

2022 - 2023

# ANNUAL REPORT

  
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**Restoration. Preservation. Education.**

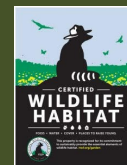
Milkweed on Ridge Mill Track



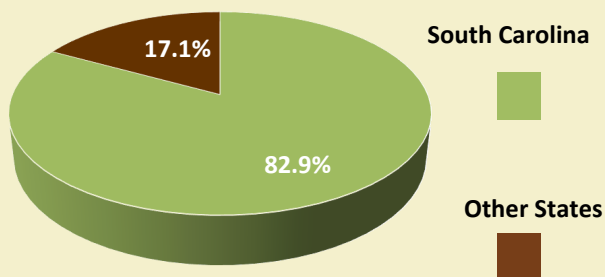
The Board of Trustees of the Hitchcock Woods Foundation sincerely thanks every donor for their continued support of the Woods.

Your donations have been vital in enabling us to provide the highest level of stewardship of the Woods and ensure that all can enjoy this magical forest today and for generations to come.

## Your Support Makes a Difference



## HITCHCOCK WOODS FOUNDATION SUPPORT EXPANDS

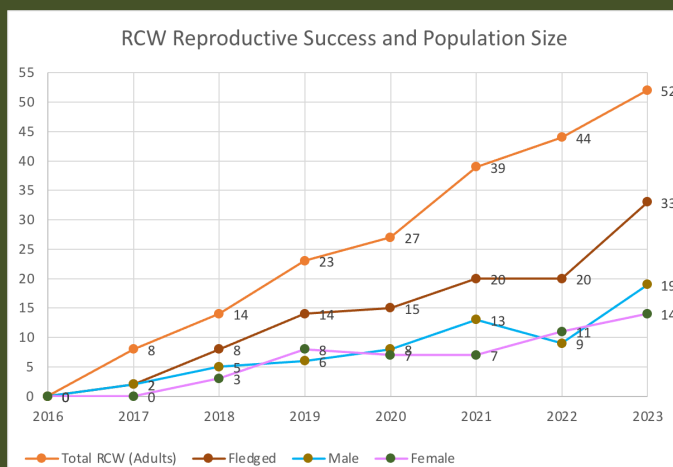


In the 2023 fiscal year (July 1, 2022—June 30, 2023), our number of donors increased 21% from our last fiscal report.

We had a substantial increase of out-of-state donors — over 17% of all donations came from outside South Carolina. Our donors represented 33 states, including Hawaii, and Canada.

## RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER UPDATE

RCWs are thriving in the Woods!



### 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.

**Restoration. Preservation. Education.**

# Stormwater Project



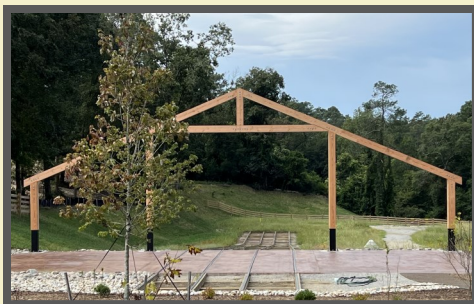
**Erosion caused by flooding**

Decades of uncontrolled stormwater from downtown Aiken resulted in massive erosion in Hitchcock Woods and the loss of over 90 acres of forested wetland. In 2022, the City of Aiken completed an extensive nearly \$16 million stormwater relief project at the corner of South Boundary Avenue and Laurens Street to help address the devastation in the Woods. This significant investment by the city is an indication of just how important Hitchcock Woods is to the community.

Already tested by numerous heavy rains, cutting edge technology provides constant monitoring of the

vaults, which appear to be efficiently working as expected. Sand River, which previously could be described as a raging rapid after a storm, is now merely a creek.

The entire area above the underground vaults has been tastefully landscaped and is known as the Gateway to Hitchcock Woods. A partnership between the City of Aiken and Hitchcock Woods Foundation generated educational kiosks which outline the stormwater project and topics related to the Woods including the longleaf pine, points of interest in the Woods, the Red-cockaded woodpecker, our diverse flora and fauna, and others.



The final component of the Gateway, a replica of the inclined plane and information about the historic railroad that once ran through the Woods, is well underway. See photo to the left.



**Prior to project, water rushing from 10' pipe**



**Underground Vaults**

**For time lapse video of the stormwater project, go to:**

<https://vimeo.com/875188727?share=copy#t=0>



## Education/Community Outreach



Numerous groups of students from elementary to college level have utilized the Woods as an outdoor classroom.



