

# MOUNTAIN CONSERVATION TRUST

Newsletter Vol. 7, Issue 2

Summer 2004

## Should the Commissioner of Pickens County enact the proposed Pickens County Land Use Intensity District Ordinance?

By Miller Andress



On Tuesday, July 20, 2004, Pickens County voters will answer the question, "Should the Commissioner of Pickens County Enact the Proposed Pickens County Land Use Intensity District Ordinance?" This is a non-binding referendum that will assist the County Commissioner in deciding to sign the proposed land use ordinance for Pickens County.

**The timeliness of this issue and its importance are emphasized by:**

- ▲ Projections that Pickens County's population will grow from approximately 26,000 today to 36,500 in 2010 and to 54,858 in 2020.
- ▲ The example of adjoining counties in failing to manage their growth.

**The proposed land use ordinance will enhance the opportunity to:**

- ▲ Promote responsible growth
- ▲ Lessen congestion on public thoroughfares
- ▲ Secure safety from fire and health conditions
- ▲ Maintain desirable living conditions
- ▲ Preserve natural resources

**Major elements in the proposed land use ordinance are:**

- ▲ Definition of types of land use and the assignment of specific areas for certain types of land use
- ▲ Criteria for development within each land use area
- ▲ Special conditions such as topography or existing non-conforming use
- ▲ Administrative procedures.

**Pickens County needs the land use ordinance to:**

- ▲ Facilitate effective infrastructure planning
- ▲ Enhance and preserve property values
- ▲ Preserve our rural environment
- ▲ Establish guidelines to reduce the impact of development
- ▲ Place the future growth of the county in the hands of its citizens
- ▲ Encourage thoughtful use of our natural resources



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## The proposed Pickens County Land Use Intensity District Ordinance

(continued from page 1)

Without the land use ordinance, Pickens County will grow in a haphazard manner that will make it expensive and difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the goals that are commensurate with the quality of life that brought us to Pickens County and keeps us here.

Responsible citizens will vote  
**YES** to the question.

Note: For further information on the proposed land use ordinance, contact Mr. Norman Pope, Director of Planning and Development, Pickens County, (706) 253-8850.

*\*\* Miller Andress is a member of the Pickens County Economic Development Task Force.*

*Editor's Note: MCT recognizes the need for a county land use ordinance, and encourages you to vote on July 20th. If the referendum passes, the county government will hold three public meetings to solicit comments about the proposed ordinance from county residents before the Commissioner enacts it. We hope that some changes can be made in the proposed ordinance at that time that will better protect the environment and rural quality of life for the future of the county. We urge you to attend. 🐾*

### Please Mark Your Calendars!

MCT's Annual Meeting  
will be held  
**On October 16, 2004**  
at the Lairds' house  
in Tate Mountain Estates

Special thanks to Emily  
Beals for her help with  
this newsletter!

## Mining Halted on Champion Creek

For years, a North Carolina stone company quarried flagstone on a 110 acre property it leased from local landowners. The location is on Champion Creek just outside Jasper's city limits. Champion flows into Long Swamp Creek downstream of the site, just above Jasper's water intake. Apparently, the formation of schist layers which are quarried there are not found in many locations in the U.S.

Frequent complaints from landowners near the quarry were made to local authorities about the operation, citing heavy siltation of Champion and Long Swamp Creeks and disturbance caused by dust and noise from the quarry trucks. MCT had been concerned about the mining operation for quite some time and had met with county officials and with the owners of the site to suggest alternative ways for the land to produce income for them without harming the environment.

In October, 2003 the property was sold to a stone company operating out of Salt Lake City. The company's ensuing mismanagement of the strip mining operation quickly began to cause serious damage to Champion and Long Swamp Creeks. The company also widened the road to the mine which crosses adjacent property without that landowner's permission. The Environmental Protection Agency cited the company for causing siltation of the creeks which was impairing Jasper's water intake operations. In January, 2004 the city asked for and received a temporary injunction from the Superior Court ordering a halt to all construction, strip mining, cutting of trees and disturbing of soil on the property.

On February 4<sup>th</sup>, the injunction became permanent. From now on, no one can mine on the property, and the Utah stone company is required to repair, stabilize, and gravel the road leading to the mine.

