ANNUAL REPORT

Hitchcock Woods

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.



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LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD 🥯 HARRY SHEALY

Upholding the Legacy of Caring for the Woods

This has been another productive year for the Hitchcock Woods Foundation, albeit with some ups and downs. Last summer we completed the multiyear, longleaf pine ecosystem restoration efforts on the western side of the Woods with a mechanical thinning and chipping operation that reduced the vegetative density and opened up the forest. We accomplished about thirty years of forest restoration in five weeks on the 320 acres of forest that were chipped. Soon we should begin to see an increase in the plant and animal diversity in the area. We also hope to become a mitigation site for the federally endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and the chipped area is target habitat for reintroducing the woodpeckers to the Woods.

In November the South Carolina Secretary of State's Office recognized the Hitchcock Woods Foundation as one of ten "Angel" nonprofits statewide. Every year, that office "selects ten organizations that represent some of the most efficient and effective charities soliciting in South Carolina." This is truly an honor and a milestone achievement for the Foundation. There are about 8,000 registered and 10,000 active public charities operating in South Carolina, and the scope of the evaluation extends to national nonprofits that aggressively solicit in the state.

In late January our very first and long serving Executive Director, Doug Rabold, resigned. It was with regret that we accepted his resignation. In the near decade that he served as Executive Director, his leadership brought many significant changes to the physical and structural organization of the Woods. His many accomplishments include our renovated office called the Green House building and our newly constructed Woods Maintenance Facility to store and secure equipment. He assisted in raising funds for many new vehicles and pieces of equipment used to manage the forest. He also insured the safety of Woods users by overseeing the replacement of two old bridges, one at Barton's Pond and another at Swampy Cut. He started the Festival of the Woods, helped to make improvements in the Aiken Horse Show, gave structure to our fundraising efforts, significantly improved our financial stability, instituted a policy and procedures manual, and held our first long range planning session.

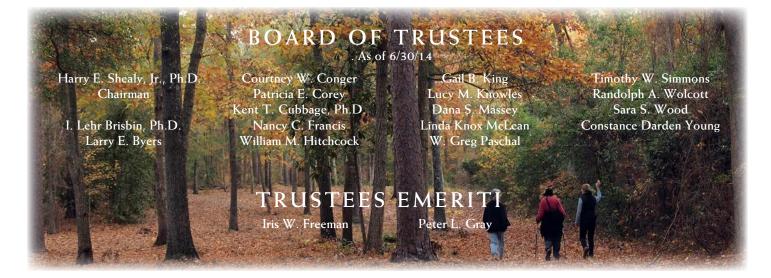
He left the Foundation with an infrastructure upon which future Trustees and directors can build. Doug left the Hitchcock Woods Foundation in better shape than he found it.

Almost immediately after Doug left, the Pax ice storm arrived in Aiken, leaving the city, the county, and Hitchcock Woods with extraordinary tree damage. I am sure that all of you have many personal stories about Pax. The Woods, which are customarily open each day from sunrise to sunset 365 days a year, were closed to the public for safety concerns for almost two weeks. No one can remember the Woods being closed for that long. The trails were impassable to emergency vehicles and the hanging limbs were dangerous. Many thanks to our Woods Superintendent, Bennett Tucker, and our Woods Resource Steward, Eric Grande, for responding immediately to the crisis. Both worked long hours with chainsaws and tractors to clear the trails in record time. The Foundation would like to thank all of our friends for their offers to personally help with the cleanup and their generosity by donating to our cleanup efforts.

As a final observation, I would like to thank all of the Trustees of the Foundation for their time, hard work, support, and good advice during this year of transition. In addition, I would also like to thank all of the supporters of the Woods for generously volunteering their time and financial support to help us manage and care for this wonderful community resource. Our work as a Foundation would not be possible without help from everyone. I would like to encourage you to call me if you have questions or concerns about the Woods.



