



# CONSERVATION

## IN THE PIEDMONT

SERVING EIGHT COUNTIES IN THE WESTERN PIEDMONT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

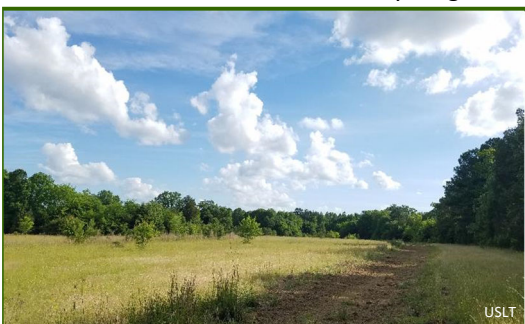
► SUMMER 2022

### Land Trust completes 2-year, 1500-acre expansion of upper Cuffeytown Creek protection via Conservation Bank Grant

Four conservation easements, each funded by the **South Carolina Conservation Bank**, were established by USLT in 2021 and 2022 to protect 1,549 acres representing a mosaic of open fields, pine timberland, and hardwood bottoms. The easements also bridge a 1-mile gap between some 4,000 acres of existing USLT easements near Epworth and downstream along Cuffeytown Creek. All four new easement properties include headwater streams of Cuffeytown, important not only for water quality in the Savannah River, but also for the downstream habitat of an endangered freshwater mussel, the Carolina Heelsplitter. One of South Carolina's rarest trees, the Oglethorpe Oak, was documented in this general area back in the 1980s and still exists on at least one of the four adjacent properties.

Spanning part of this landscape is the trace of the Georgia and Florida Railroad, which operated between Greenwood and Madison FL from 1929 to 1971, now a tree-canopied corridor crossing creek bottoms on earthen causeways penetrated by large concrete and steel culverts.

Amid the planted pines that now dominate what was once open farmland is the site of the Brick House School, to which a young



Working lands on the new easement properties include fields kept open for hay, horses, and bird dogs.



Abandoned for decades, the SC extension of the old GA-FL Railroad is returning to nature, framing critical headwaters.

Benjamin Mays (1894-1984) walked every day for his childhood education. Mays was educated as well by the legacies of racial violence that played out in an agricultural community now dominated by forest. He advanced from these South Carolina roots to pursue higher education, and became an advocate for the non-violent pursuit of civil rights, a confidante to Mahatma Ghandi, and a mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Nearby, within the same childhood paths of Dr. Mays also lie the brick ruins of his school's namesake "Brick House," the 1848 two-story brick home of Dr. Thomas Lake, a prominent physician, businessman, and farmer, of which only bricks remain in mounds covered over by lush undergrowth. Another prominent home from that era, the 1835 Moore-Kinard House, adjoins the protected area; it still stands and is listed on the National Historic Register. Even

Upper Cuffeytown, continued on page 4

### UPPER SAVANNAH LAND TRUST



CONSERVATION EXCELLENCE

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**The mission of the Upper Savannah Land Trust is to encourage and pursue conservation of natural, historic, and scenic lands—farms, forests, waterways, and open spaces in the western Piedmont of South Carolina.**

USLT's eight-county service area encompasses **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 Piedmont**  
Volume 16, Issue 1



CONSERVATION EXCELLENCE

## USLT Officers & Board, 2021-22

**Executive Director**  
Wade Harrison

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Jimmy Sanders  
Wayne Steffen  
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## Jimmy Sanders Honored with Peggy Adams Conservation Award

Long-serving and still-serving board member, landowner, and easement donor Jimmy Sanders is the recipient of the 2022 Peggy Adams Conservation Award presented each year to a person who has made outstanding contributions to further the mission of the Upper Savannah Land Trust. In her remarks presenting the award at the Land Trust's 2022 Annual Meeting, Past President Rossie Corwon noted that Jimmy has not only contributed to our mission, he was instrumental in starting it. Rossie relayed stories from Peggy Adams herself, and from Board Secretary Rick Green, on the creation and early days of the land trust, of how Jimmy's experience with

landowners, government assistance programs, and natural resource management helped some of the first easement donors in this part of the state understand that conservation easements are not a regulatory threat, and was also able to help guide the newborn Land Trust through federal requirements necessary to become a qualified holder of conservation easements.

