

SPRING 2024



LANDMARK

MAGAZINE

CONNECTING THE TRAIL

PAGE 30

for GENERATIONS TO COME

COVER STORY, PAGE 8

FOR BILL.

A FATHER'S LEGACY,
12 YEARS IN THE MAKING.

PAGE 22



CONNECTED TO THE LAND. COMMITTED TO CONSERVATION.

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THE *CONNECTION* BETWEEN *CONSERVATION* AND *CYCLING*



A Letter from TRLT President Mike Mabry

Three Rivers Land Trust (TRLT) is mission-focused on conserving the rural lands of our region. When I became more involved with TRLT almost 9 years ago, I quickly noticed a connection between my passion for cycling and the rural agricultural lands around Iredell and Rowan Counties. It dawned on me that the roads I enjoy cycling are the very same roads that have large farms, many of which have been permanently conserved by TRLT. These farms offer beautiful landscapes to cycle through, and the low traffic volume makes cyclists like me feel much safer.

Our tagline at TRLT is “Connected to the Land. Committed to Conservation.” While we are all connected to rural lands through the food on our tables and the clothes on our backs, is your favorite pastime also connected to conservation? I didn't realize how intertwined my passion for cycling was with local farms and TRLT's conservation work until I noticed “TRLT Permanently Conserved” signs popping up along my bike routes. I would like to ask you to consider what hobbies you may have that have a direct or indirect connection to conservation. Maybe, like me, your passion is cycling. Or maybe you're more into camping, photography, hiking, trail running, hunting, fishing, or paddling. The one thing all these activities have in common is that they're connected to our mission and work.

This spring and summer, as you're out enjoying your favorite pastime, I hope you'll take a moment to reflect on how many of your favorite hobbies are connected to conservation. When you do, I hope you'll consider generously supporting Three Rivers Land Trust and help us keep those hobbies and passions available and accessible. Join us so that you can be part of our efforts to expand public lands, save family farms, and protect local waters.

YELLOWSTONE

ON A LOCAL LEVEL

By Travis Morehead TRLT Executive Director

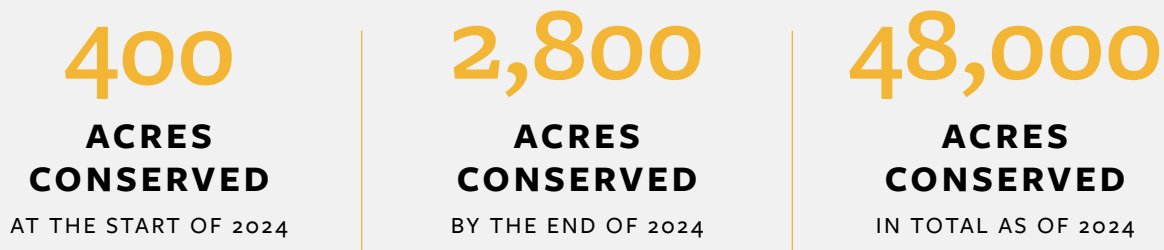
Many of you may have watched the television series Yellowstone, starring Kevin Costner. Costner plays John Dutton, the rugged cowboy family patriarch who is fighting to keep his Montana cattle ranch intact and undeveloped. Dutton's adversaries vary, but his most powerful opponent is a large private equity firm (Market Equities) that has deep pockets, political power, is "too big to fail," and represents large scale development interests. The fictional chairperson of the Market Equities board, Caroline Warner, has a line in an episode that perhaps captures their firm's position best: **"I cannot wait to pave this place over."**



This drama - while not exact - is all too familiar to Three Rivers Land Trust staff, landowners, and farmers across our region. With land prices continuing to rise and more people moving into North Carolina, landowners and farmers face the same dilemma as the fictional Dutton family: sell or stay the course. Local farmers rarely own all the land that they farm;

wells, septic tanks, and fescue lawns. That's why, when sold for development, agricultural lands are primarily converted to low density residential uses or single-family housing.

Like the Duttons, we face many challenges, but thanks to you, all is not lost. Your financial support of this organization represents the best



instead, they lease the additional land. As land prices continue to rise, many landowners are selling their traditional agricultural lands for development, leaving farmers out of luck. The American Farmland Trust considers North Carolina farmland to be the second most threatened farmland in the nation, and estimates that North Carolina could lose or compromise 1.1 million acres of agricultural lands by 2040.

The farm fields that dot our region have such great soils for agriculture. In fact, 59% of North Carolina's 8.4 million acres of agricultural soils are considered "nationally significant", meaning it takes 2-3 times as many marginal acres to produce the same crop yield as one acre on "nationally significant" soils. Unfortunately, those nationally significant soils are also great for developing residential homes with

hope of saving local family farms in the central Piedmont and Sandhills. In the first four months of 2024, we have permanently conserved over 400 acres of agricultural lands with another 2,800 acres set to be conserved by the end of 2024. Your generous support allows us to work with local landowners and farmers who share our vision of saving the family farms and farm communities, and, with them, the rural character of the Piedmont and Sandhills. With your support we can stay in the fight; the fight to conserve our important natural resources (soils), the fight to support North Carolina's number one industry (agriculture), the fight to save our rural character, and most importantly, the fight to save those family farms that make our region of North Carolina so special.

2023 CONSERVATION

Wrap Up

**In 2023, Three Rivers
Land Trust closed 16
land protection projects
totaling over 1200 acres.**

2023 was a great year with a strong finish, as we completed 6 of our 16 successful projects in just the last two weeks of the year. We'd like to highlight those projects and the diversity of conservation work completed in 2023.

We completed a remarkable number of transfers to local, state and federal government partners over the course of the year. The first project we closed was a 32-acre transfer to the Town of Spencer which added onto the Fred and Alice Stanback Educational Forest and Nature Preserve. This new addition features about two additional miles of trail for this park, which is an amazing resource for the local community. Near the end of the year we received a generous conservation easement donation on 41 acres along Abbotts Creek. Additionally, the landowner also donated the land to the City of Lexington for a future greenway.



8 ACRES CONSERVED

We transferred an 8-acre tract to the US Forest Service. This particular tract had a portion of the Wolf Den OHV (Off Highway Vehicle) trail located on it. Without this acquisition, part of the trail might have been cut off due to it remaining on private land. Now, thanks to our efforts, this trail is secured for all future users. This project was funded in part by the Yamaha Foundation.



92 ACRES CONSERVED

Two tracts were transferred to state agencies. A 92-acre property adjacent to Panther Branch, in Troy, NC, was transferred to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. This was the last remaining privately owned land along the entirety of Panther Branch, which is classified as an outstanding resource water and contains several species of rare mussels. The second property, 55 acres in Moore County, was transferred to the NC Plant Conservation Program. This tract expands the Eastwood Plant Conservation Preserve, known for rare plant species like the Sandhills lily.

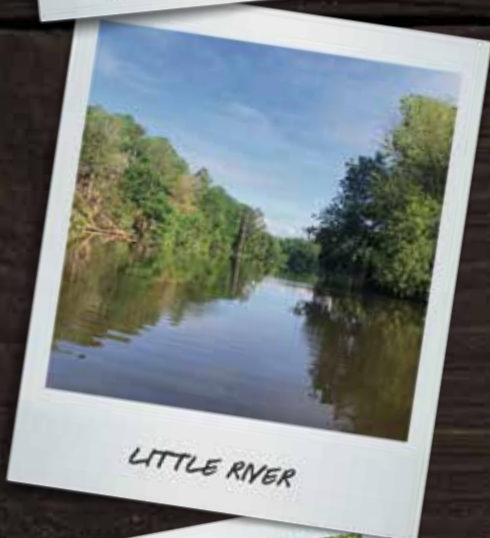


91 ACRES CONSERVED

We closed on a 91-acre military acquisition close to the northern boundary of Fort Liberty. By keeping that land undeveloped, the military is able to keep their important training operations near the base.



We had a number of farmland projects close this year, including the second phase of the Roberts Farm in Randolph County, a 105-acre conservation easement funded through the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation (NCADFP) Trust Fund. We closed four donated farmland easements, three in Rowan County and one in Iredell County, totaling over 250 acres. At the very end of the year, we protected a 121-acre farm in Davidson County through a purchased conservation easement funded by the NCADFP Trust Fund and the USDA Agricultural Lands Easement Program 9(LE).



We closed two projects along the Little River in Montgomery County, an 81-acre conservation easement and a 350-acre acquisition. Both of these projects were funded by the NC Land and Water Fund and the Enviva Forest Conservation Fund. One of these projects also received grant funds from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Altogether, this protects over 4 miles of river frontage on the Little River.



