

# ANNUAL <sup>2016</sup> REPORT

Hitchcock Woods  
FOUNDATION

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

THE AIKEN HORSE SHOW



## 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.

*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.*

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

### HARRY SHEALY IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIRMAN

When I was asked to be a trustee on the Hitchcock Woods Foundation thirty-six years ago, things were sure different. The Foundation took care of about 1200 acres of land, we had one employee, Namon Corley, and we held one meeting of the Board of Trustees each year in March. Today, we actually manage 2100+ acre urban forest, we have six employees to run the business of the Woods, we meet at least six times each year, and we have broadened our mission. During my first term as chair of the Woods, the Foundation's big accomplishment was that we acquired over 500 hundred acres of additional land for the Woods.

When I began my second term as chair of the Foundation, the Woods were in excellent condition and so was the Foundation. Despite some turnovers in trustees, personnel, and a 1000-year ice storm, we were able to hire our new executive director, Christine Rolka, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Aiken Hounds and the Aiken Horse Show in two consecutive years. Our Fall Festival of the Woods and our Spring Aiken Horse Show continue to increase in numbers and quality under the leadership of our dedicated trustees.

Last fall our staff, trustees, and small army of volunteers replaced about eighty jumps throughout Woods. The jumps were built to standard heights, widths, and with more sustainable materials. It was a big job for everyone and all of the work was done in conjunction with members of the Aiken Hounds.

Also, under the leadership of our trustees, Hitchcock Woods became a mitigation site for the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. These birds were once residents of the Woods but the absence of sound forest management resulted in

their disappearance. However, the good news is that we hope to establish new colonies of woodpeckers in the very near future.

Historically speaking, we have now completed two years of a three-year cultural inventory of the Woods. The archeologists are finding all sorts of artifacts dealing with both prehistory and historical inhabitants of the Woods. When completed, they will furnish the Foundation a record of their findings as well as a Cultural Management Plan to complement our Forest Management Plan. We are all looking forward to what they uncover next year.

We are also expanding our educational programs in the Woods. Aiken County school children are increasingly being brought to the Woods for field trips, and if you would like a day of pure fun and joy, you should try joining one of the trips.

I would like to thank our trustees and staff for all that they do to make the Woods such a wonderful asset for our community. I am looking forward to the capable leadership of our new Foundation Chairman, Greg Paschal. Greg has many talents to offer us for the next three years. As we change leadership, the Woods are still in excellent condition and so is the Foundation because of all of our friends and donors who generously commit time and money to 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. Harry served two terms as Chairman, March 1989-1993 and 2013-2016.*

### GREG PASCHAL CHAIRMAN

The past year has been one of significant achievement for the Hitchcock Woods Foundation.

March marked the first anniversary of Christine Rolka serving as our Executive Director. She has already put her background in non-profit and conservation endeavors to good use, and her energy has been contagious. We are grateful to have her leading our team.

We celebrated the Centennial Aiken Horse Show! Riders from around the country enjoyed an extraordinary three days in the Woods. Not only is the Aiken Horse Show an event which ties many people's hearts to Aiken and the Woods, it is the most important financial event of the year for the Foundation. This year's show was a tremendous success thanks to co-chairs Dana Massey and Gail King and a host of volunteers.

Our research progressed into the feasibility of introducing Red-cockaded Woodpeckers back into the Woods. We are thankful to Randy Wolcott, our Forestry Chair, for eagerly leading this effort.

We completed the second of a three phase cultural resources survey, which will give us a more complete history of early uses of the Woods property and will be important to the preservation of this property going forward. This effort has been led by Courtney Conger, our Historic Preservation Committee Chair.

A bright spot for the Foundation, again this year, was the financial support of our donors. While there are some misperceptions that the Foundation is publicly funded or works out of a long-standing endowment, the reality is that the Foundation is only viable because of the generosity of our donors.

In April the Board held a strategic planning retreat where we

established strategic priorities for managing the Woods for the next three to five years and beyond.

