FALL 2026

Into the Woods

Future Education Center in Planning Stages

As the Foundation's education program continues to grow, so does the need for a dedicated indoor space where we can reach even more people year-round. We are excited to announce that we are in the beginning stages of developing an Environmental Education Center.

The Center will provide a large, flexible classroom space, along with restrooms and an office for our Education & Grants Coordinator. It will be constructed behind the Green House, where our staff offices are located near the South Boundary entrance.

Designed to complement the learning that already takes place throughout Hitchcock Woods, the Center will allow us to broaden our educational programming for a variety of ages and audiences. We envision everything from hands-on STEM activities for students to workshops for natural resource professionals, as well as new opportunities to strengthen partnerships with local schools, conservation organizations, and other nonprofits.

Expanding our educational programs and creating a dedicated Environmental Education Center are important investments in the future of the Woods. We cannot do it alone, and we look forward to working with our donors, partners, and the community to bring this vision to life. We are grateful to Meta for providing seed funding to support the initial planning stages of this project.

Green House Remediation/Renovation

The Green House, Hitchcock Woods Foundation's headquarters at the South Boundary entrance, is in need of some remediation work to be followed by repairs and renovations.

The house needs a new roof as there have been numerous leaks. All the windows and doors must be replaced as well. The building's HVAC system was inappropriately designed which has led to severe moisture and mold issues. The duct work must be replaced and the entire HVAC system reconfigured.

The most recent work done on the quaint building was in 2006 when it was completely renovated to be an office for the Foundation's small staff. Previously, the Green House was just that, a house. According to legend, built in the 1920s and consisting of just two rooms, it originally served as a boot room and laundry for the Hitchcock family. Some time later, descendants of Monroe Heath, the first caretaker of Hitchcock Woods, were the first to live in the Green House. Later, when Dolly Bostwick purchased the house and some surrounding property from the Hitchcocks, she allowed Alberta Heath, Cleveland's widow, to stay in the house for a number of years. The Foundation purchased the house from Dolly's estate in 1998. For several years, the Foundation leased the house, free of charge, to the Aiken Department of Public Safety. During that period, a number of officers and their families lived in the house.

This renovation, like the previous one, will emphasize preserving the traditional look of the house.

The remediation and renovation work will require a minimum of four months. During that time, the Green House will be closed to visitors and staff will be working remotely. All phone calls will be forwarded to a staff member and someone will respond as soon as possible. But, as always, if there is an emergency, please call 911.

Hitchcock Woods FOUNDATION

Restoration. Preservation. Education.

P.O. Box 1702 Aiken, SC 29802 803.642.0528 www.Hitchcockwoods.org

Greetings from our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

One of the remarkable things about Hitchcock Woods is that it is never quite the same place twice. The seasons change, the light shifts beneath the pines, and even the most familiar trail can offer something new to discover. Yet through all that change, the Woods remains a constant—a place of beauty, tranquility, connection, and discovery in the heart of Aiken.

Caring for more than 2,100 acres means embracing both that constancy and change. Every day, our staff works to protect forest health, maintain trails and historic areas, restore habitat, and respond to the evolving needs of the Woods. Much of this work happens quietly, but each effort is part of the responsibility we share to care for this extraordinary place.

That responsibility extends beyond the forest itself. The Green House, built in the early 1920s and home to the Hitchcock Woods Foundation, is undergoing necessary remediation and renovation to preserve this historic building for the future.

And we are looking to the future in another exciting way. Plans are taking shape for an Education Center adjacent to the Green House—a dedicated place where students, educators, researchers, and members of our community can gather, learn, and deepen their understanding and appreciation of Hitchcock Woods, its ecology, and the importance of conservation and stewardship.

Making this important project a reality represents a significant investment by the Foundation in environmental education and the future of the Woods. We are grateful to Meta for providing some seed funding to help us begin the initial planning and design, and we look forward to working with our donors, partners, and the community to bring the Center to life. The Environmental Education Center is more than just a building—it will help inspire and prepare future generations of stewards of Hitchcock Woods.

