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30 Years of Conservation & Legacy

A letter from TRLT President Mike Mabry

As we mark the 30th anniversary of Three Rivers Land Trust, it is with immense gratitude and pride that I reflect on the remarkable journey we've undertaken together. Over the past three decades, our collective efforts have conserved over 50,000 acres of land throughout the Piedmont and Sandhills of North Carolina—all conserved for future generations.

When Three Rivers Land Trust was founded in 1995, the goal was simple: to protect our region's natural beauty, ecological diversity, and rich history. Today, we can proudly say that we have far exceeded that vision, thanks to the passion, dedication, and generosity of each person who has contributed to this endeavor.

Every one of us is connected to our mission of expanding public lands, saving family farms, and protecting local waters and wildlife habitat. Whether it's ensuring access to spaces for outdoor recreation, conserving the farmland that feeds and clothes us, or protecting the vital habitats our native wildlife calls home, our collective commitment has created a lasting impact. From the lush wetlands along the

Pee Dee River to the towering longleaf pines of the Sandhills, the lands we've conserved tell the story of our region's past and promise a future where nature thrives alongside our communities.

North Carolina's agricultural lands are ranked the second most threatened in the nation, which poses a serious challenge to local food production and our state's economy. The agricultural industry is North Carolina's number one industry, and we are committed to helping ensure that it continues to thrive. Through our work, we are conserving family farms, protecting agricultural lands from development pressures, and securing the resources needed to support local food systems.

Currently, we have many farmers trying to conserve their farms but unfortunately the funding at the state and federal level is not sufficient to support the need. If this is important to you, I encourage you to reach out to your government representative and voice support. As always, we appreciate any financial support to help us with this critical mission.

Our work has conserved critical wildlife habitat, improved water quality, and provided expanded outdoor recreation opportunities, ensuring that everyone can continue to enjoy the beauty of our landscapes. But, as we reflect on these accomplishments, we also recognize that our work is not done.

As we celebrate this incredible milestone, I invite you to be a part of the next chapter of our story. With your financial support, we can continue our work to protect land in North Carolina. Every contribution—no matter the size—plays a critical role in our mission to expand public lands, save family farms, and protect local waters and wildlife habitat.



"To waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed."

- Theodore Roosevelt

THE PAST

By Travis Morehead, TRLT Executive Director

Our state certainly has changed since European explorers first arrived in what would later become North Carolina.

Did you know that elk once roamed North
Carolina as far east as Raleigh? Most of North
Carolina's native elk were decimated by
unrestrained hunting in the late 1700's. The same
could be said for other native species that call
North America home. Between 30-50 million
bison roamed the great plains in the early 1800s.
Today, their population is around 400,000. Bison
were hunted nearly to extinction, due in part to
the market demands for their tongues and hides.

Closer to home, the estimated whitetail deer population for the entire state of North Carolina was 10,000 animals in the early 1900s. Today, whitetail deer have a population of over 1 million animals. An even more modern example is the

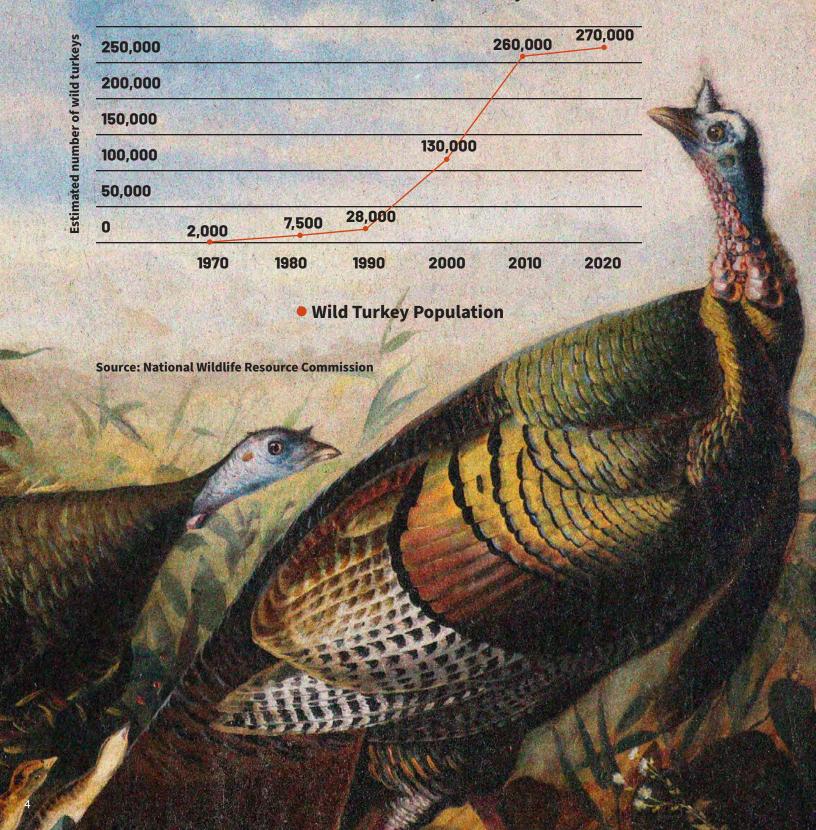
historic recovery of the eastern wild turkey. In 1970, the estimated population of wild turkeys in North Carolina was only 2,000 birds. By 2020, that population grew to over 270,000 birds. My question to you is, "Why?" Why have we seen decimated wildlife populations rebound?

First, I would offer that regular folk noticed what was happening and decided to get involved. The actions of a few led to meaningful regulations that govern these species, which helped to aid their recovery. Regulations, coupled with support from hunters, are largely responsible for the abundance of deer and turkey now in North Carolina.

What lessons can be learned from our past regarding important, finite natural resources? We've come a long way in protecting animal species, but is there another resource that we may be overlooking? A resource on the well-worn path to being decimated in the 21st century? I believe there is, and I believe that resource is rural lands.

Return of the Wild Turkey

By the early 1960s, North Carolina's wild turkey population had dramatically decreased due to unregulated market hunting and habitat loss. But now there are an estimated 270,000 turkeys across the state.



Depending on which study you read, North Carolina is somewhere between the 2nd and 4th fastest-growing state in the country, with 4 of the top 10 fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the country. The Old North State is anticipated to become the 7th most populous state by 2030. Our state is fortunate to have a great climate, business opportunities, a relatively low cost

reintroduced. That resource is rural lands. These lands contain the rich soils needed to feed and clothe us, they produce timber for our home improvement projects, and they support the livestock for our meals and family BBQs.

Rural lands are under tremendous development pressure. Did you know that 59% of North Carolina's

"We are prone to speak of the resources of this country as inexhaustible; this is not so."

- Theodore Roosevelt

of living, varied terrain, big cities, and small towns. All of these attributes and many more are inspiring more people to call North Carolina home. However, this influx of people causes significant growing pains for local governments across the state. The call for more homes, affordable housing, and improved transportation systems can be heard. As more new housing developments are proposed, the phrase, "Let the market decide" can also be heard.

