

# ANNUAL <sup>2013</sup> 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.

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Golden rays of streaming sunlight filter through the forest and illuminate the fog above a quiet path. Photo: Shelly Schmidt

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD  
RANDY WOLCOTT AND HARRY SHEALY

# *A Year of Milestones*

RANDY WOLCOTT, Immediate Past Chairman

As another year has passed, I would like to report for the entire Board on the strength of the Foundation and its finances, and the health of the Woods. The Hitchcock Woods Foundation can once again report on the tremendous support of our Friends locally and across the nation. The fundraising goals and tight fiscal responsibility of our staff have kept the Foundation in very good financial shape. The policies and procedures instituted with the guidance of our financial committee have enabled the Foundation to make significant improvements to our infrastructure without impacting the operating budget.

It has been my distinct honor and pleasure to serve as Chairman of the Board for the past five years. This year I stepped down to give others the opportunity to serve in this position. I want to personally thank each of the members of our Board. During

HARRY SHEALY, Chairman

The past year has been an important transitional period for the Hitchcock Woods Foundation. With the generous financial support of the community, the Foundation concluded a seven year campaign of raising funds to address urgent capital initiatives. Also this year, the Foundation completed the second year of a multiyear, longleaf pine ecosystem restoration effort, and observed many milestone changes to the Board of Trustees.

Since 2006, the Foundation has managed the construction of a new administrative headquarters and a new maintenance facility. Over the same time, the Foundation acquired all new maintenance vehicles and equipment. On top of all of this, the Foundation purchased ten valuable acres at the historic Coker Spring entrance to the Woods. After making payments for six years, a major loan for this latest initiative was paid off this year, officially completing this very important capital phase. Finally, since last summer, all of the groundwork was laid for the construction of two bridges in the Woods during the subsequent fiscal year.

Also this year, the Foundation was able to establish a capital reserve fund, which sets aside a modest reserve amount for unanticipated capital expenses and which can be used to accumulate funds for projected capital expenses.

The Foundation completed year two of its multiyear agreement with the National Wild Turkey Federation for restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem. The partnership employs all three tools – the selective application of contemporary forestry herbicides, prescribed burning, and strategic mechanical thinning, engaging them where they are best suited. This past year's activity focused mostly on prescribed burning and groundcover restoration.

Since July 2012, there were many changes to the composition of the Board of Trustees. With the Foundation in good standing, a number of longtime and committed Trustees chose to conclude their service on the Board. Over the 12 months, we observed the retirements of Sandra Tucker, Peter Gray, Patricia Goodyear, Scott Riviere, and Paul Simons. While we celebrated the service and passion of these Trustees upon their retirements, we acknowledge how greatly they will be missed as Trustees.

this time, the Foundation has completed many long term goals, both in financial stability, infrastructure improvements, and in the continued restoration of the longleaf forest. I will leave the remainder of this report to a man who needs no introduction, as he has been with the Foundation for many years serving in many capacities, my friend, Dr. Harry Shealy.



*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. He is a Realtor with the Carolina Real Estate Company.*

At the Board's Annual Meeting in March, three retired Trustees were elected as Trustees Emeriti. This honor was bestowed on Iris Freeman, Peter Gray, and Patricia Goodyear. Sadly, Patricia passed away just three months after retiring as the longest serving Trustee ever, with 50 years of service.

Two new members were elected to the Board of Trustees this year. We welcomed longtime and frequent visitors to the Woods Constance Darden Young and Dana Massey. Both have an interest in community outreach and in providing young people with a variety of educational opportunities, including those involving the Woods.

Finally, this was a year of leadership transition, as my longtime friend Randy Wolcott completed his tenure as the tenth Chairman of the Board. As shared in these annual reports since 2009, Randy has a passion for the Hitchcock Woods and its traditions. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we thank Randy for his many contributions on Board committees over the years and for his service as Board Chairman for the past five years. I look forward to his continued service on the board.

In March, I was honored to be re-elected as Chairman of the Board. I served as Chairman before, from March 1989 to March 1993 and now, 20 years later, it is an exciting prospect to serve again, with an entirely different set of circumstances – and challenges – from that earlier time. It will be a privilege to work with this community again on the important work of the Foundation. I look forward to working with all of the Friends of the Woods who love and enjoy the Woods as much as I do.



