My boss told me I had to move to Alabama. I was a YUC (Young Urban & Clueless) in Houston who’d grown up around Seattle. Had never been to Alabama and just knew there was not a snowball’s chance I was going to relocate. Send me to Detroit, to New Jersey, to Saudi Arabia. Anywhere but Alabama.

If you are a transplant, sound familiar? That was thirty years ago; I’m still here. Why? Because of wide open spaces right outside my back door, and all the opportunities those spaces provide. Even when I’m not hiking, biking or boating, I value the beauty of unmarred landscapes. The critter habitat, the colossal Dyson purifier of our air and water. The leaving of something other than flea-sized attention spans to future generations.

And that’s why I joined the Land Trust. Because the best way to preserve land is to go out and buy it.

Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. Aldo Leopold said that; he was the guy wrote Sand County Almanac more than sixty decades ago. We’re still walking that delicate balance today, particularly in Huntsville, Madison, and North Alabama.

BRAC. Remington. Polaris. All big wins for our home turf. With those wins come new jobs, that need new people, who need more cars, subdivisions, stores, and asphalt. Since I moved here, the population of Huntsville’s Metro Area has grown by 50% – FIFTY PERCENT!!! There are now 420,000 of us. Add Decatur Metro and we are nearing 700,000 people—more than Memphis. More than El Paso. More than DETROIT!

That’s where your Land Trust comes in – that state of harmony between men (and women) and land. Since March 2014, Marie Bostick has been our new Executive Director. She and I have been passionate Land Trust advocates since wooly mammoths roamed the South Parkway.

We have big plans for 2015. First and foremost for me: Hike With Mike! I’ll be leading a series of hikes this year, mainly for members, on our 6,000 acres. The harmony between men and land is apparent when you stand in the mist of the 70’+ waterfall on our Bethel Spring tract out Cherry Tree Road, or the rushing waters where the Flint River and Mountain Fork Creek meet at Blescher Ford near Buckhorn High.

My personal goal is to share these gems and others with a thousand people who make North Alabama their home. Hope you are one of them!
The Legacy of Life Estates
A unique expression of appreciation for the land

Landowners, whether they farm, hunt, walk, hike, climb, or simply enjoy the scenery of their lands, often have a deep connection to their land that may go back generations. Landowners know the critters that share the bounty of the land. They know the best spots to see the sunset or hear owls in the evening. They know exactly where to go to soak up the afternoon sun on a cool day and they know where to visit the settings of family lore and legend.

For many of these folks, preserving their land meets a definite need to preserve a very integral part of their being – a place that holds their heart and the need to make that connection available to others for generations to come.

In 2014, the Land Trust became permanent caretakers of two very exceptional properties. Events were set in motion many years ago by the forward thinking and planning of three landowners who arranged for their land to be held as “Life Estates.” A Life Estate allows the landowner or another designated person to continue to enjoy the land for the rest of their lives. Upon the donor’s passing or another specified time, the property transfers to the Land Trust for permanent protection and conservation.

Bethel Spring Farm
The Bethel Spring Farm is 360 acres located in Southeast Madison County. The agricultural acres are overlooked by the southeast tip of Keel Mountain which is heavily wooded, rimmed with imposing limestone cliffs, and rife with karst geologic features.

Two sisters owned the property: Doris, a retired elementary school teacher, and Marcell, who worked for many years for BellSouth. Bethel Spring had been a part of their family for over 132 years. The sisters were lifelong New Hope residents, and the homestead held the memories of their childhood and the stories and lore of their ancestors.

According to Almira B. Butler’s 1980 history of the Butler families in Alabama, the sisters’ grandfather, farmer Frank Ivy, married a Butler and began building the farm in 40 acre parcels in the late 1800s.

“The springs was one of the chief assets to the family – an abundant supply of cold, clear, pure water. Frank Ivy built over it a substantial springhouse of limestone rocks, which protected it from any possible pollution and provided a cooling system for milk and food. It became a famous spring of the area, a favorite place for picnics, parties, and family reunions. Although it was owned by the Ivy’s, they generously allowed it to be used by the public.”

Both of the sisters knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they wanted to preserve their property – mountain, farm, magnificent waterfalls and sink, caves, and springs – just as they were. Doris passed in 2012 at the age of 85. When Sister Marcell died in early 2014 at the age of 80, the land and rich legacy of Bethel Spring Farm became the responsibility of the Land Trust and was renamed Bethel Spring Preserve.