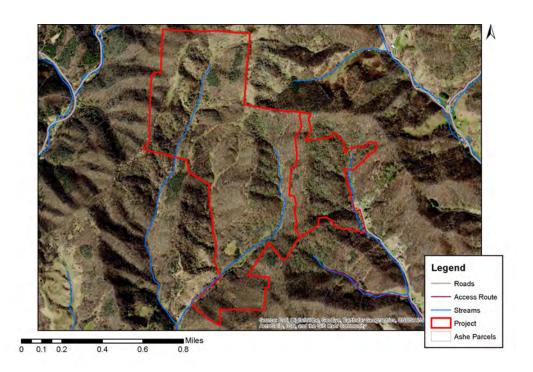
If we look back into history, the "market" decided that there should not be bison on the Great Plains, and that their hides and tongues were more valuable in stores than their presence on the prairies. The market decided much the same for elk in the Piedmont of North Carolina in the late 1700s, deer in the early 1900s, and turkeys in the 1970s. The herculean effort it took to restore these wildlife populations through regulation and conservation is one of our greatest success stories. However, if we are not careful, we are going to lose something that makes North Carolina, North Carolina. We're going to lose a natural resource that, once it's lost, can never be

agricultural soils are considered "nationally significant"? What does "nationally significant" mean? It means that these soils are so valuable that it takes 2-3 times as many acres of marginal soils to produce the same yield as just one acre of national significant soils.

We must conserve our state's rural lands. Conserving the rural lands of North Carolina is conserving the true character of North Carolina. We are not known for our burgeoning metropolises, nor do I think we want to be. Let's learn from our past mistakes when it comes to conserving our natural resources. Let's not repeat the same error by allowing the "market" to dictate what North Carolina becomes in the future.

If this message resonates with you, I invite you to join our conservation mission. Be part of those few folks willing to take a stand, to consider the long-term consequences of our actions, and make a difference for those that come after us. Join us, and let's make a difference for our state's rural lands.

THESE BIG PROJECTS



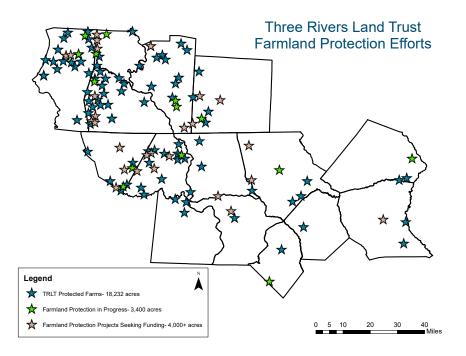
ASHE COUNTY BIG BRANCH PROPERTY

Three Rivers Land Trust is partnering with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) to permanently protect 488 acres in Ashe County, known as the Big Branch property. Three Rivers Land Trust is raising funds to purchase, conserve, and then transfer the 488-acre property to the NCWRC. The Big Branch property will become a new gameland managed by the NCWRC, creating new public access opportunities for sportsman and anglers. According to the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, this property stands out as it contains outstanding resource waters, the highest water quality designation given to streams in North Carolina, and trout streams. This property is unique because of the diversity of vegetation

types found within it, including Northern
Hardwood Forest, High Elevation Red Oak Forest,
Early Successional Fields, and Montane Seeps.
The Big Branch property hosts several plant
species of special concern, including Carolina
saxifrage, mountain watercress, and Meehan's
mint. These plants only survive on Rich Montane
Seeps and seepy boulders in Northern Hardwood
Forests. With your support, TRLT can acquire
this property, protecting its unique features, and
increase public recreation opportunities.

To help TRLT expand public lands, consider supporting this project by visiting our website and donating. www.trlt.org/donate.

NEED YOUR SUPPORT



FARMLAND PROTECTION FUND

Three Rivers Land Trust is actively working to protect prime agricultural land in the Piedmont and Sandhills regions of North Carolina. North Carolina is losing farmland at an unprecedented rate and is the state with the second most threatened farmland in the nation. According to the American Farmland Trust, every hour, North Carolina loses more than 5.5 acres of farmland. The Farmland Protection Fund helps TRLT protect fertile farmland, helping NC to meet increasing demand for food needs for a growing population and to conserve the rural character of our region.

As of March, 2025, TRLT has over 5,700 acres of farmland seeking protection. This means

TRLT has the opportunity to conserve over 40 family farms across the region, keeping farms in production and permanently protected from development. Contributions to the TRLT Farmland Protection Fund allow staff to leverage the needed state and federal grant funding and accomplish farmland protection projects.

To support our farmland conservation efforts please consider donating generously to TRLT at www.trlt.org/donate.



Cleveland, North Carolina is well-defined by its unofficial (but official) town statement: "It is great to be from West Rowan!" You may have driven through Cleveland on U.S. 70 on your way to major Interstates 40, 77, or 85. Surrounding these roads are the creeks, lush woodlands, and farmlands that characterize Cleveland. Three Rivers Land Trust has a historical relationship with this part of North Carolina, helping landowners to conserve hundreds of acres of farmland and natural landscapes since the organization's establishment.

"Eric loved the farm, woods and wildlife, especially the birds. We wanted to honor the previous landowners who sold this land to us with the idea that it would be well cared for and preserved as farmland."

- Carla Pence

In 2024, 500 more acres of land were conserved in Cleveland, North Carolina, in honor of Dr. Carla Pence's late husband, Eric Pence. Carla and the family wanted to honor their late husband and father, Eric Pence, by conserving their property with Three Rivers Land Trust. "Eric loved the farm, woods and wildlife, especially the birds. We wanted to honor the previous landowners who sold this land to us with the idea that it would be well cared for and preserved as farmland."

As a young couple, Eric and Carla Pence lived in a 500 square foot trailer and drove an old car and pickup truck in order to buy land. "Land and wildlife were Eric's passion, and I shared this passion, having grown up on a farm in Iowa."

Eric died in 2023, but the now 4th generation Pence farming tradition lives on with second cousin Matthew and his wife, Brenna Pence, with significant help from Matthew's father, Walter. They grow soybeans and corn, sell cut hay, and have a small beef herd. Longtime hunters have hunted deer, turkeys, and now coyotes in the woodlands and surrounding pasture and cropland.

What is so special about the Pence's property is the continuity of the land. In conservation work, conserving contiguous tracts of land is a rare case. When large swathes of land are conserved, it strengthens local communities. Patches of land like the Pence family's are supportive in providing clean water and air, habitat for animals and game, and farmland for local distribution of meat, produce, and animal feed. "Protecting local farmland and natural areas is TRLT's forte," states Land Protection Specialist Kyle Shores. "In a day and age where land prices can often be shockingly high, it is refreshing to be able to work with families and landowners that see the true value of their land as productive farmland, open space, or as natural areas that support wildlife."

This conservation project was made possible by a generous conservation easement donation by the landowners and also by the support of TRLT members and donors. TRLT's Director of Conservation, Emily Callicutt says, "Donated conservation easements are one of the most efficient ways to protect your land. Being able to protect so much acreage in this region of Rowan County is essential for maintaining our rural character and to continue the production of food and fiber for our local community and beyond."

If you would like to conserve your property or support TRLT's conservation mission, please contact Emily Callicutt, Director of Conservation, at emily@trlt.org.

SAFEGUARDING SOLDIERS By Barry Hull Sandhills Conservation Coordinator

The sounds of military aircraft operating in and around Fort Bragg are part of everyday life for the residents of the Sandhills.

Units on the installation are in a constant state of readiness and training. This sense of urgency permeates the very air of Fort Bragg. The need for highly realistic training is apparent. To take full advantage of every available inch on the installation while simultaneously reducing the impact on current and future residents, the Army has partnered with Three Rivers Land Trust. The goal of this partnership is to further conservation efforts on crucial parcels of land surrounding the installation.

As a part of this mission, Three Rivers Land
Trust and its partners at the Department of
Defense permanently conserved 407 acres
in Hoke County. The protection of this land
helps ensure training on Fort Bragg and Camp
Mackall can endure unabated by impending
development. It also increases soldiers' safety
as they train to protect the United States.