Rossie went on to describe Jimmy's active involvement with the Land Trust through the years, propelled by the conservation ethic instilled in him at an early age by his father, a Wildlife Conservation Officer who Jimmy accompanied as he worked to re-establish wild turkeys in South Carolina, and by his career with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation

Honoring Jimmy Sanders, cont'd on back page



USLT Past President Rossie Corwon presents the Peggy Adams Conservation Award for 2022 to long-time USLT Boardmember, landowner, and easement donor Jimmy Sanders.

## From the President's Desk . . .

This year has been an exciting follow-up to the stellar performance of our Upper Savannah Land Trust last year, and especially exciting for me as a new Board President. I sincerely appreciate the efforts of Rossie Corwon, our previous president, as well as the rest of the Board and Executive Director Wade Harrison, and all of our landowners in expanding and strengthening the Land Trust's role in protecting the conservation values important not only to landowners but also to the citizens of our State, now and for the future.

This spring, the Land Trust was invited to participate in a career day at the South Carolina Governor's School for Agriculture at the John de la Howe campus. State agencies, colleges, private businesses and related organizations were presenters, and were provided large tables in the shade of lush old trees on the Commons where students, their instructors and parents could visit. Chuck and I had a premier spot to share Upper Savannah Land Trust information, handouts and souvenirs. Wade prepared several handouts explaining what land trusts are, how conservation easements work and the roles professionals fill to assist landowners. Students were interested in college preparation for professional land trust careers. Parents and teachers looked closely at the details of conservation easement mechanics and benefits. Nearby, forester Brad Thompson, Jr. provided an "on-the-job" presentation which complement-

ed our Land Trust emphasis on natural resource careers and community organizations. He showed students and adults some of the jobs professional foresters and realtors do to help landowner families conserve and enhance open, agricultural, or natural areas such as forests, farms and watersheds.

That afternoon we brought the general Land Trust's conservation vision to all 65 students, their faculty, and approximately 20 landowner/parents. One grandfather had a conservation easement on his farm already, and his grandson said, "That's for me."

Last Fall, our Sporting Clays for Conservation event in Edgefield was an outstanding success once again. Thanks to Charles Hollingsworth and Charles Kemp for involving so many folks as volunteers, donors and supporters of Land Trust values.

In December, our members were canvassed to share ideas for the Five Year Strategic Plan. Wade received the responses and Rick Green helped organize inputs. Similar ideas were combined to narrow focus to the most essential tasks to be accomplished. For the Land Trust to continue to grow, I hope we can prioritize our resources to first achieve these 3 of our 7 important 5-year goals:

1. *Expand our staff!* Our staff capacity must be ample enough not only to administer, serve, and protect the Upper Savannah Land Trust easements but also to strategically and aggressively expand that

conservation portfolio.

2. *Harness technology!* Closely related to staffing needs, we need to ensure our work is enabled and underpinned by imagery, data, and processes that keep us efficient and on-task.

3. *Re-accreditation in 2023!* The professional standards we've committed to honor require attention to these and other goals; as the governing body of USLT, we must fulfill that commitment by documenting our performance every five years.

Many other equally valid goals are mentioned in the Plan— educational seminars for landowners and Board members, a 25th Anniversary celebration for USLT in 2025, more focus on publishing our accomplishments in the media, and expanded participation by USLT in the broader network of like-minded organizations—these are all worth achieving as resources of time, funding and manpower permit. The next five years are going to be truly exciting!

Finally, with regret that I was unable to preside at our Annual Meeting in March, I offer my gratitude and appreciation of Vice-President Doug Bell for leading that event, and everyone who stepped up to make my term as President so wonder-filled!

Sincerely,

*Sandy Gresham*

Board President 2021-22



## USLT Annual Meeting features Ninety Six National Historic Site's new Superintendent

The Ninety Six National Historic Site, which includes what long-time residents of the South Carolina Piedmont know as the *Old Star Fort*, is one of the most iconic “nature and history” resources in the region. Joshua Manley was named by the National Park Service as the site’s latest Superintendent last year, and we invited him to share his vision for the park with the Land Trust membership at our 2022 Annual Meeting at the Arts Center in Greenwood.



