ANNUAL REPORT

Hitchcock Woods

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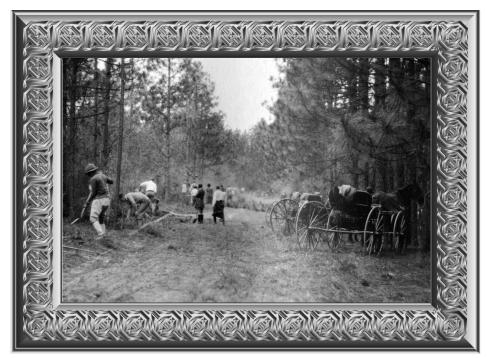
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In September 2009 the Hitchcock Woods Foundation commemorates 70 years of service in protecting and preserving – and managing and maintaining – the Hitchcock Woods for the enjoyment of the community. The Foundation was established as a nonprofit in 1939. That year the Hitchcock family committed the original 1,191 acres. The Foundation later acquired more than 900 additional acres through the purchase or donation of adjoining tracts. Most of this acreage now is protected in a South Carolina Heritage Trust conservation easement signed in 1997, conserving their natural character in perpetuity.



(For commentary, see page 3.)

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The Foundation's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30, aligning our annual budget and operating schedule with the cycle of peak activity in the Woods, from early fall to late spring.

A YEAR OF LOOKING INWARD, FORWARD, AND OUTWARD

Walking in the Woods early in the morning is a highlight of my day. With the changes of season, variations of weather, and forces of nature at work in a natural forest, the experience is different every day. Yet one thing remains the same. The Hitchcock Woods is a constant source of great enjoyment, just as it will be for generations to come.

This past year has seen changes in the Board of Trustees, as we lost two former members. We were saddened by the loss of one of our past chairmen, John Seabrook, the consummate businessman, and the passing of

our dear friend, Lucetta Knox, a longtime trustee and Master of the Aiken Hounds. Both "Jack" and "Cetta" have left an indelible impression on this organization.

To help prepare the board for the challenges of the future, a comprehensive board development initiative took root this past year. The Board of Trustees looked inward to maximize member participation and looked forward to ensure that the composition of the board in the future will be both faithful to the mission and vital to the community. This year the board welcomed a new trustee, Greg Paschal, whose community involvement, financial acumen, and love for the Woods serve these purposes well.

The Hitchcock Woods Foundation reached outward this past year in developing productive working relationships with a range of government bodies, particularly with the City of Aiken. Thanks to thoughtful planning and effective communication, three municipal infrastructure projects were completed in or near the Woods without incident. The City rerouted a municipal sanitary sewer line along Devil's Backbone by using a noninvasive directional boring technique, and installed new stormwater and fresh water lines on City streets near the Coker Spring entrance. We appreciate our visitors' patience while these necessary projects were underway.

Last October, the City and the Foundation, with the participation of the Center for Watershed Excellence at Clemson University,

concluded an intensive ten month process of discussing alternatives for addressing erosion in the Hitchcock Woods caused by municipal stormwater runoff. Aiken County Council members and staff participated in these meetings, as did representatives from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control and the Department of Natural Resources. The process even attracted the attention of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which also sent representatives to attend.

The City and the Foundation agreed to a

"Each financial gift is essential to sustain the Foundation's important work, and all of those who support the Woods are valued and appreciated."



"Preferred Alternative" that involves stormwater mitigation in the downtown watershed and a more long term plan to address the Sand River corridor. Progress on phase one will be evident this fall as the City embarks on an ambitious plan to achieve greater infiltration of rainwater in various downtown parkways to reduce the volume of stormwater entering the Woods. Phase two is projected to include the restoration of the Sand River canyon, flow management in Barton's Pond Wetland, and flushing of sediment that has migrated to Cathedral Aisle Swamp. These efforts support the

Foundation's mission objective to preserve the Woods in an ecologically healthy state.

Equally important is the mission objective to uphold traditional equestrian and pedestrian uses of the Woods. This is best demonstrated in preserving the annual Aiken Horse Show, now going into its 94th year. The 2009 event was a big success, with record setting numbers of exhibitors and out of town participants. Special thanks to event Director Gail King, Assistant Director Linda McLean, the Aiken Horse Show Committee, and volunteers from the Aiken Hounds for their hard work and personal sacrifice in keeping this longstanding Aiken tradition alive.

This year also saw progress on several important capital initiatives. A few generous donors stepped forward with pledges totaling \$200,000 which will help retire the Foundation's debt on the purchase of critical acreage near the Coker Spring entrance to the Woods. The acquisition of this land was essential to preserve the quiet ambiance of this historic entrance. Thanks to a group of committed and gracious donors, the Foundation now is within sight of reaching its goal to pay off the loan taken to make this purchase possible.

