



# CONSERVATION IN THE PIEDMONT



SERVING EIGHT COUNTIES IN THE WESTERN PIEDMONT OF SOUTH CAROLINA ► FALL 2024



A toppled oak tree blocking a woods road in Greenwood County—an all-too-common site in the wake of Helene’s path, here encountered during reconnaissance for a proposed 2025 conservation easement.

## SORRY WE’RE LATE!

Your Annual Newsletter, historically “Spring” and more recently “Summer” has slipped to “Fall” ... Sometimes *our cup runneth over* with process and projects, especially when recruiting, hiring, and orienting new staff while simultaneously juggling a full plate of conservation work.

**This Fall Newsletter represents our usual Fall Donor Appeal!**

**Please use the enclosed envelope to help us continue the fundraising progress we made in 2023!**

## Hurricane Helene strikes USLT operating area

For most readers of this newsletter, the evening of September 26<sup>th</sup> 2024, and following morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>, are not “news,” but lived experience, as were the subsequent days and weeks of sawing, dragging, searching, scavenging, assessing, recovering, repairing, helping, and caring. Top of mind, it is a *human* story that for many of us is still unfolding.

But it is also a *nature* story, a story of wind, rain, soil, rivers, floodplains, forests, and wildlife—all the parts of nature that we’ve come to know, to sometimes take for granted, with cycles, seasons, and succession. At our best, we plan around such changes. And we often dare to manage them, by agriculture and forestry, and by managing wildlife and waterways. And perhaps best of all is our inclination to *protect* the places where nature is at work—accomplished with private or public ownership, with enlightened sustainable management, and with conservation easements. The strength and scale of Hurricane Helene reminded those of us along its path that our ability to plan, manage, and protect nature has limits.

What do we learn about nature from this story? That warm ocean waters can create a vortex, a rising air column leaving low pressure at its base, which surrounding air rushes into, with

See [Helene](#), page 3

## Becky Brown Joins the Team!



Thanks to a dedicated board and several diligent Executive Directors, USLT has grown enormously since its start in 2000. This year, with easements totaling over 57,000 acres, it was time to grow our staff. In August, I joined USLT as the Assistant Director.

I grew up exploring the woods and creeks of New England where I developed a love for nature and wildlife. I found my way to

SC by way of my now-husband, Paul. His family had been in the McCormick area for many generations, and family land lured us to settle down there to enjoy a rural lifestyle. It was a perfect place to raise our kids and teach them to appreciate the natural world.

I earned my B.S. and M.S. degrees in wildlife and fisheries biology from Clemson University where I conducted research related to bats. Before joining USLT, I worked for SCDNR, first in the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries division, conducting and managing angler surveys on Upstate lakes, and then as the statewide Social Science Coordinator. I am thrilled to now be working on private lands conservation in a region of SC that’s very dear to my heart.

—Becky Brown

Visit us at our web site: [www.scuslt.com](http://www.scuslt.com)  
Or follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/scuslt](http://www.facebook.com/scuslt)

**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 8-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 18, Issue 1



CONSERVATION EXCELLENCE

**USLT Officers & Board, 2024-25**

**Executive Director**  
Wade Harrison

**Assistant Director**  
Rebecca Brown

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## Conservation Easements in Review: Fall 2023 - Summer 2024

Upper Savannah Land Trust closed out 2023 with three very special conservation easement projects, and opened 2024 with three more...

In Abbeville County, near Donalds, USLT and the SC Conservation Bank protected 76 acres for “citizen-scientist” Kim Fleming and her brother Benji, part of their ancestral family property going back to the frontier settlers of old Boonesborough. The project includes a 33-acre Special Natural Area which Kim has intensively and lovingly monitored and photographed for over twenty years, contributing to scientific research in ecology and entomology at a scale that many of us would never notice. This land is now protected, “not only for historical reasons,” said Kim, but because “all of the myriad small creatures that I care so deeply for will continue to have a home here.”