Another great acquisition was an addition to our complex of conservation lands where the Yadkin and South Yadkin Rivers come together, a 121-acre acquisition with quite a bit of frontage on the South Yadkin River. This brings the total acreage owned by TRLT at that location to over 1770 acres. This new tract was added to our Sportsman Access program and is available for SAP members to enter in for permit draw hunts on.

In all, it was a fantastic year for conservation. Thanks to all TRLT members for their support, and we look forward to another great year conserving special natural areas, rural landscapes, family farms, scenic rivers, and historic places in the central Piedmont and Sandhills of NC.

MEET OUR *NEW* TEAM MEMBERS



Sarah Paynter

SENIOR DEVELOPMENT
ASSOCIATE

Sarah joined the TRLT team in January of 2024. Born and raised on a small farm in eastern North Carolina, she appreciates the importance of saving and conserving family lands. She has over fifteen years' experience fundraising for nonprofits and higher education in our region. Sarah is a graduate of Pfeiffer University and enjoys gardening and spending time on the lake. Aside from volunteering with an animal rescue league in our community, she also serves on several planning committees in Mount Pleasant, where she lives.



Pierce Foster

COMMUNICATIONS
ASSOCIATE

Pierce joined the Three Rivers Land Trust team in February of 2024. He is a multi-disciplinary designer, writer, and filmmaker who loves collaborating and pushing ideas as far as they can go. Pierce has worked extensively in the food retail and textiles industries and has experience as a product stylist, videographer and art director. In his free time Pierce loves cooking, physical fitness, creative collaboration, outdoor exploration, and film. He loves getting his boots dirty and contributing his talents to a cause he truly believes in.



Alexis Rowe

DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE,
LOCAL BUSINESS

Alexis joined TRLT in March of 2024. She graduated from Appalachian State University with a Bachelor of Science in Biology, Ecology, and Environmental Biology. She comes to us with several years' experience working with native wildlife as a zookeeper as well as nonprofit fundraising. Alexis has a lifelong passion for the conservation of wildlife and their natural habitats. Alexis enjoys camping, hiking, kayaking, and growing her own food and flowers in her garden with her young daughter.

for
GENERATIONS
TO COME



For most farmers in North Carolina, farming is not just a living; it's a way of life.

On March 28, 2024, Tommy and Vickie Porter conserved 367 acres with a permanent conservation easement in cooperation with Three Rivers Land Trust, NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, and the USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. This 4th generation farm

is predominantly used to raise livestock. The family also operates a farm store where they sell the products grown on their land. Additionally, they have two large venues where they host weddings and other events. Four generations of Porters have lived on this land, and the generational component is one of the main reasons Tommy and Vicki decided to permanently conserve their property.

This decision has been a long time coming and means a lot to Tommy. "My wife and myself started thinking about conservation easements many years ago," he said, "and it has been our



dream to protect this land. It's always been a passion of mine to farm. We have three grown children, and ten grandchildren. Our three grown children and their spouses all work full-time on the farm. Our grandchildren - even though they range from age 18 months to 12 years old - they love the farm, they love the life here. We are trying to protect this so that if they choose to make their living on the farm, they will have that opportunity for their generation and hopefully their children and grandchildren."

"The rural landscapes of the Piedmont and Sandhills of North Carolina are becoming a haven for new development," said TRLT Executive Director Travis Morehead. "The rural character we all enjoyed is disappearing right before our very eyes. That is why saving family farms is a core tenet of TRLT. Helping families like the Porters realize their dream of seeing their farm conserved is one of the most important types of projects TRLT can accomplish. This farm will always be protected,

available for food production, and able to visually remind us of what much of North Carolina used to look like. We are proud to work with the Porter family to accomplish their conservation goals."

Conserving farms like this one offers wider benefits to the region. "With the proximity of this farm to both Concord and Charlotte, conserving this tract is not only a rewarding endeavor, but also a timely one, as this area is quickly being turned into subdivisions and housing developments," said TRLT Associate Director Crystal Cockman. "The Porters have additional lands they would like to conserve in the same manner. We are hopeful to be able to assist them and landowners like the Porters while large undeveloped tracts of land are still available."

This project was made possible by funding from the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, the USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, and the support of other TRLT members.



"My wife and myself started thinking about conservation easements many years ago, and it has been our dream to protect this land."



HUSTLE FOR THAT MUSSEL!



The Uwharrie Region may be a hidden gem among recreationists, but biologists cherish it for its high water quality and rare mussel species.

That's why Three Rivers Land Trust acted immediately to secure the last stretch of private land along Panther Branch. Just as urgently, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) agreed to take ownership of the site.

In October of 2023, 92 acres of land, in Montgomery County, were transferred to NCWRC. This unique tract of land contains 1,200 feet of frontage on Panther Branch and 2,500 feet of frontage on Barnes Creek, both of which are classified as outstanding resource waters - the highest quality classification the State of North Carolina awards to any stream.

The Panther Branch tract was originally purchased by TRLT from Jordan Lumber, in 2021, because of its ecological significance and location. With the transfer to NCWRC, the entire stream is now permanently conserved, protecting several species of rare mussels along with it.

"The conservation of this property has water quality, wildlife habitat and public access implications," said Crystal Cockman, Associate Director of TRLT. "Currently, loblolly pines cover most of the property, but soon the forest stand will be converted into a more natural forest type, most likely shortleaf pine, which will provide high habitat value to many wildlife species. We are excited to know this land, and its rare mussel species, will now be permanently conserved."

"The transfer of this tract combines two of our core tenets here at Three Rivers Land Trust,"

“The conservation of this property has water quality, wildlife habitat and public access implications”

said Travis Morehead, Executive Director of TRLT, “and those are expanding public lands and protecting local waters. We were excited for the opportunity to protect this tract and transfer it to the NCWRC to protect water quality and for the public’s use as game lands.”

A ribbon cutting celebration took place October 20th, 2023. Attendees enjoyed a 2-mile round-trip hike to the newly transferred property along the Uwharrie Trail.

This project was completed with funding from TRLT Members, Jack Horan, Fred and Alice Stanback, and the NC Land and Water Fund.



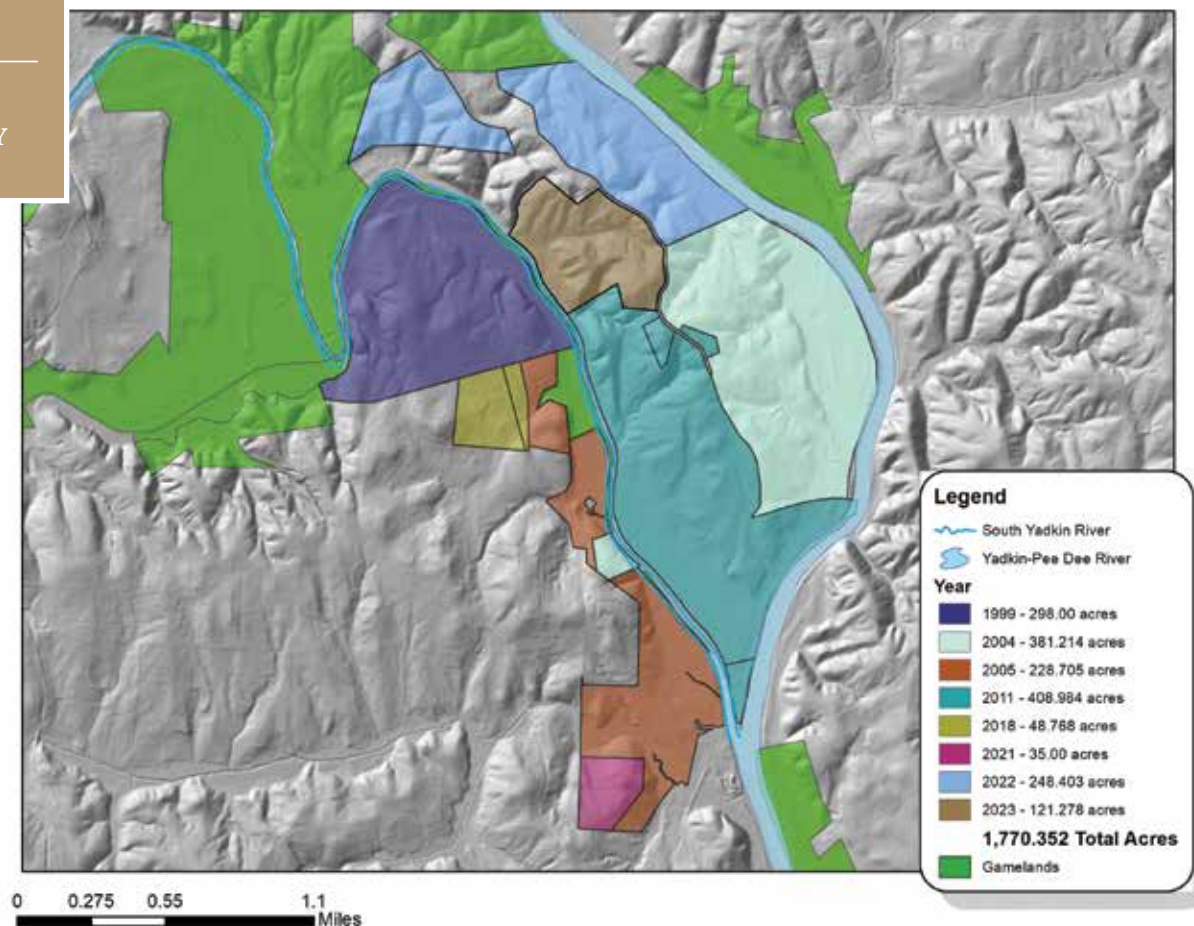
THE MIGHTY MUSSEL

Mussels are filter-feeding organisms; they eat by inhaling bacteria, algae and plankton into their gill-chambers and then exhaling filtered water back into the stream, helping improve water quality by ridding rivers of bacteria, detritus and other toxins. Because of their unique dining style, mussels are highly sensitive to a wide range of pollutants, such as ammonia, nitrates and heavy metals. So, when these mighty mussels stick around - especially in large numbers - it indicates high water quality.



