

Conservation Chronicle

Aiken Land Conservancy Newsletter 2023 Vol. 1



ALC's Mission Extends to Public Places

Since its founding in 1991, Aiken Land Conservancy has, through land purchases as well as donations and conservation easements from landowners, preserved thousands of acres in Aiken County. While these are all very important to our mission, we don't seek solely to retain open space in the traditional sense. Over the years we have also been actively involved in preserving land that is enjoyed by many as public space.

Langley Pond Park

In 2010, ALC, with funds received through a grant by the South Carolina Conservation Bank, purchased 64 acres adjacent to Langley Pond Park. An agreement was made to lease the property to Aiken County with a stipulation that it was to be used for passive recreation such as hiking. This additional property, referred to as the upland tract, expanded the park by nearly 25 percent to its current 285 acres.

Affectionately known as “the world’s largest pond” as it is just short of qualifying as a lake, Langley has

become a destination for a variety of water sport enthusiasts. Serious rowers come for the 2,000-meter rowing course. It



has been the venue for local, regional, and even national rowing events including the annual Augusta Invitational and the USRowing Masters Championship. Langley Pond is also a favorite for those who enjoy water skiing, jet skiing, and paddleboarding. Others just enjoy the large swimming area and sandy beach.

See Public Places on page 4

Pony Racing Clinic Held at Winthrop Field

On any given day, it is quite common to see riders, horses, dogs and their people using the Winthrop Field in the heart of Aiken's horse district. If you happened to pass by on Friday, March 17, you were in for a special treat as ponies galloped by under their young jockeys.

In preparation for the Aiken Trials every year, each junior jockey is required to attend a pony racing clinic held by U.S. Pony Racing to hone their skills prior to the race. Now in its fifth year, the pony races have become a crowd favorite between the thoroughbred trials.



This year, Rosie Napravnik Sharp (two-time winner of the Kentucky Oaks) and her husband Joe Sharp (Leading Trainer) were in attendance, not only as clinicians, but as parents, too. An all-time record of forty-three junior entries were in this year's pony races at the Aiken Trials. 🌿





President's Letter

As the old cartoon so humorously conveys, Aiken has always been a haven for its visitors and residents. However, that haven is now under

accelerating development pressure. Our beautiful community, high quality of life, strategic location and growing migration to South Carolina are the reasons. With its core mission to protect Aiken's quality of life, responding to this development pressure is at the heart of the purpose of the Aiken Land Conservancy. Our more than thirty years of conservation experience and active leadership to protect our watersheds, historic properties, forests, and farms, make us a key player within the community to achieve that mission.



To help protect Aiken's lands and water resources from the pressures that come with accelerating development we need every tool in the land conservation toolbox. Our number one tool is conservation easements, held and enforced by ALC. A conservation easement is a legal way for private landowners, as well as public/private partnerships, to restrict future development on their land. And we've been successful in this area, holding conservation easements on nearly 40 properties. To build on our success and be effective in the face of accelerating development, we are taking these steps.

First, as the only organization solely dedicated to protecting Aiken's lands, historic properties, and water resources, we must significantly increase our outreach to landowners and the government officials who determine land use policy. A key step in increasing our outreach is to add a fulltime executive director to our team, a search that is underway. This will be an important addition to our exceptional and dedicated board and administrative staff.

Second, by holding a conservation easement ALC is making a binding commitment to monitor and enforce the terms of that easement, in perpetuity, on every property. That obligation is a significant financial commitment, necessitating dedicated funds to assure ALC always has the resources to cover the costs of ongoing monitoring, costs that continue to grow as easements are added. The planned sale of the Rose Trace property, a gift to ALC that was made with our future needs in mind, will generate funds to help strengthen our ability to monitor for the future. We appreciate both the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Rosen, who donated the property, and their continuing and enthusiastic support for our work.

Third, we have an important leadership role in demonstrating to the community, landowners, and government that land conservation is key to a vibrant Aiken. Land conservation isn't about stopping growth and change. It is about balancing them with our core mission to protect Aiken's quality of life. That is our leadership role, leveraging our 30-plus years of conservation experience, to actively, and aggressively, advocate for protecting our community.

