

Madison-Morgan Conservancy

Newsletter
Summer, 2024

Protecting Farms, Forests, and Front Porches for Future Generations

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Letter from the President

Committed to Farmland Protection

As I approach the end of my four-year term on the Conservancy Board, I have been looking back with a bit of awe. In four short years, this community has survived a pandemic and, in spite of those hard years, has thrived. Our two largest industries have grown: tourism and agricultural production. On the Conservancy front, we have saved a few important places through the Endangered Properties Revolving Fund: 171 acres were permanently protected, and the 1882 FTM House, the 1891 Fairplay School, an 1896 cottonseed warehouse, and the 1938 Nolan Cabin were all brought back from the brink. Bonus: membership in the Conservancy has grown 18%.

The Revolving Fund is the biggest story for us. We raised \$1m in 2018 and today, six years later, have \$1.3m in assets in that fund. That's 30% growth. The \$1,000,000 fund revolved \$1,287,691 of working capital to purchase land and buildings. It also funded \$77,000 of staff time related to the Revolving Fund projects. We hope all of you who donated to the revolving fund find that growth as spectacular as we do.

Despite the good news, we've all noticed an increase in development pressure: farmland being converted to non-farm uses. And we need to balance that land conversion with land protection. That's the balance we're after – the key in our immediate future to retaining the land and quality of life we all enjoy in Morgan County.

So how do we find that balance?

Pairing permanent land protection with farm-friendly zoning is the only way to manage the development pressure in this current market and avoid the sprawl that is consuming neighboring counties. The Conservancy is a trusted partner in this effort, working with the State of GA, the Morgan County Board of Commissioners, the City of Madison, Farm Bureau, Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Land Trust Alliance, and various land trusts to protect critical resources. In the next few years, we need these partnerships to protect a critical mass of farmland to protect our largest industry (agriculture, and its 4,655 jobs) and to keep Morgan County productive, wild, and beautiful.



4 of 5 Conservancy Board Presidents,
L-R: Bob Beauchamp, Whitey Hunt,
Mary McCauley, and Robert Trulock
(not pictured, Elizabeth Branch)

To that end, the Conservancy Board revised the Conservancy's land protection goal to increase the pace of conservation locally. We intend to protect 11,000 acres by 2030 to secure enough land to stabilize Morgan County during this time of heightened development pressure. And that's where we need your help.

"Land is a problem money can solve," said a trust representative in Connecticut recently. NRCS has a great program that buys conservation easements from farmers, and the Conservancy has just begun to provide a service that helps landowners go through that Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) process. We also realize that to protect a critical mass of farmland, we'll need to raise a significant amount of money from individuals and foundations. If you are interested in knowing more about the transformational funding we are seeking, I encourage you to call me or the Conservancy staff.

President's Letter continued...

If you are a member of the Conservancy, I want you to know we are deeply grateful for your support. Many of you have been supporting this organization for many years. I hope you will encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to become members, to contribute financially to this mission, or to support the Conservancy in other ways. We (all of us in Morgan County) need a thriving Conservancy to manage the growth coming our way.

I look forward to celebrating the Conservancy's 25th anniversary next year with you. Stay tuned for announcements about events and other opportunities to celebrate Morgan County, conservation, and the future.

Sincerely,  Robert Trulock, President

Junior Conservancy

Junior Conservancy Alumni Spotlight

Will Woodard, Georgia 4-H Foundation

JC Classes of 2017-2019, Treasurer, 2018-2019

Hi, I'm Will Woodard. I am an alumnus of the Morgan County Junior Conservancy Board. I served on the board for two years with one of the years serving as the social chair and my second year serving as treasurer. I still remember coordinating the Junior Ramble around Morgan County.

I recently graduated from the University of Georgia with a Master of Agribusiness degree and also received my undergraduate



degree in agribusiness. My time at Georgia was spectacular with many great experiences including being inducted into AGHON Honor Society as well as serving as a College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Ambassador. I have just recently started a job as a development officer for the Georgia 4-H Foundation, a non-profit organization intended to assist Georgia 4-H in financially supporting its facilities and programs. My time as a Junior Conservancy Board member has been well remembered, and I am thankful that I had the opportunity to serve in that capacity.

Organizational News

Meet Our Summer Staff



Mariella Plumley, raised in Morgan County, was home for the summer and helped the Conservancy transition to a new CRM software program to better manage and communicate with our beloved members. She also assists the executive director with emails, mailings and day-to-day tasks.

