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Land Trust acquires portion of Musgrove property

The St. Simons Land Trust today purchased 58 acres of Musgrove, the former home of Nancy Reynolds Bagley and of her son, Smith Bagley, on St. Simons Island.

In a three-phase agreement with the sellers, the acquisition is the first of three parcels that will total 260 acres of the 450-acre property. With this purchase, the first 58 acres will be protected in perpetuity. The family compound, which is frequently featured during the annual Christ Church Tour of Homes, is not included in the purchase agreement.

The current purchase includes 1,000 feet of deep-water frontage on Musgrove Creek and is the first of three closings scheduled for the coming two or more years. In support of the first two phases, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Coastal Wetlands Grant program is providing two \$1 million grants. Commitments from Land Trust board members and all other donors now amount to over half of the required \$10.65 million to complete all three planned purchases. The seller will return sufficient funds from the sales price to the Land Trust to create a stewardship endowment to go toward managing the 260-acre property.

The seller is the Brenn Foundation, which was established by the late Smith Bagley (grandson of R.J. Reynolds) to focus on public policy issues such as the environment, human rights, and civic engagement. To preserve Musgrove and to raise additional funds to support the foundation's mission, the Brenn Foundation sought a transaction with the Land Trust.

"We commend the Brenn Foundation for their commitment to the perpetual conservation of this historic and ecologically significant land," said Frances McCrary, chairman of the Land Trust board of directors.

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The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) agreed in December to hold a conservation easement on the property. A conservation easement offers a permanent legal guarantee that the property will never be developed.

“The Musgrove property is a significant addition of habitat to the permanently protected lands in the Altamaha estuary and the entire coast,” said Jason Lee, program manager in DNR’s Wildlife Resources Division. Lee noted that the total property to be purchased by the Land Trust includes nearly 200 acres of maritime forest, 60 acres of rare pond pine flatwoods and rare plants. “The state-held conservation easement guarantees proper management of these habitats,” he added. “Georgia DNR is excited to partner with the Land Trust in this conservation effort.”

With the addition of nature trails, the property will eventually become a public park. However, public access will not be available until all three parcels have been acquired, most likely in two years or more.

“Once we have acquired all 260 acres, the Land Trust will have protected 1,036 acres on the island,” noted McCrary.

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SIDEBAR

The Campaign to Preserve Musgrove

The Fundraising Goal: \$11 million

The total cost of the Musgrove property is \$10.65 million. Once the purchase of all three parcels is complete, the sellers will return a sufficient amount (\$1.5 million) to the St. Simons Land Trust to create a stewardship endowment for maintaining the property in perpetuity.

By raising \$11 million for the project, the St. Simons Land Trust will have funds for initial improvements at the site to prepare for public opening.

Donors wishing to help are invited to support the Land Trust at www.sslt.org. Memberships and gifts may be mailed to P.O. Box 24615, St. Simons Island, GA 31522. For further information, please call (912) 638-9109.

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