Joshua (pictured speaking to USLT above and at left) is a charismatic Army veteran and Ohio native who has been working National Parks

since 2014. With a degree in the history of Colonial America and the Revolution, Ninety Six is a natural fit for him. He is enjoying not only his professional role but also his home and family life on nearby Lake Greenwood. Joshua spoke to the known history of Ninety Six as a frontier crossroads, trading post, and military post, as well as some of its lesser known stories and secrets. He invited volunteers and organizations like ours to get involved and collaborate on common goals and support activities that can positively impact the community, especially as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War.

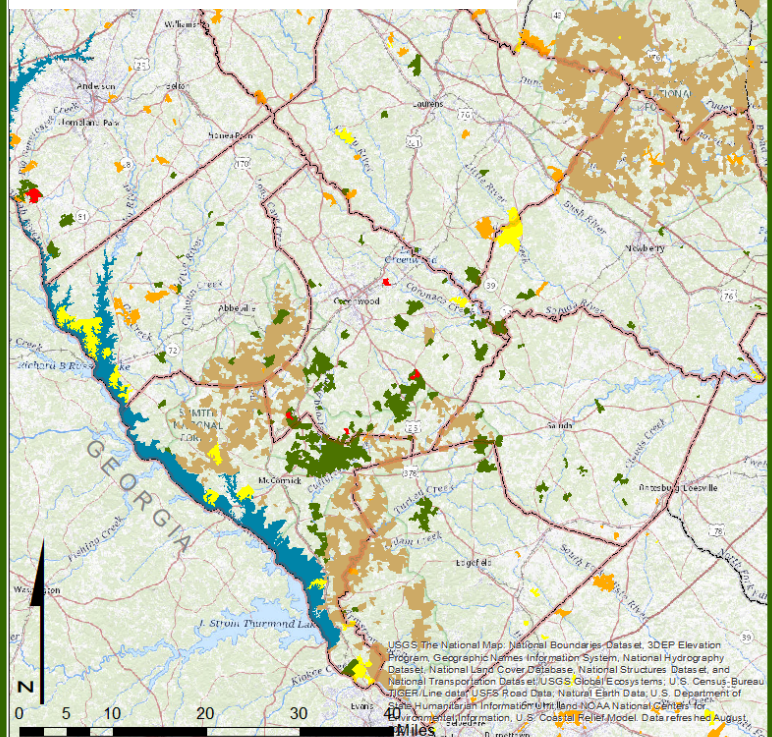
In other business, presiding officer Doug Bell reviewed the year’s accomplishments, Treasurer Andy Robinson reviewed our finances, Past President Rossie Corwon presented the Peggy Adams Conservation Award (page 2), and Executive Director Wade Harrison reviewed recent conservation easements and grant-funded projects.

We also raffled off a shotgun (right, demonstrated by Andy as Doug draws the winning ticket), enjoyed a reception courtesy of Dr. Bryan Green and a catered dinner from Southern Soul.

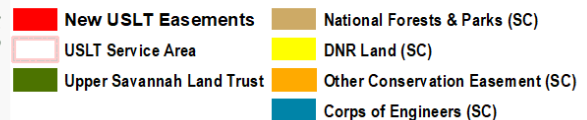


The membership voted in a new officer slate for 2022-23, in which Doug Bell will succeed Sandy Gresham as President, Wayne Steffen will become Vice-President, and Secretary and Treasurer officers will remain the same.

## USLT Map & Easement Tally



### Conservation Land in the western Piedmont of South Carolina, June 2022



### CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AND ACRES BY COUNTY, June 2022

County	Number of Easements	Acres
Abbeville	10	2,932
Aiken*	1	342
Anderson	8	3,335
Edgefield	6	4,524
Greenwood	56	17,187
Laurens	8	2,815
McCormick	18	17,605
Newberry	13	2,280
Oconee*	2	126
Saluda	18	3,205
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>54,351</b>

**Now protecting 54,351 acres, USLT has added approximately 1300 acres since the 2021 newsletter was published. The 140 easements represents 5 new closings over the same period.**

\*easements in outlying counties not shown on map.

Herman Keith, Lang Nickles, and Tim Williams were elected as new Board members for the 2022-2025 term; Charles Kemp’s resignation from the Board was accepted with gratitude for his service and Board members with terms ending were re-instated.



# Upper Cuffeytown

Continued from front page

deeper in history, a solitary gravestone stands in a field now protected by this project, marking the grave of John Ramsay (1775-1825), a member of one of the prominent 18th-century families that settled in Ninety Six District.

