

ANNUAL 2012 REPORT

Hitchcock Woods FOUNDATION

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

Wisdom from Youth

In honor of the rising generation, following are excerpts from winning entries in the annual Célestine Eustis Essay Contest for area students.

2008

"Hitchcock Woods is like a super classroom, with hundreds of teachers that don't know they're teaching ... geology, plant life, and animal life. These "teachers" include various cliff formations, the sand river beds, erosion and erosion controls, the streams, kaolin veins, and lots of different plants and trees that you just don't see in other places. I have even learned about forest management."

Why I Love Hitchcock Woods, David McKeel, third grade

2009

(of Barton's Pond Bridge overlooking Sand River)

"The smell of clay, sand, and wet foliage offers an intoxicating, inviting perfume that urges the visitor to stop and take another deep whiff of the damp air. Whenever I travel through the woods accompanied by a friend, this is always the first stop on the tour, as though I feel some strange responsibility to share something so quaint and serene."

The Woods, Meredith Walker, senior

2010

"I have had many first-time experiences in the Woods: my first canter, my first fall, my first time jumping an "Aiken," my first foxhunt, my first horse show and many others. During my very first time in the Woods I was too excited about being on Mercury the pony to pay attention to what was around me. It wasn't until I was older that I could truly appreciate what the Hitchcocks left to Aiken."

Aiken's Crown Jewel, Mary Taylor Miller, senior

2011

"I used to think the Hitchcock Woods was quiet until I actually stopped and listened. The Hitchcock Woods is alive with sounds. The trees sing with chirps and twitters, and the ground moves with hungry squirrels foraging for food. One day I just stopped running and sat down on a decaying log. I just sat and reflected on life. Surrounded by nature, I was at peace."

Life in the Woods, Annalise Eberhard, senior



For generations, Aiken's families have made a tradition of observing the Blessing of the Hounds at the Aiken Hounds' Opening Meet on Thanksgiving Day.

Photo: Ginny Southworth

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Service with Passion

This has been a year of positive developments for the Foundation and bittersweet changes on the Board. Trustees stay focused the Foundation's Mission and remain mindful of the Vision. We are blessed with a passionate, active Board and a dedicated, conscientious staff. We understand our various roles and work hard together throughout the year to achieve the Foundation's goals. This was made evident this year as we completed a financial audit with an excellent report and implemented a restoration project with promising results.

This year the Board saw the retirement of three longtime, faithful Trustees: Iris Winthrop Freeman, Lee Dane, and Dacre Stoker. Each served admirably and retired with a legacy of contributions to the Mission. Iris and Lee, who started the Aiken County Open Land Trust (now the Aiken Land Conservancy), have a keen understanding of the natural world and of the stewardship of open space. Dacre is a master planner. His skills in logistics and visitor guidelines already are missed. These former members carry with them a passion for the Hitchcock Woods.

The Foundation enjoyed another successful financial year and staff enjoyed taking occupancy of the Woods Maintenance Facility. We are grateful to the many donors identified in this report who enable the Foundation to protect and preserve the Woods, and to continue the traditions that make visiting the Woods so memorable.

This year the Board approved a long term restoration initiative. The US Fish and Wildlife Service recently awarded a grant to the National Wild Turkey Federation to conduct further longleaf pine restoration in South Carolina. The two agreed that the Hitchcock Woods would be an excellent location to accomplish true longleaf pine ecosystem restoration due to its current longleaf stands, remnant native understory vegetation, and the Foundation's stewardship practices.

Subsequently, the NWTF proposed a collaborative longleaf pine restoration project with the Foundation to provide technical assistance with one of its Registered Foresters (the Foundation's former Forest Manager, Gary Burger) and a Certified Wildlife Biologist. The NWTF will apply grant funds to this effort and the Foundation will match these funds through its own, ongoing management practices.

After more than 25 years of prescribed burning, it has become clear that, in many areas, fire alone is not sufficient to control scrub oaks and certain hardwoods. To effectively reduce this competition for resources and move these areas toward full ecological restoration, the participants agreed that hand applied,



*The 96th annual Aiken Horse Show set a new record for the number of exhibitors.
Photo: Tracy Kelsey*

contemporary forestry herbicides would be most beneficial. Last fiscal year, the Board approved a pilot project for staff to use one of these herbicides in three one acre test plots in various locations in the Woods. These tests demonstrated successful mid-story control and already are resulting in a return of native groundcover. At a special purpose board meeting this fiscal year, the Board reviewed and approved the long term proposal from NWTF. Initiated in the spring of 2012, this project will take several years to complete.

It has been my privilege to serve as the Chairman of the Foundation since March 2008. This is the final year of my term and this opportunity for service has been both challenging and rewarding. I appreciate the trust that has been placed in me for this position and it certainly has been a pleasure to fill it. The Foundation is in excellent condition and our donor base is firmly committed.

Thank you for your support!



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.

