

ST. SIMONS LAND TRUST NEWS

PRESERVING THE NATURAL AND SCENIC CHARACTER OF OUR ISLAND



WINTER 2016



Land Trust Oyster Roast Scheduled for Jan. 14

The annual St. Simons Land Trust Oyster Roast is on the calendar for Saturday, Jan. 14, 2017, from 5 to 8 p.m. at Gascoigne Bluff.

Now in its 17th year, the oyster roast continues the tradition of highlighting the talents of local chefs, who prepare and donate Southern favorites such as low country boil, barbecue, and oysters, plus sides and desserts. Making it all happen will be more than 130 donors and volunteers, under the direction of event chair Judie Mattie.

Again this year, folk singer and acoustic guitarist Owen Plant will perform onstage under the majestic live oaks.

“The oyster roast is a celebration of the Land Trust’s conservation work,” says Executive Director David Pope. “After Hurricane Matthew, we all have an even greater appreciation for the need to preserve and protect the natural and scenic character of St. Simons.”

Tickets are \$75 each. The price for members, through Jan. 6, is just \$50. Non-members who wish to join can do so online at www.sslt.org.

For information about tickets or membership, call (912) 638-9109.

On October 1, the St. Simons Land Trust welcomed David Pope as its new executive director. An attorney with a 38-year career in environmental law, Pope came to the Land Trust from the Southern Environmental Law Center in Atlanta, where he served as director of its Georgia and Alabama offices. He brings a wealth of experience in environmental protection and donor relations. Pope's leadership experience, as well as his work with environmental organizations across the state, will be an invaluable asset to the Land Trust.



Message from the Executive Director

"Procrastination is the thief of time."

On the first day of school in 1966, Mrs. Elizabeth Neel, my high school English teacher, wrote these words on the blackboard. Mrs. Neel did not coin the phrase. The saying comes from *Night Thoughts* (1742-45) by the English poet Edward Young. For some reason, these words and the message they convey have stuck with me all these years. My grown sons have heard them from me their entire lives.

In today's less elegant language, we might say, "time is wasting," "get with it," "just do it," "get 'er done."

But whether we use the poetic language of the 18th century or the coarser language of today, the point is the same: To accomplish a task we must get started and push forward until we have succeeded.

At the Land Trust, we and our supporters have started our task -- preserving and protecting our island -- and we have had some success. We have conserved approximately 840 acres. But we are far from finished and time is not on our side. Every day our island faces more development pressure, has greater demands on our infrastructure, has fewer trees and more cars. We cannot procrastinate. The time is now!

Please join with your friends and neighbors to support our efforts to preserve and protect this beautiful place. We currently have about 1100 member households. We need more. We need your financial support, your time and your ideas for preserving the natural and scenic character of our island. Don't procrastinate. Do it now!

Whether you're joining the St. Simons Land Trust for the first time, renewing your membership, or making a gift to the Campaign to Preserve Musgrove, we welcome you to visit our website at sslt.org or to call us at 912-638-9109.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Pope".

**David Pope,
Executive Director**

Cannon Point Preserve: Holiday Hours

Christmas: Saturday, Dec. 24 thru Monday, Dec. 26-CLOSED

New Year: Saturday, Dec. 31 thru Monday, Jan. 2- CLOSED



An Adventure Up Lawrence Road

Just off Lawrence Road in the middle of St. Simons Island sits a unique ecological treasure. Called Musgrove, it's home to rare habitats and plants, plus the highly productive link between the saltmarsh and adjacent uplands. Among the 840 acres that the Land Trust has preserved throughout St. Simons in the past 16 years – including Cannon's Point Preserve, the Old Stables Corner, the John Gilbert Nature Trail and Frederica Park -- Musgrove is the newest acquisition.

The Land Trust has purchased 58 acres of Musgrove so far, and is now working on purchasing another 202 acres within the next two years. Then, once improvements have been made to the property, you'll be invited in for a rare, easy-to-access opportunity to explore and learn about the island's natural heritage, to gain an appreciation for the importance of environmental conservation, and to enjoy a bit of outdoor recreation.