The work we do today—whether caring for a trail, protecting the forest, preserving a historic building, or planning for new opportunities to learn—helps shape what Hitchcock Woods will be tomorrow. We are grateful to everyone who shares in that responsibility and believes in its future.

Thank you for being part of the Hitchcock Woods family. We hope to see you in the Woods soon.

Warmly,

Mary Katherine Philipp, M.D.
Executive Director

Mark your calendars

111th Aiken Horse Show in the Woods, March 25-28, 2027

Scan code to see a current list of our upcoming events

Stewardship is our watchword

A growing season prescribed burn at Ridge Mile Track

Day of Burn

2 weeks post burn — rain lilies bloom

5 weeks post burn — vibrant new growth and butterfly milkweed in bloom

STEWARDSHIP, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is "the careful, ethical, and responsible management of resources, property, or environment entrusted to one's care. Rooted in the idea of a caretaker or manager, it emphasizes acting in the best interest of a broader community or future generations rather than for personal gain."

At the Hitchcock Woods Foundation, we take our stewardship role very seriously. Our full-time Woods Superintendent and Woods Assistant Superintendent, as well as our part-time Woods Resource Steward, work tirelessly to care for this 2,100-acre forest.

A big part of regular maintenance is assuring that our 70 miles of trails are clear and safe for a variety of uses — walkers, runners, and horseback riders. Trees and branches can be extremely hazardous and the crew is always on the lookout for any that need attention. Our team handles much of the tree work themselves, but at times a tree expert with additional equipment is required. And there is so much more that is done on a regular basis that visitors rarely see — like cutting and maintaining water bars to prevent erosion, controlling non-native invasive plants, and prescribed burns.

Prescribed burns are critical to the health of this ecosystem. Our burn team consists of staff and volunteers, all of whom have gone through extensive training. A lot of time and resources go into planning and conducting burns with safety and consideration for our neighbors always paramount.

With this care comes a substantial financial cost. It requires a lot of equipment — tractors, implements, chainsaws, and water trucks, to name just a few. Then there is the maintenance and fuel for the equipment. And, of course, there are the manhours of our staff.

The goal of our stewardship efforts in the Woods is to care for this forest as best we can to ensure it will be here for future generations to enjoy it as we have. We could not do this without the support of all the generous people who love the Woods as much as we do.

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Scan code to make a donation to Hitchcock Woods

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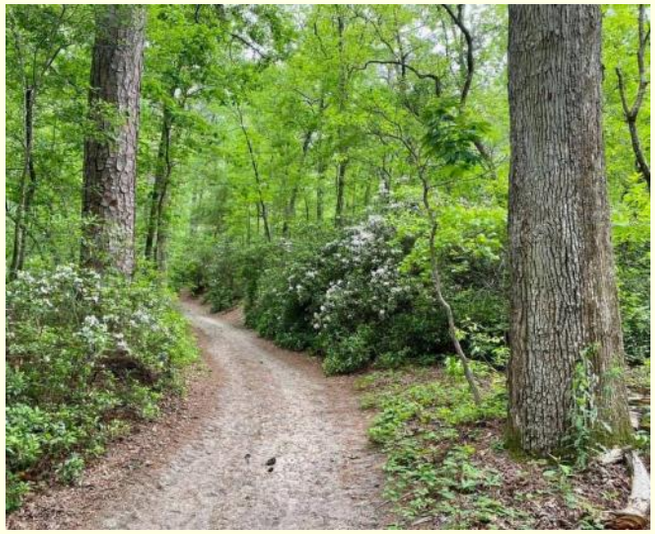
Thank you to all our vi photos; we're saving



