

Madison-Morgan Conservancy

Protecting Farms, Forests, and Front Porches for Future Generations

Newsletter
Winter, 2023-2024

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Letter from the President

Partners in Conservation

This winter, the Conservancy is celebrating a few new milestones, which would not have been possible without Conservancy members' financial support and their strong voice when called upon, donors of all kinds and of all kinds of things, and our conservation partners doing the hard work every day. On behalf of the Conservancy's board and staff, I want to thank you for your support and your trust in us to carry out this important mission.

The collaborative spirit that has defined this organization for the last 23 years has allowed us to forge new alliances this past year with local, state, and federal government agencies in an effort to promote balanced growth here in Morgan County and beyond. The result? More support (and truly bipartisan support) for conservation. We seem to be on a promising trajectory: not only is our local County leadership actively exploring funding avenues for conservation, our state leadership passed the GA Farmland Conservation Act in 2023, and national leadership is contemplating a Forestland Conservation Easement Act. This momentum will prove to increase the pace of permanent protection of critical resources here and across the nation.

If we in Morgan County want to live with any semblance of balance in the future, that pace of conservation will need to increase dramatically here to keep up with the current pace of development and farmland fragmentation. Permanent land conservation will be the only way to protect the thriving agricultural industry, the foundation of our quality of life. There are places in this country that have done just that, and we are taking cues from those communities this year. Their successes lie in permanent land protection, aka conservation easements: the voluntary sale or donation of development rights to keep farmland intact.

In the past twelve months, through conservation easement technical assistance, the Conservancy has helped landowners explore the permanent protection of over 1,300 acres. We expect some of that land (bucolic pastures, working forests, pristine waterways) to be protected in 2024, which will expand the footprint of the 6,000+ acres of land already protected by conservation easements in Morgan County: productive land that serves as the asset base of the agricultural and forestry industries. The community's support of the Conservancy has been instrumental in ensuring that our staff is

able to work with Morgan County landowners free of charge toward protection of these critical assets for current and future generations.

The citizens of Morgan County have a legacy of taking bold steps, and creating this conservancy was undoubtedly one of them. Now we stand at the threshold of the next bold step: protecting a critical mass of productive land to sustain the land, families, and jobs that are the foundation of this community and serve the critical function of

producing food and fiber for Morgan County, Metro Atlanta, and the State. The Conservancy's resolve to do so remains unyielding, and we are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead.

Your support, whether through financial contributions, volunteer hours, or simply sharing our passion for conservation, will drive this community toward balance. Together, we can make a lasting impact on the landscapes and quality of life we cherish. We can grow by choice rather than by chance. As we look toward our 25th anniversary in 2025 and at all the work and opportunities that lie ahead, I hope you will continue to walk with us along this road.

Sincerely,

Robert Trulock, President



Endangered Properties Revolving Fund Update

In the last 5 years, the EPRF has saved
171 acres and 3 historic buildings
with just \$1,000,000



- **Bramble Creek Farm:** 155 acres of farmland, forestland, watershed, and wildlife habitat permanently protected.
- **Horse Branch Preserve & Trail:** 16 acres of greenspace and watershed permanently protected, providing a link from the Morgan County School campus to the Horse Branch Trail system.
- **Fairplay School:** One of Georgia's schools supported by the Rosenwald Fund has been secured, stabilized, and is now for sale to a preservation buyer.
- **Seedhouse:** The Richter Cottonseed Warehouse was secured, rehabilitated into an EarthCraft Gold office space, and will be held by the Conservancy until it accrues in value enough to fully revolve the investment back into the EPRF. The Seedhouse is currently home to the Conservancy's offices.
- **The Foster-Thomason-Minnix House:** This project is fully revolved. The funds from selling the property to the Minnix family have been returned to the EPRF and are currently being used for the other projects.



We look forward to the EPRF being recapitalized soon to allow for more buy-protect-sell projects. This revolving fund has proven to be a significant tool in the Conservancy's tool box for protecting farms, forests, and front porches for future generations. Thank you for contributing to EPRF!