121

ACRES

DAVIE
COUNTY

ON POINT.

Standing at the point of confluence of the Yadkin and South Yadkin Rivers in Davie County, one can envision the early indigenous people of central North Carolina spending time here.

Areas like this were vitally important for early civilizations and are just as important today. Three Rivers Land Trust knows the significance of this land for wildlife habitat and historical context, which is why TRLT has worked tirelessly since 1995 to conserve this peninsula.

Thanks to the exciting new acquisition of 121 acres, the total land owned by TRLT at the Point area now comes to 1,770 acres. Additionally,

the 2,463 acres comprising the Yadkin River Gamelands were acquired by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission in partnership with TRLT. All combined, the total conserved acreage in this corridor comes to over 4,100 acres.

property so close to Winston Salem and the rapidly developing areas surrounding it with the same acreage and quality of wildlife habitat as the Point Property,” she said. “An abundance of deer, turkey, songbirds, pollinators, and other species call this area home. Due to the patchwork of vegetation types found here, and



This newly acquired property boasts over 2,000 feet of frontage on the South Yadkin River, a waterway currently listed as impaired on the 303d list. Protecting local waters such as these is a core component of TRLT’s mission.

“Protecting water quality along this stream is a high priority for us,” said TRLT Executive Director Travis Morehead. “The forested stream corridors on this new acquisition, along with the other lands owned by TRLT, provide important buffers that help promote and improve water quality for this area. Just downstream of this property is the water intake for the City of Salisbury,” he added, “so protecting water quality here helps provide clean drinking water for local residents.” Katie Stovall, TRLT Conservation Lands Manager, knows better than most just how significant this land is. “There is no other

the management work TRLT is doing, this is truly a unique location for wildlife.”

TRLT strives to keep this area as close as possible to the land central NC's earliest residents would have recognized.

The acquisition of this key parcel helps us honor its history, conserve its wildlife, and protect its waters.

This project was completed thanks to support from Fred and Alice Stanback and additional TRLT donors. Three Rivers Land Trust works with private landowners to protect conservation properties like this one in the Piedmont and Sandhills of NC.

A TALE OF

Just off Highway 150 in the Cleveland area of Rowan County, one family's 93-acre tract of land illustrates a sharp division between two ways of life. On one end, agriculture. On the other, new home construction.

As if to highlight this contrast, the tract's expansive soybean field serves as a jarringly picturesque backdrop to a new housing subdivision immediately adjacent. This dichotomy of uses is just one example of the impact of growth North Carolina is experiencing as the nation's ninth fastest-growing state.

Fortunately, the family who owns this tract decided to maintain their region and keep farming alive by electing to place their land in a conservation easement. The property was placed under a permanent conservation easement in a partnership with Three Rivers Land Trust. With this tool, the family can continue owning and leasing the land for farming while prohibiting it from being developed.



TWO WORLDS

"NC agriculture and farmers rely on the ability to lease land for farming," said Travis Morehead, TRLT Executive Director. "Very few farmers own all of the land they farm, making farm leases essential in keeping NC agriculture and farmers in business."

"Saving family farms is a core tenet of TRLT and exemplifies who we are as an organization," said Crystal Cockman, Associate Director of Three Rivers Land Trust. "We have a deep appreciation for our local farmers and an understanding of the development pressure NC agricultural lands are facing. This conservation easement ensures that this scenic piece of

Rowan County will remain a local example of North Carolina's strong agricultural industry."

This family chose to protect this land in honor of their ancestors, Edgar Lipe Baker and Marie Krider Baker, who left it to their care and stewardship. Their dedication underscores the importance of community and conservation working hand-in-hand to protect the natural beauty and important agricultural lands that define our region.

CONSERVED

121
ACRES

DAVIDSON
COUNTY



THE HEDRICK LEGACY

Three Rivers Land Trust protected its seventh farm of the year on December 29th, 2023. This 121-acre cattle farm in Davidson County brings the total farmland protected by Three Rivers in 2023 to over 570 acres.

Davidson County and the Town of Lexington are swiftly developing areas of the state, making projects like this crucial for sustaining the rural economy and providing food to local communities. The farm has over 81% prime or statewide important soils, which are between two and three times more productive than marginal soils.



“We are so thankful for families like the Hedricks, who are committed to ensuring that farmland remains undeveloped and stays in production.”

Landowners Stanley and Donna Hedrick recognized the importance of protecting their farm, leading them to work with TRLT to ensure it remains farmland forever. This property has been in the Hedrick Family for over 65 years, originally purchased by Stanley’s father. “We are protecting this land in memory of Dwight and Beulah Hedrick Sr., and to ensure it stays as farmland for the next generation of Hedricks,” said Stanley and Donna Hedrick.

“We are so thankful for families like the Hedricks who are committed to ensuring that farmland remains undeveloped and stays in production,” said Senior Land Protection Specialist Emily Callicutt. “Thanks to partnerships with the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Lands Easement Program, and

landowners like the Hedrick’s, we can ensure family farms stay family farms.”

TRLT Executive Director Travis Morehead added, “Saving family farms is a core tenet of our mission. North Carolina farmland is some of the most threatened in our nation. The loss of farmland at the current level is unsustainable for our state, and makes projects like the protection of the Hedrick Farm that much more important.”

This project was made possible in part by grant funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the N.C. Department of Agriculture through the Agricultural Lands Easement Program, and the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund. Special funding for TRLT’s Farmland Fund were provided by Chick-Fil-A, SC Johnson Company, and Louis Eubanks.

CONSERVED

59
ACRES

ROWAN
COUNTY



UNCOMPROMISED

North Carolina is losing farmland at an unprecedented rate.

According to the American Farmland Trust, between the years of 2001 and 2016, 732,000 acres of farmland in North Carolina were developed or compromised. That means that NC lost or compromised 5.5 acres of farmland every hour for 15 years. If we continue to grow as we have historically, it's projected NC will lose another 1.1 million acres of farmland by 2040. Rowan County and surrounding counties are facing this development pressure, and that is why it is so important to conserve land here before it is too late.



Protecting family farms is one of the pillars of the Three Rivers Land Trust mission. In 2023, they protected a 93-acre farm and a 50-acre farm in Rowan County. One farm which grew small grains and was leased for farming, and the other was a horse farm that provided equestrian therapy for the local community. On December 20, 2023, TRLT worked with additional Rowan County landowners to conserve their beautiful 59-acre beef cattle farm located on Chenault Road.

"This farm was protected through a generous donated conservation easement by the landowner," said Senior Land Protection Specialist Emily Callicutt, "and they also lease this farmland for beef cattle farming to a neighboring farmer. Leased land is important," she explained, "because many farmers cannot afford to own all the land they farm. Much of Rowan County is facing development pressure from Charlotte and Mooresville, and with that

comes higher land prices. Protecting places like this farm is vitally important to ensuring our farmers continue to have acres to grow on and to make their business sustainable and viable well into the future."

TRLT Executive Director Travis Morehead is serious about keeping the protection of family farms a central goal of TRLT's conservation mission. "Protecting tracts like this 59-acre one helps ensure that we have the foresight to set aside land that will continue to be in production and provide food and fiber for our local communities. We believe that conserving our farms is essential to maintaining the rural character of our region."

This project was made possible by a generous conservation easement donation by the landowners, and also by the support of Three Rivers Land Trust's members who enable the organization to carry out this important conservation work.

For Bill.



For the Harris Family, conserving their 55-acre longleaf pine forest in Moore County is a legacy years in the making.

