

SERVING EIGHT COUNTIES IN THE WESTERN PIEDMONT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

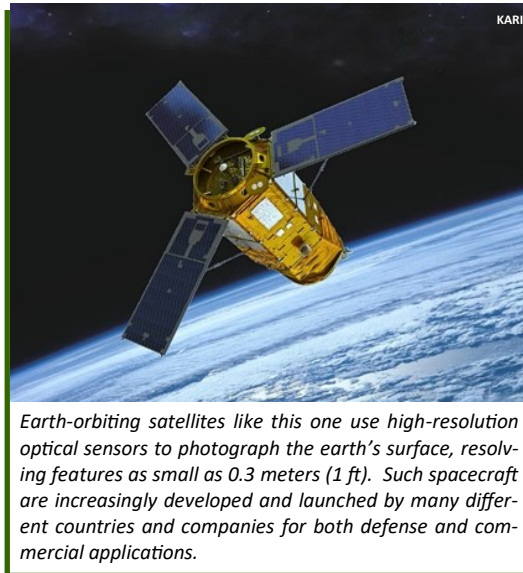
CONSERVATION IN THE LAKELANDS

► SPRING 2021

Land Trust Receives Grant for Satellite Imagery to Aid Conservation Easement Monitoring

The largest single obligation of any land trust is to monitor, or inspect, each of its conservation easements every year to ensure the conservation purpose of each easement is honored. In April of this year, Upper Savannah Land Trust was selected as one of 18 grant recipients, among land trusts all across the United States, to receive funding to investigate **Remote Monitoring** of our conservation easements. Remote monitoring refers to any routine property assessment that allows observation of the property from a vantage point other than “boots on the ground” (or wheels on the ground)—so a less intimate look, but hopefully a more expansive one.

Historically, our Land Trust’s easement monitoring volunteers have relied on a combination of walking and/or driving inspections wherever practical, also using insight from the landowner on what places, if any, that significant activities or changes have occurred that should be checked and documented. Such changes might include timber harvest, road construction or maintenance, or structural additions, all of which are generally permitted, but only when conducted in ways that honor the purpose of the conservation easement. Unless an



Earth-orbiting satellites like this one use high-resolution optical sensors to photograph the earth’s surface, resolving features as small as 0.3 meters (1 ft). Such spacecraft are increasingly developed and launched by many different countries and companies for both defense and commercial applications.

easement property is very small, it is seldom practical to visually observe every acre from the ground.

As online access to aerial and satellite photography, such as Google Earth, has increased, remote assessment and mapping of properties has become a readily available option, except that those images are generally not acquired and published frequently enough

Satellite Monitoring Grant, continued on page 4



*Traditional conservation easement monitoring on large tracts can require long drives, and navigating considerable distance from a vehicle-- a pleasant way to spend a nice day, but a difficult way to get through 53,000 acres!
(Photo from 2020 annual inspection of the Bowie Farm easement, Anderson County SC.)*

UPPER SAVANNAH LAND TRUST



CONSERVATION EXCELLENCE

Visit us at our web site:
www.scuslt.com
Or follow us on Facebook at
www.facebook.com/scuslt

The mission of the Upper Savannah Land Trust is to encourage and support conservation of natural and scenic lands, farms, forests, waterways, and open spaces in our eight-county area: **Abbeville, Anderson, Edgefield, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, and Saluda** Counties.

The Upper Savannah Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) membership organization. Contributions are tax deductible.

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**Conservation
in the Lakelands**
Volume 15, Issue 1



CONSERVATION EXCELLENCE

USLT Officers & Board, 2020-21

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Wade Harrison

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Annual Meeting features Hidden Rivers film at the Drive-In

With social-distancing measures still in place as Covid-19 vaccinations were ramping up, the Land Trust held its March 2021 Annual Meeting outdoors at the Highway 25 Auto Drive-In Theater. Land Trust members and guests were able to enjoy socializing at a distance, dinner at the concession stand, and presentations on the big movie screen, followed by a screening of Hidden Rivers, an amazing one-hour film that reveals the beauty and vulnerability of aquatic life in North America's most biologically rich waters, right here in the rivers and streams of the southeastern mountains and piedmont. Over ten years

Annual Meeting at Drive-In,
continued on back page



Photos before and after dark at the 2021 USLT Annual Meeting, held outdoors at the Hwy 25 Auto Drive-In Theatre, with dinner, business meeting, presentations, and Hidden Rivers. Brightly-colored darters light up the night in the underwater scene above.



