

MOUNTAIN CONSERVATION TRUST

Newsletter Vol. 6, Issue 1

Spring 2003

MCT's Board of Directors Meets to Consider Trust's Future Direction



In March 28-29, members of MCT's Board gathered to consider projects for the Trust to focus on for the next few years. Meeting in the lovely setting of Big Canoe's Canoe Lodge on Lake Sconti, Board members were facilitated in their discussions by Bob Kerr, head of the Department of Natural Resources's P2D (Pollution Prevention) Division and chief negotiator for Georgia in the so-called Tri-State Water Wars.

As a result of the strategic planning meeting, feasibility studies have begun on two major projects. First, ways to protect major creeks in Pickens County will be explored. Greenways along the streams would help preserve scarce water resources while providing scenic hiking and horse trails, enhancing educational opportunities, and conserving habitat for birds, mammals, aquatic life and wildflowers. The Board realizes that care must be taken to create greenways without infringing on anyone's property rights. Plans are being discussed with the county government to ensure that the Trust will work in partnership with the county and in accordance with the government's land use plans. Although this project focuses on Pickens, the Trust will continue to work with private landowners to protect their land in other North Georgia counties, such as Dawson, Gilmer and Lumpkin.

Secondly, our Board will investigate ways to make land trusts in North Georgia more viable and effective. Most of the 21 local land trusts in the state focus on relatively small geographical areas. With a limited constituency base, they struggle with inadequate staff and funding, and large foundations are seldom willing to fund such small organizations. The legal and financial obligations that a trust incurs when it accepts perpetual conservation easements or donations of land can place its long-term viability at risk. MCT will explore the possibility of forming a regional association of land trusts in northern Georgia that could offer economies of scale in operations, open doors for fundraising, and mitigate legal responsibilities of member land trusts. Board members are in the process of seeking input and advice from the national Land Trust Alliance and studying models from other states. ❁

MCT Exploring Lead Role in Association of North Georgia Land Trusts

Believing there are some common problems involving legal issues of preserving land, your local land trust is looking at how a regional association could be formed to tackle these issues.

Following the spring strategic planning, it became clear that some of the monitoring and enforcement issues which arise when land is placed into a conservation easement for perpetuity need to be worked out for all land trusts.

Vice President Dan Pool said, "This is a case where two heads are better than one. Associations help members in fields ranging from farming to stamp collecting. We believe these same benefits would apply equally to land trusts."

MCT is looking at how best to bring other land trust personnel from around North Georgia to discuss these issues, and see if some type of association, where the groups could share work or knowledge could be arranged. ❁

Executive Director Addresses Youth Leadership Class



MCT Executive Director Barbara Decker spoke to the Youth Leadership Pickens class on February 22, at the Pickens County Library. Youth Leadership Pickens is a program for high school juniors to help them develop leadership skills as they learn about the community around them. The students attend nine sessions from January to May. The sessions introduce the students to service organizations, state and local government, law enforcement agencies as well as local business and industry leaders and media. The program, in its second year, is a project of the Leadership Pickens Class of 2000.

The students were very attentive as Barbara outlined the purpose and goals of the Trust and were quick to voice their own concerns over environmental issues facing this area.

MCT's plans for an outdoor classroom on the campus of Pickens High School along the banks of Long Swamp Creek were met with a great deal of enthusiasm, and these future leaders had some wonderful ideas of their own to help this project become a reality. 🌱

Loss of Greenspace Funding Hinders Future Projects

By Dan Pool



One casualty of the state of Georgia's budget crunch has been the Greenspace Funding for 2003 and likely 2004 as well.

With the state being somewhere between \$600 million to \$1 billion short in revenue, the money used to acquire Greenspace, either through direct purchases or conservation easements will not be available for the short-term future.

The program still exists and Governor Sonny Perdue is reported to be a strong supporter of Greenspace spending, but it's come down to deep spending cuts and something had to go. Unfortunately the \$30 million budgeted in previous years to preserve land in the fastest growing counties in Georgia is expendable when compared to education dollars and personnel cuts.

Locally, Pickens County only became eligible for the program in the previous year. The program was created by Governor Roy Barnes in 2000.

In 2002, Pickens received roughly \$130,000 in the state funds which was applied to the county's portion of the Burnt Mountain Preserve purchase. This enabled the county to complete their obligation to receive the much larger transportation grants with relatively little trouble and obviously made them a strong partner for future projects.

MCT Executive Director Barbara Decker commented that the loss of these funds really does hurt the land trust as it contemplates future projects. Under the Greenspace funding formula, Pickens' yearly allocations would have steadily risen from the \$130,000 each year.

"With the county knowing they could immediately apply these state funds to pay their share of local projects, it obviously makes them more excited about conservation work," Decker said. "We clearly understand the budget strain in Georgia and why the funds aren't there, but it's still disappointing."