Family patriarch William Joseph “Bill” Harris first began talking with the North Carolina Plant Conservation Program (NCPCP) over 12 years ago. He met with then Program Director, Lesley Starke, and discussed his desire to see the property included in the preserve.

Mr. Harris knew how important this tract was for the continuity of the preserve. Because it connects two disjunct parcels, its acquisition would be the critical link needed to help NCPCP better manage the whole preserve with prescribed fire. Prescribed fire is an essential tool for land managers to help restore the fire dependent ecosystem and improve habitat for rare plants, including the Sandhills Lily.

Although Mr. Harris passed away shortly after the application was submitted to NCLWF, his three intrepid daughters stepped up and partnered with Three Rivers Land Trust to help realize their father’s dream of seeing his property protected. In the spring of 2023, full funding was awarded by the NC Land and Water Fund for the acquisition of the tract. The tract was acquired by TRLT and immediately transferred to the State of North Carolina in December 2023.

Crystal Cockman, TRLT Associate Director, was intimately involved with the process and the people who made it possible. “The Harris family has been an absolute pleasure to work with,” she said, “and their commitment to their father’s dream has been truly inspirational. The conservation of this property is due in large part to their patience, vision, and steadfast determination to honor their father’s wishes.”

"Conserving this property helps TRLT accomplish two things," said TRLT Executive Director Travis Morehead, "expand public lands by filling in an important missing link, and protect lands that likely has rare species found on them." He added, "Although NCCP preserves are not open to the public, they are open through guided hikes and by permit. This allows the public to see up close the rare plants and habitats that help make North Carolina such a special place."



Julian Wilson, who manages the Plant Conservation Program, said, "The North Carolina Plant Conservation Program is very thankful to Three Rivers Land Trust for their work to acquire and donate the Harris Tract for permanent protection at our Eastwood Plant Conservation Preserve in Moore County. The acquisition of the Harris Tract will help to improve habitat connectivity by linking the two sides of Eastwood Preserve, and it will allow us to more efficiently and effectively manage the rare plants such as Sandhills lilies and sundews, the longleaf ecosystem and the wildlife habitat contained within the preserve." She added, "As our state toast proclaims us the 'land of the longleaf pine', this ecosystem is part of what make North Carolina's natural areas so unique and special. This project is an important win for the conservation of North Carolina's rare plants and natural resources."



SANDHILLS LILY

Lilium pyrophilum

This endangered liliium species blooms from mid-July to late August in highly selective habitats, preferring open seepage areas such as streamhead pocosins. Standing 3-5" tall, its glossy green stems are topped with 5-7 large, pendant flowers with recurved "Turks hat" petals. The petals range in color from garnet to reddish-orange, speckled with dark brown or magenta spots. They attract ruby-throated hummingbirds and butterflies.

The "Sandhills Lily" is named after its limited geographical range, consisting of only 15 counties. The plant is rare, with under 1,000 known individuals in the state. It's also new, having only been described in 2002.

The word "pyro" is in "pyrophilum" because the lilies grow in areas that are in the process of regenerating following a fire. This is why prescribed fire is so essential to keeping its habitat open and sunny enough to thrive.



CONSERVED

350
ACRES

3.5
MILES OF
FRONTAGE

MONTGOMERY
COUNTY

Little TREASURE

The Little River in Montgomery County is a hidden gem.

Multiple stretches of this river are available to paddlers, each beaming with gorgeous forested stream buffers and virtually free of houses and development. However, much of this treasured river remains privately held with no formal protections in place to ensure it remains undeveloped. Now, thanks to an acquisition made by Three Rivers Land Trust, an additional 350 acres of land along Little River will be permanently conserved.

Bald eagles, river otters, great blue herons, little green herons, beaver, cormorant, white-tailed deer, a plethora of Neotropical migratory songbirds, and many other species make their homes on the Little River. The high water quality found here and the forested riparian areas

make it a perfect spot for wildlife and paddlers alike. Several river put-in locations are open to the public, making this river easily accessible, and a popular spot for kayaking and fishing in the Piedmont.

"Three Rivers Land Trust has a focus on protecting local waters," said TRLT Executive Director Travis Morehead, "and the Little River in Montgomery County is no exception to that rule. Last year we acquired 90 acres on the river, and earlier this year we worked with another landowner to conserve 80 acres through a conservation easement. Now we've acquired an additional 350 acres, ensuring that these sections of the river remain undeveloped and forested to protect water quality. Altogether, this represents over 3.5 miles of frontage on the river that is now permanently conserved as a direct result of TRLT's efforts."



"These lands are truly a treasure worth conserving in our region."

TRLT Associate Director Crystal Cockman knows how priceless the Little River is to the rich diversity of species who call it home. "This section of the Little River where these 350 acres occur is identified as a High Quality Watershed by the State of North Carolina," she said, "with six different species of rare mussel, as well as Carolina redhorse and Carolina darter, two state listed fish species. In addition, there are unique natural communities found on this land, including Piedmont Basic Glade and Piedmont Coastal Plain Heath Bluff, as well as a rare plant, Mountain Camelia. These lands are truly a treasure worth conserving in our region."

This acquisition was made possible through a generous donation by Fred and Alice Stanback, and grants from the NC Land and Water Fund, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Enviva Forest Conservation Fund.

The Little Residents *of* Little River



BALD EAGLE



RIVER OTTER



BEAVER



**WHITE-TAILED
DEER**



**GREAT BLUE
HERON**



CORMORANT



**LITTLE GREEN
HERON**



**CAROLINA
RACER**



**CAROLINA
DARTER**



**CAROLINA
REDHORSE**

CONSERVED

50
ACRES

ROWAN
COUNTY



A SPECIAL PLACE

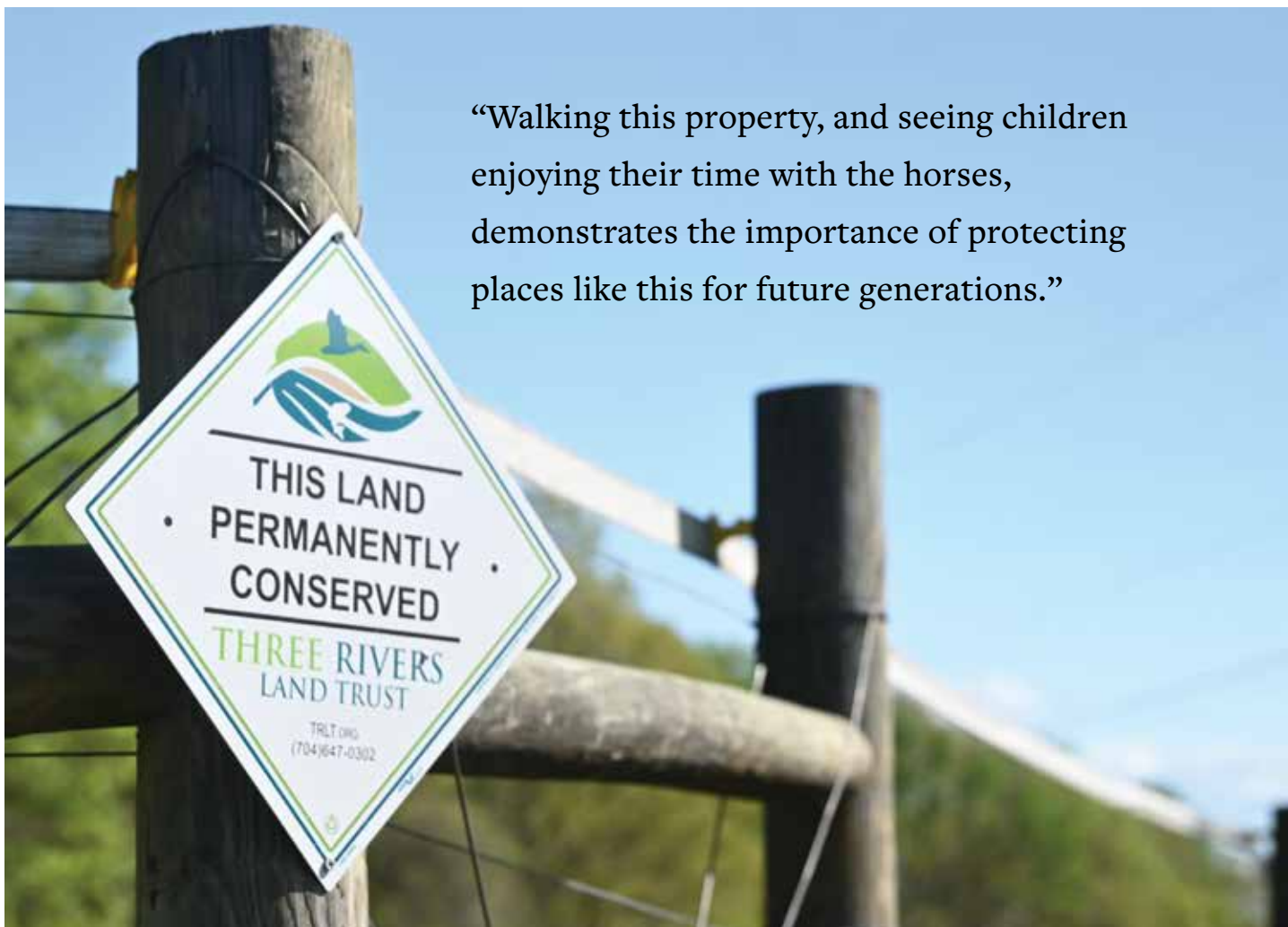
Conservation properties provide many unique benefits to the environment and to communities.