In keeping with the sisters’ wishes, the land is now preserved forever. The flora and fauna are protected, the history and legends of the property are being researched and preserved, and the acres so rich for farming will continue to be leased for growing local food. Plans include developing a trail to spectacular Falling Springs Sink and an information kiosk.

Bethel Spring Preserve will be a place where others can draw a connection to the beautiful landscape and its history. It will become a community gathering place as it was in the past. The legacy of two special sisters and their family’s love of the land will live on.

Banyon Swamp
Located just north and west of Huntsville and at the north edge of Banyon Swamp is another new and unique Land Trust property. Instead of the familiar mountainsides freckled with limestone rocks and upper hardwood forests, this property is a rich lowland saturated with water and teeming with life. The small lazy streams throughout the property are fed by blue colored springs bubbling up from sodden soil covered in ferns. Waist high cinnamon ferns, lady ferns, sensitive ferns, chain ferns, and maidenhair ferns carpet the ground.

There are signs of wildlife everywhere. Attracted to the constant supply of water and rich food sources raccoons, opossums, and deer are among the frequent visitors, as are owls, wood peckers, great blue herons and wood ducks. It’s full of black gum trees, often called swamp gums that stand tall with flaring trunks amidst the
water. Then there is the “pièce de résistance” - the wild swamp azaleas that punctuate the muted greens, blues, and browns of this oasis with vivid colors from white to deep rose. These azaleas, these ferns, and the hosts of incredible natural treasures living in this swamp are what attracted Malcolm Gillis to this property.

Malcolm was an avid runner and outdoor enthusiast. When he wasn’t running a marathon somewhere around the world (he eventually completed 100 marathons and one on each continent), you could find him at home working faithfully and lovingly on his azalea trail through the swamp.

Malcolm, the consummate engineer, built bridges and cleared trails throughout his wetland. He knew the flowers, the trees, the birds and the animals like the back of his hand. Spring Days were among his favorites. With the azaleas in full bloom, he would invite friends, fellow church members, runners, and Land Trust folks (just to name a few) to come and take a tour of his little piece of heaven.

Malcolm knew that the natural beauty of his swamp was something that should be preserved. Over12 years ago Malcolm made the decision to put his acres into a Life Estate agreement. His wish was simple - to preserve the wetland so that others could experience the natural wonders as he did. Malcolm died in the winter of 2014 and, as was his wish, this piece of Banyon Swamp is now preserved forever as is the legacy of a brilliant and passionate man who knew, loved, and treasured the exceptional beauty and life of the swamp.

If you would like to know more about protecting your land through a Life Estate, via your will, Conservation Easement, or donation, please call the Land Trust office at 256.534.5263 to discuss how we might work together to honor your conservation wishes.

Chapman Mountain and Bloucher Ford

As you travel along Highway 72 East into Huntsville, you are welcomed by the beautiful wooded slopes of Chapman Mountain. Fortunately, future generations will all be welcomed by this beautiful, natural view. The Land Trust currently owns over 350 acres of the mountain and plans to expand the preserved area and create our sixth Nature Preserve.

With fun and challenging topography (perfect for hiking and mountain biking), caves, creeks, hardwoods, limestone rock formations, as well as signs of deer, coyotes, raccoons and even bobcats - the opportunities are boundless. And, if you look even closer, you will find salamanders, snakes, box turtles, wildflowers, and the list goes on!

Chapman Mountain is not only a gateway into Huntsville, but it is also a gateway into the natural world that thrives right here in our midst. With your support Chapman Mountain will be the gateway into natural North Alabama!

Along the beautiful banks of the upper Flint River and Mountain Fork Creek near New Market, is Bloucher Ford. Close to the convergence of these two waterways you can find the remnants of the Ford Patterson Grist Mill. The dam on Mountain Fork Creek still diverts water down the raceway to a now silenced Mill foundation. Just beyond are the old Cotton Gin and two outbuildings.

What makes this place special? It begins with the natural history located within its borders. The upper Flint River is quite diverse with aquatic species. We even met a scientist there testing for the elusive and legendary Hellbender Salamander. Ferns abound in the wet areas around the creek and the river, blackberry bushes are in abundance, and there is evidence of coyotes, foxes, raccoons, muskrats, deer, and woodland, meadow, and shore birds.

But there is more about this property. According to “the Heritage of Madison County, Alabama,” Bloucher Ford was “at one time bordered by both the Creek and the Cherokee Indian Reservations.” The suggestion has been made that it was named for Joshua Bloucher, an early settler who arrived in the early 1800s.