Mariella gets married in August and will relocate to Buford, GA to start a new life with her soon-to-be husband, Jack Dodson. She has thoroughly enjoyed working for an organization that aligns with her values of preservation and her love for the beautiful outdoors, especially this place she has called home most of her life.



Erin Turner, CFRE, has been providing technical and donor data management support for Madison-Morgan Conservancy since May 2024. She is passionate about data integrity and knows the vital importance of having an accurate donor database for a nonprofit organization.

Erin is currently the associate director of donor relations for the Athens Area Humane Society, managing all things donor-related, and a development associate for Athens Parent Wellbeing, providing grant writing and management.

Erin, her husband, and their two-year-old, Maeve, reside on 1.3 acres in Oglethorpe County, surrounded by beautiful pastures. She is a pet parent to two cats, Cali and Archie, and one dog, Brooks. When Erin isn't working or being a devoted mother and spouse, you can find her crocheting blankets, specifically one for her second daughter, who will be born in a few short months.



Quint Wingate, a rising junior in the Historic Preservation and Community Planning program at the College of Charleston, interned with the Conservancy this summer. During his internship, Quint researched 25 of Madison's historic properties that are eligible for landmark

status by the city. These properties all have significant acreage, and, under the TDR ordinance, landmark status would make

them eligible as sending parcels. This allows for higher density development to take place away from Madison's historic core, and allows the low density of these areas to be permanently protected.

35 Acres Protected and Sold to Farmer at Farm Value

Charlene Kickbush and Tom Greer had spoken for years about protecting their farm. They loved the bottomland hardwoods, horse pastures, and abundant wildlife they saw daily. They did not want to see the land developed, or the mushrooms disappear, or the birds, deer, and other wildlife be displaced.



*Jacob Callaway and Wynn Howard
at Bramble Creek Farm*

Years after Tom passed away, Charlene contacted the Conservancy to explore her options. The Conservancy eventually purchased a conservation easement on 155 acres of their 165-acre farm. In return for that investment, Charlene gave the Conservancy an option to purchase 35 acres of the farm.

This June, we structured a deal to sell that 35 acres to Jacob "Bubba" Callaway, a cattleman, at a price that would allow him to continue to farm the land.

Thanks to the conservation easement removing the development rights value from the land, Jacob was able to buy the land at farm value.

Charlene was able to honor Tom's wishes and leave a lasting legacy; a next-generation farmer was able to afford to purchase farmland; and 155 acres of farm, forest, wildlife habitat, and stream corridors were protected for the rest of us. We'd say that's a win-win-win!

Conservancy Aims to Protect 11,000 acres by 2030

After gathering the data that showed us how important retaining farmland is to a balanced county tax digest and to this community's largest industry (agriculture and its 4,655 jobs), the Conservancy, Farm Bureau, and Extension advocated for local and state funding for farmland protection. And it's happening!

The Morgan County Board of Commissioners have pledged to use PILOT payments to fund the needed "third-party match" to leverage the federal funds available through the NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to buy conservation easements from farmers on prime farmland. Morgan County will be the 3rd of 159 counties in the state to provide this opportunity to its landowners.

The State appropriated \$2 million to its newly created GA Farmland Conservation Fund, to further assist in the purchase of easements on farmland through this same ACEP program.

Together, protecting a critical mass of farmland is possible, and to accomplish that, the Conservancy Board recently revised its land protection goal and now aims to protect 11,000 acres by 2030. This would not be possible without the federal, state, and local funding being provided, and will still require even more fundraising from this community and from the state's private foundations. Are you game to help? If so, please contact us.

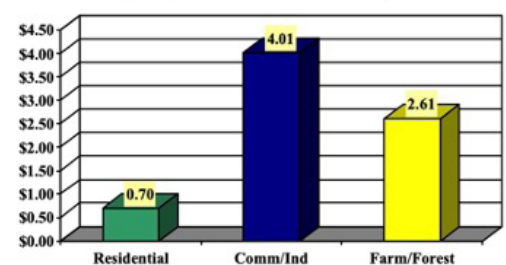
The recent Critical Mass Study for Morgan County found that Morgan County needs to retain 75,000 acres in productive land to ensure the farm support businesses (feed mills, machinery dealers, veterinarians, processors, and transportation companies, etc.) continue to operate in this area. If too much farmland is lost, the farm support businesses will relocate or go out of business, and then the remaining farmers won't be able to farm efficiently or profitably, which will lead to the inevitable loss of the remaining farmland.