*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](http://hitchcockwoods.org/media/newsletters/spring_2013.pdf).*

## *A Future with Promise*

Donor engagement enables transformations. Youth involvement eases transitions.

### **Donors: So Many People to Thank**

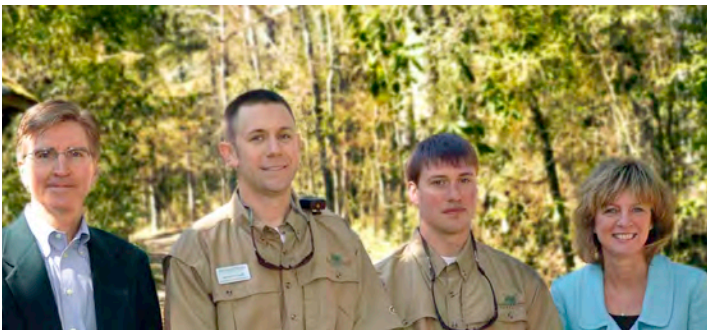
There are more donor names in this year's annual report than ever before. This statement was true last year, too, and the year before that. In fact, the number of total annual donors increased five out of the past six years. That number dropped only once, during the fiscal year that saw the onset of the recession. Since that time, however, donor participation not only has recovered, but also has exceeded pre-recession levels ... by seven percent.

The Foundation is deeply grateful to a supportive community. From individuals and families to small businesses and major corporations, the range of supporters is both breathtaking and humbling. Individuals and families support the Friends of the Woods program and the highly important Annual Fund. Many families also sponsor special events, like the Hunt Week Gala, In Celebration of Eventing, the Aiken Horse Show, and the Festival of the Woods.

Many corporate sponsors also step up with major support for the Aiken Horse Show and the Festival of the Woods. Finally, a host of Business Partners – companies large and small – round out the critical support that the Foundation receives from the business and organization community.

Hand in hand with all of these generous donors, the Foundation has kept abreast with its operating budget and has completed its primary capital objectives. Today the Foundation is poised for a promising future with new challenges. With continued donor participation, the Foundation now is ready to face a range of management initiatives that would elevate the stewardship of the Hitchcock Woods and enhance the visitor experience.

For example, in the past year, a professional contractor collected GPS data points on the extensive trail network throughout the Woods. In the near term, the data set will result in a greatly improved map of the Woods. The project later will lead to various management tools for staff and helpful navigation tools for visitors. Supporters will learn about these and many other exciting initiatives in the years to come.



*The Foundation's staff is (left to right) Doug Rabold, Bennett Tucker, Eric Grande, and Chris Reichel. Eric was hired in February 2013 to fill the vacated position of Woods Technician. An Aiken native, he is a graduate of the University of South Carolina Aiken where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in biology with a minor in geology. Eric's educational background is well suited for the position, including courses in environmental earth science, ecology, botany, animal behavior, and conservation.*



*The many adventures afforded by the Hitchcock Woods have captured the imagination of children and have brought families together for generations.*

### **Youth: So Many Stories to Tell**

Children are the future of every community and Aiken is fortunate to have many outstanding young people who may be the next generation of local leaders. To recognize and celebrate these youth, each of the Foundation's publications this past year featured photographs and articles about students interacting with the Woods.

On the cover of the 2012 Annual Report were excerpts from essays written by area students over the first four years of the annual Hitchcock Woods essay contest. Each winner received the Celestine Eustis Prize of \$500 and saw their essay published in the fall issue of "Views from the Woods." Other seasonal issues of the newsletter this past year featured photographs of youth from Mount Anna Baptist Church and Boy Scout Troop 146. These are just two examples of the many distinct groups that visit the Woods.

The 2013 monthly wall calendar (given as premium to Friends of the Woods members) featured photographs of Aiken Hounds Juniors, local students enjoying in the Festival of the Woods, child exhibitors in the Aiken Horse Show, Clemson forestry students, Aiken High cross country runners, and young trail riders. Each group visits the Woods differently, but the overall experience is a shared one.