From then it quickly became a community gathering place with a mill, cotton gin, and a country store all located on what was then the main road. It was the first place in the county to have electricity and a telephone. It was a gateway to the community many years back, and now, preserved, it is a gateway to our past, a gateway to the water treasures found here in North Alabama, and a gateway to the recreation offered by such a beautiful and winding river.
Take one beloved local landmark.
Add electricity and a stage.
Mix in strong community support and vision.
Watch a regional treasure take the leap to becoming
a world-class venue - an amazing outdoor
“listening room” to showcase top
musical talent and one-of-a-kind events.
New Look for Trailheads

L

and Trust staffers Andy Prewort and Brandon Perry, with Tony Aluia, removed the old chain link fence and gates at Three Caves and replaced them with cedar split rail fencing. The city of Huntsville’s Monte Sano Trails directional signs (which begin at Big Spring Park) lead to the Three Caves trailhead. The Willowbrook Garden Club has improved our Monte Sano Nature Preserve hikers’ parking lot trailhead entrance on Bankhead Parkway with native plants.

Want to adopt a trailhead? Please contact Brandon@LandTrustNAL.org.

Projects Completed in 2014:

Caleb Aycock built a transition walkway in the camporee area at the entrance to the Alms House Trail.

Michael Dynes added a new entrance to the camporee area at Matthews Preserve (Brian Goddy).

Projects Currently Underway:

Ryan Phillips is rerouting the trail and building steps with a small bridge at Astotel on Green Mountain (Land Trust Liaison Brandon Perry).

Macron Graves will conduct a trail reroute and install and replace benches on the Trough Springs Trail (Brandon Perry).

Aaron Winn is installing more campfire rings and individual ring markers on the Matthews Preserve (Brian Goddy).

Collin Carter will construct a picnic pavilion on Matthews Preserve (Brian Goddy).

Even the Best Trails Need Ongoing Care

Our Trail Care Partners and Trail Care crews are essential to maintaining the high standards set for the 45+ miles of trails available for public access on Land Trust and Nature Conservancy Preserves in Madison and Jackson Counties. First-rate trail care involves planning, building, and maintaining, not only the trailheads, but trails, bridges, benches, and signs along the way. Community involvement and support help provide and maintain the natural trail experiences that are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

Our Trail Care Partners (TCP) adopt a favorite trail for a year, making a commitment to monitor the trail at least annually and to conduct light maintenance as needed. The TCPs keep the Land Trust apprised of their progress and report any problems or concerns that may need attention by the full Trail Care Crew.

Currently seven TCPs - comprised of individuals, families, and a Home Owners Association - are enrolled in this program.

Sound like a service that your family or group would enjoy? Please contact Land Manager Andy Prewort at 256.534.LAND (5263).

Projects Completed in 2014:

Caleb Aycock built a transition walkway from the kiosk to the first bridge at Harvest Square Preserve (Land Trust Liaison Charlie Chesser).

Scott Bozeman installed intersection markers and benches on the Green Mountain side of Blevins Gap Preserve (Rick Rodriguez).

Michael Dynes built a dock on Harvest Square’serry Pond (Bobby Terry).

Roman Hawrzych built several bridges on the Monte Sano Nature Preserve’s Alms House Trail (Paul Tidewich).

Danny Storch added a new entrance to the camporee area at Matthews Preserve (Brian Goddy).

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Thanks to Scouts

The Land Trust is grateful for the many hours donated by our new Trail Care Volunteers and troop partners who contribute to our community efforts to improve our trails and trailheads. The Scout community continues to be an invaluable partner not only to the Land Trust but the entire community!

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Corporate

Mountaineer $5,000+
Combined Federal Campaign Community Foundation of Huntsville-Madison County
Foxes at $2,500
C & A Printing LLC Pennington Animal Hospital, PC Robinson Spring, LLC
Saddletree Homeowners Association

Conservationist $100 - $299
Bozeman 400, Incorporated Enfield Engineering Geo Solutions

Explorers $250 to $499
Accurate Machine and Tool Corporation C & A Printing LLC

Dr. and Mrs. Charles Alms

Karen and John Achatz

Lori and Dan Cole

Marion and John Conover

Alberta Cowley

Danny Cooks

Michael Cox

Neil and Harry Craft

Michael Cubrah

Kristen and James Cutting

Audrey and Donald Day

Patricia and Mike Dray

Edna and Jerald Duviver

John Dobhe

Cathy and Dallas Diaz

Linda and John Dimmock

Paula and Carl Distler

Connie Ansley

Janice and Leon Allen

Conni Asley

Jill Blaylock and Bob Armstrong

Jessie and C. Frank Asquith

Chad Ayden

Andrew Bailey

Virginia and Jay Bain

Catherine Balzil

Sallie and David Balakinski

Jay Bartley

New gate at Three Caves thanks to Susan and Ben Stevens and New Market Ironworks.