From the President's Desk . . .

Spring Greetings to you all!

Our organization successfully weathered a year's worth of Zoom Board Meetings, with only a few minor mishaps (note: my pup has strong opinions and is very vocal).

The Year 2021 marks the fifth year of the 5-year Strategic Plan the Board adopted in early 2017. Guided by Executive Director Wade Harrison and former Executive Director Wallace Wood, the organization has made significant progress toward meeting five goals:

1. Finances – Our plan was to secure sufficient funding to meet our land protection mission, fulfill our perpetual stewardship obligations, and support annual operations. **Status: Realizing that income from easement fees alone was not a sustainable operational model as we grew USLT, the Board began fundraising via an Annual Clay Shoot, various grant applications, continuing our campaign for donations. We set a challenge goal of one million dollars in total funds, from which investment earnings could begin to function as an operating reserve. As of April of this year, we met that goal.**

2. Accreditation – **Status: With active Board participation and support, USLT received accreditation in 2017 and will focus on our 2022 re-accreditation in the coming year.**

3. Marketing – USLT should become a more widely known community partner supported by an active and diverse membership. **Status: Made numerous presentations to community organizations and partnered with regional organizations to increase awareness of our mission. We have also stepped up our social media presence, and are actively recruiting for Board diversity.**

4. Organizational Strength and Stability –

Status: USLT engaged summer interns for 2020 and 2021. We also obtained a technology grant to begin remote monitoring using Satellite Imagery, to assist our volunteers in annual easement monitoring responsibilities (see front page).

5. Mission centric goals for Land Protection, Land and Easement Stewardship – **Status: Since early 2017 we have added over ten thousand acres in conservation easements, with our protection tally now standing at almost 53,000 acres.**

I would like to offer a sincere word of thanks to all of you who have given so generously to support the fiduciary responsibilities of this organization. We especially want to acknowledge and thank past Board members Peggy and B Adams for their especially generous 2020 donation, and for their entire family's participation in our SC Conservation Bank Grant effort (see page 3). Their gift was one that our existing "supporter categories" do not adequately recognize, and the adjacent conservation easements made possible by their Bank Grant protect important timberland, water quality, rare species, and historic landmarks, simultaneously.

I'd also like to offer heartfelt appreciation to the Board members and Executive Directors with whom I have served, the easement donors who've made our work possible, and the members who have guided and supported this organization during my seven years as President of the Board. I'm handing off my gavel, and look forward to participating as a board member of USLT, supporting the new President, Sandy Gresham.

Sincerely,

Rossie Corwon

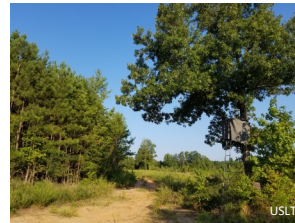
Board President 2014-21

New Conservation Easements bring USLT near 53,000 acres

Bill and Betty Young, 108 acres in McCormick County they call “SunTree Farm,” near historic Willington, adjacent to Corps of Engineers Land around Lake Thurmond. Bill is a sustainability-minded engineer with an intense interest in ecological land management.



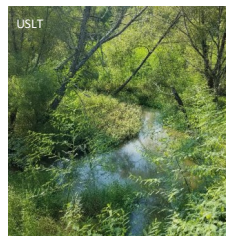
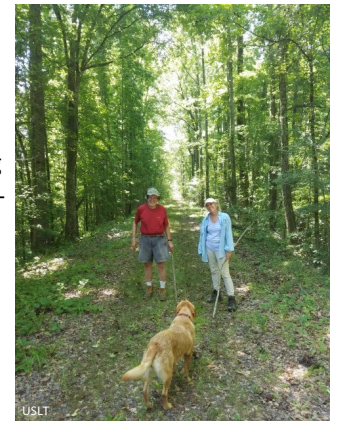
Photo by Betty Young