"Ensuring that the soldiers on Fort Bragg have every possible training advantage is in everyone's best interest. Knowing that these soldiers are routinely called upon to put their training into action for this nation and its citizens makes this work extremely rewarding," states Travis Morehead, Executive Director of Three Rivers Land Trust.

Fort Bragg and Three Rivers Land Trust have a long history of working together to safeguard the land surrounding the installation to benefit both the environment and training. Currently, with TRLT's efforts, there is a network of over 4,000 acres of protected land within the region. The partnership between TRLT and Fort Bragg means the amount of conserved land will continue to expand.

"Our goal is to work with willing landowners and our military partners to permanently conserve key lands around Fort Bragg. Conservation of these lands will reduce the impacts of military training on the local population and protect the area needed by the military to provide effective training to its units," states Barry Hull, TRLT Sandhills Conservation Coordinator.

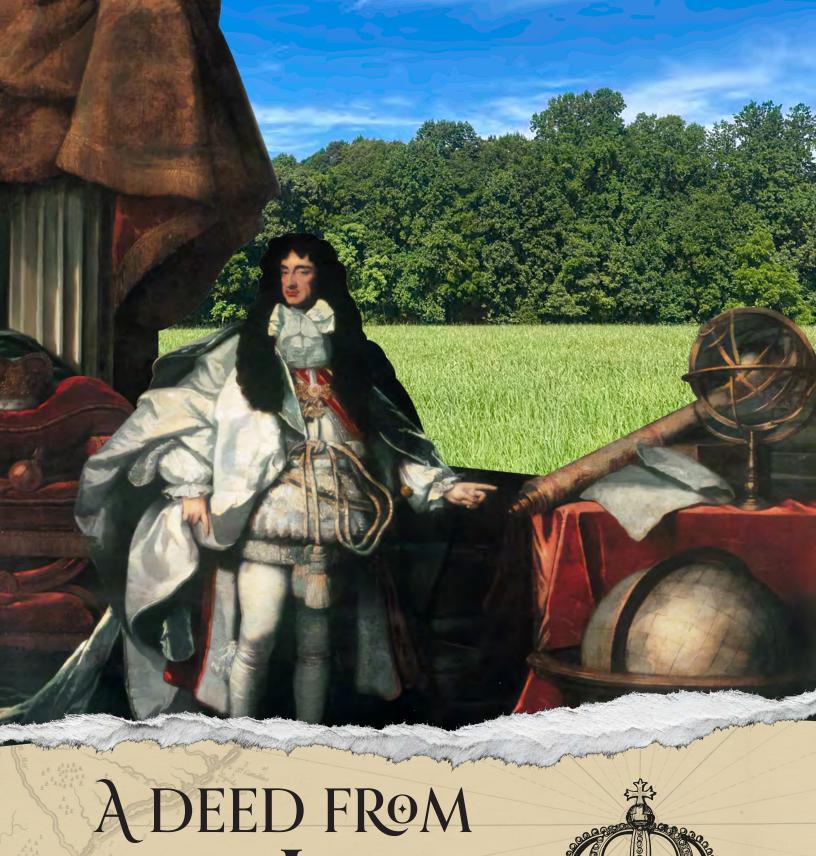
Without the bravery and sacrifice of our military, there would be no land to conserve. Three Rivers considers it an honor to be part of protecting the vital training happening at Fort Bragg and our courageous soldiers.





"Ensuring that the soldiers on Fort Bragg have every possible training advantage is in everyone's best interest."

Travis Morehead | Executive Director, TRLT



ADEED FROM THE KING

By Jessie Wilson & Kyle Shores | Land Protection Specialists

New Map of AROLINA The Mooresville-Lake
Norman area is better
known for its rapid
population growth,
subdivisions, and traffic
than for permanently
conserving land.

However, three property owners from the same extended family have worked to change that somewhat in the past few months. Three tracts of land totaling over 42 acres have been permanently conserved off Templeton Road. Three Rivers Land Trust accepted three donated conservation easements from the family members that permanently restrict the future development of these properties. "We always say, once land is developed, it is gone forever," Land Protection Specialist Kyle Shores stated. "These donated conservation easements will prevent the future development of these parcels and provide a bit of sanctuary for the wildlife in this part of Iredell County."

Perhaps even more unique than to have these lands conserved in the fast-paced growth of Mooresville is the fact that these parcels have been in their family for the past 250 years. The newly conserved properties were part of the Granville Land Grants, which spanned east to west the length of the North Carolina-Virginia

Lake Norman Land Conserved



border and then approximately 65 miles south to present-day Mooresville. "The deed reads "From His Majesty King Charles II" an amazing piece of history," states Shores.

"Permanently conserving our natural resources and an amazing piece of history is a big win for Three Rivers Land Trust and the local community," states Emily Callicutt, Director of Conservation at Three Rivers Land Trust. "We are so happy to work with these conservation-minded landowners, who decided to conserve their property instead of letting their land become the next subdivision. They rightfully deserve all the credit for having a resolute commitment to conservation."



Wendy Hill Farm

A NC FAMILY'S LEGACY AND 120-ACRES CONSERVED

By Kyle Shores | Land Protection Specialist

As Davidson County's population grows, family farms are being altered into subdivisions.

The late Dr. Douglass Myers Everhart did not want to see that happen to his family's farm. Thanks to his forethought and estate planning, development will never harm his 120-acre farm, because he chose to safeguard it with a permanent conservation easement.

Although he traveled the world, Doug returned home to help his father at Wendy Hill Farm. He loved this land, and preserving it was vitally important. He wished to spend his final days there and watch nature at its finest. He was fortunate to do just that until he passed," said Kathy Hunt, a longtime friend of Dr. Everhart.

Those fortunate enough to own family land often wonder about what will happen to their beloved property after they are no longer able to care for it. Dr. Everhart guaranteed his family farm will always be protected by donating a conservation easement through his estate. Three Rivers Land Trust is honored to be part of fulfilling Dr. Everhart's last wishes. Thanks to him, Wendy Hill Farm will never be subdivided or paved over. Future generations will be able to enjoy the beautiful Davidson County farm, as generations before them have done.

Not only did Dr. Everhart secure his family's legacy, but he also saved the very soil from which it grew. The family farm consisted of prime farmland soil. Prime soil has the precise combination of quality, mineral content, moisture, temperature, texture, drainage, and elevation to sustainably produce high crop yields on an economic scale. Agriculture is the number one industry in North Carolina. Protecting prime farmland soil protects the future of North Carolina.

"Davidson County is a rapidly developing part of the region, but that development will not degrade this farm, because of Dr. Everhart. Three Rivers Land Trust staff believe in the importance of local family farms and good soil. We are fortunate that Dr. Everhart shared our values," states Travis Morehead, Executive Director of Three Rivers Land Trust.

"While we were not lucky enough to meet Dr. Everhart during his lifetime, we are able to know him through the land and legacy he left behind. Three Rivers Land Trust is thankful for Dr. Everhart's commitment to conservation and his love for his family farm," states Kyle Shores, Land Protection Specialist. Conservation safeguards land and legacy, just as Wendy Hill Farm will be, now and in the future.

MAPPING A LEGACY

BY MICHAEL CHUPITA | DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE, MEMBERSHIP

GPS TECHNOLOGY HAS REVOLUTIONIZED THE WAY WE NAVIGATE THE WORLD, MAKING EVEN THE MOST REMOTE CORNERS OF THE BACKCOUNTRY ACCESSIBLE.