We again face the challenge of stopping the erosional and wetlands damages caused by stormwater entering the Woods. This is the Foundation's top strategic priority.

We also look forward to building an endowment that will ensure the Foundation has the operating dollars it will need in the future to allow us to continue our good work. We will begin this effort in earnest in the coming year, with the leadership of Sara McNeil, the Foundation's Fundraising Committee Chair.

Like most endeavors, there is a lot more that goes on behind the scenes than meets the eye, and our trustees are the critical ingredients. I am thankful to each of them for their time and dedication to the Hitchcock Woods Foundation. Special thanks to Dr. Harry Shealy, who not only finished his second term as Chairman of the Foundation in March, but has dutifully, served the Foundation for over thirty years!

It is truly an honor to serve as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and on behalf of the Hitchcock Woods Foundation, I thank you for your support!



*Greg Paschal has called Aiken home since 1974. A Certified Financial Planner and Senior Vice President for Wells Fargo Advisors, LLC. Greg is also an avid outdoorsman and has been in and around the Woods for most of his life.*

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHRISTINE K. ROLKA

### *Off these pines could talk*

I came across a bumper sticker this summer that read "May the forest be with you". It struck a chord with me not only for its humorous play on words and movie reference, but because it seemed to coin the perfect salutation for wishing one well. Like many of you, my love for the Woods was inspired by its magnificent trees, and the way they seemed to embrace me and nourish my soul and sense of well-being (and still do!) with each visit. To me this is one of the greatest gifts our forest and work provides. Our activities this past year opened my eyes to our forests gifts of rich history and tradition as well. I now have more reasons to love our Woods, and a greater sense of the magnitude of our responsibility to care for it, tell its story and preserve its heritage and traditions for future generations.

### *Accomplishments*

The following are some of the many successes your support made possible this past year:

#### **Restoring the Ecological Health and Integrity of the Woods –**

Our work to restore our historic longleaf landscape continues to result in a healthier and more resilient forest. We are poised to reintroduce an extirpated species, and our forest continues to serve as a model for urban forestry and longleaf restoration, as it did for a host of national conservation agencies on the American Longleaf Restoration Tour this spring.

**Maintaining and Managing Traditional Uses –** We paid tribute to the Centennial Aiken Horse Show this spring, and traveled through the decades to compile its history and grandeur in the planning of a celebration worthy of marking this milestone. Last fall, the Foundation established consensus for a standard durable fence design that was implemented throughout the Woods, and Kiosks were installed at each entrance to promote the safety and enjoyment of our variety of Woods users.

**Preserving and Protecting our Woods Heritage –** The conclusion of Phase II of our Cultural Resource Survey in the spring deepened our understanding of our Woods past, and will soon afford it further

protection as a culturally significant site.

**Education and Stewardship –** The Woods continue to serve as a classroom for hundreds of students annually, helping to nurture our next generation of stewards. Our Cultural Resources Survey inspired our first Cultural and Natural Resources of Hitchcock Woods School Field Day Event, thanks to the help of our growing network of community and agency partners.



*Students learn how early Woods users survived off the land during a Woods Field Day Event.*

### *Looking ahead*

Our spring strategic planning retreat gave us pause to reflect on the Foundation's many accomplishments since its inception in 1939. Most notably, the near doubling of the Hitchcock family's original gift of 1,191 acres to 2,100 acres today, protections applied to these precious

acres, and the building of a network of supporters who not only value this resource, but contribute their dollars, time and talent towards its care. We also identified strategic priorities critical to our mission and role as caretakers of this resource; protecting our Woods from threats that plague its health and integrity, and endowing the Foundation to ensure our future work on its behalf, being paramount. With history as our guide, we are confident we will meet these challenges in the years ahead with your continued support.

Thank you for all you do for the Foundation on behalf of our beloved Woods. May our forest be with you, always!