Three Rivers Land Trust has focused on three main aspects of conservation: expanding public lands, saving family farms, and protecting local waters. However, their recent conservation of a beautiful 50-acre horse farm in Rowan County has added a fourth, unexpected community benefit to the mix—equine therapy.

Equine-assisted therapies are programs where professionals guide clients through therapeutic activities with horses. There are different kinds of equine programs with different goals. Some programs are part of a mental health treatment, and others allow clients to ride horses as part of a physical or occupational therapy regimen. Palmie and Jim Freeze, who own this special farm, wanted to permanently protect it for the animals and people who benefit from all it has to offer.



“Walking this property, and seeing children enjoying their time with the horses, demonstrates the importance of protecting places like this for future generations.”



“Three Rivers Land Trust prides itself on conserving local family farms,” said Executive Director Travis Morehead, “and this project does just that, along with providing a special service to the local community. So much land in western Rowan County is being developed, and working with great landowners who have the foresight to protect farmland through donated conservation easements is a core tenet of what we do here at TRLT.”

“Walking this property, and seeing children enjoying their time with the horses, demonstrates the importance of protecting places like this for future generations,” said Senior Land Protection Specialist Emily Callicutt. “Three Rivers Land Trust appreciates the dedication of these landowners to give back to their community, and their desire to conserve their special place so it will always be available for this use.”

This project was made possible through the generous donated conservation easement by the landowners, and the support of Three Rivers Land Trust’s work by its members.



CONSERVED

99
ACRES

RANDOLPH
COUNTY

Connecting **THE TRAIL**



Although some people see a forest as wilderness, the definition of federal wilderness is specific. The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines it as, “An area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

The Act’s purpose is to preserve and protect natural ecosystems and wild areas while providing opportunities for solitude and retrospective or primitive recreation. Wilderness areas are valuable for their historical, scientific, educational, geologic, and ecological benefits. They help the environment, the economy, and all those who spend time immersed therein.

The Uwharrie Trail (or Birkhead Mountain Trail) goes through our very own Birkhead Wilderness Area in Randolph County, providing hikers the ability to traverse a long stretch of forested area with beautiful rock outcrops and scenic views from the ridgelines. However, a portion of this section of the trail was on private land that risked being closed off to the public forever. That is, until Three Rivers Land Trust acquired the property in March of 2019. By January 2024, the property was officially transferred to the Uwharrie National Forest, securing this section of trail for all future hikers.

The 99-acre property is located along the Uwharrie Trail, approximately 1 mile from the Tot Hill Trailhead on Tot Hill Farm Road. It is surrounded on three sides by United States Forest Service land, two sides of which are

designated a Wilderness Area. Beautiful Talbott’s Branch bisects the property, which has rolling topography and possesses the peak of Cooler’s Knob at approximately 940 feet in elevation. This scenic property is mostly mature hardwood forest, housing the natural communities of Piedmont Alluvial Forest, Piedmont Monadnock Forest, Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest, and Dry Oak-Hickory Forest. “The Board of Directors, staff, and more importantly, our members, are excited to see



the transfer of this property to the Uwharrie National Forest,” said Executive Director Travis Morehead. “Our organization prides itself on expanding public lands and has spent the last two decades working to reconnect the historic Uwharrie Trail, so we are extremely excited to see this inholding added to the national forest. We are now only a half-mile section away from having the entire 40-mile trail reconnected.”



THE CELEBRATION

On March 22, Three Rivers Land Trust and the United States Forest Service held a ribbon cutting for the transfer of a 99-acre tract that is now part of the Uwharrie National Forest.

Approximately 20 people joined in for the celebration at the Tot Hill Trailhead, the northern terminus of the Uwharrie Trail. Since 1995, Three Rivers Land Trust has been working with other conservation partners to fill gaps in the Uwharrie National Recreational Trail. When they began this work, the trail had 5 gaps where lands were owned privately and sections of the trail had been lost.

Now, thanks to TRLT's efforts, 4 out of 5 of those gaps have been filled, with this most recent acquisition and transfer filling the fourth gap in its entirety.

Supporters heard from Travis Morehead, Executive Director of Three Rivers Land Trust, at the ribbon cutting: "Three Rivers Land Trust prides itself on our ability to transfer strategic lands to public agencies, and the connection of this land and this trail does just that. This project was funded through the federal Land



TRLT Executive Director Travis Morehead addresses the attendees.

“We are now only a half-mile section away from having the entire 40-mile trail reconnected.”

and Water Conservation Fund, and TRLT supporters, including a generous donation by Fred and Alice Stanback. We are so grateful this section of trail is now permanently protected and available for all to enjoy.”

Susan Miller the district Ranger on the Uwharrie National Forest also spoke about the significance of this tract for the trail and the importance of the partnership the US Forest Service has with Three Rivers Land Trust. “We cannot act quickly enough to secure tracts like this one, and are fortunate to have partners like Three Rivers Land Trust who can work with local landowners to secure these tracts and then transfer them to our ownership.”



CONSERVED

172

ACRES

1.8

MILES OF
FRONTAGE

78

ACRES OF
WETLANDS

MOORE
COUNTY

WELCOME TO THE

WETLANDS

DID YOU KNOW?
40% of the world's
species live and
breed in wetlands

Wetlands play an integral role in the ecology of any watershed. The combination of shallow water and high levels of nutrients is ideal for the development of microscopic organisms that form the base of the food web and feed a variety species of insects, amphibians, and fish. Many species of birds and mammals rely on wetlands for food, water and shelter, especially during migration and breeding.

Because of the significance of wetlands, Three Rivers Land Trust is proud to announce the permanent protection of 172 acres in Moore County that possesses over 78 acres of designated wetlands along McLendons Creek in northern Moore County. The wetlands on this tract are so significant that TRLT secured a very competitive national grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Grant, to place a permanent conservation easement on this property.

"One of our three core tenets at TRLT is to protect local waters," said TRLT Associate Director Crystal Cockman. "By conserving this large wetland we are providing an invaluable home to native wildlife all while helping to protect the water quality of our region's rivers and streams." She went on to explain the land's unique characteristics that make this acquisition so special. "This property possesses over 10,000 feet of stream frontage on McLendons Creek and its tributaries. The stretch of McLendons Creek adjacent to this property is located within the 'Deep River below High Falls Aquatic Habitat,' an 'exceptional Natural Area as designated by The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program."



"The conservation of this property would not have been possible without our partners at the North Carolina State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation," said Executive Director Travis Morehead. "Their partner contribution helped us secure a NAWCA grant to purchase the land. Without the support of partner organizations like NWTF and TRLT members, we would not be able to complete great conservation projects like this one."

Although Three Rivers Land Trust purchased this land in December of 2022, the majority of the funds to permanently protect this property were awarded through a North Carolina Land and Water Fund grant, which requires TRLT to place a perpetual conservation easement on the property to protect the forest and water quality of the tract. That conservation easement was placed on the property on February 21, 2024, completing the project.

This project was made possible by funding from the North Carolina State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, the NC Land and Water Fund, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the support of other TRLT members.



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BURNING



Prescribed fire is a tool that many wildlife managers use to improve habitat quality for various wildlife species. Prescribed burning has differential effects depending on how it is implemented. Fire managers often use prescribed burns to alter the distribution and availability of food and cover resources to benefit a particular wildlife species or a suite of wildlife species.



TO BURN?

By **Katie Stovall** Conservation Land Manager

On the most basic level, land managers craft burning regimes to increase and improve food and cover resources for focal wildlife species. If you are only burning because you have heard that “burning is good,” you are likely not maximizing the potential of your burns or your satisfaction with the results. You will receive a suite of answers if you ask any burn manager what they believe the most important parameter for prescribed burning is. I would wager that weather parameters like wind direction, wind speed, relative humidity, or soil moisture would be at the top of many lists. The parameter that is most important to me when conducting a burn is the landowner’s objectives.