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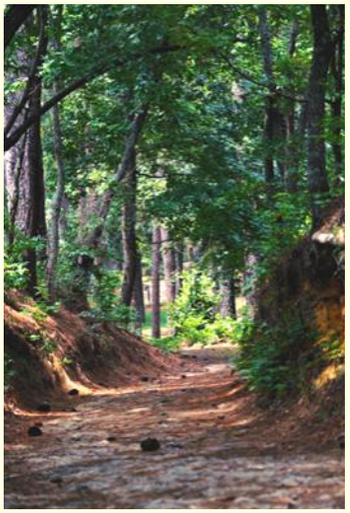


The Tenacious Turtle

Eastern box turtles are a familiar sight in Hitchcock Woods, often spotted slowly making their way across the forest floor in the warmer months. A terrestrial turtle, they are capable of swimming but are less adept in the water. Their name comes from the hinged plastron (the bottom part of the shell), which allows them to completely close themselves inside their shell for protection. Their shells are ornately patterned with yellow-orange markings. Males typically have red or orange eyes, while females usually have yellow or brown eyes.

Eastern box turtles occupy a variety of habitats, including woodlands, forest edges, and meadows. During spring and fall, they may be active throughout the day. In the heat of summer, they are most active during the morning and evening, avoiding the hottest part of the day. During winter, they burrow into the soil and leaf litter and remain dormant until temperatures warm in the spring.

Eastern box turtles are long-lived and can survive for more than 30 years in the wild, with some individuals living longer, and don't reach sexual maturity until around 10 years of age. Breeding occurs from late spring through early fall, and females typically lay one to five eggs in a shallow underground nest. Like many reptiles, the sex of the hatchlings is determined by incubation temperature.

In early July, a female Eastern box turtle laid eggs right by the Green House! Staff constructed and placed an exclosure over the nest to prevent mammalian predators from digging them up, a common threat. The holes are large enough that the hatchlings can easily fit through. As their hatching date gets closer, staff will put up a game camera to capture photos of the hatchlings leaving the nest.

Unfortunately, Eastern box turtles face numerous threats. Many are hit by cars when crossing roads and they are popular in the pet trade. They are also highly sensitive to habitat loss, fragmentation, and other environmental changes. Hitchcock Woods provides a large, contiguous tract of high-quality habitat for Eastern box turtles, supporting a healthy local population. Protecting landscapes like Hitchcock Woods helps ensure these remarkable turtles have a safe place to live and reproduce.

Fall Blooms in the Woods

Ken Perrine, co-author with Dr. Harry Shealy of several books on Hitchcock Woods' flora, suggests a few blooms to be looking for on your fall walks in the Woods this fall. Locations noted are those of the last few years. These flowers are typically seen singly as individual plants or scattered in very small groupings.

Elephant's Foot

Elephant's Foot, *Elephantopus tomentosus,* has pale lavender flowers and large, oval ground-level leaves. It is most often seen alongside shaded trails such as Whitney Drive west of the Clark Road entrance. This plant is in the daisy family, *Asteraceae*.

Commelina erecta, or **Dayflower**, has blue flowers. Unlike Elephant's Foot, Dayflower tends to be seen by higher trails with more sunlight. A citation from the internet notes, "Linnaeus [the father of modern botanical nomenclature] picked the name *Commelina* in honor of the two Dutch botanists of the Commelijn family, using the two large showy petals ... to symbolize them." These flowers have been spotted at Bear Pit Line. Dayflower is in the Spiderwort family, *Commelinaceae*.

Dayflower

Gerardia or Threadleaf False Foxglove

In the Figwort family, *Scrophulariaceae,* has the scientific name of *Agalinis setacea*. The plant is known by two common names, **Gerardia** and **Threadleaf False Foxglove**. For several years these have been seen in bloom during atumn at the trail known as 1977 Burn. Referring to the Hitchcock Woods map, this trail is at coordinate F-11. The flowers are pink in color. The "threadleaves" clearly show in the photograph.

In addition to these three species, you might want to look for Spurred Butterfly-Pea at Dove Field, False Foxglove beside Cuthbert Ridge Line, Goldenrod at 1977 Burn, and Blazing Star near the western terminus of Palmetto Ride.