Harry Shealy earned his Ph.D. in biology with an emphasis in botany. He came to Aiken in 1970 to teach biology labs at USC Aiken, where he held several positions over the years before retiring after the spring 2013 semester. He has been very active in many other organizations, as seen at hitchcockwoods.org/media/newsletters/spring_2013.pdf.



LETTER FROM THE WOODS SUPERINTENDENT 🧇 BENNETT TUCKER

Working With Nature Proactively and Reactively

Highlights of this busy year include continued longleaf pine ecosystem restoration, fuel mitigation projects, continuing education, safety enhancement, and the massive cleanup after February's ice storm.

The Foundation has been working for several years on longleaf pine ecosystem restoration on the west side of Hitchcock Woods. This work has been in partnership with the National Wild Turkey Federation through a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The restoration work over the last three years has taken place across 500 acres of the Woods. The last two phases were completed this year, beginning with a fuel-chipping project across 320 acres last summer. Second, a forestry herbicide application was completed this spring to control hardwood re-sprout. The fuel chipping removed scrub oaks and pine regeneration that had grown too densely for over four decades. It shaded the forest floor, robbing native herbaceous groundcover of adequate light. About 10,621 tons of material from these stands were used as fuel chips that were burned as a biorenewable fuel at a co-generation plant outside the Savannah River Site. This thinning has not only improved daylight for native ground cover, but it also has created healthier spacing among the trees for improved growing conditions. It has drastically reduced the wildfire hazard in this area of the Woods, removing tons of fuel that could have contributed to a destructive wildfire. This project will make it much easier for staff to apply prescribed fire in these units.

We are constantly striving to create a safer urban forest for our visitors and neighbors. Fuel breaks, or gaps in vegetation, are installed and maintained to create defensible space in certain areas of the Woods to protect our neighbors against wildfire. Fuel mitigation is important in the event of wildfire caused by a lightning strike, a carelessly tossed cigarette, or an improperly hooked safety chain dragging on asphalt. This year, the Trustees approved five new fuel breaks. Thus far we have completed two. Hopefully we will have several more in place by this time next year.

If you were in Aiken in February, you know we experienced a natural thinning in the wake of winter storm Pax, which brought on challenges to our small staff in a cleanup effort that has not been seen

in decades. Woods staff utilized contracted help for the initial passes, but we since have undertaken a lot of trailside cleanup on our own. Once the Woods re-opened after a brief closure, we still had months of cleanup ahead of us. Effects from the storm will be seen for years to come. One way to clean up in the different units is to keep up with the prescribed burning program. Historically, natural fire has been nature's means for ridding the forest landscape of storm debris. We have already seen beneficial results from the last several prescribed burns conducted since February. It cannot go without saying that we could not have made progress as fast as we did after the storm without the support, both financial and moral, of people like you. The outpouring of volunteerism after the storm was humbling.

Staff continues to attend seminars with the Prescribed Fire Council, Exotic Pest Plant Species Council, and Longleaf Alliance, and accesses area educational opportunities. We also stay involved with natural resource webinars for continuing education to keep a pulse on practices in the forestry community. Staff also continues to train with local public safety agencies for responding to incidents in Hitchcock Woods. This year we completed an afternoon with Aiken Public Safety Technical Rescue Team, training with different search and rescue scenarios in the Woods.

I would like to thank Woods Resource Steward, Eric Grande, for his service, especially since the ice storm, for working many long days and weeks. Thank you all for your support and, as always, I'll see you in the Woods!



Mechanical thinning and chipping achieved a more historically accurate landscape.



STAFF

The Foundation's staff is (left to right) Woods Superintendent Bennett Tucker, Woods Resource Manager Eric Grande, and Financial Administrator Chris Reichel.

Bennett Tucker was bired 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.