All of this easement protection was made possible by a generous grant from the SC Conservation Bank, used to partially offset the loss of market value resulting from the conservation easements. A larger portion of the value reduction was donated by the landowners. The grant from the Conservation Bank resulted from a USLT proposal that highlighted the natural and historical attributes described and illustrated here, as well as the expansion of contiguous protected land along the upper Cuffeytown to 5,500 acres.



Oglethorpe Oak (above) has un-lobed elliptical leaves with a rounded tip, broader and longer than willow oak, larger than water oak, and with pale "white oak" bark. It seems to be unique to a narrow slice of Piedmont in Georgia and South Carolina, more or less the "Carolina Slate Belt," where it is obscure and infrequent.



An early-nineteenth-century grave marker (above) honors the memory of one John Ramsay, a child during the Revolution but a veteran of the earliest years of the republic. His story is unknown, and his resting place is obscure, likely more isolated now than it was when he passed away and was buried in an outlying settlement of Ninety Six, that would later become rural Epworth.



The childhood school of Dr. Benjamin Mays (left) has vanished, but stood near an intersection of old roads still used by foresters, loggers, and hunters and now protected by conservation easement. Mays' life and contributions are memorialized at the Benjamin E. Mays Historic Site in Greenwood SC.

# USLT restores streambank on Turkey Creek in Edgefield County



There's a biologist operating that machine!

Land conservation is often a lot more than restricting land use via conservation easements. It can also include complicated hands-on work to restore natural resilience and diversity of a site degraded by humanity's past transgressions—agricultural run-off/erosion, lack of adequate stream buffers, and invasive species.

The Edgefield County site pictured here has been well-managed and easement-protected for over a decade, but years of high-energy streamflow had scoured a steep creek bank, exposed by a long-ago misplaced woods road, not to mention invaded by feral hogs and privet, all of which threatened not only the stability of the bank and the road, but also the health of Turkey Creek, which is critical to an endangered species (the Carolina Heelsplitter mussel), and a whole suite of more familiar plants and animals no less important.



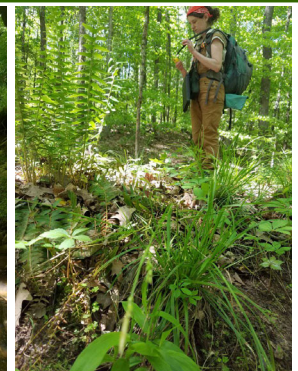
Bret Beasley, the "Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program" biologist with the USFWS in Charleston SC, poses on the site "before" (left, April 2019) and "after" (right, May 2022). The clean surface in the photo at right is an open-weave natural fiber through which vegetation can emerge, as from the seedmix Bret is spreading from the bucket.

The re-sloping, stabilization, and restoration of this streambank was conducted according to a carefully-designed plan, permitted by the US Army Corps of Engineers, blessed (in fact encouraged and funded) by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and coordinated and commissioned by USLT (the grant recipient), with the voluntary permission and cooperation of the landowner, whose conservation easement we hold. In May of this year, three years of planning and paperwork culminated in the work pictured here. Initial seeding of the new streambank has already created a lush green slope.

**Streambank Restored, Continued on Back Page**

## More wild virtues of Cuffeytown Creek

Both the expanded "upper Cuffeytown" conservation easement area (Greenwood County) and an even larger complex of USLT easements that includes "lower Cuffeytown" near the rural community of Liberty Hill (McCormick County) represent some of the most ecologically significant portions of USLT's conservation portfolio. During April of this year, biology teams with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the SC Department of Natural Resources inventoried various species of freshwater mussel on lower Cuffeytown, and re-confirmed the presence of a very rare species called Ravine Sedge on upper Cuffeytown. An equivalent "mussel team" also visited Turkey Creek, a "sister stream" to Cuffeytown, as both are tributaries of Stevens Creek, to assess species and numbers of freshwater mussels below the streambank restoration project described elsewhere on this page. Each team was hosted by USLT on behalf of conservation easement landowners who granted permission for this access, and in each case, these sites occupied generous long-protected Streamside Management Zones within a working-forest landscape of intensively-managed loblolly pine.



Morgan Wolf, USFWS, (left) uses a "view bucket" to search a representative stretch of lower Cuffeytown. Samantha Tessel, SC-DNR, (right) counts clumps of Ravine Sedge on upper Cuffeytown.