Political prognosticators say the Greenspace program's popularity was strong enough that it will definitely be funded again, when the economy in Georgia picks up.

Decker also noted that the loss of these state dollars further highlights the importance of other funding sources including grants and individual/corporate contributions. 🌱

Be sure to check our website
www.mctga.org for information on
MCT's Annual Meeting in September!

MAKING TRACKS

By Barb Decker, Executive Director

In the day-to-day course of operations at the Mountain Conservation Trust, we are working on many separate projects with many different partner organizations, and sometimes the view of the forest can be obscured by the trees. While putting this newsletter together, I could see how everything we do revolves around a cohesive theme driven by our mission to protect permanently the natural resources and scenic beauty of the mountains and foothills of North Georgia.

Over the course of a year, we advise many private landowners on methods to protect their land, usually with conservation easements, and we try to match conservation-minded buyers with owners who want to sell their large tracts of spectacular land in the mountains. Our sponsorship of a workshop for tax assessors in North Georgia counties will help develop guidelines for property tax relief for landowners who place conservation easements on their land. Negotiations with landowners are complicated and always take a long time, usually years, to complete. Large tracts of undeveloped land still exist in Georgia's mountains, often at prices that astound Atlantans, but they won't last long. It is important to protect what we can before the window of opportunity closes.

Our work with partners on an outdoor classroom/nature sanctuary of 42 acres at Pickens High School protects a magnificent half-mile stretch of Long Swamp Creek. We are also helping to restore and landscape the high school campus which sits on a barren plateau left when earth-moving during construction removed the entire top of a hill.

Our sponsorship in Pickens of the Upper Etowah River Alliance's Clean Water Week presentations in schools supports our goal of preserving a clean and plentiful water supply.

While working on the application for Georgia Scenic Byway status for Burnt Mountain Road with other partners, we realized that Pickens County has no designated hiking trails. Land protected for trails provides greenways that will protect streams, wildlife corridors, and greenspace. We're now working with the county to provide trails of varying degrees of difficulty for residents and visitors to the Byway. The tourist industry is a relatively clean one and helps local businesses without placing much stress on the county's budget and infrastructure.

Although we're involved in a number of projects with over fourteen partner organizations, they are all cut of the same cloth and cohere under one mission and set of goals.

Conservation Biology 101: Forest Fragmentation Causes Extinctions

By Barbara Decker, Ph.D.



Counties on their way to becoming suburbs are realizing that high-density subdivisions greatly increase the cost of services such as police, fire, roads and schools. That's probably the main reason your property taxes are going up. But there is another terrible cost of poorly planned development. As farms are divided into lots and forests are cleared, the landscape which was mostly continuous greenspace is changed into a patchy mosaic of varying land uses and the wildlife is driven out.



Ecologists and conservation biologists now know that the best way to save animal and plant species from extinction is to preserve their habitat whether rainforest, coral reef, wetland or our own temperate forest, in a chunk large enough to encompass multiple ranges or territories. If individual parks are too small, it helps to connect several of them by greenways or corridors of protected land to permit their wild inhabitants to migrate between the parks.

My research work in the Tana River Primate Reserve in Kenya is a distressingly perfect illustration of the negative effects of forest fragmentation and human population growth. The narrow strip of riverine forest along the Tana River which flows through an otherwise arid landscape contains two species of critically endangered forest primates – the Tana River red colobus and the Tana crested mangabey. Neither primate exists anywhere else in the world. The red colobus monkeys are shy and purely arboreal – neither they nor the mangabeys can survive outside their forest. Vying with them for land along the river are the Pokomo agriculturalists. Over the last 25 years as the Pokomo population grew and more forest was cleared for farming and villages, the formerly continuous riverine forest was

chopped up into disconnected fragments.

As the magnificent trees were felled, the monkeys were squeezed into ever smaller forest patches. Overcrowding meant that there was not enough food for all the refugees. Fighting ensued over territory, life was stressful, and many group members, weak from malnutrition, contracted diseases and died.

Another phenomenon of forests is called 'edge effects'. The edges of forests are subjected to more sunlight than the interior and are therefore hotter and drier – a different microclimate from the cool interior. Colonizer or early successional plant species grow along the edges—different from the canopy tree species found deeper in the forest. Different animal and insect species inhabit this environment. In a small patch more of the forest is edge, leaving less room for plants and animals which are adapted to life in the forest interior. Wildlife like the colobus prefer to feed on the leaves and fruits of the tree species that grow inside the forest.