*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.*

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## LETTER FROM THE WOODS SUPERINTENDENT BENNETT TUCKER

This year marks my 10th year on staff with the Hitchcock Woods Foundation (HWF). It's gratifying to reflect on how far we've come fulfilling our mission of stewardship and preservation of Hitchcock Woods. Highlights this year include having our second most successful prescribed burning season in the last 10 years, the establishment of a HWF Fire Team, completing a major restoration thinning, supplemental tree plantings, progress towards the re-establishment of the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker, a major jump overhaul, new kiosks, visits from conservation partners and continuing education and outreach efforts.

The HWF woods staff became more self-sufficient with our burn program by securing in-house insurance coverage to conduct our prescribed burns. This avenue allows us to conduct prescribed burns more frequently, while not being under pressure to maximize our acres burned per day. This year, we've prescribed burned just shy of 400 acres, keeping us in the rotation we like to be in of 350-500 acres per year. Prescribed fire is a safe way to apply a natural process, ensure ecosystem health, and reduce wildfire risk. The HWF Fire Team was important to this success and was comprised of local volunteers with prescribed burning and firefighting experience who assisted on days that we conduct prescribed burns. We had some great experiences on the fire line this year and I'd like to thank those volunteers who have helped us with our success!

The HWF Board approved a major restorative thinning in order to restore the Woods historic landscape aesthetic, harvest older-weaker loblolly pines that were aging out, clean out the damaged trees from the ice storm, reduce the risk of insect infestation, create an uneven aged longleaf pine (and shortleaf pine!) stand structure in the uplands. We have since planted over 1500 longleaf pine seedlings to supplement regeneration in some of these units and currently selectively spraying some of the scrub oak competition to enhance the groundcover restoration and conduct prescribed burns in these units this coming winter to reduce the fuel load and restore the ecological integrity to these stands, as we have across the other upland areas of Hitchcock Woods.

The HWF Board and staff have been working with state and federal wildlife agencies to restore an old friend to the forest, the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW). Decades ago, the RCW once called Hitchcock Woods home, but due to a lack of management of the forest for many years, they

disappeared. Thanks to our longleaf restoration efforts, the habitat is again suitable for their domain. Stay tuned for exciting news on this front!

Informational kiosks now greet everyone at our seven main entrances as well as the major intersection at the old Gamekeeper's Lodge site, and a major overhaul of 100 percent of the Aiken dragline jumps was completed with the intent of enhancing the equestrian experience and utilizing sustainable materials and a uniform jump design. This effort would not have been possible without major donor support as well as the herculean efforts of the Axe Club and Aiken Hounds volunteers, and an elite group of Axe Club volunteers dubbed "the Axe Men," who logged hundreds of hours of volunteer time helping to demo and rebuild the fences across the woods.

We hosted a number of education and outreach programs including, a longleaf pine restoration tour with a national conservation group, summer camp tours, a college forestry class from Clemson University, and the "People Chase Run" as part of the Aiken's Earth Day Festivities. We also enjoyed a visit by Clemson Extension's Amanda McNulty, local horticulturist, Bob McCartney and the film crew of SCETV's "Making it Grow".

As always, The HWF woods staff participates in continuing education throughout the year to stay on top of the

latest research and best practices for forest management.

I would like to thank our Woods Resource Steward, Eric Grande, for his continued service to the HWF. Eric has been a great asset to our prescribed fire program, education and outreach efforts, as well being a great ambassador for the HWF. I'd like to also thank each and everyone's continued support through, time, talent or financial contributions. As always, I'll see you in the woods!