Joni and Stephen Stephan

Roger Morris

Robert Minor

Ryan Phillips

Alms House Trail

Nature Preserve’s camporee area at the entrance to the Alms House Trail.

The Willowbrook Garden Club has improved our Monte Sano Nature Preserve hikers’ parking lot trailhead entrance on Bankhead Parkway with native plants.

Want to adopt a trailhead? Please contact Brandon@LandTrustNAL.org.
Nick Sharp, Nongame Biologist with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Program, spoke to a crowd of over 275 about the endangered 14 million gray bats of North Alabama's protected Sauta Cave, the largest nursery colony of gray bats east of the Mississippi River.

The popular program was part of our award-winning Tuesdays on the Trail environmental education summer series.
We were honored to partner with Alabama Outdoors and Randolph County to conduct the 2014 Land Trust of North Alabama National Geographic Hiker and 2012 National Geographic Adventurer of the Year, who tracked 2,181 miles in 46 days.

1. To a Education Committee Chair Joyce Teul, Duvall, and Duvall.

Remembering...

Granaddy

Jacob Atchley

Michael Richard Allen

Alton Nance

Noelle and Gordon Anderson

Margaret and Eugene Andrzejewski

Ann and Grace O’Shea

Deborah Enright

Shirley and Barry Fagan

Carla and James Sanford

Thomas and Joseph Basso

Sarah and Jerry Schieman

Nicole Scherer

and Donald Hopper

Malcolm Parsons

Brett Patterson

Mary Jane Clough

Brian McElhinney

Lee Kosterman

Robert Shutts

Dorothy Scott

Mary Clare Soffon

Malin Shady

Peggy Shanahan

Cindy Shanks

Jordan Sharp

Nicholas Sharp

Phillip Showers

Lara Slaby

Jo and Ed Seig

David Simmons

Daniel Senter

Ronald Sisk

Brenda Sisson

Cleodis Smith

Regena Evans

Terry Smith

Karen and Somers Alexander

Amy and William S. Alexander

Lennart Spencer

Julia and Harrell Spalding

Lynn and Lennard K. Spalding

Karen and Lee (Rob) Michael Mason

Mark Allen Miller

Alfred and Linda F. McFarland

Nancy and Thomas Morlan

Susan and Kevin O’Hara

Kathleen and Ed Parnell

Tamara and Robert Roberts

David L. Provin

Mabel Provin

Harry Pennington Sr.

Lori and Loren Gross

Carol Newton

Lindsey and Mark Brown

Randy McFarland

Sara Beth and Mac Martinson

Patty and Mike Lowe

Carol Newton

Vicki Baskin

Chloe and Jeff Starnes

Dave Branham

Dana and Scott Averbuch

Mary and William Mastin

Chever Kellogg

of preserving land on this mountain.

and identified as valuable conservation property.

This property, not far from the Madison County Lake, is located on the land: a 40 acre parcel of woodland on Nance Mountain just north of Daniel Clough

Dana Schwieger

of the Madison County Lake, is located on the land: a 40 acre parcel of woodland on Nance Mountain just north of Daniel Clough.

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On our region's “Quality of Life Balance Sheet,” the Land Trust is a top strategic asset. The Trust was a pioneer in conservation in their successful “SOS” Save Our Slopes campaign in the 80’s. Now, decades later, the Trust is Green and Strong. Thousands of acres have been protected, miles of trails built, thousands of children introduced to the outdoors and dozens of partnerships established to leverage the effort. The Land Trust is a force for good in our community and is one of the most effective 501(c)3’s in the area.

Matt Fowler
Former Land Trust Board Chair and current member of The Nature Conservancy in Alabama
Board of Directors

Our Mission: The Land Trust preserves and protects land and its legacies, including wildlife habitats, farms, historic sites, waterways, and mountains for conservation, public recreation, and environmental education to enhance quality of life in North Alabama.