This is a wonderful victory for Pickens County's watershed and the fragile ecology of the area. 🐾

# Land Trusts 101 – Protecting the Future

By Laura Slaughenhop



*We are often asked what a land trust is or what it can do. I'd like to share with you what I've learned about land trusts and what land trusts can and cannot do. Consider this Land Trusts 101.*

Land trusts are private, nonprofit organizations on the local, state or regional level directly involved in protecting land for its natural, recreational, scenic, historical or productive value. In Georgia there are 20 local land trusts like the Mountain Conservation Trust working to protect their special places. Over 1,200 land trusts in all 50 states, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico have protected over 6 million acres. These trusts protect mountains and prairies as well as forests and river corridors. They protect islands, marshes, coastlines and scenic vistas. Ranchlands, farmlands, urban gardens and parks, cultural landscapes, Civil War battlefields, and hiking trails are all protected by land trusts.

The history of land trusts can be traced to *village improvement societies* which began in New England in the mid-1800's. These groups were organized to "improve the quality of life and of the environment." In 1891, the Massachusetts legislature incorporated the Trustees of Reservations to protect what they termed "the jewels of the living landscape."

The like-minded Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests was organized in 1901. Both these groups are still among the nation's leading state conservation groups. At the turn of the 20th century, a group of Californians with the slogan 'Save the Redwoods' created the Sempervirens Club. Other organizations that worked in some ways similar to land trusts include the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History, 1800; the Maine Audubon Society, 1843; and the Ohio Historical Society, begun in 1885 to preserve the state's historical and archeological sites.

One definition for the noun 'trust' found in the

dictionary might put a more personal face on land trusts: 6. (n) *Reliance on something in the future; hope.* The goal of a land trust is to help private landowners protect their property without having to sell it or give up their right or their family's right to use and enjoy it. A land trust works to help families preserve their fields and forests for future generations.

One of the more popular and flexible tools of protection is the conservation easement. This is a legal agreement between a landowner and a conservation organization that permanently limits the property's uses in order to protect its conservation value. In some cases a conservation easement might provide some form of tax savings, but the most important benefit for a landowner is the peace of knowing that his or her land is permanently protected.

Conservation easements allow the land to be privately owned and enjoyed within the conditions set forth by the landowners and their land trust. A family can use an easement to protect their property from being subdivided, yet retain the right to continue farming or timber operations within the guidelines of the easement. They can retain the right to hunt and fish on the property. All or part of a parcel can be included in an easement. Perhaps a stream bank, a stand of mature hardwoods, or a meadow of wildflowers can be protected while the owners retain the right to improve their home and set aside building lots for their children. A landowner can be assured that in the future his or her land will never be exploited or disturbed.

Over half of the land trusts in the United States are run by volunteers; others may only have a director or one or more part-time staff members. The Mountain Conservation Trust is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and employs a part-time Executive Director and one part-time staff member and we have a number of loyal volunteers. Our budget is based almost entirely on membership dues and donations. As property owners and in most instances as members of the community, the main focus of MCT is to help our neighbors who want to protect their special places. We share your concern for the land and the environment and stand ready to provide assistance and guidance. 🐾

# Youth Leadership Class Explores Outdoor Classroom



*Photos by Sheri Crowe*

*MCT staff member Laura Slaughenhop is a graduate of the Leadership Pickens Class of 2000. As a class project, the group organized the Youth Leadership Pickens program. Laura has participated as a facilitator for the YLP classes of 2002 and 2003 and currently serves as coordinator. MCT is one of the organizations that is introduced to each YLP class. This year she asked John White to help lead a field trip down to the outdoor classroom at Pickens High School.*

On a perfect Saturday morning in April, Pickens High School teacher and MCT member John White and I, along with fellow YLP leader Sheri Crowe and Bill Slaughenhop, explored the outdoor classroom on the banks of Long Swamp Creek on the PHS campus with a group of students. These youngsters, all high school juniors are participants in the Youth Leadership Pickens Class of 2004. This program is designed to help the students develop leadership and team building skills as they learn about the community around them. They are introduced to service organizations, state and local government, and law enforcement agencies, as well as local business and industry leaders and the media.