With few exceptions, animals in the wild do not breed with closely related individuals, usually leaving the family at puberty to move to another group. But with the monkeys compressed into small pieces of forest and too shy to cross a farm to another forest patch to find a mate, inbreeding probably occurred with its resultant manifestations of maladaptive recessive genes. Eighty percent of the red colobus and twenty-five percent of the mangabeys died. Scientists fear that the two Tana primates will soon become extinct.

In order to save the wildlife in the montane forests of north Georgia from devastating population crashes of whole wildlife species, large tracts of forest land must remain intact. Sizeable land parcels still exist in Georgia's mountains at reasonable prices, and MCT is scrambling to protect them. When choosing land to protect, we focus on large tracts and connecting greenway corridors which allow wildlife to move between forests while, at the same time, providing hiking and horse trails and protecting views and streams. 🐾

Special Thanks to Our Wonderful Volunteers for Their Gifts of Time and Talent

Thank You to Pat Wilber for all your hard work as our Membership Director!

Thank You to Mary Ann & Emory Williams CPAs for your dedicated work as our accountant!

Thank You to Don Wells and Robert Anderson for mapping trails
through the Burnt Mountain Preserve.

Forest Service Previews Plan for Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest

The Forest Service released its “Draft Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forests” in early March much to the dismay of the conservation community and in particular, Georgia Forestwatch. Under this proposed forest management plan, an unbelievable 457,000 acres would be open to logging.

Georgia Forestwatch has been leading the Wild Georgia Coalition, of which MCT is a member, and working with a number of other organizations ranging from the Georgia Wildlife Federation to the Georgia Interfaith Alliance to create a positive alternative to the current plan for Georgia’s National Forest written in the early 1980’s. This alternative plan would retain all existing uses of the forest and aim for 48,000 more acres of Wilderness areas to protect the clear flowing water and wonderful diversity of life found here in our North Georgia Mountains.

Under the proposed draft plan, the Forest Service would recommend only 8,000 acres for new Wilderness areas. Throughout the forest any number of areas would go from Recommended

Wilderness to land open to logging, including Mountaintown, Indian Grave Gap, Boggs Creek and Turner Creek. After a few years of the management called for under this plan these areas would never be eligible for Wilderness designation again. The Conasauga River would be removed from Watershed Restoration Area to Dispersed Recreation. This would allow clear-cutting, selection-cut logging and the development of motorized recreation. This would be devastating to one of the most biologically diverse watersheds left in North America.

To review this draft plan in its entirety you can go to the following website: www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/planning/sa_plans/Chattahoochee/chapters.htm, or call the Forest Service in Gainesville at (770) 297-3000 to ask where you can go to read a copy. There is still time to make your feelings known. A special team will be analyzing comments on the proposed plan from concerned parties until July 3, 2003. To find how you can help the Wild Georgia Coalition, you can contact Georgia Forestwatch by phone (706) 636-1371 or e-mail info@gafw.org. 🌱

Exploring Burnt Mountain Preserve

Since July of last year, MCT members Don Wells and Robert Anderson have been mapping and exploring the Burnt Mountain Preserve on our behalf. They have provided us with wonderful observations on the flora, fauna and cultural aspects of this area.

The list of wildflowers that bloom during the seasons in the Preserve is endless. They have seen Asters – bushy, late purple, white wood and Maryland Golden, Black-eyed Susans and Wild Quinine. Other flowers include Heal-all, Rattlesnake Plantain, Phlox, Jimsonweed and Hoary Mountain Mint. They have also seen Starry Champion, Creeping Bush Clover, Flowering Spurge, Tall Bellflowers and Goldenrod just to name a few. While there were plenty of signs of wildlife activity, there were very few sightings. One exception was a brief meeting with a skunk that was given a wide berth. There were signs of bears digging for grubs under rocks and dropping small trees to get to a paperwasp nest.

Don and Robert found an older footpath now overgrown paralleling a more recent road. It’s possible this path was used by the Cherokee or early settlers to the

area. A large number of Trail Trees have been seen in the Preserve. One large Trail Tree was found near Champion Creek in a relatively flat area that the native people would have found suitable for camping and hunting. The form of this particular tree is that which was believed to be used by the Cherokee to work animal hides.

When they began their exploration last summer, both men noted with concern the damage caused by our drought conditions. Large areas of trees and undergrowth were dying off well before Fall. A very old stand of Mountain Laurel appeared to be dying from the drought with the leaves on many trees turning black from lack of water. Fortunately, when they revisited that old grove in January the Mountain Laurel appeared to have recovered from the extremes of last summer. The wildflowers are blooming again, the streams and waterfalls are running full and the green is returning to Burnt Mountain.

We appreciate the effort that Don and Robert have put into documenting the diverse wildlife and beauty that we have all worked so hard to preserve. 🌱



Board Member Profiles



Clay Johnston

Clay Johnston, currently serving as President of MCT, was born in north Atlanta and grew up in Sandy Springs where he graduated from high school in 1972. Clay attended college at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, California and the University of Georgia in Athens. He also studied in Cortona, Italy. Clay owns a small residential design and construction company working on special homes and projects.