Thank you for your support of ALC and our mission to protect Aiken's quality of life. It's a pleasure to be back as president to work with you on that mission.

Larry Comegys
President, Board of Trustees

The mission of the Aiken Land Conservancy is to preserve Aiken's unique character and natural and historic resources for present and future generations through advocacy and land protection.

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Public Places

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Langley Pond Park offers way more than just water sports. The 2.8-mile Langley Pond Loop Trail, which winds through a cool, wooded route, is enjoyed by all ages and levels. Host to numerous 5K runs, the trail is equally enjoyed by walkers, joggers, dog walkers, and even riders on horseback.

A championship level disc golf course brings one more element to Langley. The 18-hole course is considered to be one of the top courses in the Southeast. In addition to its varying terrain, water holes, and multiple tee locations, the course features a driving range and putting area.



Carolina Bay Preserve

It took six years of fundraising for ALC to raise \$600,000 to acquire a 14-acre parcel, just off Whiskey Road, which would be combined with a 10-acre parcel owned by the City of Aiken to establish the Carolina Bay Preserve. The City, County, local businesses, individuals, as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the SC Legacy Trust Fund, all contributed to the effort, and in 2002 the land was purchased. Upon acquiring the land, ALC deeded the property back to the City and a conservation easement was placed on the property ensuring that this rare urban parcel would be preserved for educational purposes and the enjoyment of the public.

A bit of a misnomer, a Carolina Bay is not a true bay, but rather an oval or circular depression which are fairly common in the lower elevations of the Carolinas. Water tends to accumulate in these depressions forming ponds in which a variety of plants and animals, often not typical of the area, thrive.

Due to its urban location and high level of biodiversity, Carolina Bay Preserve is a treasured educational resource. It is



amazing that in this location students can observe an entire ecosystem created by the birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and plants living here. A natural wetland, the goal has always been to make minimal improvements to the Carolina Bay Preserve and maintain its natural tranquility. There are two walking trails with gentle terrain, the upper one being .48 miles and the lower .31 miles. An observation deck overlooks the “bay” and the preserve also includes a climbing wall.

Winthrop Field

The Adam Winthrop Polo Field, a 12-acre property in Aiken's historic horse district, has a long history. In Aiken's Winter Colony days, the polo field was part of a much larger property owned by New York governor, Averill Harriman. In 1960, Adam Winthrop purchased the 12-acre piece to use as a polo field. In 1993, ALC launched a private fundraising effort to purchase the polo field from the Winthrop Family. ALC bought Winthrop Field in 1998, ensuring that this magnificent open space would not be developed.



Photo by Ginny Southworth

Unlike many of our conservation projects, ALC retains ownership of Winthrop Field and thus also bears the expense and work of maintaining the property. Aiken Polo Club, which uses the field for practice, has partnered with ALC to maintain the property which is enjoyed daily by residents in a variety of ways. The field, which sits between Grace and Mead Avenues, is open during daylight hours to equestrians, pedestrians, and dogs under control.



Photo by Ginny Southworth

In 2016, ALC, spearheaded a project to have overhead power lines along Mead Avenue buried in an effort to save the live oaks from excessive pruning. The two-year project was a public/private collaboration between ALC, the City of Aiken, and South Carolina Electric & Gas. The success of this project led the City to undertake a similar project, but on a larger scale -- saving the iconic live oaks all along South Boundary Avenue.

Boyd Pond Park

Boyd Pond Park could be considered two parks in one as it offers both active and passive recreational facilities. Nearly half of the property encompassing this county park is owned by ALC. The entire 207-acre parcel in Beech Island was formerly Savannah River Site's employee recreational facility. In 2008 ALC received a \$300,000 grant enabling the purchase of 92 acres of the property, while Aiken County purchased the remaining 115 acres. ALC owns the portion on which the

See Public Places - Boyd Pond Park on page 6



Public Places - Boyd Pond Park

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Due to the popularity of disc golf in the CSRA, a former 9-hole golf course on the property was converted into a challenging 18-hole disc golf course featuring a mix of wooded and open holes. Another welcome addition to the park is the Boyd Observatory with its free programs designed to introduce young visitors to astronomy. 🌿



pond is located as well as surrounding land which was never developed for recreational use. ALC leases this tract to the County for passive recreation. The 30-acre pond is a favorite for fishing and canoeing. Hikers enjoy the two-mile trail through the woods while bird watching and geocaching are also popular passive activities in the park.