In the sandhills north of Aiken SC, nurseryman Bob McCartney main-tains a small cabin on 61 acres of longleaf pine and wiregrass which he has restored

the past 30+ years, now protected as a fine example of ecological restoration and sustainable forest management. Bob’s property includes his own plantings of various unique and imperiled woodland and wetland species, rounding out a unique project, for both the Land Trust and the Conservation Bank.

Several years ago, one of our most dedicated supporters and frequent easement donors acquired over 600 acres near the Ninety Six National Historic Site, with one corner just across the road from that crown jewel of Greenwood County’s historic and natural heritage. His generous year-end donation of a conservation easement on this tract protects tributaries of the Saluda River, working pastureland and timberland, and several historic features, including an old colonial road trace, and vestiges of railroad building and agricultural drainage from the nineteenth century, long abandoned and melting back into the woods.

See [Easements in Review](#), page 4

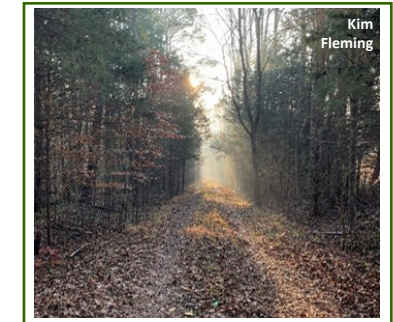
## From the President’s Desk . . .

**Dear Members, Friends, & Supporters,**

Upper Savannah Land Trust has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 2000. We are now closing in on 58,000 acres protected in our operating area. This is a great accomplishment, realized through countless hours from dedicated volunteers with minimal budget and staff. To continue to be successful in our mission and given our current protected acreage the Board took a big leap of faith this year with the hiring of an Assistant Director. The scale of our work demands that we develop sustained leadership and incorporate modern technology to administer the many needs and requirements of being an Accredited Land Trust. Wade Harrison, our “part-time” Executive Director, has done an excellent job and is looking forward to passing on his vast knowledge and experience to

Rebecca Brown. I am eager to see what new concepts and innovations are in store for Upper Savannah Land Trust!

The Board’s “leap of faith” in expanding our staff/budget is due in no small part to the patronage received over the years from its members and supporters. We are confident that our new team will generate more easement fees and fundraising capacity. But a stock market aberration or some other surprise during these unsettled times could challenge that assumption, so I ask that you please continue with your dedicated support. Special thanks to Green Diamond and those who helped fulfill their “challenge” pledge to match our major-gift fundraising last year, which started us off on the right foot in 2024. Regardless of our size, our first commitment is to



Kim Fleming

**Abbeville County 2023:**  
A path into family history and nature’s mystery



USLT

**Aiken County 2023:**  
A planting of rare pitcherplants



USLT

**Greenwood County 2023:**  
A railroad to nowhere, abandoned

maintain the trust of our donors.

As we approach 2025 and USLT’s quarter century anniversary as a 501c(3) non-profit organization, let me reiterate that without our combined efforts, many acres and special places would be lost forever to development. None of us really “own” land – what we own is the responsibility to improve upon what we pass on to others. I appreciate and look forward to the support and guidance of all our friends in the continuing pursuit of our mission – “to encourage and pursue the conservation of natural, historic, and scenic lands - farms, forests, waterways, and open spaces in the western Piedmont of South Carolina.”

Sincerely,

*Wayne Steffen*

Board President 2024-25



## Helene Continued from front page

an abundance of moisture and a spin caused by the Earth’s rotation, and given low enough pressure, the “wave” becomes a storm, and then a hurricane, that follows pressure gradients in the air. In this case, there was already a line of low-pressure over the southern U.S., already pulling moisture up from the Gulf of Mexico, falling on the southeastern states as rain.

