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

It is hard to believe that I have served In the Hitchcock Woods Foundation board for thirty-five years. Much has happened during my tenure including two terms as Chairman of the Foundation. When I first became a trustee, we had one Board meeting each year, and it was usually at the Green Boundary Club; it lasted about one hour, and concluded with drinks and sometimes lace cookies. We had one employee, Namon Corley, and he had one small tractor and numerous hand implements to manage our 1,191 acres of forest. Things have really

changed We now have five employees, a large shed full of the latest forest management equipment, over 2,100 acres, at least six board meetings a year. When the meetings are over, we almost never have lace cookies much less drinks.

This year was another busy one beginning last September with a sold out Festival in the Woods featuring well known conservationist, Dana Beach. It was a kickoff celebration for the Foundation's 75th year. Last January, we officially became a mitigation site for the federally endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW). Thanks to Randy Wolcott and the wildlife committee, we are working towards having nest boxes installed in the recently thinned area on the bypass side of the Woods. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, we will have RCW's living in the Woods again.

Also last January, we began the first year of a three phase cultural inventory study of the Woods which will result in a comprehensive Cultural Management Plan for the Woods. It's pretty exciting to know that 11,000 years ago there were Native Americans living in HitchcockWoods and making survival tools that will become a part of the story of the Woods. The study and the story are a continuum from the prehistoric to historic, and it is equally exciting to find earthenware made in the Woods during the Civil War by a potter who was filling the need to supply pottery locally as a likely result of blockades against the South. It is going to be a



Ground stone axe from the Late Archaic found in the Hitchcock Woods. Photo credit: The Diarchronic Research Foundation

wonderful story about Woods.

HARRY SHEALY

Another big event this year was the hiring of a new Executive Director. In March of this year, we hired Christine Rolka who came highly recommended by everyone with whom she has worked. Christine is a native of New York and has lived and worked in South Carolina for twenty-four years. Christine is an outdoors enthusiast who enjoys hiking, camping, hunting, bicycling, and running. She also has an excellent background in environmental education and worked for fourteen

years at the National Wild Turkey Federation in Edgefield before coming to work at the Hitchcock Woods Foundation. Christine and her husband Tom have two children, Heidi and Lance. We are all looking forward to working with her in the coming years. If you see Christine, please introduce yourself; she likes to meet friends and users of the Woods.

Looking ahead, we are currently planning for our Festival in the Woods on Friday, September 25. This year's speaker is Dr. Walter Edgar, noted South Carolina historian. Next April 1-3, 2016 will be our "Centennial Celebration" of the Aiken Horse Show. Please put both events on your calendar now.

Once again, I would like to thank all of you for your continued and generous support of the Woods. All of our work with the Woods depends on your support and on behalf of all to the trustees and staff, we appreciate your help. If you ever have any questions or concerns about the Woods, please do not hesitate to contact me.



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. Harry has held the position of Chairman since the Spring of 2013.

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 🥯 CHRISTINE K. ROLKA

I am humbled and thrilled to work on behalf of Hitchcock Woods, the very place that enamored me and my husband, both outdoor enthusiasts, to Aiken shortly after arriving here from New York in 1991. We used to run by the Green House in those early years and think how lucky the residents were to live so close to this amazing resource. I didn't know then that we would make Aiken our home, the Woods an extension of our front yard, and that my office would someday be in that very Green House.

Like many of you, I've traveled and spent enough time in the conservation arena to know and appreciate how rare and precious a resource we have in Hitchcock Woods. My short tenure has enlightened me to an equally precious resource, the very people whose time, efforts, and support continue to make the Woods available to us. While green space in many areas across our state and country is diminishing, these people continue to ensure that our beloved Hitchcock Woods does not! I am grateful to those who came before me, imparting an impressive legacy and a strong foundation from which to build.

2015 Milestones

Despite a year of transition, the Foundation achieved several milestones key to our mission:

Management- Our forest management activities are not only restoring the Woods to its native longleaf pine ecosystem, but are reestablishing suitable habitat for the federally endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, a former resident of the Woods!

Research- The Foundation wrapped up phase one of a first ever cultural resources survey of the Woods. One third of the Woods property surveyed has already revealed sites dating back 11,000 years!

Education- Thanks to a partnership with the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center, the Woods served as an outdoor classroom for 661



Students observe a snail on an Eco-Hike with the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center. Photo credit: Brent Cline

students, who learned about the Woods ecosystem and the management practices we apply to keep the Woods healthy. According to one teacher, "Being outside and actually seeing and touching what we have studied", was the most beneficial part for her students.

The Woods also served as a model for landowners seeking to improve their lands.