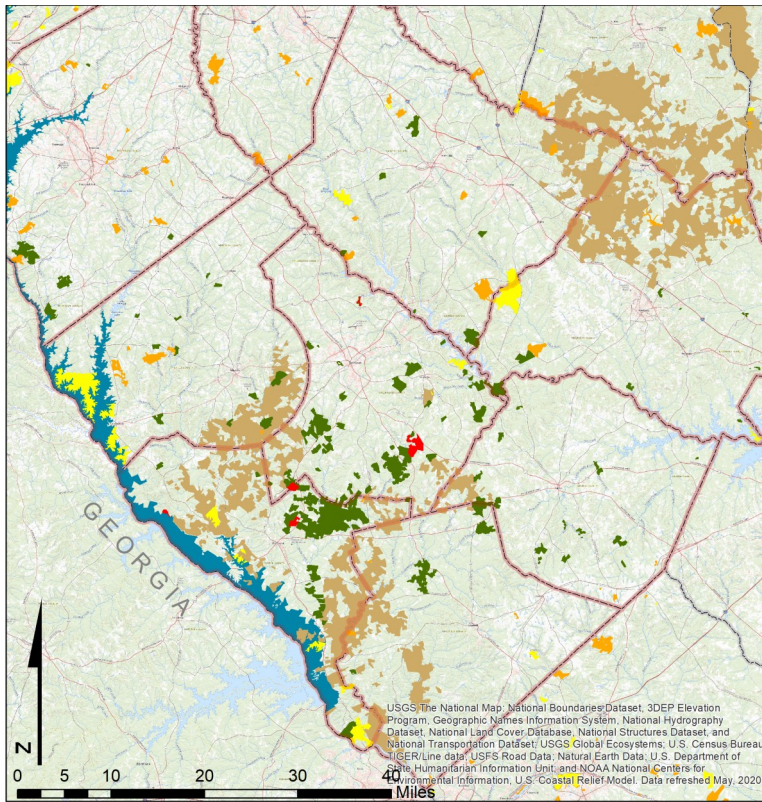
Davis Land & Timber, 736 acres on two properties in McCormick County and partially Greenwood County, expanding and connecting what may be the largest combination of public/

private conservation land in our Piedmont. Includes recreational and working timberland along the route of the historic Barksdale Ferry Road, also Rocky Creek, a high-quality tributary of the Stevens Creek watershed.

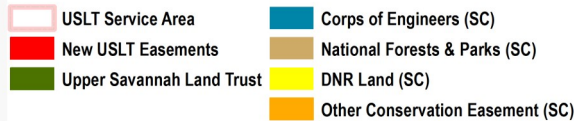
The Family of Peggy and B. Adams, 1332 acres on three adjacent family properties in central Greenwood County between Epworth Camp and Martintown Road, also expanding and connecting a large protected working-forest landscape, as well as preserving the rural character of several historic landmarks. Includes the childhood errand routes to school and work walked by U.S. civil rights icon Benjamin Mays, ruins of a brick-constructed 19th-century plantation house, and an early-20th century railroad line that once carried passengers between Greenwood and Madison FL. Tributaries of Cuffeytown Creek flowing off the properties are headwaters to some of the most critical downstream habitat of the endangered Carolina Heelsplitter mussel. Made possible by the SC Conservation Bank, this protected area is likely to be expanded in 2021 thanks to an additional landowner's participation.



The Wilson and Stockman Families, working with **Vulcan Materials**, 50 acres near Vulcan's Greenwood Quarry, to protect streams and riparian areas undergoing ecological restoration to mitigate quarry operations, as approved by the Corps of Engineers.



Conservation Land in the western Piedmont of South Carolina, May 2021



| CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AND ACRES BY COUNTY, MAY 2021 | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------|
| County | Number of Easements | Acres |
| Abbeville | 10 | 2,811 |
| Aiken | 1 | 342 |
| Anderson | 7 | 2,731 |
| Edgefield | 7 | 4,524 |
| Greenwood | 51 | 16,868 |
| Laurens | 8 | 2,815 |
| McCormick | 18 | 17,246 |
| Newberry | 12 | 2,280 |
| Oconee | 2 | 126 |
| Saluda | 19 | 3,223 |
| Total | 135 | 52,967 |

The Upper Savannah Land Trust is approaching 53,000 acres in the spring of 2021, having added over 2,200 acres since the end of 2019. The NUMBER of easements (now 135) represents 8 new easements over the same period, but is also affected by subdivisions, i.e. landowners selling a portion of their easement property to a new landowner. The map above plots USLT easements in dark green, omitting only three outlying easements in Aiken and Oconee Counties.

Satellite Monitoring Grant

Continued from front page

to provide year-to-year documentation. Some land trusts with large timberland holdings will commission custom aerial surveys, timed at their discretion, that return photographs sufficient for easement monitoring. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), often called “drones,” are another technique to observe properties remotely at any particular time. Both of these approaches can be expensive, while also requiring skills and expertise beyond our ability as a volunteer-based organization.