"Until then, we invite everyone to drive farther north on Lawrence Road to explore Cannon's Point Preserve, where you'll see some of the same plants and animals," says Stephanie Knox, Cannon's Point Preserve Manager. "Musgrove is a complement to Cannon's Point. Both properties include ecologically significant coastal habitats, though there are different types of habitats found on the respective properties. The impact of their preservation extends up the Altamaha River corridor to the river's estuary and delta, five miles north of here."

Once Musgrove is open to the public, here's what you can expect to see:



Photo by Ben Galland

Trees in Rare Coastal Plant Communities

Musgrove contains both pond pine wetlands and mature maritime forest – an exceedingly rare combination on the same island. You'll find the two together only at Musgrove and on Cumberland and Sapelo islands.

Pond Pines

The first thing you'll notice about pond pines is that they grow needles out of their main trunk – the only pine species to do so.

Pond pines are native to Georgia, and they exist in rare coastal habitats. They love water, and fortunately Musgrove has just the wetlands they need to thrive and to grow to their 40-80 foot height.

Another unique feature: Pond pine stands depend on fire or lightning for their long-term survival. Their pinecones remain unopened, sometimes for years, before releasing their seeds. What makes them open? Fire!

Sand Live Oaks

While St. Simons Island's famous live oaks are grand trees with impressive canopies, sand live oaks are relatively small, twisted, scrubby trees that grow in thickets. They are hardy trees that grow in dry, sandy soils in which it is difficult for most trees to survive. They have dark, thick bark with thick, leathery leaves that are significantly cupped. You'll see both



Pond Pines
Photos by Ben Galland



Sand Live Oak
Photo by Ben Galland

types of oaks in Musgrove's Florida scrub maritime forest, along with hickories, pines, palms, and red cedar. Sand live oaks are native to the Southeastern coast. This type of scrub forest is fairly common in Florida but quite rare in Georgia.

HOW YOU CAN HELP SAVE AND OPEN MUSGROVE

If you're like most St. Simons Land Trust supporters, you have a passion for environmental conservation, public access to beautiful places, and outdoor recreation. If this sounds like you, you're invited to join the outpouring of support for the campaign to acquire Musgrove. The Land Trust has already acquired 58 acres and needs your help to acquire an additional 202 acres to open the property as a park with trails, fishing pier, and boat ramp.

The goal: \$11 million Raised so far: \$6 million

An anonymous St. Simons resident has made a \$1 million challenge grant to the Campaign to Preserve Musgrove. Make a gift to Preserve Musgrove by January 31 and your donation earns an equal amount.

Rare Shrubs

Growing on Native American shell middens on a bluff near Musgrove Creek are two rare shrubs – climbing buckthorn and Florida wild privet. (You can see both of these today growing on the shell middens at Cannon’s Point.)

Climbing Buckthorn

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has found climbing buckthorn at just a dozen or so locations in the state (on shell middens, limestone bluffs, and along creeks and coastal marshes) and considers it a state threatened species. It’s a deciduous shrub that can grow to nine feet tall but, as you might guess, climbs and sprawls instead of growing upright. Look for its tiny white flowers in August, and its purplish berries in the autumn. But watch out for the thorns!

The DNR website offers a formula for protecting the threatened climbing buckthorn. Very simply, “protect shell mounds, and other coastal habitats from development and clearcutting.”

Florida Wild Privet

You’ll see these rare shrubs standing up to 10 feet tall on the middens. Their leaves are basically evergreen, but they may drop in late winter just before new spring growth. Their flowers may not have petals, but in early spring you’ll see what looks like single, showy flowers with greenish-yellow petals that are actually clusters of bracts. In the summer, you can see clusters of their round, blue-black fruit.



Climbing Buckthorn
Photos by Stephanie Knox



Florida Wild Privet
Photos by Stephanie Knox

While Florida privet grows on barrier islands and along salt marshes in Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and the West Indies, the DNR has identified fewer than 10 populations in Georgia. Like the climbing buckthorn, it’s threatened by development in coastal habitats and by destruction of shell middens. DNR’s recommendation: “Protect coastal forests from clearing and development. Protect shell mounds from clearing...dredging.”