The remainder of the park serves a multitude of active recreational interests. There are softball fields, a soccer complex, over six miles of mountain bike trails, a boardwalk, boat ramp, multiple picnic areas, outdoor basketball court, sand volleyball court, and a playground.



ALC is proud to have played an integral part in the preservation of all of these public places that are enjoyed by so many Aiken County residents. Our work ensures that these properties will remain accessible to the public for generations to come.



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We have new and interesting posts every week for you and your family.

CLAYS FOR CONSERVATION



Photo by Ginny Southworth

Join us Thanksgiving Weekend!

CLAYS FOR CONSERVATION

On a perfect day in November, Aiken Land Conservancy held its eighth Clays for Conservation event at the state-of-the-art Palmetto Shooting Complex. Approximately 100 people attended, with a record number of beginners (39!) who received professional instruction from the Palmetto staff.

After the shooting competition, a delicious BBQ lunch was provided by Park Row Market No. 1, with the “Last Shot Bar” and homemade desserts from ALC.

Not only did everyone have a terrific time, but the funds raised will help ALC protect the places you love in Aiken County.



Candy Moore and Jeffrey Mullen - Best Seniors

Congratulations to all the winners!

Top Men's Team:

Ted Hoel
Tony Horan
Rich Santalesa
Gordon Whiting

Best Beginners:

Logan Meyer
Desiree Voegle

Best Adults:

Cameron Houston
Jessica Knox

Best Seniors:

Candy Moore
Jeffrey Mullen

Best Junior:

Blake McLemore

Top Women's Team:

Kelly Green
Jessica Knox
Ann Mitchell
Candy Moore

Clay Conservationists:

Lilly Hottensen
Patrice Lamy

Photos by Ginny Southworth



Desiree Voegle - Best Beginner



Logan Meyer - Best Beginner



Blake McLemore - Best Junior

Many thanks to our sponsors who made this event possible

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Cameron Houston - Best Adult



Candy Moore, Ann Mitchell, Jessica Knox, Kelly Green



Jessica Knox - Best Adult



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Thanksgiving
Weekend
**SATURDAY,
NOVEMBER 25**
Bring your
friends
and family!



Photos by Ginny Southworth

The State of Aiken's Trees

Aiken Streetscapes and Aiken Land Conservancy (ALC) have contributed funds over the past three years to assist the City in their ongoing proactive tree care. Over this winter, there has been a huge improvement in the western portion of the downtown City grid. Numerous hazardous trees were removed, a substantial amount of deadwooding was completed and we were able to lift the canopy to allow for safe vehicle passage. The job began on

