

What will
you
do?

HOLDING ON BY LETTING GO

“We believe that keeping the land in its natural state brings jobs and tourist dollars that help this rural economy.”

A couple finds a way to share a Macon County treasure with the future

Like many people who buy land in western North Carolina, Ralph Preston and his wife, Deborah Thomas, had long dreamed of a mountain getaway.

“We were looking for beautiful, affordable land that had a wide-valley feel, like the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia,” Ralph said. “We came to see what western North Carolina had to offer and when we walked the property on a cold winter day, we fell

in love with it and the Cowee area.”

“The property” Ralph speaks so fondly of is 350 acres on Mouse Mountain, one of the largest unbroken tracts in Northern Macon County -- a key tract in a forested corridor that connects the Cowee Mountains to the Nantahala Mountains.

Ralph and Deb have long ties to LTLT. A photographer by trade, he has showcased his talents in numerous projects for LTLT, letting his visual work



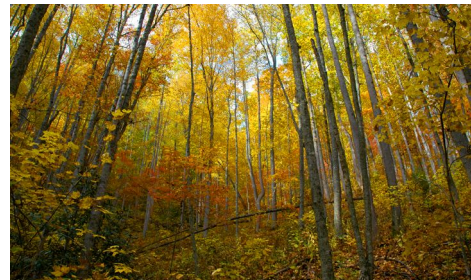
“We felt that selling the land for conservation was the right thing to do.”

tell the stories of the area. Deb has led bird walks and other hikes with LTLT. “It’s so effective to get people out into the natural world, in terms of opening their eyes to the possibilities that conservation brings.”

When family ties led Ralph and Deb to relocate to Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, the conservation possibilities for the property included selling their share of the mountain to LTLT. “It’s never been about the money with us.

We bought the property to build a house for ourselves. When it became apparent that wasn’t going to happen, we felt that selling the land for conservation was the right thing to do. We have always wanted to dedicate this land to its highest and best use. Now others can enjoy the undeveloped beauty of the Cowee Valley.

“If you’re fortunate enough to own land still in its natural state, it is worthy of preserving for future generations.”



A STREAM—AND A LIFE— RESTORED

“It would be a terrible waste if all this soil and farmland ended up in Fontana Lake.”

A family farm on Savannah Creek gets help from LTLT

“**F**arming is in my blood, I guess.” Sitting on the front porch of his 100+ year-old family home, Tom Kelly rocks in a chair with his dog, Heidi, at his side, and talks about growing up on Savannah Creek in Jackson County. “It’s always been home to me. I can’t imagine being anywhere else.”

For more than 60 years, Tom has been farming this land, first as a kid helping his grandfather, then as a father and grandfather himself, showing the way to a new generation. Tom and his wife, Conchita, raised five children here and have seen horses, sheep, goats and Pyrenees dogs on



“I was worried about my pasture washing away but didn’t really know if there was anything I could do about it.”



the farm. Now in his 70s, Tom raises beef cattle. A need to keep the cattle out of the water was what first brought him to LTLT.

“I needed fencing, but it was hard to know where to put it because the banks kept falling into the creek. I was worried about my pasture washing away but didn’t really know if there was anything I could do about it.”

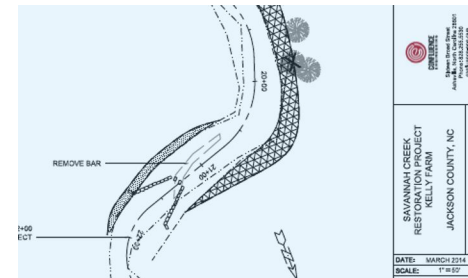
Walking the 23-acre property, it’s easy for even the untrained eye to see where the damage is. The banks are sloughing off and forming sand bars in the creeks, while gravel in the streambed is creating mini-islands that push more water into the banks during storms.

LTLT Restoration Coordinator Ben Laseter is leading the partnership between five funding sources, ten

federal and state agency partners, and four of Tom’s neighboring landowners to fully fund the estimated \$150,000 project. The goal is to stop Kelly’s farmland from washing downstream while also improving the habitat for fish and mussels in Savannah Creek and the Tuckasegee River downstream.

A project that directly impacts his livelihood, Kelly says. “A few more floods and I wouldn’t have enough pasture to keep cattle here. And can you imagine all that dirt running through the Savannah, into the Tuckasegee? It would be a terrible waste if all this soil and farmland ended up in Fontana Lake.”

Tom reaches down and absently strokes Heidi. “This land means more to me than just grass and soil. I’m glad I’m doing my part to save it.”