The 2013 Aiken Horse Show program featured articles about Junior Foxhunters and columns with unique perspectives of the Hitchcock Woods as expressed by three young siblings. Demonstrating intergenerational connections to the Woods, an inside photograph featured Thomas and Louise Hitchcock with their children and grandchildren. The cover image showed a daughter and mother who were Foxhunter Champion and Reserve, respectively, in the previous year's Aiken Horse Show.

Clearly, the Hitchcock Woods inspires young people and brings families together for a wide variety of life affirming experiences. In many positive ways, the Hitchcock Woods helps shape the values of the young people who visit. What a profound joy it is to sense that some of these youth will one day be among the stewards of 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.*

LETTER FROM THE WOODS SUPERINTENDENT  
BENNETT TUCKER

# *A Forest with Stewardship*

During a recent family vacation out west, I thought about the fire prone nature of so many forests in the United States. As dry as it is out west this year, numerous wildfires will leave their mark on the fire suppressed western landscape. Here in the Southeast, we have been blessed with bountiful rainfall this year. As I thought about the condition of the Hitchcock Woods, it was good to know where we stand should we experience an extremely dry situation. The Foundation began a prescribed burning program in the 1980s and that effort has continued through the years. More recently, this has been enhanced with mitigation through several fuel breaks cleared along the perimeter of the Woods.

Highlights from this past year include a collective welcome of the Foundation's newest staff member, progress on longleaf pine ecosystem restoration efforts, seasonal maintenance of the Woods, prescribed burning, continuing education, and further involvement with the natural resources community.

Eric Grande joined the Foundation staff as Woods Technician in February. Eric brings with him knowledge of Aiken and its historic traditions. He grew up on the south side of the Hitchcock Woods in the Surrey Woods / Houndslake North neighborhood. He has taken off with understanding the longleaf pine ecosystem and the maintenance and stewardship functions of the Woods. He will continue to attend training on prescribed burning, wildland firefighting, longleaf pine stewardship, and non-native exotic invasive plant species control.

The multiyear longleaf pine ecosystem restoration project on the west side of the Woods is progressing well. It is funded by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife grant secured by the National Wild Turkey Federation, but applied in the Hitchcock Woods. We receive technical support from the Federation and Gary Burger, the Foundation's former Forest Manager. This year's effort focused on the restoration of a utility right of way on the west side of the Woods.

Following Carolina Gas Transmission's replacement of its main gas line through the Woods last year, Woods staff prepared the right of way for a native groundcover restoration project. In April, contractors planted the impacted right of way with a native groundcover mix of southeastern ecotype seeds that included seven grasses and 15 forbs that are all native to South Carolina. The legumes are growing well and the native grasses are getting started toward maturity. The native groundcover will become better established over several years of self-seeding. Staff also planted 2,500 wiregrass plugs to support native groundcover restoration.



*"It has been a pleasure working with Hitchcock Woods Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, and SC DNR in restoring the right of way to habitat with native vegetation," said Rick Kopec, Environmental Engineer with Carolina Gas Transmission.*

Seasonal tasks in the Woods help maintain the Woods for visitors. Continued trail blading, water bar maintenance, trail trimming, hazardous tree felling, and storm damage cleanup always keep the small staff on our toes throughout the year.

This past year provided a fairly good prescribed burning season. With some limitations from big rains in February, we were still able to capitalize on some good burns on the north side and western end of the Woods. One of these prescribed burns finished out next to Corley Pass, where drivers and passengers on the Hitchcock Parkway can see the results of a fire maintained longleaf pine ecosystem.

The Woods staff has continued to be involved in various training activities and conferences throughout the state and in town. Again this year, we participated in the Earth Day celebration at Hopelands Gardens, the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council, South Carolina Exotic Pest Plant Council, and several other events.

I wish to thank Eric for his hard work and dedication to helping take care of the Hitchcock Woods. We also thank our Friends of the Woods and Business Partners for their continued support. We are honored to be involved with the challenge of caring for the Woods, but it really takes the support of each one of you. As always, take care, 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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## STAFF

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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.

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