Understanding a landowner’s goals, the desired effects, and their focal wildlife species are critical to successfully implementing a burn. The aforementioned statement becomes even more true when you realize there are winners and losers to every habitat management decision. There is simply no way to improve the habitat quality for every species on the landscape because each wildlife species has a specific set of habitat requirements.

The greatest effects of burning can be realized by evaluating the plant community and subsequently altering fire regimes to meet the desired results. Manipulating how and when a burn is conducted can result in drastically different effects. The frequency, intensity, and timing of prescribed fires can be altered to meet specific objectives.

FREQUENCY

Fire frequency is the number of times that a burn occurs within a defined area. Generally speaking, frequent fires occur once every 1-3 years, whereas infrequent fires occur once every 5-10 years.

Frequent prescribed burns are often less intense than infrequent burns because frequent fires reduce fuel loading. Prescribed burns that occur once every 1–3 years result in greater coverage of forbs, grasses, and legumes. Infrequent fires will favor woody plants, soft mast, and vegetation cover that can be coined “shrubby” or “a thicket.”



This forest has experienced infrequent fire (4+ year return interval), thus it is dominated by woody species.



This pine oak woodland is managed with frequent fires (1 to 2-year return interval). The frequent fire, coupled with additional management practices, allows this area to be dominated by a lush understory of forbs and grasses.

INTENSITY

Fire intensity is the amount of heat released during a fire event. Low-intensity fires may only remove the leaf litter and have a limited effect on controlling woody encroachment. Generally speaking, the hotter the fire, the more likely it is to kill or injure woody species. However, it is important to consider the species of trees within the burn unit. Thick-barked tree species, like shortleaf pine and oaks, are less susceptible to fire compared to thinner-barked species like yellow-poplar or American beech. Low-intensity burns may result in a patchy mosaic of burned and unburned areas. Unburned patches can serve as an important refuge for slow-moving animals like eastern box turtles or timber rattlesnakes. Low-intensity burns often do not consume large, coarse woody debris, which is an important refuge for reptiles and amphibians.

High-intensity fires are more likely to kill trees. High-intensity fires can be used when an objective is to remove woody species to increase the coverage of forbs and grasses. It may be advantageous to use a high-intensity burn followed by routine low-intensity burns if woodpeckers are a management objective. An initial high-intensity burn can create snags that provide important structure for woodpeckers. The area can subsequently be maintained by low-intensity fires to avoid consuming the standing dead snags.

TIMING

The time of year at which a burn is conducted can contribute to differential plant composition results. Prescribed fire practitioners often group the timing of fire into four categories: dormant



HOT FACT

Historically, prescribed fire was used by Native Americans to return nutrients to the soil in their crop fields, make the landscape easier to traverse, and hunt game. Prescribed fire does an excellent job of reducing fuel loading, reducing ground coverage of leaf litter, and allowing sunlight to penetrate the soil. In the near months after a prescribed fire, new growth of herbaceous plants will thrive, providing a lush understory for many species of wildlife.



Prescribed fire can create snags. Woodpeckers like the red-headed woodpecker may excavate cavities, store food, forage, and roost within snags. Larger snags that have lost their bark have a smooth surface that can deter common predators like snakes.



This photo demonstrates a low-intensity burn that did not consume coarse woody debris. This woody debris can provide important structure for basking fence lizards and refuge for amphibians.

season (Nov–Mar), early growing season (Apr–May), summer (Jun–Aug), and late growing season (Sept–Oct). Burning during the dormant season or early growing season generally maintains the current plant composition, whereas burning during the late growing season may be used to reduce the woody component and encourage a greater forb response.

Aside from the indirect vegetation effects of prescribed burning, it is important to understand the direct effects in regards to the mortality of species of interest. For example, the time of year a burn is conducted can be altered to avoid compromising turkey nests or disturbing maternal bat colonies.

IS FIRE A MAGIC BULLET FOR PREMIER WILDLIFE HABITAT?

No! Prescribed fire is one tool within a wildlife manager's tool belt. Occasionally, fire may be the only tool that is needed. Other times, prescribed fire may need to be used in concert with other management prescriptions.

For example, a field riddled with sericea lespedeza is pictured on the next page. Fire alone will not fix this problem. This scenario is also true for many other non-native and invasive plants. Additional management techniques are required to transform areas dominated by non-native plants into productive plant communities.

Similarly, the amount of tree canopy cover must be considered in balancing expectations.

A common goal for many landowners when considering a prescribed burn is to increase herbaceous plant coverage for food and cover resources. However, prescribed burning within a closed canopy forest may only remove the forest leaf litter. Canopy manipulation should be used to allow at least 20% sunlight to reach the forest floor to stimulate herbaceous groundcover.

SMOLDERING LAST-MINUTE THOUGHTS

There is not a cookbook recipe to meet land management goals. Proper stewardship of land requires frequent assessments and dynamic management.



A field riddled with sericea lespedeza. Prescribed fire alone will not fix this issue. Additional habitat management techniques, such as herbicide application, will be required to control this non-native, invasive plant.



These photos demonstrate the importance of canopy manipulation in regards to herbaceous ground cover response. Left: increased canopy cover doesn't allow sunlight to reach the ground. Right: forest stand improvement techniques have allowed enough sunlight penetration to elicit an herbaceous plant response.



A turkey nest that was impacted by a prescribed fire is pictured above. Nest disruption can be avoided by burning during the dormant season or during the late growing season.



Three Rivers Land Trust has conducted prescribed burns totaling 1,328 acres during 2023 and 2024. These burns will enhance wildlife habitat and help perpetuate fire-dependent species.

The objectives of these controlled burns were to control woody encroachment, reduce fuel loading, return nutrients to the soil, and promote wildlife and plant species diversity.

Your financial support allows us to accomplish these goals. Consider donating to increase our impact across our region. Email katie@trlt.org with any questions.



SCAN HERE to contact
Katie Stovall at katie@trlt.org
about land management needs.



SCAN HERE to donate to TRLT
and support our efforts to
enhance wildlife habitat.









HARDAWAY

By Crystal Cockman
Associate Director

Revisited

I recently crossed off a significant bucket list item - visiting the Hardaway Site in Stanly County.

The Hardaway trip was on January 20th and organized by Three Rivers Land Trust as a unique opportunity to visit this significant Native American archaeological site.

The Hardaway Site is located just outside of the town of Badin above the Yadkin River. The site name comes from the Hardaway Construction Company that built the dam here, which forms Badin Lake. The site was first identified as a significant archaeological site by Herbert M. Doershuk, an electrical engineer with the Carolina Aluminum Company. He showed the

site to Joffre Coe in 1937. It became one of three sites (the other two being the Doerschuk Site in Montgomery County and Lowder's Ferry) that allowed Coe to describe in chronological order the prehistoric site occupations from about 10,000 to 2,500 years ago.

The event started at the Badin Inn with a lecture by Dr. Randy Daniel, Jr., a professor of anthropology at East Carolina University. He talked about the history of the site and its significance, along with his own doctoral research. Then participants were taken by rented vans to the actual site where the excavations occurred back in the 40s and 50s, and then again in the 1970s. A friend of Dr. Daniel was at the event and there was a picture



of that friend participating in the excavations in the 1970s in the slideshow he presented. The site itself is on land that was recently transferred from the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) to the state of North Carolina as a new addition to Morrow Mountain State Park. However, it is not open to the public and there are signs around the site that say “Protected Area” and prohibit digging, excavating, disturbing the ground, or removing any material from the site. We passed through two locked gates to get there, guided by Morrow Mountain Superintendent Jeff Davidson.

Once there, the site looks like a prominent point on Badin Lake with grassy, open understory, hardwood forests. I imagine it looked much different when the excavations were going on, so much so that Dr. Daniel and his friend couldn’t pinpoint the exact spot where excavations took place. But the whole area was not too large so we were likely on the spot or very close. You could easily see how this point was likely a good place for early Native peoples to gather, where they could see for a distance



* Artifact given to TRLT by donor, not found at the Hardaway Site.

and near the lake where they could fish. It is a convenient location to Morrow Mountain which was known to have high quality rhyolite used for making projectile points.

It was an awesome experience to be in that spot where so many people have been known to have also visited, as far back as 10,000 years ago. I really enjoyed the ability to visit the site and get a tour with some of the folks who have studied the location extensively.

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H.E.L.P. NEEDED

With private lands accounting for over 95% of the region, the Habitat Enhancement Lands Program is a critical component in conserving our region's biodiverse resources. The responsibility of wildlife and forest management cannot be left only to state or federal agencies. Private lands in North Carolina account for the majority of the acreage, which in turn, are left holding the majority of wildlife species. If we truly want to improve populations of declining wildlife species, that work has to also occur on private lands.