Permanent land protection coupled with farm-friendly zoning is the only way to prevent the sprawl that is happening all around us. Thankfully, this Morgan County community is prepared and committed to staying productive, wild, and beautiful. Here we go!

Of GA's 159 counties in 2022, Morgan County ranked 34th in Total Farmgate Value (a \$500 million agricultural industry), was home to 4,655 ag-related jobs, and more specifically ranked:

- 1st in Christmas Trees
- 2nd in Horses – Boarding/Breeding/Training
- 2nd in Field/Tree Nursery
- 2nd in Silage
- 3rd in Pork – Farrow to Finish
- 3rd in Total Livestock
- 3rd in Straw
- 4th in Dairy
- 4th in Greenhouse
- 4th in Hay
- 4th in Total Ornamental Horticulture
- 4th in Quail
- 4th in Turkey Hunting Leases
- 6th in Beef Cows
- 7th in Wheat
- 8th in Miscellaneous Row and Forage Crops
- 10th in Deer Hunting Leases
- 14th in Turfgrass

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



Nolan Cabin Saved from Demolition

We got a call one day. "Do you know they are going to tear down the Nolan Cabin in Rutledge???" We jumped into action. We called the developer. He was happy to work with us to find a solution for the cabin. After all he is a bit of a history buff and really didn't want to see the cabin torn down. But it did need to be removed from the site for his future development plans.



A few more calls to the developer, returned calls to alarmed Rutledge residents to tamp down the angst, and finally to Chad Roling of Roling Custom Homes to see if he had the time in his schedule to act as the general contractor on the job, and we were all set.

Except for the field trip weeks later to go see the cabin on its new lot. The perks of this job. This whole project feels like a perk, an honor to be a part of saving Morgan County's special places!

Who you gonna call? The Nolans of course. A call to Nancy Nolan Kuperberg followed by a call to Taylor Williams and his sister Scottie did the trick. Along with cousin Kelsey and matriarch Pat Nolan, they, as a family, were game to move this precious piece of their family history to their farm where they will rehabilitate it and use it once again for family events.

Not a dime was spent in capital expenditures, just staff time. This is one of the reasons why this Conservancy is here -- for you and because of you. **Thanks to members and donors to the Endangered Properties Revolving Fund, work like this is possible!**

Support Georgia's First and Only Countywide Conservancy

Permanent land protection coupled with farm-friendly zoning is the only way to manage sprawl. If you agree and want to help keep Morgan County productive, wild, and beautiful, you can support the Conservancy by joining, renewing your membership,

or donating to the mission. We will need all the help we can get and all the funding we can find to protect 11,000 acres by 2030. It's a lofty goal, a stretch goal, and we are actively working toward it. We would love your help!

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

- Daniel Morgan Society - \$5,000+ (Watershed Donor Level)
- Sustainer - \$2,500+ (Watershed Donor Level)
- Benefactor - \$1,000+ (Watershed Donor Level)
- I would like to contribute an additional: \$ _____ to the Endangered Properties Revolving Fund.
- My Company has a matching gift program. Please send me information about matching gifts.
- Please send me information about including the Madison-Morgan Conservancy in my will.
- I would like to volunteer.

- Supporter - \$500
- Donor - \$250
- Preservationist - \$100
- Conservationist - \$50
- Naturalist - \$25

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, click the "Monthly Membership" 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



Taking the Farmland Protection Message on the Road

Over the last three months, the Conservancy embarked on a series of presentations to highlight the critical importance of farmland protection. Through a partnership with Morgan County Extension and Morgan County Farm Bureau, the Conservancy was able to speak at some of their events.

- April 30th: Row Crop Association
- May 9th: Jasper-Morgan Cattle Forage Association
- May 20th: Cattleman's Association
- June 17th: Dairy Association

Each event involved discussion regarding the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program - Agriculture Land Easement (ACEP-ALE) and the importance of sustaining Morgan County's agriculture industry.

Outreach is a vital component in retaining a critical mass of farmland in Morgan County, and the Conservancy extends its services to anyone who would like to know more about permanent land protection. Contact us, and we will meet with you and/or your group.