College students from **Clemson's Forestry Program** came to Hitchcock Woods to study stewardship practice such as urban forestry, longleaf restoration, and RCW recovery.



**Project Learning Tree** brought 27 teachers to the Woods to focus on ecological aspects of forestry with HWF staff, representatives from the **SC Forestry Association and Commission**, and **The Longleaf Alliance**.

***"In the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught." ~Baba Dioum***



Our staff have been guest speakers at various organizations in Aiken including garden clubs, the **Bluebird Society**, **Kiwanis Club**, and **USC Aiken's Lifelong Learning** program.

As part of our community outreach, we regularly participate in local events such as **USC Aiken's** educational **SEED** event with nearly 3,000 attendees, **Nature Rocks**, a family event at **Hopelands Gardens**, and **Aiken's Earth Day** celebration.



A project using QR codes will provide visitors more information about specific areas of interest in the Woods. Many thanks to **Jamie Koelker**, award-winning film and video producer, and to the **Garden Club of Aiken** for their sponsorship.



***Your generous gifts support our educational mission and outreach... helping students, professionals and educators.***



Most burn team members are certified

Although we were taught by Smokey the Bear that fire is bad, “Only you can prevent forest fires”, that isn’t entirely true...

- Fire revitalizes forests and many plants and animals, including longleaf pines, which literally depend upon fire to survive and thrive.
- HW is dedicated to improving the sustainability of the longleaf pine through management practices, especially prescribed burning.
- Due to our model fire program, the **South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council** held their 2023 Annual Meeting in Hitchcock Woods.
- Longleaf pines are a keystone species, playing a critical role in the ecosystem.
- The longleaf pine ecosystem is one of the most diverse the world.
- Due to overharvesting and fire suppression, only about 3% of the original 90 million acres of longleaf forests in the Southeast remain today.
- More than 30 plant and animal species associated with the longleaf pine ecosystem are listed as threatened or endangered.



Day of burn at Bog Field



One month later at Bog Field burn site



Birds enjoy foraging after a burn

## A lot goes into planning a prescribed burn including:

- Create and prioritize burn plan
- Check and organize all equipment
- Prepare fire breaks for safety of neighbors and forest
- Monitor weather for opportune burning conditions
- Alert neighbors and public of location and timing of burn
- Notify state fire officials and review plan with burn team
- Conduct test fire to ensure appropriate conditions
- Fire strategically ignited per terrain/conditions with burn team in place
- After burning, team extinguishes smoldering areas and monitors until safe



## Bezos Earth Fund Features Hitchcock Woods in Longleaf Conservation Video

Considered a model for longleaf restoration and preservation, Hitchcock Woods was chosen by representatives of the **Bezos Earth Fund**, **The Longleaf Alliance**, and the **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation** to video extensive footage for a documentary focusing on the longleaf pine ecosystem.

Follow this link to view the video.

<https://www.nfwf.org/media-center/videos/conserving-longleaf-pine-forests>



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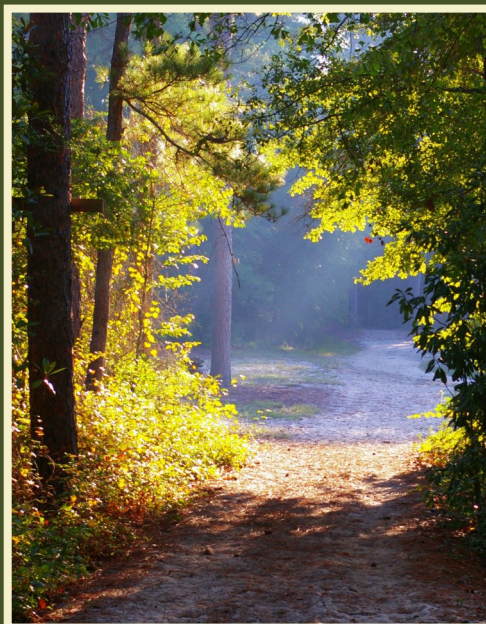
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Ms. Valerie Wrobel  
Dr. Sarah Young  
Anna W. Zouck



# Our Supporters Say It Best



"I found the most beautiful hidden secret here...the Chalk Cliffs."