Upper Savannah Land Trust’s successful grant proposal was to use a commercial satellite image provider, with access to high-resolution imagery across huge swaths of the country, acquired from various commercially available satellites at frequent rates to be re-sold into the expanding land-assessment marketplace. We will also receive access to online mapping technology that pre-loads the boundaries of our conservation easements, to overlay the images from points in time we specify. At only five-to-ten cents per acre, our use of such technology becomes a credible strategy, and thanks to the grant, we can test this approach over the coming year at no cost to our budget, comparing it to (and combining it with) our usual on-the-ground inspections. We can then decide whether to invest in such imagery and technology ourselves over subsequent years to augment our easement monitoring program, thereby decreasing pressure on our volunteers, and potentially getting better documentation of land conditions, especially on our largest properties.

One of the options to be investigated includes sufficient resolution. Imagery with a resolution of 1 meter or larger is considerably cheaper than resolutions of 0.3 to 0.5 meters. (Satellite imagery of even finer resolution, less than a foot, is feasible, but available only for national security purposes!) To adequately monitor our conservation easements may not require the highest available resolution. Other questions include the best season for imagery (probably late winter), versus ground inspections (typically spring or autumn), and which properties to prioritize for remote monitoring (the largest, with fewest roads, versus the properties most at risk from encroaching development or trespass).



Dalton Shealy (L) accepts Gene Berry's Peggy Adams Conservation Award from Past ED Wallace Wood at the USLT Annual Meeting.

Honoring the late Gene Berry 2021 Peggy Adams Conservation Award

Mr. C. E. (“Gene”) Berry, Jr., beloved teacher, conservationist, and devoted friend, passed away in July 2020. He was honored posthumously by the Upper Savannah Land Trust at its Annual Meeting in March as the recipient of the 2021 Peggy Adams Conservation Award. The presentation was made by Wallace Wood, past Executive Director of USLT. In his remarks, Wallace said, “Gene was a true conservationist. By putting his land and property in a USLT conservation easement, he ensured this beautiful setting will be enjoyed for generations to come.” Gene was a frequent host of events and gatherings at his Padgett Pond property, always enthusiastic to share stories of its history, geology, and ecology, as well as its lodge, museum, and botanical collection. Shortly before his death, he made arrangements to bequeath the property to the State of South Carolina to be appreciated and enjoyed by future generations.

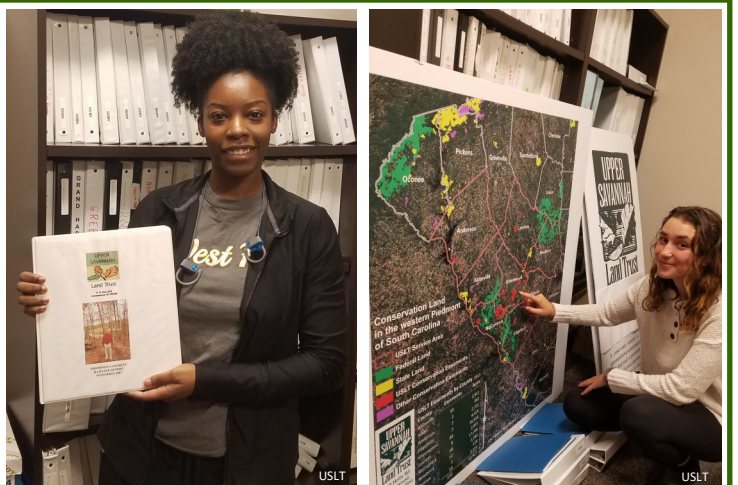
Gene’s friend and site manager Dalton Shealy of Batesburg accepted the award on Gene’s behalf. The plaque was inscribed:

*Carl Eugene “Gene” Berry, Jr. 1941-2020
In Appreciation for His Outstanding Stewardship and Generosity in
Protecting and Sharing the Conservation Values of the Padgett Pond
Conservation Easement 567 Acres Saluda County, SC.*

Honoring Gene, Continued on Back Page

Land Trust Summer Interns!