Each financial gift is essential to sustain the Foundation's important work, and all of those who support the Woods are

valued and appreciated. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend a sincere "Thank you!" to each Friends of the Woods household, Business Partner, and donor for your continued financial and moral support.



Randy Wolcott, Chairman

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Randy Wolcott moved to Aiken in 1989 and joined the board of Trustees in 1998. After serving on many board committees over the years, and chairing several of them, he was elected Chairman of the Board in 2008.

MISSION

The mission of the Hitchcock Woods Foundation is to:

- protect and preserve the Hitchcock Woods in a natural and ecologically healthy state,
 - maintain and manage historic and traditional equestrian and pedestrian uses, and
 - foster education and research on the history and resources of the Woods.

PRESERVING AN AIKEN LEGACY

he photo on the cover of this year's Annual Report depicts the original, storied Axe Club hard at work on trail maintenance in the historic Hitchcock Woods. Legions of community volunteers, many of them nationally known businessmen and socialites, worked alongside the Hitchcock family's staff in blazing trails, maintaining jumps, and tending to the Woods, equipped only with simple tools.

Today, members of the community participate in caring for the natural and recreational resources of the Woods primarily through their financial support. In fact, a group of generous donors made contributions last fiscal year to help the Foundation order two new 100-horsepower, fourwheel-drive John Deere tractors, enabling Woods Staff to perform work that once took scores of volunteers.

Other modern management tools are needed to further elevate the Foundation's important work. Mentioned in this report two years ago were a suite of critical needs that continue to this day. Among them were a Woods Maintenance Complex, new kiosks for all formal entrances to the Woods, a GPS based map, and a software model of the physical characteristics and management activities for all compartments of the Woods. Once funded, tools like these will help the Foundation to provide more efficient and more effective service to the community.

Until the early 1990s, for the most part, there was a single person on staff at a time.

Today the Foundation has a staff of four, clearly a modest workforce given the environmental and recreational resources of the Woods ... and the ambitious mission and vision of the Foundation. The many names of individuals and businesses in this Annual Report, along with the three letters, reflect the magnitude of this community effort and the meaningful progress that continues to take place.

This vast team effort is rounded out most importantly by you, the donor. It is your generosity and moral support that make all these pursuits possible. The Foundation's work is not subsidized by tax dollars or by an endowment, although interest on some reserve funds covered 6% of this past year's operating expenses. The balance had to be raised, as it is every year, by appealing to supporters like you who recognize the importance and value of the Hitchcock Woods.

Thanks to your help, the Foundation ended this past fiscal year just a shade in the black. When it became clear last fall that the current economy would impact annual contributions (and it did), budgeted expenditures were scaled back by 10%, keeping operating expenses in check and within

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The Foundation's staff consists of (from left to right) Doug Rabold, Bennett Tucker, Deon Mealing, and Chris Reichel.

revenues. Special thanks are extended to supporters who worked on and attended three fundraising events this past year: the Aiken Steeplechase Association's Fall Fete, 302 Polo's Aiken Equine Charities Cup, and the sponsored Hunt Week Gala.

An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to Chris Reichel, who continues to serve faithfully and diligently behind the scenes as the Foundation's Administrator, a role she has held since January 2001. Chris handles extensive bookkeeping functions, database management, and donor letters, all of which will be streamlined with the transition to a new software package this fall. Chris provides critical fundraising support and is truly the tie that binds for the Aiken Horse Show. She accomplishes all of these roles capably and,

remarkably, on a part-time basis.

This past June the Foundation bid well wishes to Carol Stewart, who accepted an offer of employment elsewhere after serving as Communications Specialist for nearly two years. We thank Carol for her many contributions.

Finally, community outreach was a major focus again this past year, with personal presentations on the Woods made to Aiken Newcomers Club, Aiken Junior Woman's Club, Aiken Sunrise Rotary, Leadership Aiken County (and its sister Junior program), and Aiken-Palmetto Kiwanis Club. Longtime trustee and former chairman Harry Shealy also spoke to various organizations and

conducted many guided tours of the Woods. Media visits to the Woods included CNN, Southern Living, Sandlapper, and Horse City TV.

Outreach expands in the current fiscal year as the Foundation holds the inaugural Festival of the Woods, a new annual event to celebrate the wide range of pedestrian uses of the Woods, and to provide education on the history and resources of the Hitchcock Woods. Participants will learn about the Foundation's stewardship of the Woods and how to experience the Woods more thoroughly and responsibly. In 2010, the event will be expanded from one day to two, with family activities for Friends of the Woods households scheduled for day two.

Thank you for participating in the great traditions of the Hitchcock Woods, both old and new.

Wangles E. Rebola

Doug Rabold has been involved in Aiken's business, civic, and cultural life since 1990. He was hired as the Hitchcock Woods Foundation's first Executive Director in October 2005.

VISION

The vision of the Hitchcock Woods Foundation is to maintain and restore the ecological integrity of the Hitchcock Woods and to serve as a model for sustainable urban forestry, balancing stewardship of forestland natural resources with compatible human uses.