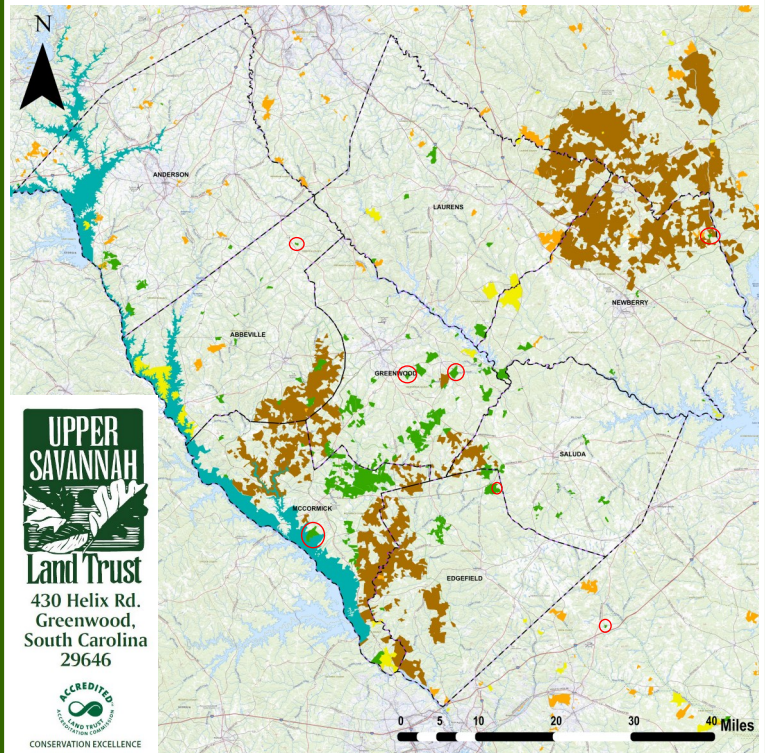
Hurricane Helene rode that low-pressure gradient like a log in a chute, following a curving path north and northwest through Georgia and along its Savannah River edge with South Carolina, moving quickly, and spinning such that the wind on its right-hand side was pushed not only by the overall speed and direction of the storm, but by its counter-clockwise direction of spin. Even 300 miles beyond landfall, there were 80-100 mile per hour winds from Augusta, GA through Aiken, Edgefield, and McCormick Counties and into Abbeville and Greenwood Counties-- blowing against trees that had never had to withstand that sustained force for so long. Whether at a weak point on their trunks, or at the rain-loosened grip of their roots, they toppled. Old-growth pines were blown down in Georgia and in Aiken’s Hitchcock Woods, while mature oaks, especially the white oaks of our SC Piedmont, suffered the most dramatic damage in floodplains, on hillslopes, but most obviously in our yards and neighborhoods, across streets and driveways, on houses, and into powerlines.

As the storm blew up over higher and higher ground, air cooling and water condensing, the rain kept increasing in volume—the physics of elevation and condensation. So for all the record rainfall amounts across the Piedmont, 6, 8, 10 inches and more, when that wet air hit the Appalachian front and tumbled into North Carolina, those rainfall numbers *doubled*, and the headwater streams of the French Broad River, along with the steep slopes and mountainsides of that north-facing watershed, were overwhelmed. Between the still-powerful winds hitting slopes and ridge faces head-on, and the tons of water trying to find its way down through channels and valleys, not only paved and populated, but simply not big enough to carry that volume of water, the result was a disaster on both natural and human scales. Despite all the heartbreaking damage South Carolinians endured, we had to count ourselves lucky that the French Broad River flows north.

And yet for all that, for all the loss of life and property across multiple states, these natural events are not unprecedented. The forests and fields and soils and waterways carry evidence of past events, not only wind and water but fire and earthquake. Big trees fall and splinter, roots come out of the ground, waterways, valleys, and floodplains are inundated and scoured, wildlife scatters and migrates, and nature realigns and rearranges itself for another cycle, whether it’s an insect’s short life in the sun, or an acorn sprouting in a broken forest canopy, or a river adopting a new course through an altered valley floor. We call that *resilience*. When nature has been minimized,