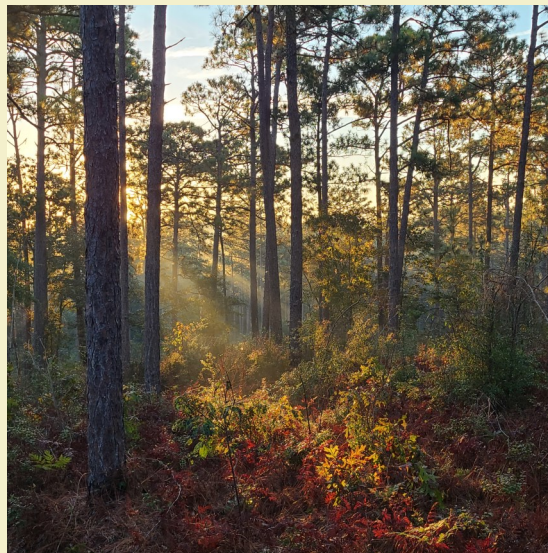
"You can be there for hours and never pass the same place twice."



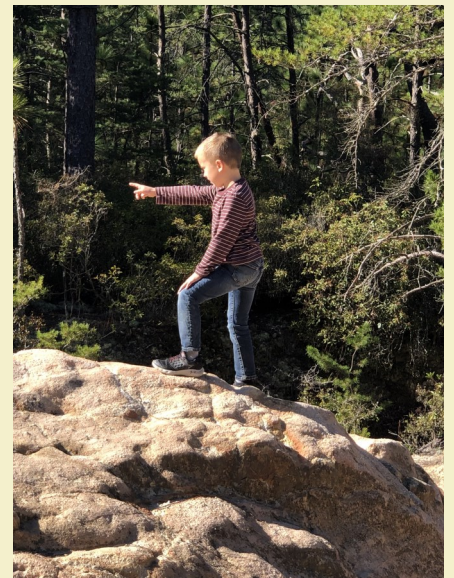
"As the sun peeks through the canopy along Cathedral Aisle, highlighting the majesty that is Hitchcock Woods, I am moved by its tranquility."



"The immense trail system is well maintained for hikers, runners, dog walkers and those on horseback."



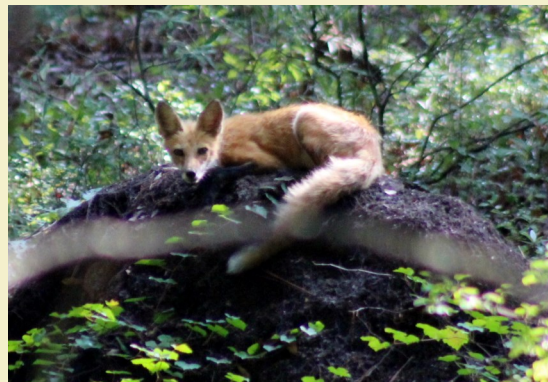
"Walking into Hitchcock Woods —winter, spring, summer or fall, in any weather, at any time of day - restores an ancient sense of balance and humility to my spirit."



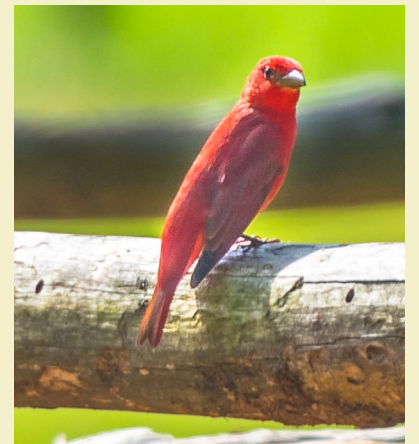
"When we walk in the Woods...it is possible to begin in an ecosystem that looks like South Carolina and end in one that looks like you are in the mountains of North Carolina."



"There is beauty in every season."

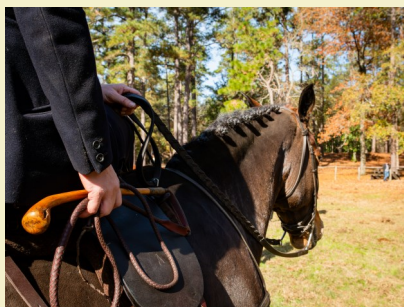


"To breathe the fresh air, hear the sounds in Hitchcock Woods, and see nature at its best, is a gift to all visitors."



"It is a massively beneficial resource and a huge part of the community and lifestyle in Aiken... I can't imagine the area without it."

# In The Woods



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