Poisonous Plants in the Woods

While the Woods is home to many beautiful plants and trees, there are a few you will want to avoid. The usual culprits – Poison ivy, Poison oak, and Poison sumac – are all present here. They all contain the same sap oil, known as urushiol, which causes an allergic reaction of varying degrees when it comes in contact with one's skin. It is important to remember that you may be exposed not only by direct contact with the plant, but also through indirect contact such as touching clothing, animals, or tools that have urushiol on them. A key to avoiding contact with these poisonous plants is being able to identify them. There is an old saying to keep in mind while walking in the Woods – "Leaves of three, let them be." Each of these plants indeed has leaves that grow in groups of three or more.

Poison ivy usually has three broad, tear-shaped leaves. It can grow as a climbing or low-spreading vine that sprawls through grass. It is found everywhere in the United States except Alaska and Hawaii.

Poison sumac has seven to 13 leaflets per stem that are characterized by smooth surfaces and pointed tips. It is most often found in wooded, moist areas of the southern United States.

Poison oak has leaves that look like oak leaves; it grows as a vine or a shrub. The plant can have three or more leaflets per group

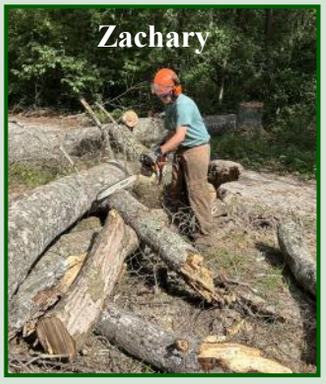
If you come in contact with Poison ivy, oak or sumac, immediately wash the exposed areas thoroughly with soap and warm water as quickly as possible. The longer you wait to wash after exposure, the less effectively the oil will be removed. It is best to shower or hose off outside as bathing may spread oil to other parts of your body.

Wash all clothes and shoes immediately after exposure because oils can remain on them and cause reinfection.

To reduce itching and swelling, you may apply wet compresses, calamine lotion, or hydrocortisone cream. Oral antihistamines can relieve itching. Seek medical attention in severe cases. If you have a severe allergic reaction, with swelling or difficulty breathing, call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room.

Virginia Creeper, seen throughout the Woods**,** is often mistaken as a poison plant. It is generally harmless to touch and is good for wildlife and shade groundcover.

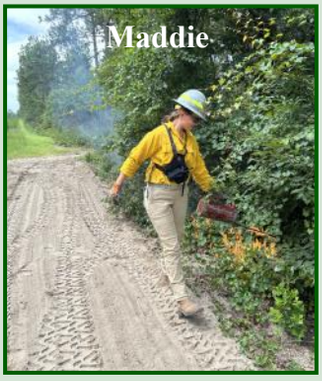
Farewell to Maddie and Zachary



This summer we had two bright, hardworking, and personable young interns working with great mentors. We feel it is important to encourage and teach our youth — the future stewards of Hitchcock Woods!

Maddie Matthews will be entering her senior year at Wofford College where she is an Environmental Studies major. After graduation she would like to work in a position involving animals and conservation. "I've come to understand what it takes to care for this forest," she says with a smile. She adds that assisting with prescribed burns and learning how to operate a chainsaw were highlights of the summer.

"I've learned so much about various species of plants here; it's especially interesting to see how much the vegetation varies in different parts of the Woods."



A rising senior at North Carolina State University, Zachary Patterson says this internship fit well with his major in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology. "I learned a lot about biodiversity and longleaf," he begins. "The hands-on experience we gained was great and beyond what I expected." He notes that learning about prescribed burns and then actually participating in one was eye opening.

Zachary feels the skills he learned this summer will serve him well in a future profession. He hopes to someday work in our National Park system.

Woods Assistant Superintendent, Eric Grande, notes, "Maddie and Zachary were quick learners and really helped out this summer." He adds with a smile, "Their enthusiasm and strong work ethic give me hope for the future generation."

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