MISSION
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
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 Hitchcock Woods Foundation has had a banner year, thanks to all of our donors, supporters, volunteers, sponsors, our hardworking trustees and last but certainly not least, our incredible and dedicated staff.

**Our Mission.** 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.

**Our Staff.** This past year we restructured our office and Woods staff to enable the Foundation to embrace this mission with more focus and resolution. We increased our Woods staff from two to three employees and this team, under the leadership of Woods Superintendent, Bennett Tucker, has done just that and then some. One just has to read Bennett’s Annual Letter to grasp the enormity of what they have accomplished. Hats off to Bennett, Mike Grabowski and our newest and very able member, Frank Morelli.

Our Woods Team could not do what they do without the amazing support of our office staff. Joanne Gunnell, our Foundation Administrator, makes certain the Woods staff has everything they need, keeps the trustees on their toes and sees to it that the everyday administrative workings of the office, (no small task!) is accomplished with efficiency and effectiveness. She is assisted by the newest member of our office team, Karen Peters.

**Community Partners.** In our ongoing commitment to educate ourselves and the public, the Foundation continues to stay engaged with many regulatory, institutional and private partners throughout the year. We attend the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council each fall, host Clemson University’s Forestry Camp, work with our local USCA’s Biology program and the Longleaf Alliance on workshops to educate others about the longleaf ecosystem, as well as our local NRCS office on different restoration practices.

The Foundation is partnering with the Aiken Land Conservancy and the Girl Scouts to premier an annual event in 2020 designed to educate and delight a new generation of conservationists. We also participate in the City of Aiken’s Earth Day festivities and we continue to work with organizations such as the Bluebird Society to protect the wildlife and wildlife habitat in the Woods.

Moreover, our popular 2018 Annual Festival of the Woods was a great success. We were honored to have Dr. Patrick McMillian back as a speaker, and we held a field day for a local school at the show grounds to educate our local youth about the history and beauty of the Woods.

Finally, the Foundation is proud to continue its over one-hundred-year partnership with the Aiken Hounds, the oldest drag hunt in the country.

**Archaeological Findings.** The Woods is also home to many well-documented archeological findings, which we continue to work, catalogue, protect and preserve. Just two years ago, a momentous discovery was made in the Sand River corridor of the Woods: the remnants of the 1833 Charleston to Hamburg railroad. These remnants include intact pieces of rail, siding and other antiquated early railroad equipment that, until now, have only been seen in pre-Civil War engineering and design drawings and do not exist in physical form anywhere else in the world. The Foundation, the city, railroad historians, the archeologists of the SC Department of Natural Resources and the Best Friends of the Railroad are working to secure, protect and preserve these remnants for future generations.

**Stormwater.** In 2017, the Board determined that finding a solution to the escalating erosion and damage to the Woods caused by the city’s unmanaged stormwater is a top priority of the Foundation. In 2018, the Foundation and the city reached an historic agreement for a shared solution to resolve this sixty-year problem that has destroyed and continues to destroy acres of the Woods fragile habitat, ecosystem and artifacts. Until the implementation of the stormwater plan is complete, the Foundation will continue to work diligently with the city to eliminate the ongoing damage and ultimately to restore the Sand River channel.

The old saying “it takes a village” is so true with the Hitchcock Woods. When the Hitchcocks created the Foundation and donated the Woods, they did not establish an endowment to help offset the costs of preserving this extraordinary resource, so every single donor, sponsor and volunteer is critical to the very existence and the future of the Hitchcock Woods as we know it today.

I did not say that lightly: none of this would be possible without our annual donors and sponsors. Your generosity makes it possible for this magnificent, uniquely Southern urban forest to thrive for the benefit of the entire Aiken community.

On behalf of the Foundation’s Board of Trustees, thank you. We are grateful for everything you do to help us protect and preserve the Woods for future generations.
“The purpose of conservation: The greatest good to the greatest number of people for the longest time.” ~ Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service

The Hitchcock family surely embraced the vision of Gifford Pinchot when they formed the Hitchcock Woods Foundation in 1939. I often dwell on the legacy of the Hitchcocks and their extraordinary gift to the Aiken community—whether on foot, on horseback, strolling with their canine companions, bird watching or just observing the forest as a naturalist. Over the past year I’ve met numerous visitors out in the Woods who were training for a race, or getting in shape to go hiking with friends in Alaska, or exercising their horses in the early morning hours to beat the summer heat. How fortunate we are to have a place like the Hitchcock Woods in our backyard for the public to enjoy.

The Hitchcock Woods is the largest natural urban forest in the country, home to the increasingly rare Longleaf pine ecosystem, 160 different species of wildlife and plants, and 35 distinct archaeological sites with state and national significance. I and my Woods Stewards, Mike Grabowski and Frank Morelli, consider it our sacred duty to protect, preserve and maintain the Woods for future generations.

This past fiscal year, we completed a 70-acre forest stand improvement fuel chipping operation in and around the Ridge Mile Track in the Foxes’ Den and the Lover’s Lane areas to ensure the ecological health of the forest and reduce the potential for wildfire. These management units will be slated to be prescribed burned in early 2020.

In addition, I am proud to report our 2018-2019 prescribed burning program hit a new high: since November 30th of 2018, our HWF Prescribed Fire Team has completed 636 acres of prescribed burning. The results have been gratifying—not only does our burn program protect the neighboring communities from potentially devastating wildfires, it is also the foundation of our efforts to restore and protect the increasingly rare Longleaf pine ecosystem that at one time dominated 90 million acres of the Southern landscape.

To cap off our fire season, I am humbled to report that I was awarded, on behalf of the HWF the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council Fire Practitioner of the Year award for “Excellence in prescribed fire management and advocacy.” This would not have been possible without the effort of the staff, board, fire team and our Hitchcock Woods Foundation supporters!

The Longleaf pine stands in the Woods also provide critical foraging habitat areas for the federally endangered Red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs), which we reintroduced back in 2016. I am happy to report that there are now nine active clusters of RCWs throughout Hitchcock Woods, with roughly forty birds on the local landscape. On a daily basis, we thrill to hear the birds foraging throughout Hitchcock Woods. The success of our RCW program is an ecological success story on every level.

In the fall of 2018, the Foundation activated the long-standing volunteer work crew of the Woods called the Axe Club. Comprised of supporters of the Aiken Hounds and the Woods, these volunteers assisted the HWF staff in the annual undertaking of restoring the brush in all of the historic drag line jumps. With their help and hard work, all eighty of the jumps were re-brushed and ready for the commencement of the Aiken Hounds hunting season. Thank you to all who came out to assist in that endeavor!

I would like to thank our Woods Resource Stewards, Mr. Mike Grabowski and Mr. Frank Morelli for their hard work through the year to help keep Hitchcock Woods the enjoyable forest it is day in and day out!

Thank you for your continued support in everything we do to make the Woods a special place for the people of this great community. As always, see you around the Woods!
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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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Cover Photo: At the end of a prescribed burn with the sun filtering lazily through the tree tops, the white smoke was high overhead shutting out the direct sunlight. As of June 30, 2019, the burn team has conducted prescribed burns to over 600 acres in Hitchcock Woods. Photo courtesy of Bennett Tucker.