Program assistance includes the professionally-trained staff crafting customized forest management plans, assistance with reforestation and planting of trees, pollinator habitat improvement, or deer and turkey wildlife management plans. The program provides access to highly qualified natural resource professionals who are trained in wildlife and forest management to assist landowners wherever needed. The intent of the H.E.L.P program is to improve wildlife habitat and forest health by promoting stewardship of forests and wildlife within local communities.



Scan here to contact Katie Stovall at katie@trlt.org if you have areas on your property that you would like to enhance.

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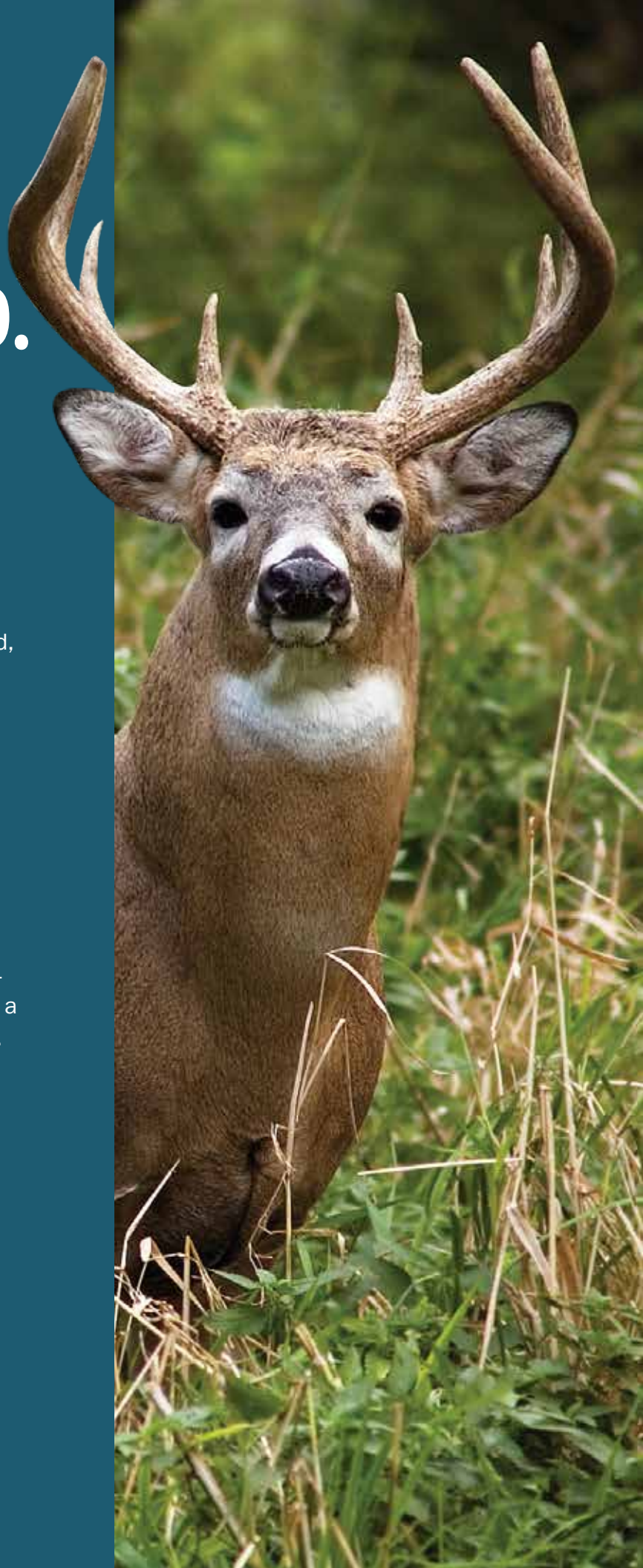
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LONG LIVE *the* LONGLEAF

By Davis Grubb
Three Rivers Land Trust Volunteer

On Monday, March 18th, Three Rivers Land Trust planted 2,000 longleaf pine seedlings on their Cotton Creek Preserve, also known as the Saunders property. The tract consists of 30-acres of grassland sprinkled with the towering pillars of old longleaf pines. Several weeks before the planting, a controlled burn had been conducted, clearing out many smaller patches of grass and brambles and scorching the trunks of the lofty pines (but not causing any permanent distress to them).



Roughly 30 people attended, including TRLT staff, members of The Longleaf Alliance (TLA), Appalachian Mountain Brewery (AMB), and volunteers who had driven out to the tract located outside the little town of Star, which borders the Uwharrie National Forest. The volunteers were of all ages, from the elderly to children not yet five. The seedlings had been purchased through the support of AMB and TLA, and had come in six cardboard boxes. They were small, about 4 inches of budding pine and 4 inches of clumped root and soil. We set out to cover the tract with the

seedlings, each carrying a bag full of roughly 50 and carrying either a shovel or dibble bar. They took to the tract and began planting, taking care that the tops of the seedlings poked out of the ground and that each seedling was planted at least 10 feet apart. The event lasted two hours, and by the end, each of the 2,000 seedlings had found a new home in the ground.

Longleaf pines are highly fire-resistant; in fact, they *require* fire for their survival. Fires can clear out less resilient trees and many harmful shrubs that impede longleaf pine growth, making it essential to conduct controlled burns on areas where longleaf pines are planted. TRLT had conducted such a burn weeks before, in preparation for the planting.



Why were we planting longleaf pines when there are hundreds of other native tree species we could plant? The answer is that 300 years ago, North Carolina was a very different looking place. There were still large swaths of old growth forest with the dominant tree species being the longleaf pine. The pine trees were the foundation of many southeastern forest ecosystems, but with the expansion of European colonists came mass logging, suppression of regenerative wildfires, and clearing land for agriculture. By the early 1900s, the longleaf pine had all but disappeared from the American landscape, only surviving in small pockets across the southeast.

Restoration of longleaf pines and longleaf forests is essential for the conservation of biodiversity and environmental health in North Carolina. Plantings like the one we conducted at this tract helps this once disappearing species to rebound. Hopefully, through the efforts of conservation groups and unique partnerships like the one between TRLT, TLA, and AMB, we'll see longleaf pine forests expand out and return to Americas' Southeast.



THE ONE THAT *Got Away*

By Jeffery Davidson
Morrow Mountain State Park
Superintendent



For the last couple years, hunting Three Rivers Land Trust property has been rewarding, and has filled our deep freezer with wild game.

Thanks to Three Rivers Land Trust, these lands are protected for future generations. The rolling hills in Montgomery County are centered in the Uwharrie Mountains and filled with the sounds of the Uwharrie River peacefully weaving through. Not only does nature speak through these woods but if you sit and listen, you can hear the voices of the native people who have continuously occupied and hunted these lands for thousands of years. These lands are sacred and rejuvenating.

While Three Rivers Land Trust has many prime hunting properties, I prefer to hunt their Low Water Bridge property. I have memories of visiting Low Water Bridge as a child and even have an old clip of a Montgomery Herald newspaper photo from 1990, of my mother, younger brother, and myself during a camping trip at Low Water Bridge. On that trip, the river flooded overnight, wiped out our campsite, and almost swallowed our vehicle. Even today, after a major rainfall when I see the bridge under water, I am reminded of that story and the memories my family have made on these lands.

For the past two years, I have been fortunate to be awarded several draw hunts at Low Water Bridge. On a few days during those weeks, I hunt alone and enjoy the quiet solitude. On most hunting days, I've been able to take my



15-year-old son, Cade, with me. The time spent with him in the woods has been a great way to continue making family memories on these lands, sharing hunting heritage with him, and fostering an appreciation for environmental stewardship. Cade shot his first deer a couple years ago on Block 1. He shot his second deer on Block 4. We had fun last year on Block 2 calling in a turkey gobbler within shooting range.

THE "BIG FISH" STORY

This past deer season provided an entertaining story that's hard not to share. On a cold Thursday morning, sitting in a hunting blind on Block 1, a doe ran through at about 100 yards with a large 8-10 point buck running full speed behind her. I had been talking to some of the local hunters and they mentioned a large

"By creating these types of memories with our families, I pray that we will inspire future generations to be good stewards of the land and in return, make memories in the woods with their families."

white-tailed buck running across the road a couple days prior near this property. I felt that this may be that very same deer. I gave a simple grunt call and he stopped for a couple seconds, long enough for me to get on target and take a shot. I was certain I placed a good shot directly in the vitals. He ran a short 30-40 yards and disappeared behind a tree. I waited about 30 minutes before going to claim my trophy. Arriving on scene, not only did I find no deer, but I couldn't find any blood, even after hours of grid searching. I packed up, headed home, determined to return the next day to find the deer.