CAREFUL PLANNING LEADS TO IMPROVEMENTS

n a recent family vacation, a flight took us to an international airport in a major city. During our descent, I glanced through the window to see an example of suburban America, patterned neighborhoods with tiny yards and acres of pavement, exposed under the scorching July sun without a single mature tree to provide shade for the homes. My mind drifted home to Aiken and I was thankful for the open space we enjoy and for the natural character of this city which sometimes can be taken for granted. I had a sense of pride as the superintendent of one of the largest treasures in Aiken County and one of the largest urban forests in the nation.

Some of the highlights in the Woods this year include participating in a professional assessment of the implementation of the Foundation's ten-year ecological management plan, going on field trips to other managed forests in the area, making major progress on our prescribed burning program, training Woods Watch Volunteers, and responding to several serious incidents.

Back in 1998, when the Foundation contracted a team of researchers to prepare a forest management plan, the team recommended that the Foundation conduct an assessment of progress against its restoration goals after ten years, or in 2008. In response, last year the Foundation hired Julie Moore, a biologist with the U.S. Fish

and Wildlife Service, to take on this task. An expert in the longleaf pine forest, Ms. Moore has been a part of the Tall Timbers Research Institute and the Longleaf Alliance.

On her own time and separate from her usual work, Ms. Moore traveled to Aiken on occasion for several days at a time. She visited each of the 49 management compartments in the Woods with various staff and trustees to investigate the progress of restoration over the past decade. Julie had spent much time in the Woods years ago, before active forest management was conducted, allowing her to see great changes through selective thinning and the prescribed burning program. Ms. Moore's assessment was helpful in focusing and directing management activities into the next decade.

This year various members of the staff and board made a few field trips to state owned and managed forest preserves in the area. These trips are designed to learn from other land management practices in the region. Two trips were to South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Heritage Preserves in Aiken County. Active timber management and prescribed burning are a part of the longleaf pine and wiregrass ecosystem restoration program at these sites. Future field trips will be to properties

"My mind drifted home to Aiken and I was thankful for the open space we enjoy and for the natural character of this city which sometimes can be taken for granted."





The 65 miles of trails in Hitchcock Woods enable visitors to see a wide variety of ecosystems.

managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

The prescribed burning program in the Woods was very successful this year, completing 253 acres of "fuel reduction" burns and 70 acres of "growing season" burns. Fuel reduction burns are conducted where there is a high level of fuel on the forest floor. These burns are conducted when the weather is cooler and the soil is damp to enable the fire to burn off the top layer of pine straw and leaves. Growing season burns are used where the fuel layer already has been reduced and are conducted when the weather is warmer. These burns are sometimes referred to as restoration burns because they help stimulate the seeding of native grasses.

Training was held this year for members of the Woods Watch Volunteer program for those who serve as extra eyes and ears – and sometimes feet – for the Foundation.

Training paid off tremendously this spring in an incident that involved loose horses in the Woods. A Woods Watch command post was set up at the Stable on the Woods entrance. With the help of cell phones and the Woods Watch Volunteer call list, all entrances were secured within ten minutes. After the entrances were secured, a search took place with various staff and trustees, volunteers on horseback, and personnel from Aiken Department of Public Safety. Soon the horses

were located and were returned home safely.

CNN made an appearance to the Hitchcock Woods in May while covering the arboretum project in Aiken. Because of the proximity of the Woods to downtown, the reporter covered the Foundation's prescribed burning program and the benefits of reducing the risk of wildfire in the setting of an urban forest.

Thanks to Woods Technician Deon Mealing for his service, hard work, and dedication. Deon will mark his second anniversary with the Foundation in November. Actively managing a 2,100 acre urban forest is a big task, but it helps having a great assistant. As always, thank you for your continued support and I'll see you in the Woods!

With hake

Bennett Tucker was hired as Woods Superintendent in June 2006. His many certifications in firefighting and first responder training strengthen our prescribed burn program and enhance our ability to work with public agencies in achieving more efficient response to incidents in the Woods.

To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field it beholds, every hour, a picture which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS CONTRIBUTORS

Cumulative giving from July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009

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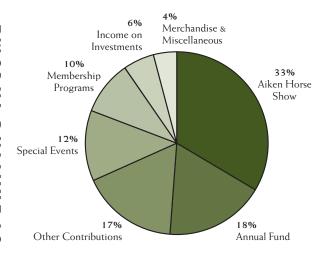


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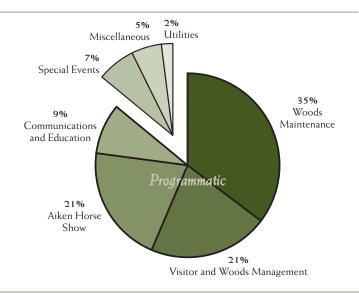
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