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Cause for Celebration

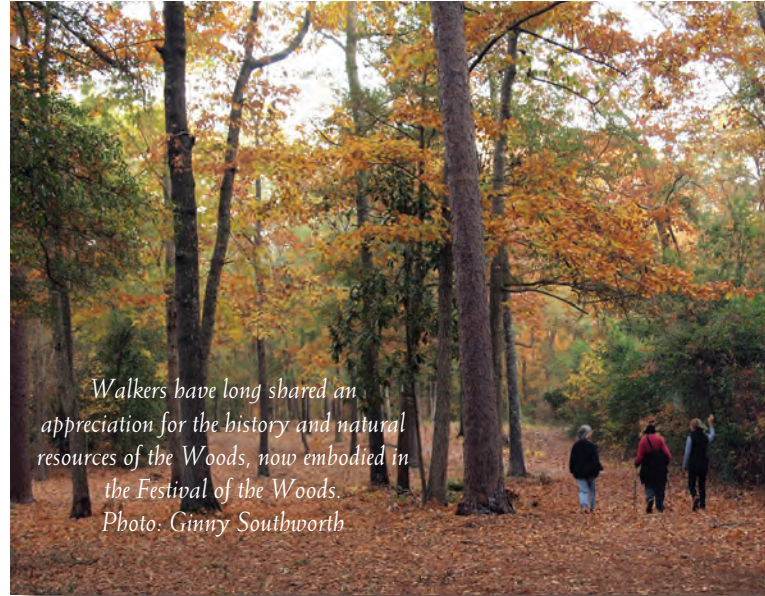
Aiken residents know there's no place like home and many visitors call Aiken their home away from home. We enjoy many causes for celebration in this inspiring community and the Hitchcock Woods ranks high on the list. Aiken stands shoulder to shoulder with the few great North American cities that also have a major urban forest. There's Central Park in New York, Forest Park in Portland, Oregon, and Stanley Park in Vancouver, British Columbia. What a thrill to be in the company of these dazzling destinations. Each of these urban forests has its own distinctive characteristics and virtues. So what sets the Hitchcock Woods apart?

The second largest of the four (after Forest Park), the Hitchcock Woods alone is privately owned, managed, and funded. Only the Hitchcock Woods has an equestrian heritage, and figuratively and literally shaped its community. The Hitchcock family birthed Aiken's polo, foxhunting, and steeplechase cultures. Each culture gradually developed its distinct economy. Over the years, other equestrian disciplines and cultures were drawn to Aiken, bringing new economies with them. Neighborhoods developed around the edges of the Hitchcock Woods, gradually enveloping and embracing it. For more than seven decades, riders and walkers alike have found solace in this natural sanctuary.

Just as so many visitors every day celebrate the Woods in their own way, the Hitchcock Woods Foundation celebrates its communities throughout the year. There are shared occasions with steeplechase, hunting, eventing, and driving enthusiasts. Walkers, too, have found countless personal ways to enjoy the Woods and its resources. The natural response to their interests is the Foundation's new Festival of the Woods.

Established in 2009, the Festival of the Woods celebrates the history and natural resources of the Hitchcock Woods. In just three years, it has become for many residents a highlight on Aiken's busy calendar of community events. The Festival reached new heights this year with the inclusion of Ruth Patrick Science Education Center, Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, South Carolina Bluebird Society, Palmetto Dog Club, and Green Gardeners Club. What a joy it is to see these resources coming together.

Whether visitors enjoy the Woods on horseback or on foot, they share a passion for the Woods and a commitment to the Foundation's important work. The Friends of the Woods program reached a milestone this year by exceeding 1,000 households participating since 2006. The program remains strongest when faithful Friends renew each year. The robust annual participation of Corporate Sponsors and Business Partners demonstrates value



*Walkers have long shared an appreciation for the history and natural resources of the Woods, now embodied in the Festival of the Woods.
Photo: Ginny Southworth*

for the role of the Hitchcock Woods in our quality of life and diverse economy.

This Annual Report honors all donors who enabled the Foundation to close another fiscal year with income exceeding expenses. A net operating surplus of \$22,597 provided just enough funding to pay off the balance on the Woods maintenance facility. This facility was completed last fall and donors to all major capital projects were honored at an event in the spring.

The Foundation appreciates the generosity of every donor. Operations are managed with a respectful stewardship of your gifts. For the year ended June 30, 2011, the Foundation underwent an audit by Serotta Maddocks Evans & Co., CPAs, an independent auditor. This audit resulted in an unqualified or "clean" opinion on our financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2011.

The Foundation serves donors with attention to detail and a commitment to your good faith. Thank you for your generosity and for celebrating the Hitchcock Woods.



Douglas Rabold was hired as the Hitchcock Woods Foundation's first Executive Director in 2005. He has been involved in Aiken's business, civic, and cultural life since 1990. He serves in Rotary Club of Aiken and on the board of directors of the Greater Aiken Integrated Trails Foundation.