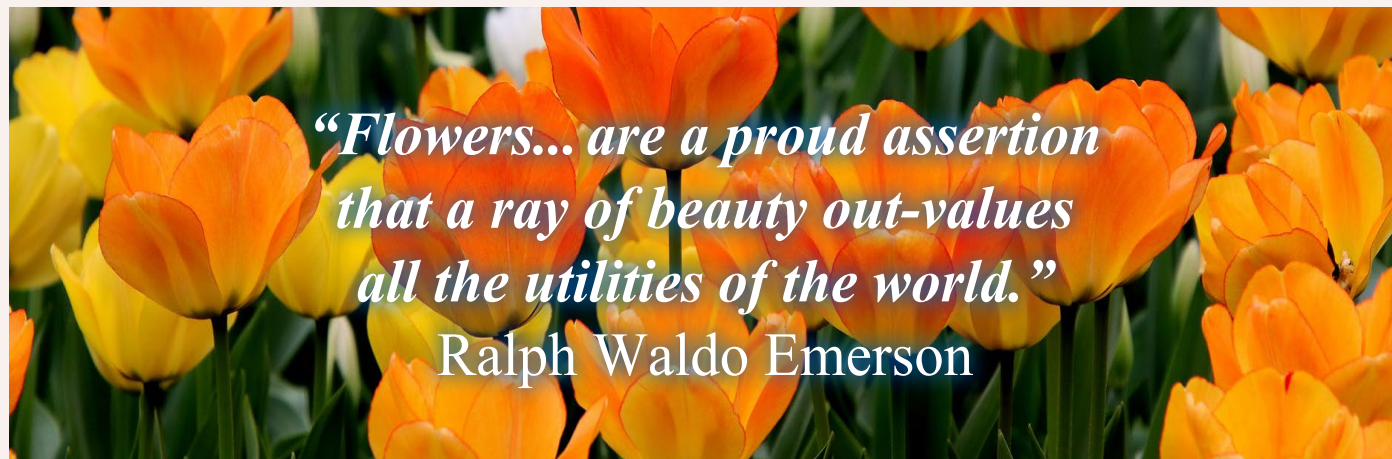


Barnwell Avenue NW, in mid-November, at the Morgan Street NW intersection. Collins Tree Care worked west from this starting point and completed the entire area located within Morgan Street NW between Hampton Avenue and Richland Avenue down to Laurens Street. Numerous grand and significant live oaks were cleaned up and thinned to allow for better air movement. We are quite happy with the results -- this area will benefit from the work for many years. This is also an area where there will be an opportunity to plant new live oaks and other Aiken favorites in the future.

Dominion Energy informed the City that it has completed the undergrounding of the main power lines along South Boundary all the way to the Chesterfield/Whiskey intersection. This was very welcome news! We anticipate some extensive cleanup work and proactive pruning of these live oaks in the Fall of 2023. Plans will be finalized upon the passing of the City's upcoming budget. Aiken Streetscapes and ALC are committed to providing funds towards this very important project to preserve and protect the iconic live oaks lining South Boundary Avenue. 🌿

Congratulations are in order to Lex Kirkland, City of Aiken Public Services Director, and Aaron Campbell, City of Aiken Horticulturist, on this recent news: "On behalf of the Arbor Day Foundation, congratulations on earning recognition as a 2022 Tree City USA. Residents of your community should be proud to live in a place that makes the planting and care of trees a priority, and you should be proud of a job well done!"

Contributors to this article: Lex Kirkland, City of Aiken Public Services Director, Aaron Campbell, City of Aiken Horticulturist, Dacre Stoker Executive Director, Aiken Streetscapes. Photo by Ginny Southworth



“Flowers... are a proud assertion that a ray of beauty out-values all the utilities of the world.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