“This land means more to me than just grass and soil.”



FROM COUCH TO CREEK

Sara Messer and Michelle Ward are typical 14-year-old girls. Eighth graders at Macon Middle School in Franklin, they're busy with school, homework, friends, and...they'll admit it...their mobile devices.

Hands-on learning with two Macon County teens

"I love the outdoors but really, I'm just so tired by the end of school that all I want to do is hang out on the couch," Sara admits.

But ask them about their recent experience participating in LTLT's Kids in the Creek program and the two light up. "It was SO cool!"

Not a bad assessment from teenagers.

Created just last year, Kids in the Creek is designed to inspire a new generation of land and water stewards. Students get hands-on education by throwing on waders, getting in the water and working directly with



equipment scientists use to test and monitor the health of the water and the wildlife that live there.

LTLT's Citizen Science Program Manager Jason Meador coordinates the program around something that relates directly to the kids. "We take them to Cartoogechaye Creek, which

is the water source for the town of Franklin, including Macon Middle School. That way, they can understand how important clean water is."

Michelle and Sara's science teacher, Dwight Long, says this kind of hands-on education makes his job much easier. "Water is a big



"This gave us a second chance to learn. Even the guys who are always goofing off were listening and joining in."

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component of the national 8th grade curriculum and makes up a large subject section for End-of-Grade required testing. My students learned in one day what it took three weeks in the classroom to absorb. You can almost see the direct shift in their brains from vague abstract ideas to the real world and how science directly affects them.”

It also gets them to experience the beauty around them, something teenagers don’t often do. “You’d think that, because they live here, they appreciate this landscape. But they’re like every other kid in America—self absorbed, busy with sports practices and homework, obsessed with video games and social media... and many split their time between multiple homes because of divorced parents. Their lives are stretched in 100

directions and for most, hiking and enjoying the water is just not a priority.”

Sara and Michelle agree that Kids in the Creek made a difference in how much they learned. “Some kids can’t just be in class, only hearing lecture after lecture,” Sara says. “This gave us a second chance to learn. Even the guys who are always goofing off were listening and joining in. I mean, the bus ride home was so loud because we couldn’t stop talking about what we did. It was the most excited I’ve ever seen us after a field trip.”

Michelle says having instructors like Jason Meador helps. “They let us handle their stuff and trusted us to give them the right data—it made us feel important, which made us take it more seriously. But we were all having a good time too. You can tell they love

their jobs and when they have fun teaching us, we have fun too.”

Kids in the Creek is expected to reach more than 530 students and is currently conducted in Macon and Clay Counties, with goals to expand the program throughout the region. Private support is critical to the program’s success and future. “It costs about \$12 per youth to run this program. Without LTLT donors, we absolutely could not coordinate Kids in the Creek,” Meador says. “Most of these kids will stay in this area after high school. Our hope is that they gain an understanding to take care of what they have, so fewer regulations are needed and clean water remains in the area for many more years.”

For Michelle, who will start Macon Early College in the fall with dreams

of becoming a nurse, Kids in the Creek opened her eyes to a world bigger than her own. “I used to look at streams and only see the water and rocks. But now I realize how many living things are actually in there and how important it is to keep the water clean so they can live how they’re supposed to.”

“We could not organize and coordinate Kids in the Creek without LTLT donors.”





The stories in this report have a common thread - they each required *action*. Action by Ralph Preston and Deb Thomas to conserve their land. Action by Tom Kelly to protect his pastures while restoring Savannah Creek. Action by Sarah and Michelle to put on waders and experience the river firsthand.

LTLT is about action. For 17 years, we've built a reputation as one of the premier conservation organizations in North Carolina: conserving 23,000 acres with 200 stream and river miles throughout the Southern Blue Ridge region, initiating streambank restoration and sustainable forestry programs, and much more.

Action defines our future as well. We are not resting on our past accomplishments. Rather, we're expanding educational opportunities, reaching more youth than ever in 2014 with an eye toward increasing that further in 2015. We're also building our work regionally, focusing

on key projects in each of the seven counties we serve that will maintain water quality, wildlife habitat, agricultural productivity, and beautiful mountains. Finally, we're working to connect conservation with economic and community development.

***"Your support
is critical to
our success."***

Yes, LTLT is about action. And we can't do it without you; it's just that simple. Whether by volunteering your time to monitor stream conditions or clean up LTLT properties or by assisting us financially so we can move our vision forward, your support is critical to our success.

Conserve. Restore. Connect. *What will you do?*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "P" and a simple "aul".

Paul J. Carlson
Executive Director

Read more of our stories at www.lflt.org.



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