Thanks to your generosity, the Foundation also enjoyed its most successful Annual Fund campaign this year. These contributions are vital to our mission and to securing the future of our precious Woodland.

Looking Ahead

2016 presents us with a once in a hundred years opportunity to showcase and celebrate our Woods history and traditions in grand style through the centennial Aiken Horse Show in the Woods. We look forward to harnessing the momentum generated by this event and these milestones to build the next generation of Woods stewards and supporters, expand the breadth of our Woods management activities, and secure the future of our beloved Hitchcock Woods resource.

2014 Celestine Eustis Essay Contest Winner third grader, Pippa Miller, wrote, "The Woods makes me feel active and happy, knowing that I have a special place to go." Your continued support will ensure that the Woods remains that special place for us, and becomes that special place for future generations. Thank you for all you do for the Woods!



Christine joined the Hitchcock Woods Foundation in March 2015 after working for a national wildlife conservation organization for 14 years, and as an educator for 6 years prior. She earned her M.A. in Natural Sciences from the University of South Carolina. Christine and her family enjoy spending time in the Woods and the outdoors.



LETTER FROM THE WOODS SUPERINTENDENT 🥯

Highlights this year included continued cleanup to the 2014 Ice Storm Pax, preparing for an ecological thinning in response to damage from the ice storm, continuing our important prescribed burning program, working in partnerships, becoming a Safe harbor forest, continuing education, and an unfortunate visit from a tornado in April.

During the last year, it's been interesting to learn that the areas that were impacted the least by the ice storm were areas where we have conducted selective thinning operations, and areas that have been in

a regular prescribed burning regime for the last two and a half decades. What does that tell me? It tells me that our Longleaf Pine ecosystem restoration efforts are working to re-create the historic landscape that is better suited as a resilient landscape. As a response to the structural damage many of the trees endured as well as from a restoration aspect, this winter the Woods staff cruised 115 acres of land on the northeast side of the woods for a selective thinning operation. The desired condition of this tract is to restore the historic Longleaf Pine uplands to the way the woods existed a century ago.

An important forest stewardship tool utilized to maintain a healthy forest ecosystem is prescribed burning. This year was our 27th year of applying prescribed (or controlled) burns to various management units in Hitchcock Woods. During the winter, dormant season of prescribed burns, we were able to conduct several burns on some tracts that were behind the rotational schedule of burning which was beneficial. Despite the dry summer pattern in between rainy spells, we were able to cover some acres with growing season burns that are best for groundcover restoration.

This past winter, the Hitchcock Woods Foundation signed a Safe Harbor agreement that will aid in local recovery efforts in Hitchcock



In January 2015 the HWF entered into a Safe Harbor agreement with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. Photo Courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Woods of the federally endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker (Picoides borealis). The Red Cockaded Woodpecker once called the Woods home but due to a lack of proper stewardship practices, the birds disappeared because their habitat became unsuitable, mostly due to fire suppression. The Safe Harbor Program provides incentives for property owners to restore, enhance, and maintain habitats for listed species.

BENNETT TUCKER

During the fall, our Woods Resource Steward, Eric Grande, and I traveled down to Mobile, Alabama for the 10th Longleaf Alliance Conference that occurs every two years. I presented "The Careful Return of

Fire to Long Unburned Stands of Longleaf Pine." It was a great conference and we listened to many great presenters on all kinds of research and restoration projects. This past November, the Hitchcock Woods was home to a Longleaf Alliance Field Day where landowners and natural resource professionals from the region came out to learn about our restoration efforts that have been going on for the last several decades.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our Woods Resource Steward, Eric Grande, for his continued service to the Hitchcock Woods Foundation. I'd also like to thank each one of you reading this, and for your support either through time, talent, or financial contributions. As always, 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.



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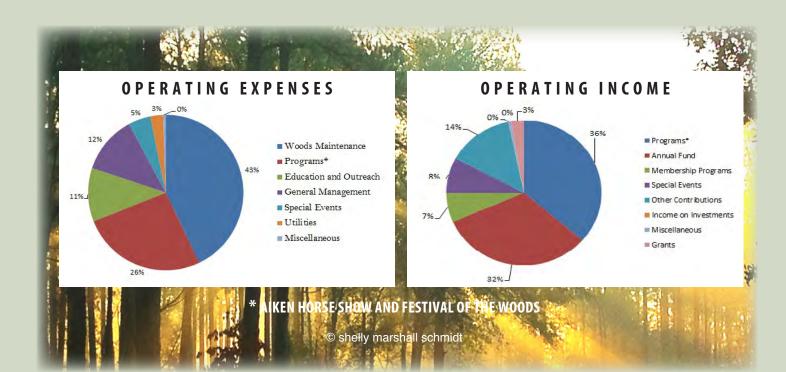
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