**"CONSERVATION WILL ULTIMATELY BOIL DOWN TO
REWARDING THE PRIVATE LANDOWNER WHO CONSERVES THE PUBLIC INTEREST."
- Aldo Leopold, Sand County Almanac**

ACEP-ALE - What is it?

You've probably heard or read the acronym "ACEP-ALE" plenty of times by now, but it's complicated, so we're breaking it down. What is it and how could it impact Morgan County's future?

ACEP-ALE is a program that pays farmers for voluntarily giving up some of their development rights, which very well may be the only way to protect a critical mass of farmland from the development pressure radiating from Atlanta.

The Agriculture Conservation Easement Program - Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE) is a voluntary program implemented by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in each state. The purpose of this program is to pay farmers to protect privately owned agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural uses.

CRITERIA & FUNDING

Through NRCS, there is a set of eligibility requirements the landowner and the land must meet to qualify for funding. The landowner must meet typical Farm Service Agency and NRCS requirements, and the land must: 1) contain 50% prime or important agricultural soil, or 2) contain historical or archaeological resources, or 3) protect grazing uses and related conservation values, or 4) further a state or local government

policy consistent with the purposes of the ACEP-ALE program.

If you think you qualify, or if you just want to explore this program, please contact the Conservancy to start your application. Once your application is submitted, NRCS staff will rank the property based on these and other eligibility requirements.

If the land ranks high enough to be funded, ACEP-ALE may fund up to 50% of the value of the agricultural land easement (which is typically 40%-60% of fair market value as determined by an appraiser). The other 50% may be funded through third-party matches from local and state governments.

BENEFIT\$ FOR THE FARMER

Unlike a typical real estate transaction where you would be paid for selling your land, in ACEP-ALE, you are only selling a portion of the development rights on your land. You retain ownership of the farm, can continue to work the land, and can sell the land or will it to heirs. Of course, you are only being paid for the development rights, which is usually about half the value of the fair market value of the land. But you can use those proceeds to improve farm infrastructure, buy more farmland, go on vacation, send a child to college, or invest the proceeds in other ways (1031 exchange may be an option).

Conservancy Members

June 2023 - June 2024

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|--|--|--|---|
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| THE 1772 FOUNDATION | *HARRISON BUCK | NICOLE & BRANDON FORDE | * MARY & JOHN HUNTZ |
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| | ANGI FETCH | | |
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Watershed Donors (bolded)

** Junior Conservancy Members

New Members (green)

Conservancy Members

June 2023 - June 2024

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* Charter Members

Watershed Donors (bolded)

** Junior Conservancy Members

New Members (green)



MADISON-MORGAN
CONSERVANCY

PROTECTING FARMS, FORESTS, AND
FRONT PORCHES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Madison-Morgan Conservancy
P.O. Box 752
Madison, GA 30650

(706) 818-8046

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.

Summer, 2024

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Leading by Example. Our Founder's Most Recent Gift.

A Wedding Gift for the Future

Katie Vason is forward thinking. Not only did she found the Conservancy (with her dad's help) while she was in high school, 24 years later, she is giving Morgan County another gift.

That gift comes from Katie (Vason) and Greg Devaney's wedding registry and will go toward the Conservancy's work to protect a critical mass of farmland. **The gift totals almost \$9,000!**

Married June 15th in beautiful Madison, GA at Empire Mills, this couple has set a high bar when it comes to sustainable weddings and thinking about the future. Not only were all the flowers cut locally, parts of the delicious meal were from the Empire Mills garden, and there was not a single-use plastic bottle in sight.

Katie and Greg also chose to support two non profits as part of their registry instead of asking for "things" to keep it even more sustainable.

Katie's, and now Greg's, continued support of this organization is inspiring. Her commitment to conservation in many ways is making a difference in the

world. Philanthropy at a young age is uncommon, and Katie and Greg are setting a meaningful example for the generations coming up in the world.

Katie's parents, Lee Harper and Wayne Vason, did the same - they set an excellent example for Katie and for all of us. They have donated four conservation easements to permanently protect 257 acres of farm, forest, wildlife habitat, and water quality in this productive, wild, and beautiful county.



We so appreciate Katie and Greg's support through their wedding registry. It's an extremely meaningful gift in many ways - financially and in the moral support that keeps us going.

Thank you Katie and Greg! Cheers to you and to many more years of conservation in Morgan County!