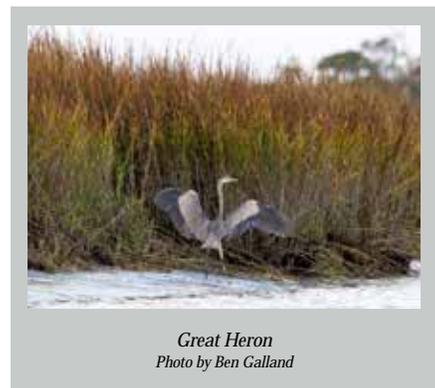
Abundant Wildlife

Like Cannon’s Point, Musgrove is rich in wildlife. Its distinctive marsh edge habitat supports marsh foraging birds like wood storks, egrets, herons, and osprey with places for nesting and roosting. This type of habitat is rapidly declining due to ongoing development.

At both Cannon’s Point and Musgrove, you’ll see diamondback terrapins, which enjoy feasting on snails, bivalves, fiddler crabs, and algae. Terrapin stew was popular in the early 1900s, and their populations dwindled. Today, terrapins are threatened by development, highway traffic, and incidental capture in crab traps. Fortunately, diamondback terrapins like to live their lives in one locale, so the populations at Musgrove and Cannon’s Point are safe.



Terrapin Nesting
Photo by Stephanie Knox



Great Heron
Photo by Ben Galland

Finally, Musgrove supports essential habitat for fish hatcheries along Musgrove Creek.

The upland forests help prevent erosion that can lead to sedimentation and other water quality problems like an overabundance of oxygen and nutrients. The tidal saltmarshes provide habitat for species such as red drum and spotted sea trout (both favorites of Georgia anglers), Atlantic menhaden, and crustaceans.

MUSGROVE PARK

As soon as the Land Trust has completed its purchase of all 260 acres of Musgrove, work will begin on the public park located creekside near Village Drive. There you’ll find picnic tables, along with opportunities for accessing the deep-water, tidal Musgrove Creek.

You’ll be able to fish from an upgraded fishing pier. Or you can explore the natural beauty of the numerous waterways that wind through the area’s saltmarshes. A boat ramp will accommodate your kayak, stand-up paddleboard, or motorized boat up to 20 feet long.

Throughout Musgrove, you’ll find roads and trails for hiking and biking. The current three miles of trails and paved roads will be expanded and connected to make a loop system in the preserve. The trails will also link up with the island-wide trail system, so if you’re biking up Frederica Road, you can come right in to Musgrove.

The park is expected to be open daily and to become a must-see destination for both residents and visitors.

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Volunteers Key to Achieving Land Trust's mission

Have you ever thought of becoming a volunteer for the St. Simons Land Trust? Do you have an interest in the historical, ecological, and natural assets of Cannon's Point Preserve and other properties conserved by the Land Trust?

If you can be available to greet visitors and share with them the beauty of Cannon's Point, or if you can participate in stewardship activities at Land Trust properties, the Land Trust would like to hear from you.

The Land Trust's mission to preserve the natural and scenic character of St. Simons Island depends on volunteers willing to help in a variety of ways.

Become a Member or Renew Your Land Trust Membership Today.

Our Monthly Membership Giving Program

The Land Trust invites you to join a growing number of members choosing to make their annual membership contribution monthly, over 12 months, via credit card.

Monthly giving provides a reliable stream of support for the Land Trust's mission. Here's how it works.

- ▶ You determine the amount of your monthly donation.
- ▶ Your credit card is charged each month and you receive an email confirmation.
- In January, you receive an annual giving statement.
- ▶ Your membership renews automatically each year.

To enroll in the Monthly Membership Program, visit: sslft.org

Your annual membership to the Land Trust allows us to fulfill our mission. Join us today!

Please mail check and form to: St. Simons Land Trust, P.O. Box 24615
 St. Simons Island, Georgia 31522 or join online at www.sslft.org.

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} A PROVISION IN MY ESTATE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF ST. SIMONS ISLAND

JOIN OR RENEW TODAY AND HELP PRESERVE THE NATURAL AND SCENIC CHARACTER OF OUR ISLAND

