

Musgrove: Your questions answered

There's a hidden treasure in the heart of St. Simons Island. A pristine tract of land called Musgrove, filled with maritime live oak hammocks, rare or threatened plant and animal species, ponds, and fragile wetlands. A major part of the property is the latest acquisition of the St. Simons Land Trust, which plans to preserve it in its natural state forever.

The Land Trust parcel will total 258 acres of the 450-acre Musgrove property. Tobacco magnate R.J. Reynolds' grandson, the late Smith Bagley, transferred the property to the Brenn Foundation, which in turn is selling it to the Land Trust. The family compound, shown frequently on the Christ Church Tour of Homes, is not part of the acquisition.

Soon, you'll be able to explore Musgrove for yourself, hiking or biking its trails, fishing from its pier, or launching your kayak or small boat into Musgrove Creek. The land will remain pristine natural habitat.

Below, we answer your questions about this latest addition to the island's system of protected parks, natural areas, and trails.

Why protect Musgrove?

As one of the few large undeveloped parcels on the island, Musgrove could have been subdivided into hundreds of home sites and added significant strain to our island's sewer and road systems. Instead, its rich environmental attributes and public use potential will benefit current and future generations. Protecting Musgrove will preserve for perpetuity the beautiful and resource-rich habitat. It will provide a forever-protected green space where residents and visitors can experience the benefits of conservation and recreation in the great outdoors. Finally, its hiking and biking trails will add another link to the island-wide trail system.

How much will Musgrove cost?

The purchase price for all 258 acres is \$10.65 million, a good price given the development pressures facing the island. The Land Trust is purchasing the property in three phases. The first phase totaling 58 acres and the second phase totaling 90 acres have been purchased. The third phase totaling 110 acres should close by early 2018. The Land Trust is currently raising the final \$1.93 million to complete the purchase.

What is Georgia DNR's involvement?

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources is the holder of the property's conservation easement. This is a binding agreement that the land will never be developed and that it will be managed in an environmentally sensitive way. Legally,

the Land Trust needs another party to hold the easement, and the DNR's staff of environmental and land management experts fills the bill.

As the Land Trust's partner, the DNR has already contributed immensely to the project by obtaining federal grants totaling \$3 million - \$1 million per phase. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grants came through the highly competitive National Coastal Wetlands Grants Program because of Musgrove's environmental significance, as well as the opportunities for low-impact public recreation on the property.

When can the public begin enjoying the park?

The Musgrove property will open after the Land Trust raises the remaining funds to acquire Phase 3, sometime in 2018. It will have a "soft" opening to see whether adjustments need to be made to the operations and management plan. It is hoped that the property will eventually be open seven days a week.

What kinds of recreation will the park offer?

You will find hiking trails, biking trails, a fishing dock, an exploratory area for children, and a ramp to launch kayaks, paddleboards, and motorized boats no longer than 20 feet.

How will the public access Musgrove?

There will be an entrance off Lawrence Road to the east on a private asphalt road known as Middle Road. Not far into the property, cars can park and hikers and bikers can depart on the trail system. The direct entrance to the waterfront area of the property will be via Village Drive, a public paved road that runs east off Lawrence Road. There will be strict limitations on parking in the waterfront area to minimize traffic on Village Drive and to protect the ecological values of the site.

How does the Musgrove purchase further the Land Trust's mission?

St. Simons Island is a uniquely beautiful and special place from an ecological standpoint, and the Land Trust's mission is to "preserve its natural and scenic character and to enhance the quality of life for our island community for present and future generations." Having Musgrove in our "portfolio" beautifully supports that mission.

Development already encompasses much of the island, and there's more and more development pressure. The Land Trust has no regulatory authority to preserve the island, but we do have the ability to identify valuable properties that can be protected with mostly private funding along with occasional government funding. Since 2000, we have raised more than \$40 million to protect island property. Once the Musgrove

acquisition is complete, our protected property will total approximately 1,036 acres in 20 locations, all of them available to the public. For a list of our properties, please visit our website at www.sslt.org.