Whether you're on a long road trip or deep in the wilderness, having the confidence to know exactly where you are has become a game changer. Enter onX, the leader in this field, offering hunters and anglers a powerful tool with their app. It's a game-changer, giving users an accurate view of their location in relation to terrain features and property lines.

onX's commitment to accuracy, conservation, and public lands naturally aligns with the values of TRLT, and that's how a partnership was born. This collaboration has led to a generous \$48,000 grant from onX to enhance TRLT's Sportsman Access Program (SAP).

SAP offers affordable access to TRLT's private lands—lands that are carefully managed for wildlife. With hunting access becoming harder

to come by and more expensive, this program offers a vital opportunity. The SAP provides hunters access to thousands of acres of low-pressure private lands, while supporting local conservation.

The SAP operates through a lottery system, similar to the draw-hunt opportunities found on public lands. Hunters select their preferred hunt block and the week they wish to hunt, and then the program's software randomly selects the winners. It's a fair and equitable way to open up hunting opportunities for all skill levels and income brackets.

Before the SAP, TRLT's hunting opportunities were limited, often leased to only a few individuals or small hunting clubs. But now, thanks to this revamped system, more people can access these lands, all while supporting the conservation efforts that keep these places pristine. The focus is not just on hunting—it's about creating lasting memories in the outdoors. And with onX's partnership, it's a step toward making those memories more accessible to everyone.



By Kyle Shores | Land Protection Specialist

A 220-acre wetland in Robeson County is on its way to permanent conservation, thanks to a major win for TRLT. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently announced its 2025 U.S. small proposals grant recipients, and TRLT was one of just 22 projects selected nationwide. Even more notably, it was the only project chosen in North Carolina and one of just two in the entire Southeast.

This grant will help TRLT secure a conservation easement along Big Swamp, a vital waterway within the Lumber River basin. With 4.3 miles of stream frontage, the property is a hotspot for biodiversity and a high-priority conservation area, according to the N.C.

Natural Heritage Program. It also connects to more than 2,200 acres already conserved through a previous NAWCA grant, expanding a critical stretch of protected land.

For TRLT, this isn't just another project it's a major step toward safeguarding local waterways, improving water quality, and ensuring unbroken wildlife habitat. Conserving this wetland strengthens a legacy of conservation that will shape the landscape for generations to come.



CHASING TRADITION

By Pat Kelly | TRLT Sportsman Access Member

TRLT's Sportsman Access Program offers so much to the sportsmen and women who cherish the traditions of hunting. This unique program means different things to different folks, but here's what it means to one sportsman.

Every time I turn down Point Road in Mocksville, I'm hit with a rush of emotions. I'm heading back to TRLT properties, eager to experience the joys and challenges they offer. As I drive, I can't help but look for turkeys or deer, keeping my eyes peeled before parking the truck—my "Outdoor Office," as I like to call it.

As a lifelong hunter and outdoorsman, these feelings run deep. Growing up in upstate New York, I was fortunate to be surrounded by a community of hunters, including my dad and his friends, who passed down not just the skills, but also the traditions. From basic chores at deer camp to earning the right to be considered a hunter—those moments were invaluable, and they continue to shape who I am today. I've been able to pass those skills on to my son and his friend, keeping the circle alive. Will my grandkids hunt? I'm not sure, but if they do, Grandpa will be ready.

Winning a block of land means more than just a hunting opportunity. It means solitude, safety, and well-managed land.



As hunters, the location may change, but the challenges remain the same. In the past, there were always places to hunt—whether in upstate New York, where farmland was plentiful, or in Pennsylvania, where I continued my hunting journey after relocating for work. But as many of us know, those opportunities can change over time. Farms are sold, friends move on, connections fade, and the land we once hunted on is developed. So, we find ourselves asking, "Where can I hunt now?"

It's at this point that we often look back, nostalgic for what we once had. The loss cuts deep, and we realize how much we cherished those times. But as hunters, we can't let that part of us slip away. We adapt, we solve the challenge, and we continue the tradition. The good news? We can still hunt. Public lands offer opportunities, though they come with their own set of challenges. So, what's next?

For me, it was a conversation while shooting sporting clays. Someone mentioned a group that had conserved land for hunting. My curiosity led me to Three Rivers Land Trust. What I found was impressive—land conservation, responsible land management, and preservation of the natural habitat. Perfect! But then imagine the smile I got when I discovered the SAP program that TRLT offered. Let's go!

The SAP presented a unique and affordable way to hunt private land. Whether you hunt solo or link up with a few friends, it's your choice. The lottery system for selecting hunting blocks gives everyone a fair shot at being selected. Plus, the funds from the SAP go directly to supporting TRLT's conservation mission.

Winning a block of land means more than just a hunting opportunity. It means solitude, safety, and well-managed land. It's also an experience that touches the soul. Through a local neighbor near The Point property, I learned about the early Native American and settler history of the land, which added a deeper connection to the place as I hunted. There's something powerful about feeling that connection while pursuing game. Let the land speak to you. Being in that

The next morning, the temperature was again cold, and I was back in the blind, adjusting my position. By mid-morning, the buck reappeared, this time from a slightly different angle. I took a steady hold and made a clean shot with my muzzleloader. Success!

The SAP presented a unique and affordable way to hunt private land. Whether you hunt solo or link up with a few friends, it's your choice.

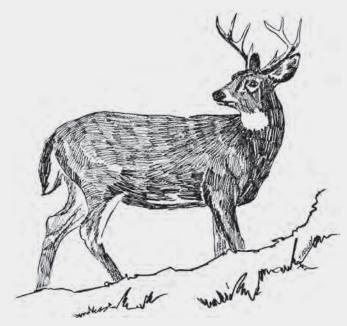
environment brings memories flooding back, reminding me of how I got to this point. For me, it's about feeling my dad's presence, staying connected to the past while enjoying the present.

Now, let's take a quick hunting adventure. I drew Block 10 at The Point during the fall 2024 hunting season. It had been warmer than ideal for hunting. After some scouting, I found a couple of decent stand locations, but things weren't going as planned. Yet, one Thursday morning, the land showed me what I had been missing. A sharp drop in temperature brought movement. Two bucks emerged from a gnarly patch of brush, but they stayed out of range.

I thought strategically, circled wide, and set up a ground blind the next day. It was cold again, and I was ready. Early the next morning, one of the bucks appeared, walking toward a tree near my setup. He stopped at 10 yards. The only problem? The wind shifted, and the deer turned and walked back. Lost opportunity. I left the ground blind dejected by determination.

The SAP gave me the opportunity and challenge to harvest a deer. I'm deeply grateful for that. Beyond the hunt itself, it's been a pleasure to meet new people and forge new friendships. What could be better?

So, until next season, I'll hold onto the memories, the bounty of the hunt, and the warmth of the SAP Rendezvous campfire, even if it's just in my mind, still burning.



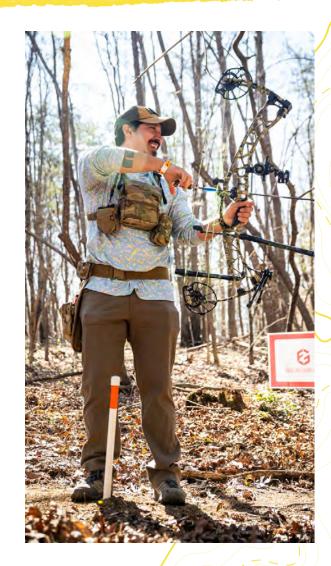


AFTER A YEAR OF METICULOUS PLANNING, THE UWHARRIE ARCHERY CHALLENGE KICKED OFF MARCH 1ST AND 2ND AT THE SCENIC LOW WATER BRIDGE PROPERTY IN TROY, NC.