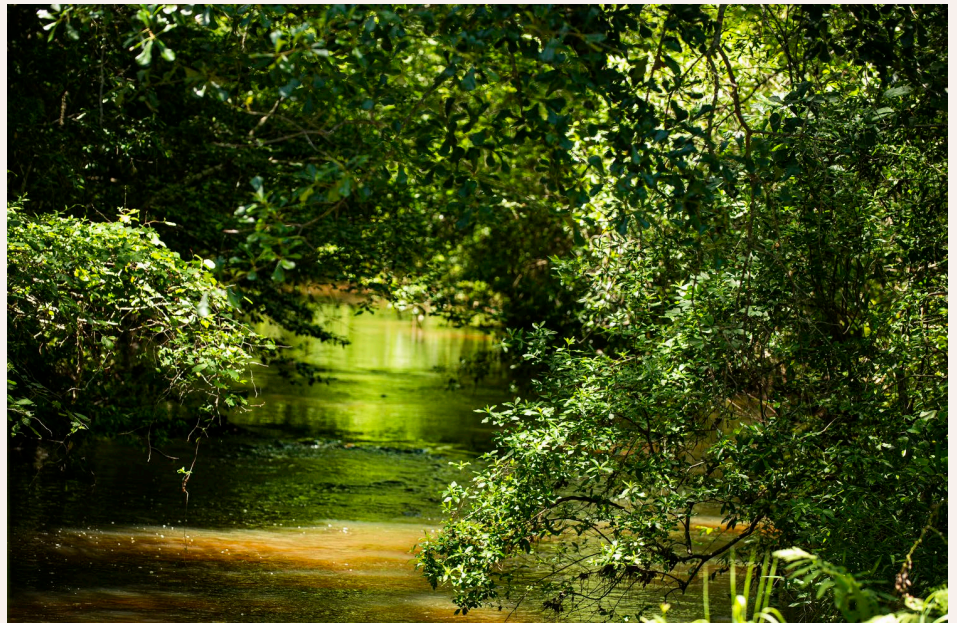
The Sylvia Cullum Whitney Preserve

In December of 2022, the Aiken Land Conservancy and Eureka Partners (consisting of three brothers: Ray Bradford Whitney, Jr., George Bell Timmerman Whitney, Colwell Cullum Whitney) closed on a conservation easement protecting 611 acres of undeveloped land in

Eureka, a small city located in the northern reaches of Aiken County. The property has been family-owned and responsibly managed as an active timber farm for thirty years by local professional forester extraordinaire, Lee Rhodes. Over the years, the farming operation produced the income to send the Whitney children to college, says one of the partners proudly. In fact, the partners plan to delegate the management of the Preserve to the next generation, Catherine Whitney, daughter of Colwell Whitney. Very cool stuff. We look forward to working with Catherine as the next family steward of this lovely and ecologically important property.

Named the Sylvia Cullum Whitney Preserve after their mother, Sylvia, the partners have stewarded a property with extraordinary conservation values. The Preserve is bounded on one side by a mile of frontage on Shaws Creek, which is a critical source of drinking water for the City of Aiken. In addition, the Preserve borders on the City's Mason's Branch Tract, almost 2600 acres of undeveloped land that includes Shaws Creek and its primary tributaries, Boggy Branch and Masons Branch (the Shaws Creek watershed drains into the Edisto River, the longest unimpeded blackwater river in the

Country). The combination of the Preserve, the Reynolds Preserve to the north (protected by the Central Savannah River Land Trust), the Masons Branch Tract, and the City-owned properties around Reynolds Pond (to name a few) provide a significant corridor of undeveloped green space along Shaws Creek. This green infrastructure provides natural pre-treatment of drinking water processed by the City's Shaws Creek water treatment plant (WTP) and serves to reduce operating costs at the WTP.



The permanent protection of the Preserve not only expands the riparian buffer along Shaws Creek, but also helps protect the overlapping recharge zones for the region's four major groundwater aquifers—the Floridan, the Crouch, the Gordon, and the McQueen—which provide water for residents throughout the coastal plain of SC. Conservation of this beautiful property ensures that it will never be threatened by high density residential, commercial, or industrial development.

Eureka Partners sold the conservation easement to ALC in a bargain sale transaction, which means the development rights were sold for a fraction of the appraised value of the easement. ALC applied to the South Carolina Conservation Bank for grant funds to pay for the easement, which was approved in October 2022.

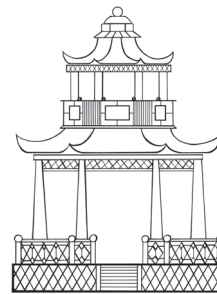
The Sylvia Cullum Whitney Preserve is the largest easement in ALC's diverse portfolio of conservation holdings. It is also the second Shaws Creek conservation easement held by ALC in accordance with the City's Upper Shaws Creek Voluntary Conservation Program. ALC will continue to identify new conservation opportunities along Shaws Creek to increase the green corridor and protect the City's water supply.

ALC is proud to be part of this growing collection of protected properties defending the quality of Aiken's drinking water and protecting an ecologically diverse watershed. 🌿



Photos by Ginny Southworth

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If you would like an updated membership list, please visit our website at www.conserveaiken.org

Donors who have continuously given over the past five years are noted in blue.

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