In the News: What We're Asking the County to Do

Gather Data & Help Fund Farmland, Forestland, and Watershed Protection

This fall, the Conservancy requested that the Morgan County Board of Commissioners (BOC) 1) help fund the permanent protection of farmland/forestland/watersheds and 2) split the cost of two studies that will provide information critical to Morgan County's effort to grow in a balanced way. We are so pleased to partner with them on the following:

Critical Mass Study

How many acres of productive land are required to sustain Morgan County's agricultural industry? That is the question. The agricultural industry consists of farmland, forestland, farmers, foresters, and the agribusinesses that serve that agricultural land and those farmers/foresters. If we lose too much agricultural land, we will lose the agribusinesses that serve that land, and then the remaining farmers would be unable to continue farming because the agribusinesses would be farther away and, therefore, more expensive. That's when you lose the rest of your farmland. If this community can protect a critical mass of agricultural land, our farm/forestry industries will be secured for future generations. Hello food, hello trees/paper products/clean air, hello wildlife. We hope you'll stay awhile.

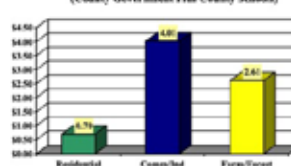
Cost of Community Services Study

The cost of land use is important when planning growth. Residential development pays less in taxes than it receives in services like water/sewer, police, fire, roads, schools. In Morgan County, where development pressure is intense, significant residential

growth can be a significant burden on the county budget. Agricultural land and commercial and industrial developments pay more in taxes than they receive in services, which helps

balance out the strain of residential development. A balanced tax digest is key to a financially healthy community, and understanding the real cost of land use is critical to reaching that balance.

Figure 2. Revenues per \$1 of Expenditures by Land Use (County Government Plus County Schools)



Fund a Third-Party Match for the ACEP Program

The Farm Bill programs that protect farmland are numerous. Of those programs, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) pays landowners to give up some or all of their development rights to permanently protect the farmland as farmland. The farmers still own the land and can continue to farm it, of course, but they sell the right to develop it into rooftops and pavement. The ACEP program requires a match from a third party to accrue the needed criteria points to reach the level required for that federal funding. The BOC is considering including a designated fund in next year's budget to provide that match to Morgan County farmers and to leverage that federal funding for our community.

Land Stewardship Workshop Series IV

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program/Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP/ALE)

Is ACEP/ALE Right for Your Family Farm?

Want to explore selling a conservation easement on your farm?

Stay tuned for your invitation for two workshops in February.

Why Sell an Easement through ACEP/ALE?

- Receive payment for selling an easement
- Continue to own and farm your land
- Maximize the amount of land passed to your heirs through your estate plan
- Help conserve a critical mass of farmland to sustain Morgan County's agricultural industry
- Protect prime agricultural soils for future generations

This year's Land Stewardship Workshop Series will consist of two workshops designed to inform farmers, elected officials, and the farming community about the GA Farmland Conservation Act and the U.S. Farm Bill's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program/Agricultural Lands Easement (ACEP/ALE).

The ACEP/ALE program pays farmers to permanently protect some or all of their farm by selling development rights to ensure the future of farming in America.

The GA Farmland Conservation Act is creating a fund to provide the third-party match required through the ACEP/ALE program. Our local Board of Commissioners are considering doing the same.

The workshops will feature speakers from:

- USDA/NRCS (U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service manages the ACEP/ALE program)
- American Farmland Trust
- Athens Land Trust
- The Working Farms Fund (The Conservation Fund)
- Farmers engaged in the first Morgan County ACEP/ALE projects

Who should attend? Anyone working in agriculture, Morgan County Board of Commissioners, and anyone else interested in protecting farmland/forestland in Morgan County.

Get to Know Morgan County Conservation Easements

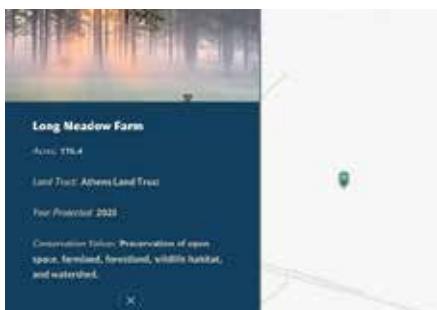
This past summer, the Conservancy launched a Story Map highlighting conservation easements in Morgan County. This interactive tool aims to educate the public on the benefits of conservation easements, how the easement process works, and show where the conservation easements are located in the community.