See [Helene](#), back page

## Latest USLT Map & Easement Tally



| County       | Projects   | Acres         |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| Abbeville    | 11         | 3,008         |
| Aiken        | 2          | 403           |
| Anderson     | 8          | 3,335         |
| Edgefield    | 7          | 5,290         |
| Greenwood    | 49         | 18,159        |
| Laurens      | 8          | 2,815         |
| McCormick    | 15         | 19,268        |
| Newberry     | 13         | 2,411         |
| Oconee       | 2          | 126           |
| Saluda       | 17         | 3,069         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>132</b> | <b>57,884</b> |

### Conservation Land in the western Piedmont of SC, Nov 2024

- Counties in USLT service area
- New in USLT
- USLT easements
- Army Corps of Engineers land & water
- SCDNR & SCPRT properties
- Other private conservation land
- National Forests and Parks

**UPPER SAVANNAH**  
**Land Trust**

**8<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL**  
**SPORTING CLAYS**  
**FOR CONSERVATION**

**Stay Tuned for the 2025 Date!**

**\$500 Entry Fee for Team of Four**

**Sponsorships available!**  
**\$1000 - \$500 - \$250 - \$150**

More details, updates, and registration coming soon at [www.scuslt.com](http://www.scuslt.com)

**Palmetto Shooting Complex**  
535 Gary Hill Rd  
Edgefield SC



## Easements in Review (continued from page 2)

Matt and Laura Bachinski, long-time USLT supporters who had previously donated a conservation easement of over a thousand acres of timber-and-hunting property in Edgefield County, expanded that protection earlier this year with 272 additional acres along the storied slopes and hillsides of Little Stevens Creek. Their forestry and wildlife management practices have been called some of the best in our operating area!

Also this year, with help from the Conservation Bank, almost a thousand acres of the old Ellington Searles estate, which once extended to the banks of the Savannah River, was protected by one of the Searles descendants. Now bordered along much of its McCormick County perimeter by Corps of Engineers land around Lake Thurmond, this extensive working forest tract includes a diversity of habitats as well as traces of history from both cotton and colonial eras.

Another conservation easement that closed in 2024 was fully donated by a Greenwood landowner on 223 acres on the edge of that city, right where residential fragmentation ends and rural Greenwood County begins, if you were taking one of the still-dirt roads that lead east towards Ninety Six. This property includes his family residence, some beautiful open fields, headwater streams of Henley Creek, and pine forest creatively managed for diversity and resiliency.

As this newsletter went to press, we were working three more 2024 projects, in Newberry, Laurens, and Greenwood Counties; the one in Newberry had just closed and is included in the map and table on Page 3. Be on the lookout for news on all our late 2024 closings in our next exciting issue!



Edgefield County 2024: Little Stevens Creek, with a canebrake.



**McCormick County 2024:** History looms in the woods of the old Searles homeplace... an old well in an open pine stand.



**Greenwood County 2024:** Keeping the country green and wooded.

## Highlights from the 2024 USLT Annual Meeting The Drummond Center at Lake Greenwood



Guest speaker **John Lane** (right), Emeritus Professor of Environmental History at Wofford College, and writer of thoughtful prose and poetry, shared some of his latest thinking and writing on how the farming



history of the Piedmont eroded both its lands and its people. In addition to his remarks, at least a dozen copies of ***Gullies of my People***, his remarkable book on the intertwined topics of landscape and family, made their way into our membership. In it you will find unexpected gems, ranging from the Marshall Tucker Gully, to Einstein's ghost, to the buried organic remnants of a lost world, a hundred thousand years old, discovered, lost, and re-discovered. Look for a copy!

The **2024 Peggy Adams Conservation Award** was awarded to **Bret Beasley** (left, with USLT ED Wade Harrison at right). Bret has been our contact for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners in Fish and Wildlife Program, and has been invaluable in bringing federal grant funds to useful projects on and around our conservation easement land. Whether stabilizing streambanks or replacing poor stream crossings,



these funds benefit not only landowners and communities, but also wildlife species like the Carolina Heelsplitter mussel, and endangered species that depends on the unique ecology of our Piedmont creeks.