HITCHCOCK WOODS FOUNDATION 🥯 75 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Commemorating 75 Gears of a Shared Passion

The issuance of this annual report falls at a time when the Hitchcock Woods Foundation is celebrating a distinguished milestone. In September 2014, the Foundation observed 75 years of service in protecting and preserving the Hitchcock Woods, making this incomparable resource available for the enjoyment of area residents and visitors.

The legacy began with Celestine Eustis and her niece, Louise Eustis, who originally moved to Aiken simply to take advantage of its climate, but who later shaped its culture and brought it national recognition. Louise married the renowned horseman Thomas Hitchcock of Long Island and persuaded him to make Aiken his home. Together with their friend William Whitney, the Hitchcocks purchased forested lands in Aiken for relaxation and recreation, and they graciously shared this land with friends far and wide.

In 1939, Thomas "Tommy" Hitchcock, Jr., and his sister, Helen

Hitchcock Clark, established The Hitchcock Foundation (as it was originally known) as an eleemosynary corporation. Weeks later, Thomas Hitchcock, Sr., committed 1,191 acres of forest to be transferred to the Foundation over a period of years. Without the ongoing efforts of the Foundation, the Hitchcock Woods would have been lost to mining, timbering, and residential development.

In recent decades, the Foundation acquired more than 900 additional acres through the purchase or donation of adjoining tracts. With more than 2,100 acres today, Hitchcock Woods is



These commemorative plaques adorn Memorial Gate in the Hitchcock Woods.

likely the nation's largest privately owned urban forest.

Many generations of Aiken's families and visitors have taken great pleasure in visiting the Hitchcock Woods. Sensitive to this heritage, the Foundation has ensured that future generations will enjoy the same benefits. Most of the acreage now is protected in a South Carolina Heritage Trust conservation easement signed in 1997 to ensure that the natural character of these lands will be preserved in perpetuity.

Over the years, scores of Aiken residents have served on the Foundation's Board of Trustees, all of them as committed volunteers who have collectively shouldered the tremendous responsibilities that come with the stewardship of this land. Many hard working staff members, too, have served across the decades.

The Board of Trustees has had ten chairmen. Thomas Hitchcock, Jr., was elected in 1939. After his death in 1944, Helen Hitchcock Clark served until 1957. Also serving as dedicated chairmen over

the years were Seymour H. Knox, Samuel A. Cothran, Harry E. Shealy, Jr., John M. Seabrook, Timothy W. Simmons, Peter L. Gray, Gail B. King, and Randolph A. Wolcott.

The Foundation cannot accomplish its ambitious mission and vision alone. Preserving the Hitchcock Woods in the center of Aiken's growing population is an effort that requires the commitment of the greater community and the consistent involvement of those who love the Hitchcock Woods. That will ensure an even happier celebration 25 years from now.

Back Row: Thomas Hitchcock Sr., Louise Hitchcock, Averell Clark Sr. (husband of Helen, daughter of Thomas and Louise)

Middle Row: Celestine "Titine" Hitchcock Peabody (daughter of Thomas and Louise), Margaret "Peggy" Mellon Hitchcock (wife of Tommy, son of Thomas and Louise) with Louise Hitchcock Stephaich (infant), Francis Hitchcock (son of Thomas and Louise), Memorial Gate honors his Uncle Francis, Julian Peabody Sr. (husband of Celestine, the daughter of Thomas and Louise), Helen Hitchcock Clark (daughter of Thomas and Louise)

Front Row: Thomas "Tommy" Hitchcock Jr. (son of Thomas and Louise), Alec Loughlan, Tommy Clark (son of Helen Hitchcock and Averell Clark), Julian Peabody Jr. (son of Celestine Hitchcock and Julian Peabody Sr.), Daphne Peabody (dauther of Celestine Hitchcock and Julian Peabody Sr.), Averell Clark Jr. (son of Helen Hitchcock and Averell Clark)



Photo at Mon Repos, Aiken, South Carolina, March 1930

Photo courtesy of Patricia Davies

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