The event drew in nearly 350 dedicated archers from across the country, with participants traveling from as far north as New Hampshire and as far south as Mississippi to take on the exciting challenge. Competitors ventured out to tackle a demanding three-mile course, navigating a rugged landscape while shooting at 30 3D targets strategically placed along the way.

This one-of-a-kind event was inspired by the growing popularity of archery competitions that push participants beyond traditional target ranges. These events not only test an archer's aim, but also their skill, stamina, and perseverance as they take on long distances and varying conditions. Upon arrival, archers had the opportunity to warm up and hone their skills at a dedicated practice range before embarking on a grueling 4½ hour hike through the wilderness. Along the way, they encountered a diverse range of exciting and unique 3D targets, including a life-sized bison and a towering seven-foot-tall Bigfoot.

Events like the Uwharrie Archery Challenge help Three Rivers Land Trust to build meaningful connections with outdoor enthusiasts, particularly sportsmen and women who have a deep appreciation for nature. For many, hunting is not just a pastime but a way to actively contribute to conservation efforts.



These individuals understand the crucial role they play in conserving wildlife habitats for future generations, a sentiment that was palpably felt throughout the event.

The buzz of excitement was undeniable as attendees came off the course and discussed the event with one another, with the most common question heard being, "Are you doing this again?" The answer is a definite YES! Next year's Uwharrie Archery Challenge promises to be even bigger and better, with two courses consisting of 20-25 targets each. Don't miss it – March 7-8, 2026.

The Uwharrie Archery Challenge stands as a testament to the dedication of those who not only love the sport of archery but also care deeply about conserving the natural world for future generations.



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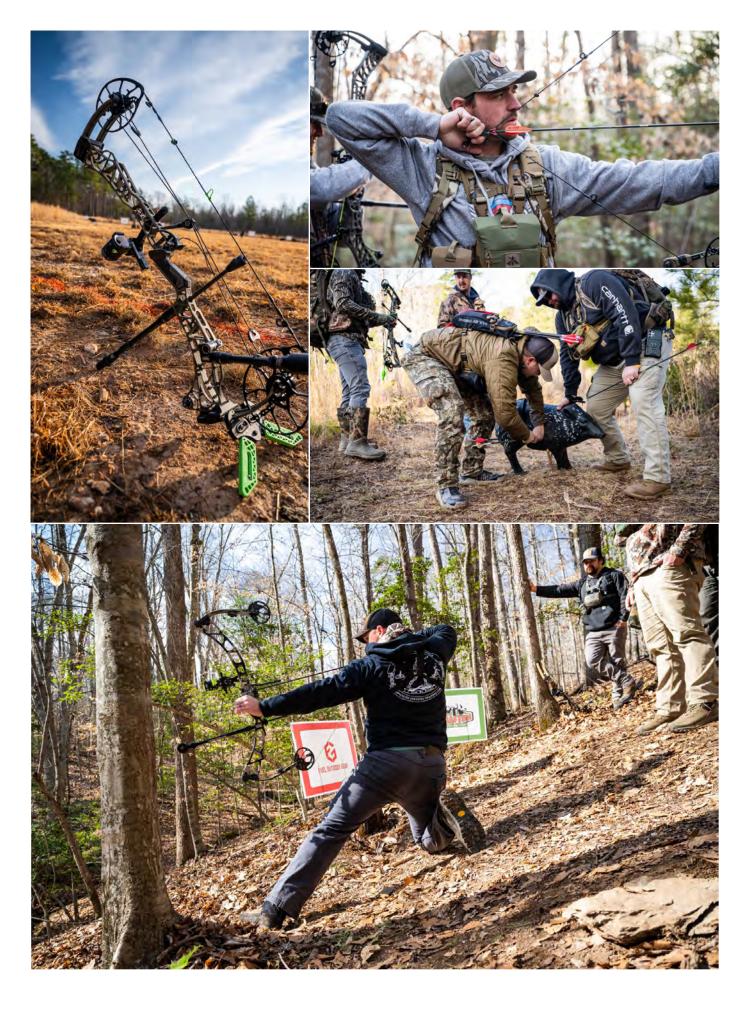
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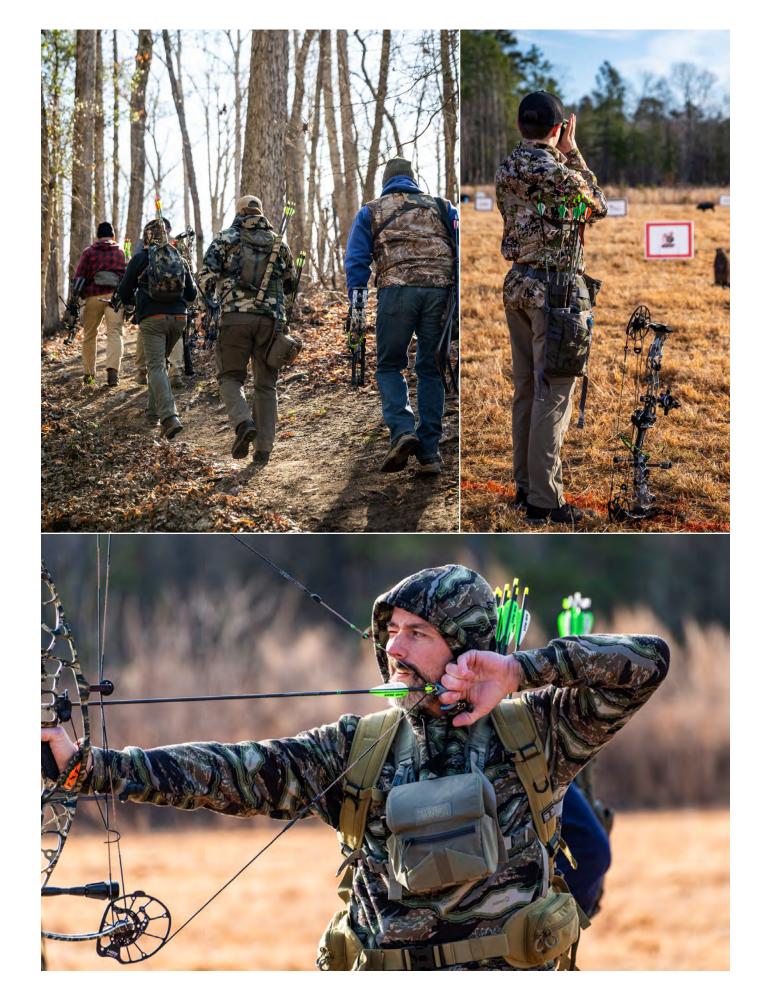
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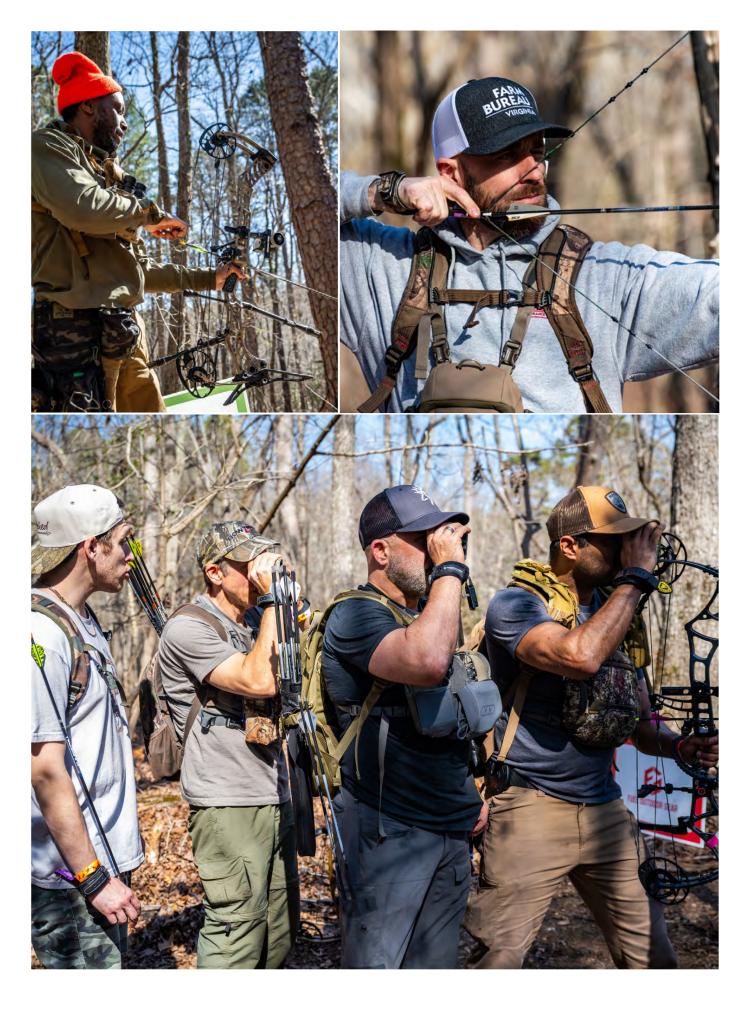
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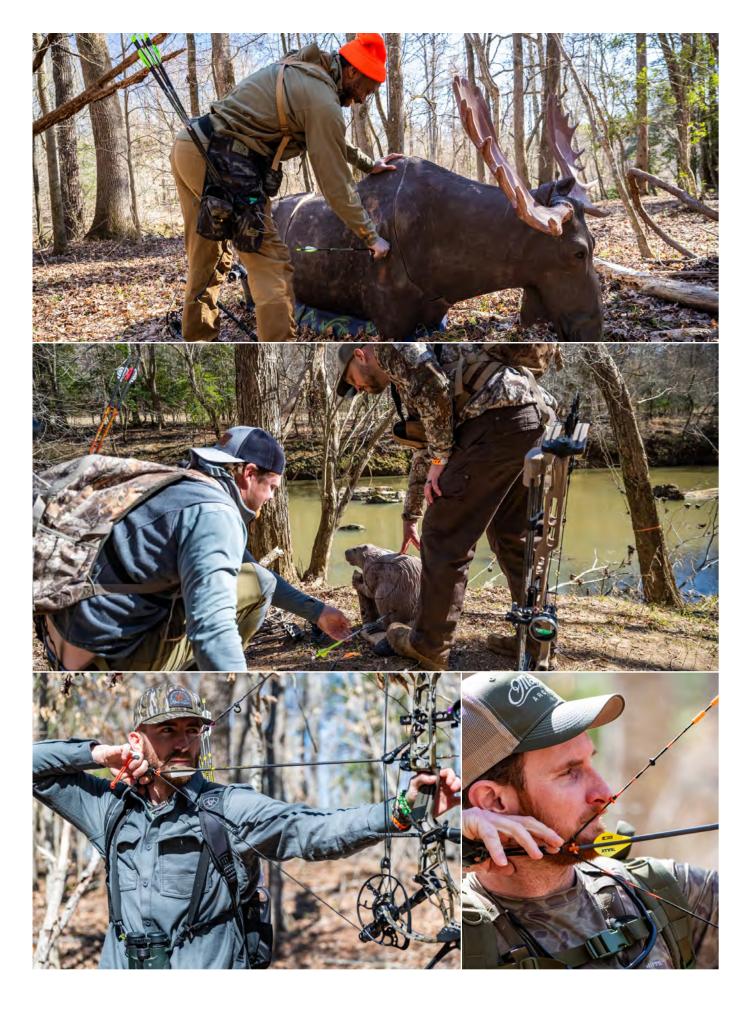