Early Friday morning, on my birthday, I threw my gear in the truck and headed back to the same spot. This time though, I had Cade with me. He has better eyes and is quicker scaling the high hills on this property. He had heard me tell my "large buck" story the night before and promised to return with me to help search the woods. I'm sure he shook his head, thinking the deer probably wasn't as big as I described and that I was exaggerating. Many of us have our "big fish" stories, right? I had promised Cade that we would hunt until noon, then go out and search the backwoods of the hunting block for my big buck. We got to the blind early and settled in. It was a cold morning with frost on the ground. We were bundled up

with at least five layers of clothing. Sunlight slowly lit up the treetops and a couple of does walked through. I looked over at Cade to see him curled up, sleeping on the ground. The thought of waking him to see if he wanted to take a shot crossed my mind, but I decided to let him get a few more minutes of sleep. Noon came and nothing else walked through. We crawled out of the blind and started a walk to search for signs from the large buck from Thursday. Walking the hills was tough work and Cade advised me he was hot and tired. He decided to walk back to the blind to cool down, remove some layers, and drink some water. I continued walking the far property boundary and worked my way slowly back towards the blind.



A YOUNG JEFFERY DAVIDSON, 1990

THE ENCOUNTER

My search for the buck was unsuccessful. As I made my way closer to the blind, Cade came out to meet me. He said he found my buck. I saw a deer skull mounted on a stick and propped against a tree. Not funny. Then, he proceeded to show me a two-minute video of a large buck-8 to 10 points-on his phone. When Cade had gone back to the blind, he had stripped down to his underwear trying to cool down. He said he was sitting there with all his clothes around his ankles when he heard some leaves rustling, and he was hoping that it was me returning from my search. Instead, he found himself staring at a large buck about 30 yards away. Looking around, he saw about six does with him. So, there sat my son: no rifle (we only brought one rifle that day, and I had it with me), no clothes, and a trophy buck that he could only capture with his phone. He felt so defeated. I encouraged Cade to treasure the memory and the experience. He is still frustrated but has since shared his story and video with family and friends. I was happy to know there was no injured buck in the woods and that the buck was left to live another day. Maybe he'll still be there next season.

Thanks again to the Three Rivers Land Trust for protecting these beautiful lands, allowing members the opportunity to hunt some of them, and being a platform to create memories with our families. By creating these types of memories with our families, I pray that we will inspire future generations to be good stewards of the land and in return, make memories in the woods with their families.



CAUGHT ON CAMERA: THE LUCKY BUCK

SAVING FAMILY FARMS

President John F. Kennedy once said that the farmer is “the only man in our economy who must buy everything he buys at retail, sell everything he sells at wholesale, and pay the freight both ways.”

Accounting for nearly 20% of the overall gross state product, North Carolina agricultural lands are indispensable. They are the visible embodiment of the largest economic sector in our state, grossing over \$100 billion in economic value. “While there may not be a building or parking lot in the rural fields of our state, make no mistake, they are North Carolina’s number one industry” said Travis Morehead, Executive Director of Three Rivers Land Trust.



Between 2001 and 2016, 732,000 acres of farmland in North Carolina were developed or compromised. That means that NC lost or compromised 5.5 acres of farmland every hour for 15 years. If we continue to grow as we have historically, it is projected NC will lose another 1.1 million acres of farmland by 2040 according to the American Farmland Trust.

“The rapid loss of agricultural lands is why we have dedicated significant resources to permanently conserve family farms in our

32,000 dairy operations in the United States. Protecting farms with purchased conservation easements helps ensure these operations continue to be economically sustainable.

In October 2023, the State-funded NCADFP Trust Fund awarded funds to TRLT for four farms totaling \$1,459,422. This includes two small grain farms totaling 169 acres in Cabarrus County, a 45-acre beef cattle farm in Davidson County, and a 75-acre sheep farm in Moore County.

“Protecting farms with purchased conservation easements helps ensure these operations continue to be economically sustainable.”

region” said Travis Morehead. “When we lose a farm to development, we lose our region’s character and our way of life.” Three Rivers Land Trust submitted several applications this year to the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation (NCADFP) Trust Fund, and the USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) for the purchase of farmland conservation easements and has been awarded funds for five of these farms.

In August 2023, the federally funded USDA ACEP program awarded \$977,812 to Three Rivers Land Trust for the protection of a dairy farm in Iredell County. This first phase protects 380 acres of the farm with more portions of the farm anticipated to be conserved in the future. Since 2003, there has been a dramatic decline in the number of dairies in the United States, with a loss of more than half of licensed dairy operations, and now there are just shy of

“We are incredibly excited to have been awarded funds for these projects,” said Associate Director Crystal Cockman. “Without the support of these grant agencies, TRLT corporate partners like Chick-fil-A and SC Johnson Company, and TRLT members, our ability to conserve our region’s farms would not exist.”

The total award from these farmland grant agencies totals \$2,457,234 and will protect 659 acres. This is all funding that will go directly to landowners for the permanent conservation of their properties.

PROTECTING LOCAL WATERS

When you decide to swim in a local lake, kayak on a scenic river, or drink water straight from your tap, you're relying on organizations like Three Rivers Land Trust to protect that natural resource. TRLT has conserved over 350 miles of stream frontage in the central Piedmont and Sandhills since 1995. That is longer than the distance from Greensboro to Atlanta.

The NC Land and Water Fund (NCLWF) is a program of the Division of Land and Water Stewardship within the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. NCLWF awards funding each year to nonprofits, local, and state governments across North Carolina to conserve these valuable natural resources. This year, NCLWF awarded full funding to TRLT for five projects.





The first project will conserve a 204-acre natural area in Richmond County adjacent the Pee Dee River. The protection of this tract's mature hardwood forest is located on five tributaries to the Pee Dee River. "Tracts like this allow for water to naturally filter through the conserved area before entering the river, protecting water quality and aquatic biodiversity," said Crystal Cockman, Associate Director of TRLT.

The second project is an 82-acre mature hardwood forest in Davie County with a tributary to the South Yadkin River. The South Yadkin River is a 303d listed impaired stream, so protecting the forest on this tract will help maintain and improve water quality in this watershed. The third project is a tract that adjoins Raven Rock State Park in Harnett County. The fourth tract is a property that protects a high quality watershed in

Montgomery County, Arnett Branch. The last tract protects Toms Branch in Richmond County. The award total for these five projects came to \$1,937,385.

"Three Rivers Land Trust is committed to protecting local waters through conservation easements, just like these," said TRLT Executive Director Travis Morehead. "We appreciate the North Carolina General Assembly making this funding available to conserve North Carolina's natural resources."

This funding will go directly to landowners for the permanent conservation of their properties. To join TRLT in protecting local waters, please visit our website at trlt.org.

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LEAVE A LEGACY

BE A CHAMPION FOR CONSERVATION WITH UNIQUE PLANNED GIVING OPTIONS

A Donor-Advised Fund (DAF) is an opportunity to put your charitable dollars to work on your own terms, giving you the flexibility to tailor your philanthropic giving in easy, cost-effective ways. You can initiate a grant directly from your DAF by using our convenient DAF Direct Widget on our website, trlt.org.

While many planned giving options are gifts that are meant for the future, there are several options that allow you to make an immediate impact on conservation in your community. Unlike other legacy giving vehicles, the options below are two types of gifts that you can achieve online in a few clicks, without the expense of an attorney. These approaches to philanthropy will enable you to immediately see the impact of your generosity, making you a champion for conservation both today and for generations to come.

COMMIT TO CONSERVATION THROUGH YOUR IRA

If you are 70 or older with a traditional IRA, you are eligible to make a tax-free gift to Three Rivers Land Trust called a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). Because you are not receiving the money yourself, you will not pay

taxes on the transfer, so this is a very tax-smart way to make a gift even if you don't itemize deductions on your tax return. By making a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to Three Rivers Land Trust from your IRA, you are making an immediate difference and commitment to conserving our lands, in a tax-savvy way that will enable you to create a lasting legacy for future generations through your generosity.

MAKE AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT THROUGH YOUR DAF

DAFs are a philanthropic vehicle that allow you to thoughtfully set aside money for charity giving, obtaining a tax deduction on that money at the time you establish or contribute to the fund. Funds are even flexible in the amounts that can be donated, making it a philanthropic tool that is perfect for anyone.

If you would like to learn more about planned giving options, we would be happy to answer any questions you have. Please consult your attorney and your tax or financial advisors as well. Your attorney or financial advisor can also get in touch with us. All information regarding your charitable contribution will be held in the strictest of confidence.

The information on this page is for educational purposes and is not considered tax or legal advice. Please consult with your professional advisor while making charitable plans. Three Rivers Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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EVENTS CALENDAR

Every year TRLT hosts tons of exciting hikes, paddles, shed hunts and sporting tournaments. Check out our calendar and never miss an event!



Scan here see the calendar!