Of the 6,000+ acres protected in Morgan County, most are privately-owned. Private landowners have voluntarily given up development rights to permanently protect important conservation values for the benefit of the public. Conservation easements in Morgan County protect farmland, forestland, wildlife habitat, waterways, parks, and historic places. Check them out in our Story Map!

What is a Story Map? A Story Map is a digital map-making software that provides creators the ability to show geographical information, alongside a built narrative and imagery for public educational purposes. Each pinpoint on the map, when clicked upon, will pull up a profile of a protected property (photo - bottom left). There, you can find the amount of acreage protected by the easement, the holding land trust, the conservation values, and the background info that led to the execution of the conservation easement.

Where can I access it? The Story Map can be found on the Conservancy's [website](http://www.mmcGeorgia.org). The Story Map will display best on a computer or tablet. The application will work on a smartphone; however, the map will be significantly reduced in size and difficult to navigate. Depending on your device, there may be longer than average loading times.



Join Us

A Watershed Moment

The time has come. The tipping point is here. If we don't protect it soon, it will be gone. This is a time for faith.

The Conservancy has been in operation for almost 25 years and has become a conservation leader in Morgan County and in the state. We think you might agree that without this organization, our county would look and feel much different.

Past accomplishments aside, there is so much more to do in the next five years if this community wants to remain agrarian, beautiful, clean, and financially stable. **This is a Watershed Moment.**

Protecting a critical mass of productive land (farms, forests, watersheds) to sustain our existing agricultural/forestry industries and environmental health is going to take a HUGE leap of faith. That's what we need you to do. Take this leap with us and support it in any way you can.

This year, we are asking, specifically, for you to consider joining or renewing at the Watershed Donor Level (see levels below) and commit to that level of support for the next five years. We ask that you dig deep, increase your level of support, and significantly invest in this community's future.

The Conservancy needs to grow its organizational capacity to realize its goal of permanently protecting a critical mass of productive land. And that's where Watershed Donors make the biggest difference. Gas in the engine.



A Charter Member and Watershed Donor wrote in 2014: "What is accomplished in our community by such a small organization is nothing short of a miracle! What our county has accomplished in the area of conservation easements is the envy of our neighbors and could not have happened without the Conservancy. Our community is richer because of the Conservancy's leadership, and I am so proud to be a supporter."

– Christine Lambert, Watershed Donor

In 2009, the Conservancy received a \$50,000 grant from the Waterfall Foundation, and each year we aim to match that gift through Watershed Donor memberships.

This year, we aim to double it.

To be vigilant is our task in this Watershed Moment. We ask that you join us and take the leap with us. It's going to be a ride to remember and a legacy never to forget.

And remember, it was to every generation that President Theodore Roosevelt spoke when he said, "Here is your country. Cherish these natural wonders, cherish the natural resources... the history... the romance, for your children and your children's children. Do not let selfish men or greedy interests skin your country of its beauty, its riches, or its romance."

How many acres is that critical mass? We will know in March 2024, when the Critical Mass Study is complete, thanks to the Morgan County Board of Commissioners splitting the cost of that study with us.

Join or Renew Your Membership Today!

Madison-Morgan Conservancy

P.O. Box 752, Madison, GA 30650

706-818-8046 | www.mmcGeorgia.org | info@mmcGeorgia.org

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daniel Morgan Society - \$5,000+
(Watershed Donor Level) | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter - \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainer - \$2,500+
(Watershed Donor Level) | <input type="checkbox"/> Donor - \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor - \$1,000+
(Watershed Donor Level) | <input type="checkbox"/> Preservationist - \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I would like to contribute an additional: \$ _____
to the Endangered Properties Revolving Fund. | <input type="checkbox"/> Conservationist - \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My Company has a matching gift program. Please send me information about matching gifts. | <input type="checkbox"/> Naturalist - \$25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Please send me information about including the Madison-Morgan Conservancy in my will. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I would like to volunteer. | |

Name(s) as it should appear on the Membership list:

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone 1: _____ Phone 2: _____

Email 1: _____

Email 2: _____

Monthly Giving:

It's all about cash flow. If you would prefer to give monthly, it's easy to do online. Just go to the Membership page on our website, www.mmcGeorgia.org/membership and click the "Monthly Giving" button, and fill in the monthly amount you'd like to contribute. Monthly giving is a win-win:

- You can spread your contribution over 12 months.
- Monthly membership income helps the Conservancy budget for the year.