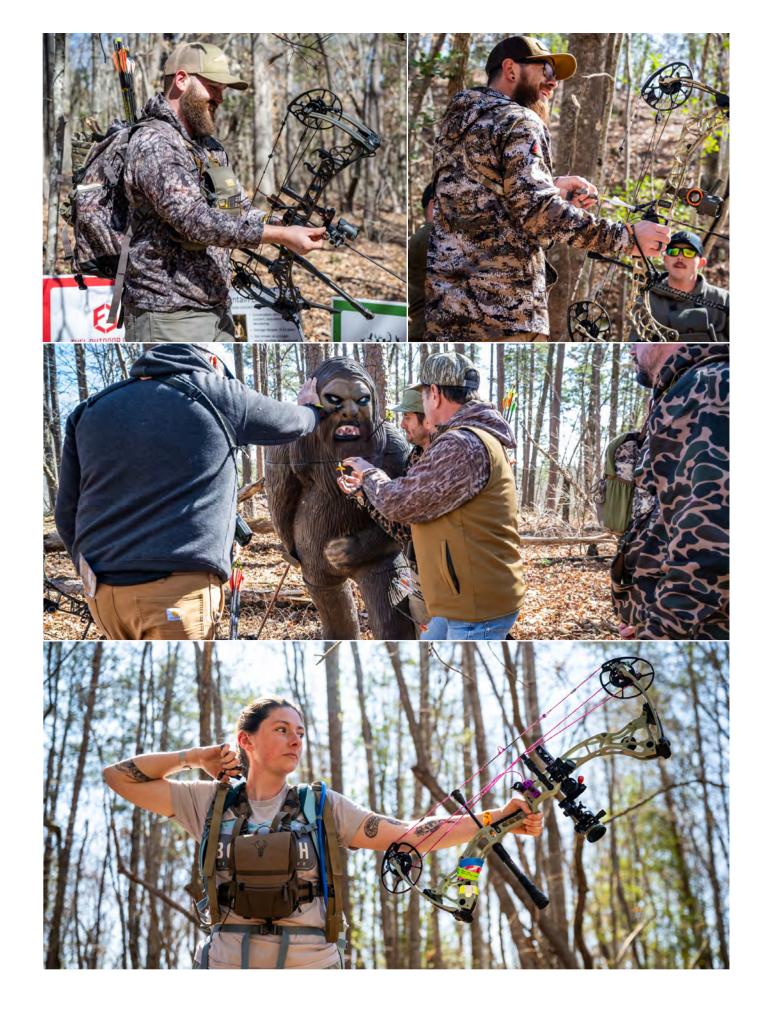






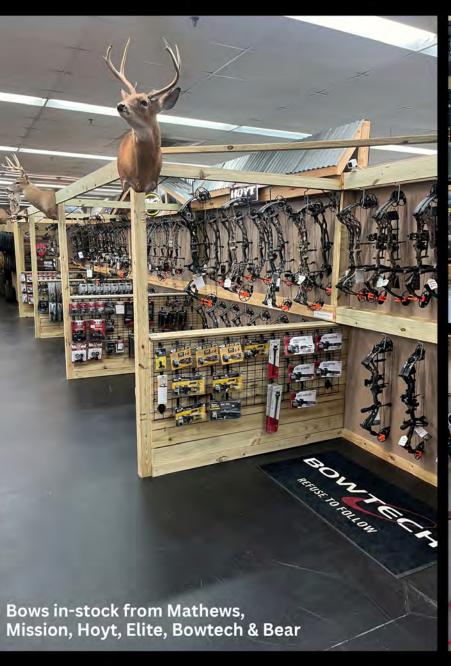


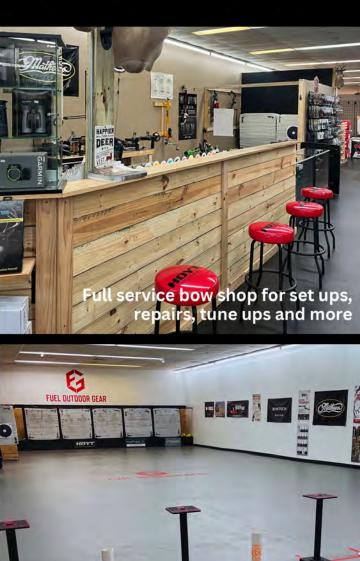






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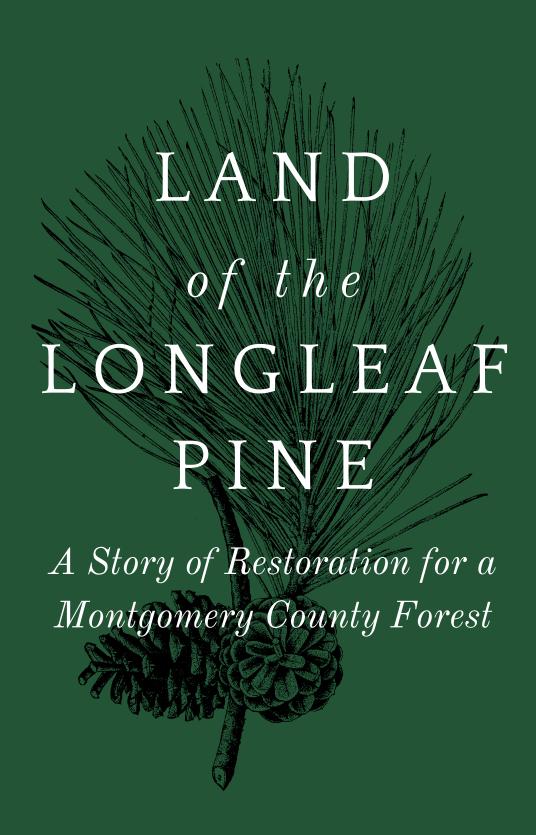


THE RIGHT GEAR MAKES FOR THE BEST HUNT

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By Jessie Wilson, Land Protection Specialist & Katie Stovall, Conservation Lands Manager

There was once a land where towering longleaf pine trees held court over a sun-dappled forest floor, where fox squirrels leaped between branches, and where tiger swallowtails danced. The air was filled with the music of woodpeckers beating their ancient rhythm against tree bark, the wind whistling through tree branches, and frogs singing for rain. This was a place of beauty and peace, but also of strength and hardship. The land was North Carolina, the Land of the Longleaf Pine.

Today, less than 3% of longleaf pine woodlands remain. The once-soaring trees were scarred for turpentine before being cut down to build ships and houses. The fox squirrels were driven out by development. The tiger swallowtails lost their homes and no longer floated on the breeze. The red-cockaded woodpeckers were listed as endangered. Few longleaf branches were left for the wind to shake. The ponds where frogs held their nightly chorus were drained. The longleaf pine woodland that once reigned king over the Southeast is now another victim of progress, but all hope is not lost.

Dedicated conservationists are working tirelessly to save the remaining longleaf and restore the woodlands where possible. Three Rivers Land Trust is one such group of devoted conservationists. Under the stalwart care of the TRLT Stewardship Team, longleaf pine woodland is returning to Montgomery County.



The current condition of the restored longleaf tract, a Montgomery County property, that is managed by Three Rivers Land Trust.

THE STORY IN THE TREES

In 2014, the TRLT land protection team saved the land from development. The land had previously been slated for clearcut harvest, bulldozing, and platted for a mobile home park. The proposed land use change reflected change that was irreversible. The family that owned the tract understood this hard truth and worked with TRLT to ensure the property would be protected in perpetuity. The landowner reached out to TRLT in 2014, determined to conserve his irreplaceable property. TRLT's Board of Directors promptly saw the necessity of accepting ownership of this exceptional place. Spotted salamanders and a rare baptisia plant called the bygone forest home. It was blindly apparent that this was a

historic place boasting 90+-year-old longleaf pine, remanent turpentine stumps, and cat-faced trees. The story of North Carolina was written in those trees for anyone who cared to look.

The land is now protected from development in perpetuity. The landowner left a legacy that honors his, his parents, and his grandparents' love of the land. This is a beautiful example of how conservation protects the past for future generations. A healthy, productive, longleaf forest will again stand guard over Montgomery County, thanks to one family's passion and interest in working with the Land Trust.



The tract before longleaf restoration efforts began. Photo taken March 2016.



THE RETURN

The first phase in restoring the site to its former glory was to selectively remove the sweetgums, loblolly pines, and other undesirable tree species that were seizing control. This removal of competition reduced the pressure on the remaining longleaf, allowing them to flourish—like escaping the crushing embrace of an overcrowded shopping mall for fresh air and sunshine.

This photo illustrates the tract after a low-impact timber harvest and a site preparation burn that was completed during 2017 to remove undesirable species, including sweetgum, poplar, maples, and loblolly pine. The longleaf pines and oak species were marked as "leave trees" during the harvest, shown by the pink flagging tape.



The TRLT Stewardship Team began to prepare the site for restoration during October of 2017 by implementing a site preparation burn. A site preparation burn is a technique to remove debris to facilitate planting and to remove competing vegetation to allow planted trees the opportunity to flourish.

The first planting of longleaf seedlings during November 2017.

The long absence of fire meant there was a long and difficult road ahead, but the team did not balk. TRLT staff knew every aching muscle and drop of sweat would be repaid tenfold. In November of 2017, 3,000 longleaf seedlings were planted, each one carrying hope for the future. For the first time in decades, the vibrant pompoms of new longleaf danced on the breeze. The new generation of trees was a promise of a brighter tomorrow for the forest.

The first restoration prescribed burn was conducted by the Stewardship Team in March of 2022. Longleaf pine woodlands are fire-adapted ecosystems that depend on the rebirth that fire provides. This inarguable fire was something of a

homecoming to this land. It was the return of a long-awaited friend.

The tract was still experiencing competition from loblolly pines that were too large to be controlled safely during the first restoration burn. A forest stand improvement was recommended by TRLT's own registered forester and wildlife biologist, Katie Stovall. The forest stand improvement was completed with brush saws during March of 2022. This stand improvement technique removed any loblolly that survived the initial restoration burn, releasing the understory longleaf. The budding longleaf now had an unobstructed route to the sky.





These photos illustrate the first change entry to restoration burn that was conducted during March of 2022. The goal of this burn was to control encroaching loblolly pine (photo 1).

Young loblolly pines can be susceptible to prescribed fire. Conversely, longleaf pines can tolerate fire at a young age as a result of their anatomical characteristics. Longleaf seedlings have thick tufts of long needles (photos 2-3) that protect the terminal bud of the plant. The young longleaf pines were not harmed during the burn.



A FRESH START

A new year is a time for renewal; this was certainly true for the tract. Fire returned once again with the new year in 2023. After decades of fire suppression, a consistent burn schedule was essential for restoring the ecosystem. Three Rivers staff understood this need. The flames burned away the competing vegetation that impedes longleaf growth. Prescribed fires are the lifeblood of longleaf pine woodlands. With the return of these healing fires, wildflowers began to dot the landscape.









