-county Upstate SC region who would like to learn more about permanently protecting their land through a voluntary conservation easement? We would love to share more information on the benefits of conserving land. Funding and tax incentives are available.

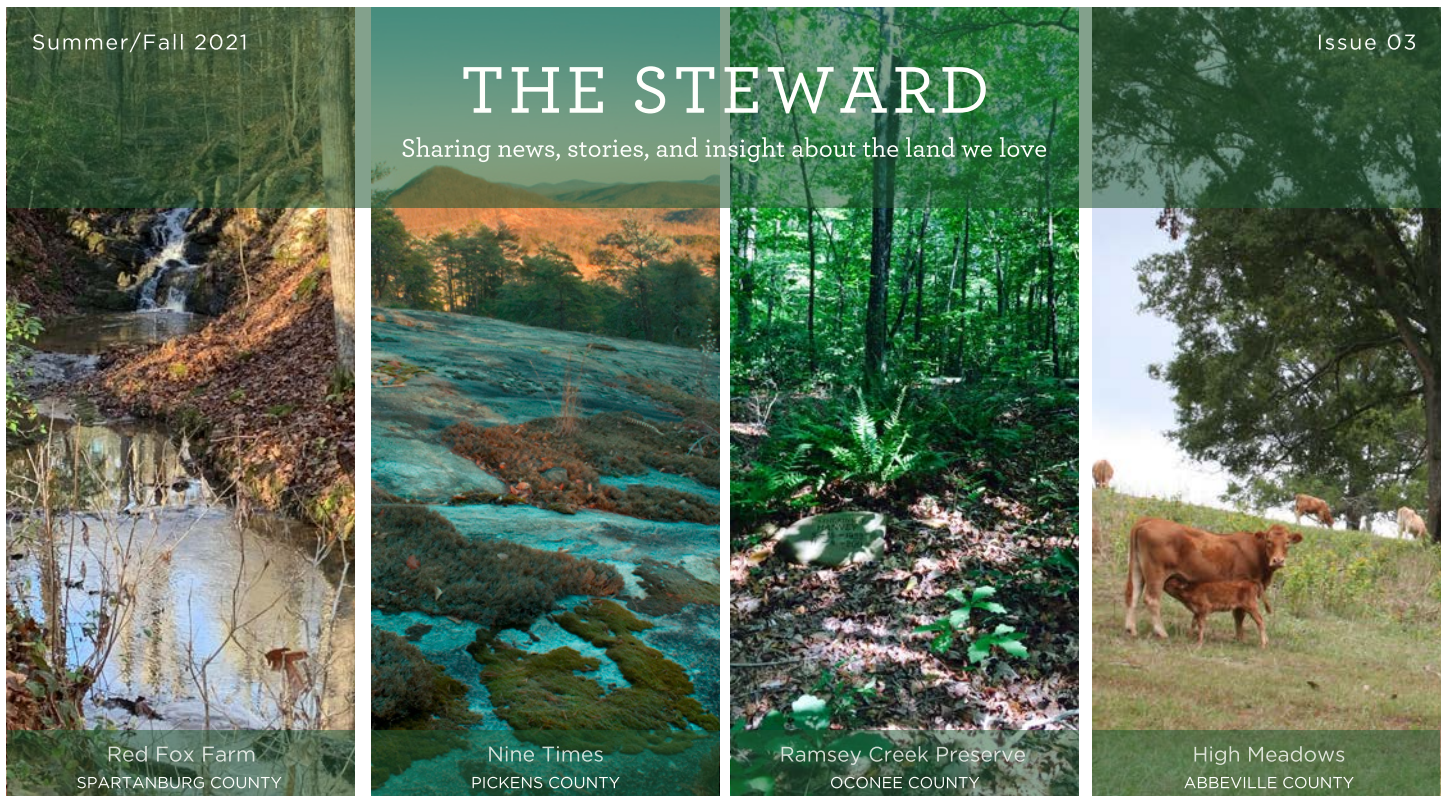
Contact landtrust@upstateforever.org
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A few of the many scenes from Upstate Forever's conservation easements. Through our Land Conservation program, we have protected nearly 28,000 acres in the Upstate.