Clay is past president of area home builders' associations; past president of Friendship Force; past president of Tate Mountain Associates, Inc. and a charter member and chairman of the Grandview Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company.

Married to Rebecca Beeson since 1980, Clay and Rebecca make their home in Pickens County with their children Caitlin Justice and Clayton James.



E. Cody Laird, Jr.

E. Cody Laird, Jr. is a member of the ING America Insurance Holdings, Inc. board of directors and Managing Partner of Oakridge Farms in Worth County Georgia.

He has been associated with Life Insurance Company of Georgia since 1964, when he joined the company as manager of Life of Georgia Center Development. He was named vice president - Real Estate in 1970. He has served on the Board of Directors of Life of Georgia, Southland Life, and Security Life of Denver and as chairman of the executive committee of the Life Insurance Company of Georgia board.

Prior to joining Life Insurance Company of Georgia, he served as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force as Base Police Officer of Travis Air Force Base, California and, thereafter, as Facilities Officer with the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division at Cape Canaveral.

Mr. Laird is past chairman of the board of directors of the Atlanta Speech School, past member of the board of trustees of the McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tennessee and past chairman of the board of trustees of the Westminster Schools in Atlanta.

He is a past member of the board of trustees of the Georgia Conservancy, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Georgia Chapter of The Nature Conservancy a member of the board of the Path Foundation. He is a past President and current board member of the Mountain Conservation Trust of Georgia.

He and his sister own Oakridge Farms, a 2500 acre property in southern Worth County Georgia, where they are working to restore the Longleaf Wiregrass ecosystem. A conservation easement was recently placed on the property with The Nature Conservancy.

A native of Atlanta, Mr. Laird is a 1957 graduate of Georgia Institute of Technology with a degree in mechanical engineering.

Mr. Laird and his wife, Linda, have a home at Tate Mountain Estates and live part time in Atlanta, Georgia and Wilson, Wyoming.



Dan Pool

Dan Pool is editor of the Pickens County Progress. A graduate of the University of Georgia and a lifelong resident of Jasper, Dan and his wife Christie have two daughters, Madeline and Ellie.

Dan has been a member of the Board since 1999 and is currently serving as Vice President. His hobbies include traditional archery and whitewater kayaking.



Neil Williams

Neil Williams of Atlanta recently retired as general counsel of Amvescap PLC, a British company that owns a number of investment management companies around the world. Prior to his work with Amvescap, Neil had a four decade career with the Alston & Bird law firm, where he

was managing partner for many years. Neil and his wife Sue have a home ("Cracow") at Tate Mountain Estates and have set a portion of their mountain property aside in a conservation easement with the Mountain Conservation Trust.

He continues to be active in the Atlanta community. Neil is chairman of the board of the Woodruff Arts Center and a member of several corporate and foundation boards. He has long had an interest in education and is a former chairman of the board of trustees of Duke University.

Neil comments, "although Sue and I are not full time residents of Pickens County, we know it as a place where our roots are growing deeper and deeper. We care a lot about the quality of development (and non-development) of this area. Wise, forward-looking land use is an essential ingredient in successful development. I think the trust has an important role in helping to keep these special mountains just that - special.' 🌲🌲🌲"

Thank You!

August 2002 - April 16, 2003

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Special Thanks To All Who Helped Make Our Annual Picnic Such a Success!

Thank you to Bill Pound for the wonderful music and for donating part of the proceeds from the sale of his CDs at the Picnic.

Thank you to Jane Kirk for the splendid job she did as Coordinator and to her daughter Katie Gardner who designed our 2002 T-shirt.

Thank you to David Akoubian and Evelyn Steiner for the beautiful and entertaining slide presentation.

Thank you to Cody Laird and his family for hosting our Picnic at their lovely home.

Thank you to Our Intrepid Hike Leaders: Robert Anderson, Rebecca Johnston, Don Wells & John White.

Thank you to Rick & Marsha Jasperse for the Best Barbecue in the Georgia Mountains.

Thank you to Salem Suber & Jasper Family Steakhouse.

Thank you to Community Action Center for the use of their portable lectern.

Thank you to all who helped with set-up, registration and clean-up: Kenneth Caudill, Melinda Edwards, Marsha Jasperse, Rebecca Johnston, Miriam Kiser, Florence Melda, Bill & Shelia Ragsdale & Rebecca White.

Thank you to Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Jasper & Gary Reece.

Thank you to Fred Decker & Clay Johnston for signs and photos.

Thank you to Palmer Temple for asking God's blessing on our gathering.

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