Photos 4-6: These photos represent the flush of wildflowers that responded from the seedbank immediately after the first restoration burn and the timber stand improvement. Photos taken May 2022.

Photos 4-7: Photos illustrating dense pockets of loblolly pine that were not successfully controlled with prescribed fire. A forest stand improvement technique was needed to control these loblolly pines and to allow the planted longleaf to flourish.



Photo 8: Forest stand improvement technique of using brush saws to selectively remove loblolly pines, allowing the longleaf pine ample sunlight and resources to grow.





Photos 9-10: The stand after loblolly pines were selectively removed (April 2022), which allows the longleaf pine and the herbaceous plant community ample resources to grow.



Photo 11: This photo illustrates the tract after the second restoration burn.



Photo 12: This photo illustrates the tract during the growing season after the second restoration burn.



NEW GENERATION

Volunteers gathered in March of that same year to establish a new generation of longleaf at the preserve. This event was led by TRLT and sponsored by the Longleaf Alliance and Appalachian Mountain Brewery; all groups driven by their passion for ecosystem restoration. New longleaf, with their bright green poofs climbing towards the sky, were placed into the blackened ground by loving hands. The verdant pompoms of longleaf are a symbol of hope for a better tomorrow, of a return to the way things were meant to be.

To truly thrive, the newly planted longleaf needed to feel the warm embrace of prescribed fire. In February of 2024, TRLT staff donned their Nomex and set to work. Drip torches in hand, TRLT staff walked under the standing longleaf and carefully set fire to the land. The staff marched through the vegetation, the smoke, and the ash to revitalize the landscape—and it was worth it.





These photos illustrate the condition during and after three restoration burns. The competing loblolly pines were effectively controlled, ensuring a canvas for longleaf pine and wildflowers to flourish. Photos were taken in February of 2024.



LITTLE VOYAGERS

On a misty March morning in 2024, volunteers once more grabbed dibble bars and gloves. Passionate volunteers returned to the tract, fueled by a love of nature and the will to leave the world better than they found it. Two thousand longleaf pine seedlings were planted once again. Little voyagers journeying into the future. Together, young and old planted a new legacy. The treasures they buried will one day stand sentry over new generations.

The work being done by Three Rivers Land Trust to restore longleaf to central NC and the Sandhills is made possible by donor support. Without the generosity of our donors, this tract would have likely been a subdivision or a parking lot. Instead, it is a patch of history, a badge of honor on the landscape, and a breath of hope for the future. This tract will provide peace and tranquility for future generations in perpetuity. Please remember the importance of conservation for the past, present, and future. Once land in North Carolina is lost to development, its natural resource benefit is largely gone forever. No amount of stewardship or volunteer work can get it back. So, if you have ever found peace among the trees, please give back to conservation. We can't do this without you.



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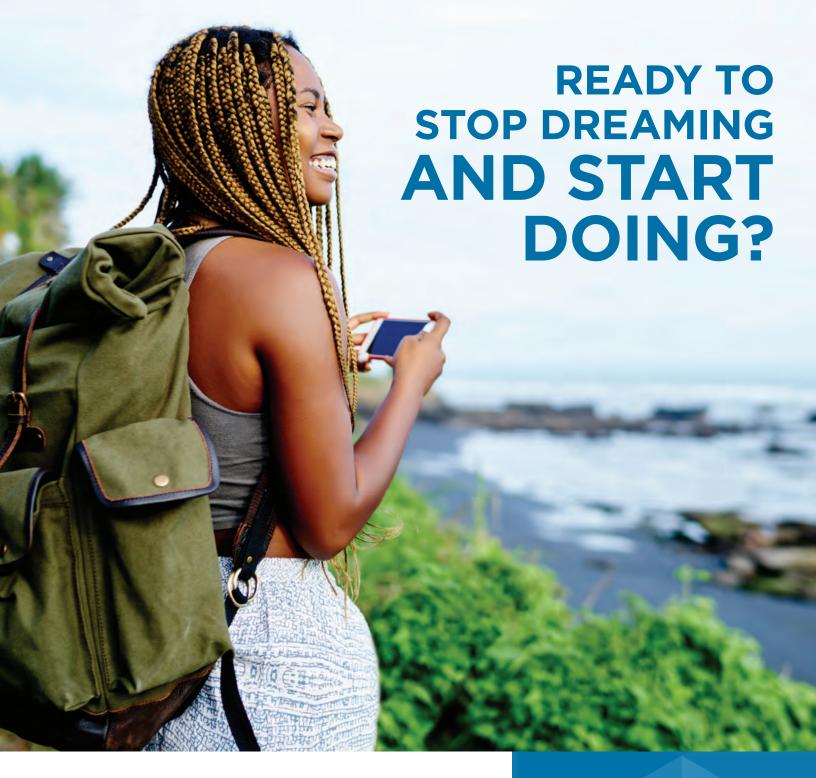
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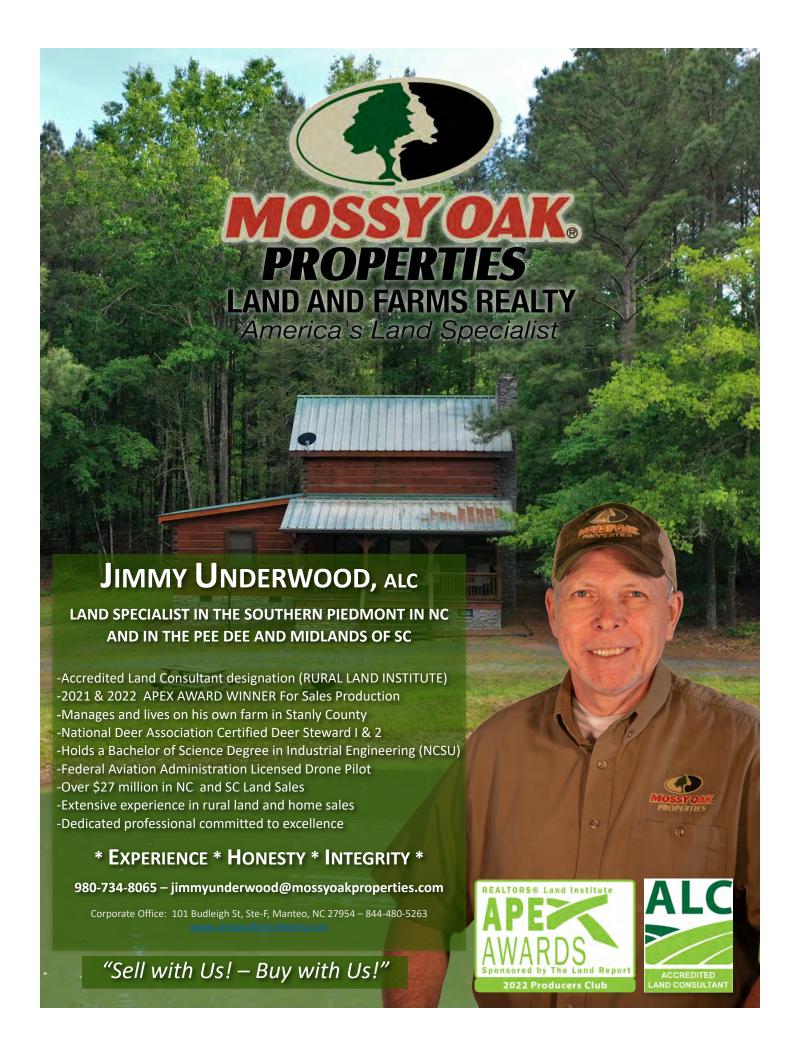


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