## Thanks to our 2023 Land Trust Supporters!

We gratefully acknowledge the support of our members, donors, sponsors, & event participants! Many of you have already given in 2024, and will be acknowledged in our 2024 Mid-Year Newsletter.

\* 2023 Sporting Clays for Conservation Sponsors

### Savannah/Saluda Society, \$3,000 and higher

Margaret & L.B. Adams Jr.  
David & Deborah Brett  
Sara Gottlieb  
Sandy & Chuck Gresham

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

\*SC SFI Implementation Committee  
Storey Foundation

### Guardian, \$1,000 - \$1,499

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\*Mike & Rossie Corwon  
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### Friend, up to \$99

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Kathleen Culp  
Rick Green  
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## Thank you Green Diamond!

Last year, Green Diamond pledged to match donations of \$1,000 or more, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$25,000. Thanks to their challenge and the generosity it inspired, USLT raised over \$33,000 in gifts of \$1000 or more in 2023, and Green Diamond matched *all of it* in early 2024 for a combined total of over \$66,000! We are humbled by this amazing show of support for land conservation.



### Conservation Easement Donors August 2023– November 2024

Kim Fleming (2023)  
Robert B. McCartney (2023)  
Dr. Bryan Green (2023)  
Dr. Matthew Bachinski (2024)  
Della Coulter (2024)  
Nick Yarbrough (2024)  
Lina Marston (2024)

### USLT's 6th Annual *Sporting Clays for Conservation* was held Oct 27, 2023.

Thank you Clay Teams (below)  
& Sponsors (\* see right)

#### Teams

Canal Wood  
Charles K. Doolittle  
**Clemson Shotgun Team (2nd Place Team)**  
First Citizens  
Kleinschmidt—Fish Passage  
Kleinschmidt—Hydropower  
Team Loners  
**Rocky Knoll (1st Place Team)**  
Stockman Lands  
The Territories  
Thompson Forest Consultants  
Tidewater Equipment Company  
Upper Savannah Shooters Assn  
West Fraser

Look for the  
2024 Sporting  
Clays teams  
& results in  
the upcoming  
2025 Mid-Year  
Newsletter!



USLT salutes the Rocky Knoll team (above left), and the Clemson Shotgun Team (above right) for the first and second place highest-scoring teams at the 2023 *Sporting Clays for Conservation* fundraiser. Many thanks to all participating teams, sponsors, and our hosts at the National Wild Turkey Federation's Palmetto Shooting Complex.

## Helene Continued from page 3

simplified, compartmentalized, or fully replaced, that natural resilience fails. Resilience, it turns out, is a “conservation value,” no less than the open space, habitat, history, and esthetics called out by our conservation easement language.

Over the course of human history, we’ve invented, created, built, lost, recovered, re-built, and re-imagined our castles and cathedrals and shining cities. We’ve paved many roads with good intentions, and we’ll continue to do so, let’s hope, until Judgement Day. But we’re going to need the natural world too—where a power greater than us operates at its own unpredictable pace, whether orderly or catastrophically, delivering air and water, food and fiber—and change. As long we’ve protected enough of it from our own ambition, that world can live on beside us (part of us? or us, part of it?) renewing itself, and renewing our own human spirit, if we learn from its history.  
— Wade Harrison



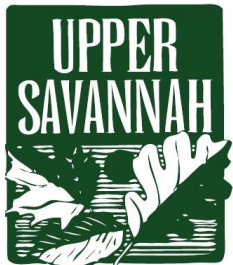
A metal gate crushed by a roadside longleaf pine in Aiken County (2025 Conservation Easement project in progress).

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

## We Need Your Support

Please consider a tax-deductible donation to USLT in one of our membership categories. Use the enclosed envelope, or visit [www.scuslt.com](http://www.scuslt.com) to download our membership form or donate through PayPal.

**Friend (up to \$99)    Family (\$100–\$249)    Patron (\$250–\$499)  
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Foundation (\$1,500 – \$2,999)    Savannah/Saluda Society (\$3,000 or more)**



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