Daniel Morgan Society \$5,000+ | Monthly = \$417

Sustainer \$2,500+ | Monthly = \$209

Benefactor \$1,000+ | Monthly = \$84

Supporter \$500+ | Monthly = \$42

Donor \$250+ | Monthly = \$21



JCers on the Move in 2023



The Junior Conservancy's first meeting this year was a tour of the Fairplay School and Malcom's Crossroads.

David Nunn led the tour, explaining the history of the communities. The highlight? Spotting student scribbles on the walls in the Fairplay School left from 1900-1938.



Next up, maintaining historic cemeteries in Hard Labor Creek State Park. Park Ranger David Guzman led the students on a hike to the little-known cemeteries for a little headstone restoration.



In November, Anna Nolan led the JCers back to the Boys & Girls Club to maintain the trail they built last year with the help of David Burbach and Dan Zant. They hauled out trash, cut back brush, and reoriented trail markers.



In January, the JCers were joined by some of their parents for a tour by Joe Smith of the Foster-Thomason-Minnix House. One parent, Theresa Dickinson, was an integral part of saving the house and was stunned by its transformation.

Alumni Spotlight

James Martin
Classes of 2018-2021
President, 2020-2021



Upon graduating high school and the Junior Conservancy, I moved to Birmingham, Alabama to attend Samford University. During my time at Samford, I became a member of a church in my community. Our congregation, a young church plant, rented a beautiful building from an existing church in the area. This year the owners of the church decided to shut their doors and sell the property. Being a small congregation, we knew we couldn't compete on the open market. Expectedly, we lost the bid to a real estate developer. Determined to live at peace with everyone, we would not fight the transaction, however, as concerned citizens, at the hearing for rezoning we expressed our concern at the loss of a valuable community space. It worked. The developer agreed

to a compromise where the land would be subdivided and the church protected, while also allowing for their project. My time as a Junior Conservancy board member impressed upon me the importance of conservation. Whether it be a school, a community center, or a church, institutional spaces matter. They alter the culture and landscape of a community. With a humble heart, we can protect the spaces that we love.



Conservancy Members

December 2022 - December 2023

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December 2022 - December 2023

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Madison-Morgan Conservancy
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www.mmcGeorgia.org



Return Service Requested

Need to Renew?

Check Your Mailing Label:

The date printed above your name on the mailing label is the last date on which you paid your annual membership dues. Please renew your membership annually to support the Conservancy's work and to expand its capacity.

Winter, 2023-2024

This newsletter is printed on 100% post-consumer waste recycled paper.

Junior Conservancy Application Period

Junior Conservancy Board

Want to be in the Junior Conservancy next school year? Or know someone who might? It's time to apply!

JC Applications are due March 22, 2024, and can be found on the Conservancy website:

www.mmcGeorgia.org/junior-conservancy.

Junior Conservancy Scholarship

Junior Conservancy Seniors, it's time to apply for the JC Scholarship!

Scholarship(s) is(are) to be awarded to applicant(s) for financial support related to tuition and board at an accredited college and purchase of books, technology, or other other supplies needed for college. One scholarship in the amount of \$2,000 or two scholarships in the amount of \$1,000 each will be awarded. Thank you to our anonymous donor of these scholarship funds!

Membership Supper Friday, March 22, 2024



On Friday, March 22, 2024, the Conservancy will host its Annual Membership Supper at Malcom's Crossroads!

Join us for a casual chili supper in a historic barn at one of Morgan County's most pristine rural crossroads to celebrate the year past and look forward to the what's in store for the Conservancy and its members.