*The Woods benefited from one of the highest prescribed burn seasons on record.*



*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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*The Hitchcock Woods Foundation works very hard to ensure that our donor information is listed correctly, however, occasional mistakes do occur. Please contact the Foundation office at (803) 642-0528 with any questions or corrections.*

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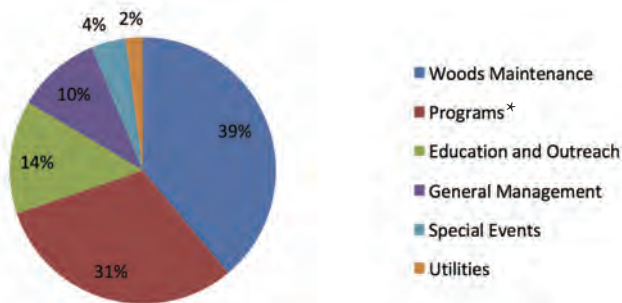
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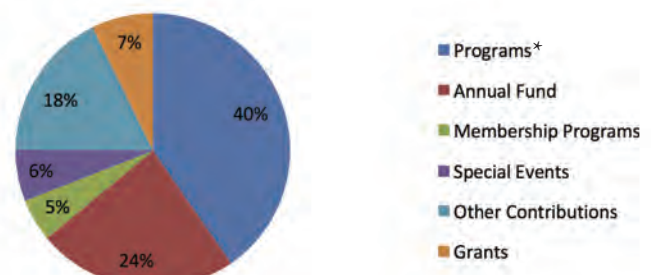
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Oh Schmidt Productions  
Jack Roth – The Carolina Real Estate Company  
Stable View, LLC 1  
Suzy Haslup, Meybohm Realtors  
The Willcox #  
Judith Bovitz, Wells Fargo Advisors, LLC

### \$500 LEVEL

Aiken Luxury Rentals  
Aiken Pest Control  
Floyd and Green Jewelers  
International Ventures, Ltd. #  
A. R. Knowles, Allamuchy Farm  
Matchless Address  
Megan Timmerman Photography  
Security Federal Bank #2  
Tracy Kelsey-Equine Photograph  
Tobias G. Ward, Jr., PA

### \$250 LEVEL

Aiken Equine & Associates, PA  
Robyn & Cissie – Aiken Fine Properties at Meybohm  
Aiken's Horse Hotel  
Birds and Butterflies  
Cherry Bekaert, LLP  
Dinner Bell #  
Gillam and Associates

Koelker & Associates, LLC  
Mercedes-Benz of Augusta 3  
Sand River Woman's Club  
Shealy's Bar B Q  
The Carolina Real Estate Company  
#3 – Courtney Conger  
Three Runs Plantation  
True Value Hardware  
Wyatt's Bed and Biscuit LLC

### \$100 LEVEL

AgSouth Farm Credit, ACA 4  
Aiken County Farm Supply 4  
Aiken Equestrian Resource.com  
Aiken Veterinary Clinics, PA  
Allstate, Tom Young  
Atlantic Broadband 4  
Baker Family Dentistry  
Barbara Sue Brodie Needleworks  
Bartlett Tree Expert Company 4  
Bridgestone Americas Tire

Operations, LLC  
Dr. Robert Lee Buchanan, III and  
Dr. S. Taylor Garnett  
Martin Buckley, Architect  
Chris' Camera Center  
The Community Foundation for the CSRA  
Michael J. Costigan, Sr., CPA, LLC  
Double L Farm  
East Coast Equine Dentistry - Louis Heffner  
Foxchase Stables  
Darren Haeusler Farrier Services, LLC  
Howell Printing Company # 4  
Hull Barrett, P.C. 4  
Hutson-Etheredge Companies #  
J.E. Stewart Builders, Inc. #  
King Management, Inc. #  
Lionel Smith, Ltd. #  
Andrew Marine, Attorney at Law

O.A.K. Services  
Paschal Financial Group of  
Wells Fargo Advisors  
Progressive Show Jumping Inc.  
Sporting Days Farm  
Sweet Water Tree Farm, LLC #  
USC Aiken Equestrian Club  
Deirdre Stoker Vaillancourt - Meybohm Realtors  
Ray B. Vaughters, Jr., MD #  
Warneke Cleaners, Inc.  
York Cottage Antiques 4

### KEY

- # Charter Partner
- 1 Diamond Corporate Partner
- 2 Platinum Corporate Sponsor
- 3 Gold Corporate Sponsor
- 4 Silver Corporate Sponsor