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.

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

Partnership with Nature

I just came into the office after being in the Woods for four hours with a chainsaw in my grasp. We have been clearing a massive group of trees that came down in a recent storm. This "reactive" task reminds us of the power of nature. Proactive stewardship of the Woods through prescribed burning and timber thinning are two of our best practices for mimicking nature. It is natural for this forested landscape to burn on a regular basis and thin itself through natural disasters, but we as land managers prefer to choose the "when factor" to the extent possible.

Last September, Woods staff moved into the newly completed maintenance facility that also includes an office and staff restroom. We began to construct workbenches and shelves, and to organize equipment. The new shop has been a great and necessary addition to the Foundation's campus, as it safely and securely houses maintenance equipment and supplies. It has helped with day-to-day efficiency, especially in preparation for, and on, prescribed burn days. It is hard to imagine operating out of the old, open air sheds now that we have such a fitting facility. We are extremely thankful for this great addition.

For many years now, the Foundation has been using prescribed fire as an ecological forestry management practice. However, due to former decades of fire suppression, hardwood species encroached from the bottomland areas into the upland areas and became well established. Even now, after 25 years of prescribed fire, hardwood scrub oaks persist and compete with native groundcover species.

Implementation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife grant through the National Wild Turkey Federation will help with mid-story hardwood control. It employs commonly used forestry herbicides that will remove the unwanted hardwoods. This already has been done successfully in our state to help restore native groundcover in the longleaf pine ecosystem. This spring, hand applications were completed across acreage on the west side of the Woods and early results are promising.

Last October the Foundation sent me to Andalusia, Alabama, where the Longleaf Alliance is headquartered at the Solon Dixon Forest, Auburn University's experimental forest. I attended the groundcover restoration workshop to gain knowledge on restoring native groundcover of the longleaf pine ecosystem, including native grasses, legumes, and wildflowers.

Throughout the year, Woods staff remained involved in the natural resources community, participating in the Science Education



A tour of the Hitchcock Woods by a forestry class from Clemson University included a talk about the Foundation's prescribed burn program by Bennett Tucker. Photo: Ginny Southworth

Enrichment Day at USCA and Earth Day at Hopelands Gardens. We also took part in a workshop for the cohesive wildland fire strategy group at the South Carolina Forestry Commission headquarters and one for the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council. Staff also attended a forest herbicide workshop by Clemson Extension to learn how to combat non-native invasive plant species in forests.

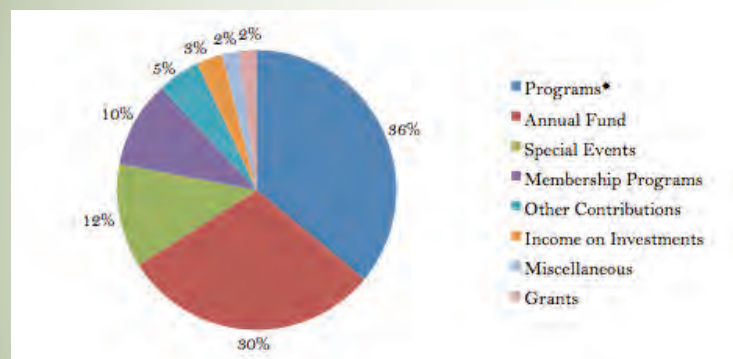
Some changes this year at the Horse Show Grounds included raising and expanding the tent pad as well as improving the drainage flows to accommodate changes in the tent layout. This past April during the Aiken Horse Show, the changes in the pad were put to the test for Saturday's competition and proved successful.

In closing, I would like to thank Deon Mealing for his service, hard work and dedication as he will mark his fifth anniversary with the Foundation this November. As always, thank you for your continued support and I'll see you in the Woods!

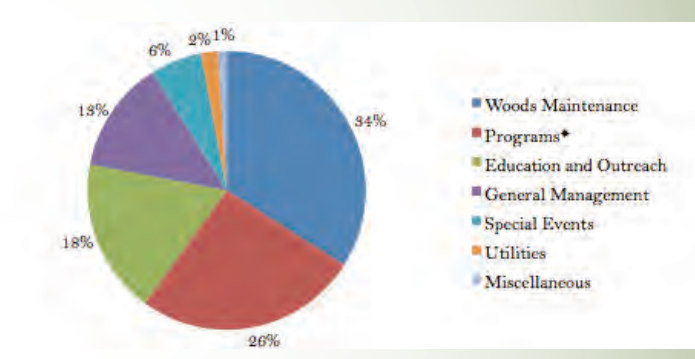


Bennett Tucker was hired as Woods Superintendent in June 2006. His certifications in firefighting and first responder training strengthen our prescribed burn program and enhance our ability to work with public agencies in emergency response. He serves on the board of directors of the Aiken Land Conservancy.

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OPERATING EXPENSES



* Aiken Horse Show and Festival of the Woods

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