# Thanks to our Land Trust Supporters!

**We gratefully acknowledge the support of members, donors, sponsors, and participants in 2021:**

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

David & Deborah Brett  
Davis Family Foundation  
Digestive Disease Group  
J. Patrick Financial, LLC\*  
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## **Easement Donors contributing Administrative & Stewardship Fees, 2021 & early 2022**

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Scott & Sharon Turner  
Stoney Hill LLC

## **Our 2022 Fundraising Year is underway...**

Please give, and help us expand our protection and stewardship! (see back page, and enclosed Giving Envelope)

**Special thanks to those who've been so generous already...**

**2022 Annual Meeting Sponsors...** Countybank, Enviva, Log Creek, Holstein Appraisals, Manley-Garvin, McDonald-Patrick, Pollard Land, Sanders Wealth Management, Stone & Associates, SC SFI, West Fraser, W.K. Brown Timber, Frank Wideman, Bryan Green, and Bill Rogers

**2022 Family Supporters through June...** John & Virginia Kemp, Janis & Jimmy Sanders, Bill Stringer, Craig Stuckey

**2022 Foundation/Society Supporters through June...** Judy Burns, Sandy & Chuck Gresham

**...and a remarkably generous bequest from the Estate of Gene W. Berry**

Dr. Bryan Green (our generous purveyor of spirits) serves Peggy Adams (a generous spirit) at the March 2022 USLT Annual Meeting.



## **Teams contributing entrance fees for USLT's 2021 Sporting Clays for Conservation fundraiser**

All-In-Fun  
Boscobel Golf Club (see photo below)  
Eastern Industrial  
Enviva  
Sanders Wealth Sandbaggers  
So Close!  
Stockman Lands  
Sweets Skeet Shooters  
Team Loners  
The Territories  
Thompson Forest Consultants

\* 2021 Sporting Clay Event Sponsors are indicated in supporter list at left with an asterisk.



USLT salutes TEAM BOSCOBEL, for achieving the highest overall score at the 2021 Sporting Clays for Conservation fundraiser. Many thanks to all the participating teams, and to our hosts at the National Wild Turkey Federation's Palmetto Shooting Complex.

## Honoring Jimmy Sanders

(continued from page 2)

Service, with whom he served as Soil Conservationist, Natural Resource Specialist, and District Conservationist. Along with serving on the USLT board, his participation and leadership of the easement review and monitoring committees have been strong and steady, whether reaching out to landowner contacts, walking properties with a practiced eye, or evaluating new-fangled computer imagery to analyze change over time. His technical expertise in the establishment and management of ponds has been critical to many landowners, as well as to our own community engagement with the Burton Center for Disabilities and Special Needs to construct a fishing pond for recreational and educational opportunities.

Jimmy's simultaneous involvement with many other natural resource organizations, especially the Forestry Association of SC and the SC Tree Farm Committee, are entirely consistent with our mission, and has helped to advance it by spreading awareness of conservation easements throughout his network.

Jimmy and Janis, his bride of 50 years, currently own and operate two tree farms in South Carolina. One of these farms is protected by a conservation easement, generously donated to the Upper Savannah Land Trust.

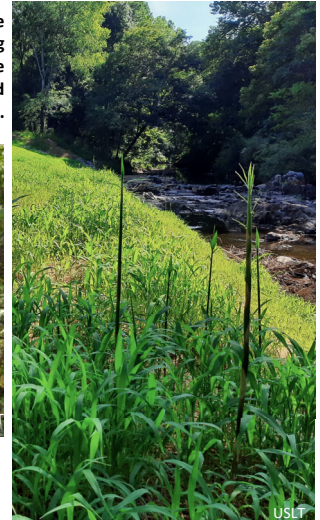
## Streambank Restored

(continued from page 4)

River cane saplings over 12 inches high are already visible (*right*) in mid-June, emerging from on-site root-stock. Planting of native trees this fall will further stabilize and restore the re-vegetated slope.



Mountain Laurel (*above*) was blooming in mid-May, undisturbed, along Turkey Creek a little upstream of the project site.

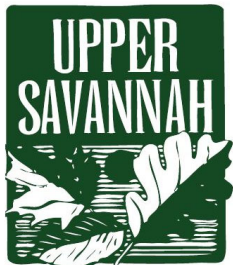


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