I began the morning by presenting a brief history of land trusts in general and the Mountain Conservation Trust in particular. MCT is a wonderful example for these students of how a group of individuals unite to confront an issue facing their community. Then by working together, they can often bring these issues to a successful resolution.

Under clear blue skies we headed down to the outdoor classroom. The trees along the trail and on the creek bank were full of young, spring green leaves, and there were violets everywhere. Fire pinks, green and golds, and bluets were some of the other wildflowers John pointed out to the students as they made their way along the creek. There were lots of ferns and a beautiful Decumbent Trillium. We also filled a couple of bags



The trees along the trail and on the creek bank were full of young, spring green leaves and there were violets everywhere.



with trash left along the trail and found some of the 'Private Property' signs posted by the Board of Education that had been yanked out of the ground and tossed aside. There were several places where the stream bank had been degraded by ATVs driving in and out of the creek. The silt from the ATV tracks covered the creek bed at the edge of the damaged

banks. This abuse of the area served as a reminder of how harmful thoughtless behavior can be to the environment.

After a very pleasant morning along Long Swamp Creek, we hiked back up to the high school. The students took away with them a renewed appreciation of their own backyard and an awareness of the need to protect the beautiful places around us. 🐾

Only when the last tree has died  
and the last river has been poisoned  
and the last fish has been caught will  
we realize that we cannot eat money.

-19th century Cree Indian

# Plans Progressing for Network of Land Trusts in Georgia

In the Spring of 2003 at their strategic planning retreat, MCT's Board of Directors decided to explore the possibility of forming a regional association of land trusts in northern Georgia. The Board first asked the Land Trust Alliance's southeastern office for advice and information about how associations had been formed in other states. Chuck Roe, the new Director of LTA's Southeast Regional Program, organized a meeting of Georgia's land trusts at LTA's annual southeastern conference. During the meeting, it became apparent that there is a need for not just a northern group but a statewide network of some kind.

Most land trusts in Georgia focus on relatively small geographical areas which are scattered around the state. These local land trusts have similar needs and problems such as small staffs and underfunding. Without established communication channels between the trusts, they often 'reinvent the wheel' as they begin to accept donations of conservation easements, build a membership base, set up administrative procedures, and raise funds. By accepting easements, they often assume legal obligations without enough revenues to defend the terms of easements from violations. In a never-ending search for grants, they find that large foundations are seldom willing to fund individual land trusts.

At the meeting, MCT Board member Bill Ragsdale took on the task of writing a proposal for the group. Land trusts responded with comments and suggestions, and a follow-up conference call was held. The consensus was to initiate the formation of a network, and an ad hoc steering committee was formed. In addition to support from Chuck Roe, Hans Neuhauser of the Georgia Land Trust Service Center is assisting in the effort.

Plans are in the works for a two-day meeting of all Georgia's land trusts this fall. Participants will discuss organization of the group, the formation of associations in other states, information exchange among land trusts, and other topics of mutual interest. With the report from the Governor's Land Conservation Partnership due in August, the land trusts will consider the recommendations of that council and opportunities for land protection efforts.

Bill Ragsdale will serve on the steering committee, and, of course, Board member Brad Currey represents land trusts on the Governor's Advisory Council for the Land Conservation Partnership. We are delighted with the progress already realized and will watch with interest as the group evolves. There is great potential for the group to make all of Georgia's land trusts more efficient and effective. 🐾

## 'Conservation Buyer' Properties Available

MCT keeps a list of properties available in the North Georgia Mountains that need to be purchased by people who will preserve their beauty and the flora and fauna on them. Many are not listed with real estate agents, and the landowners would prefer not to sell to developers. Most are fifty acres or more.

*One offering is 51 acres on Sassafras Mountain in Dawson County – very private but close to Jasper. Beautiful view from an elevation of about 2700 feet. Stream and waterfall. Can be divided into two parcels.*

**For more information, contact MCT's office at (706) 253-4077 or [bdecker@mctga.org](mailto:bdecker@mctga.org)**

# Thank You!

## New Members & Renewals February 19, 2004 – June 2, 2004

*(Donations Received after June 2 will be recognized in Fall 2004 Newsletter)*

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Thank you for your contribution!

*MCT is dedicated to the permanent conservation of the natural resources and scenic beauty of the mountains and foothills of North Georgia through land protection, collaborative partnerships and education.*



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