Thanks to our 2020 Summer Intern **Mariah Holmes** (L) and WELCOME to our 2021 Summer Intern, **Savannah Steet** (R)! Mariah completed the critical task of taking apart each of our Conservation Easement “notebooks,” the official documentation of each project, scanning the material into digital form, then uploading and organizing in a “cloud-based” data repository, and finally re-assembling each physical notebook. Savannah will undertake a similar task with a set of consistently-formatted electronic maps of 135 conservation easements, including those based on the high-resolution satellite imagery we’re receiving this year, to be cross-referenced with each easement and made a part of our annual easement-monitoring materials.



Land Trust Supporters in 2020

*We also thank all of you that have already made 2021 contributions, and are especially grateful to the those that sponsored our 2021 Annual Meeting: **PRESENTATION SPONSORS** Digestive Disease Group of Greenwood, Sanders Wealth Management; **CORPORATE SPONSORS** AgSouth, Enviva, Greenwood County Soil & Water, Log Creek Timber, Manley-Garvin, Pollard Land Company, SC-SFI, Stone & Associates, West Fraser's Joanna Mill, and an anonymous donor.*

We gratefully acknowledge the support of members, sponsors, and participants in 2020:

Savannah-Saluda Society, \$3,000+
L. B. Adams Jr
Davis Family Foundation

Foundation, \$1,500 - \$2,999

Sanders Wealth Management, LLC *
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Guardian, \$1,000 - \$1,499

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Curt Rone
Clark Rushton
Virgil Wall Jr.
John & Anna Welborn
Frank and Lisa Wideman

Easement Donors also contributing Administrative & Stewardship Fees in 2020

Davis Land & Timber
Betty & Bill Young

Sporting-Clay Teams contributing Entrance Fees in 2020

Boscobel Golf, Christensen & Conrad, Diamond-W Contracting, Derek Kinney, Metcalf & Associates, Sanders Wealth Management, Thompson Forest Consultants.

* 2020 Sporting Clays Event Sponsors are indicated in supporter list at left with an asterisk.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Partners Grant for Freshwater Mussel Habitat Improvement



USFWS biologist Bret Beasley poses on an unstable streambank along Turkey Creek, near its confluence with Log Creek in Edgefield County.

In 2020, USLT received its first "Partners in Fish and Wildlife" federal grant funding for assessing and restoring stream habitats most important to the Carolina Heelsplitter, an endangered freshwater mussel found locally in Cuffeytown and Turkey Creeks. Substantially more grant funding came in 2021, with which USLT has contracted an engineering design firm to provide a stabilization plan for the pictured site with cooperating USLT easement donor Steve Mullins. The Partners team continues to assess other locations in the Heelsplitter area. Contact USLT if you have an idea, whether unstable streambank, bad culvert, eroding road surface, or stream barrier that might affect these critical waterways. The program is intended to assist, not to intrude!

Annual Meeting at Drive In

(continued from page 2)

in the making by its creators at Freshwaters Illustrated, Hidden Rivers premiered in 2019 and has since become a galvanizing message for river conservation and restoration.

Prior to the film screening, Board President Rossie Corwon reviewed the past year's accomplishments and recognized our Board and Staff, Vice-President Sandy Gresham recognized our Guests and thanked our Sponsors, and Treasurer Andy Robinson reviewed USLT's 2020 financial performance, which was particularly successful, despite the pandemic. Executive Director Wade Harrison reviewed the conservation easements completed over the past year and his predecessor Wallace Wood presented the Peggy Adams Conservation Award.

This unique and memorable event would not have been possible without the generous support of presentation sponsors **Dr. Bryan Green and the Digestive Disease Group of Greenwood** and **John Patrick with Sanders Wealth Management**, and the additional corporate sponsors listed at the top of Page 5 of this newsletter.

Honoring Gene

(continued from page 4)

In addition to Dalton, others representing Gene's Ridge Spring and Batesburg-Leesville community at the event were David Sawyer, Ronnie Cumbee, David Craps, Mike Shirey, and Bert McCarty. Gene will always be remembered for his generosity, intelligence, friendship, and loyalty.

Gene Berry posing with his much loved bromeliads.

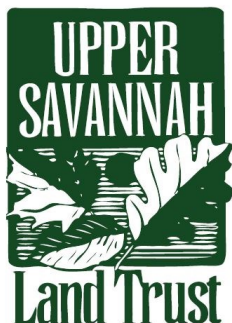


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conserve vital lands
while easing tax burdens
on donors.**

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Savannah/Saluda Society (\$3,000 or more)



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29646



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