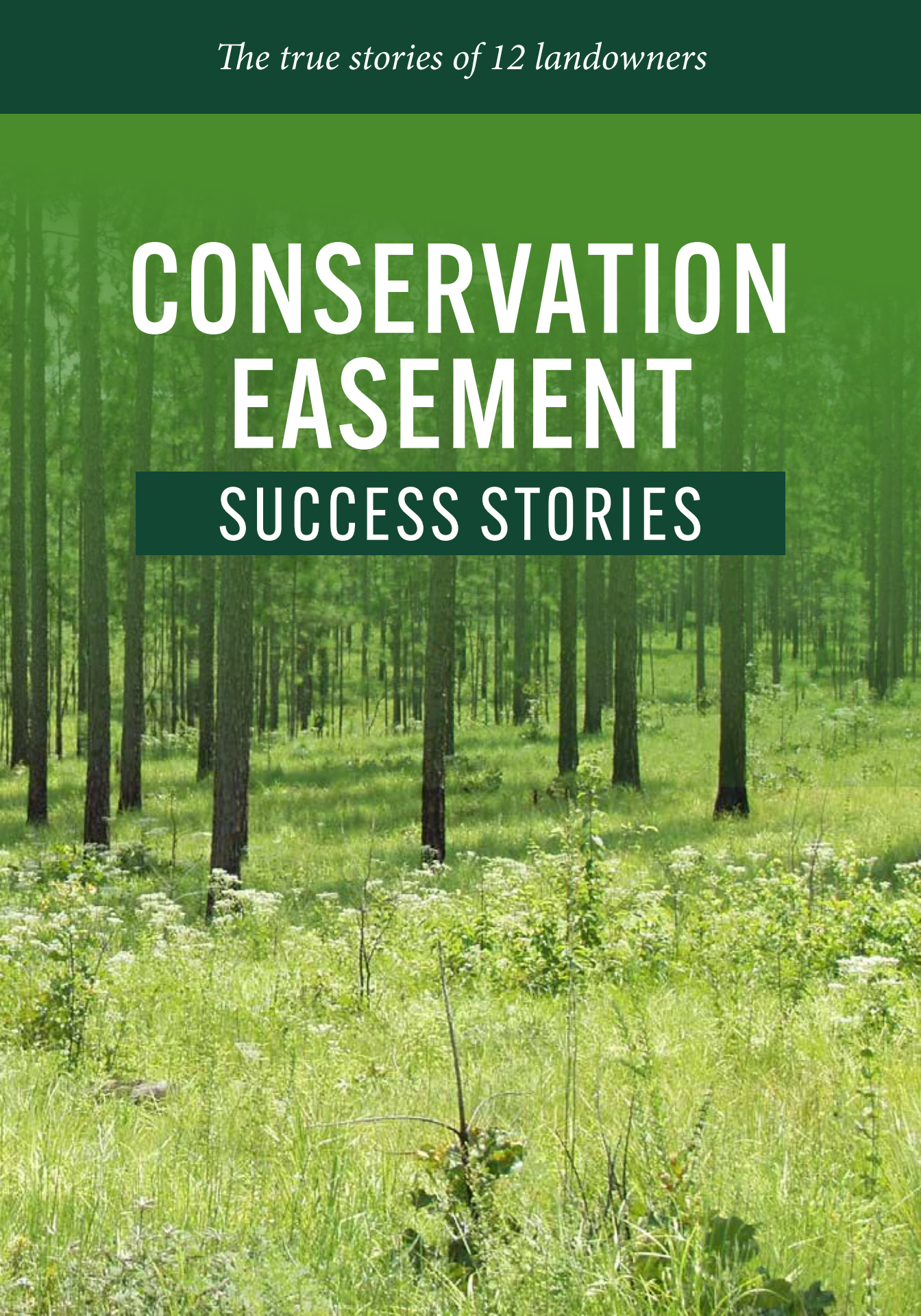
The true stories of 12 landowners

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

SUCCESS STORIES



Acknowledgements

Preparation and distribution of this handbook was funded through a grant made by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Written by James L. Cummins
Cover photo by Randy Browning
Edited by Kathy Jacobs, Brian Ballinger, Alyene Boyles, and Jessica Bond

Special thanks to the landowners profiled, the Mississippi Land Trust, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department who provided much of the information in this handbook.

Accounting consultation provided by Mike W. Jackson, CPA.

For copies of Conservation Easements, A Handbook for Mississippi Landowners, contact one of the offices of the Mississippi Land Trust.

Mississippi Land Trust
Main Office
P.O. Box 23
Stoneville, MS 38776
Ph: 662.820.9774

Mississippi Land Trust
Northeast Mississippi
Field Office
P.O. Box 187
Amory, MS 38821
Ph: 662.256.4486

Mississippi Land Trust
South Mississippi Field
Office
P.O. Box 16537
Hattiesburg, MS 39404
Ph: 601.264.6010

December 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BEAVER DAM 1

CAULK ISLAND LAND & TIMBER COMPAMY 2

COLES CREEK LAND & TIMBER COMPANY 3

DEAD TIGER MITIGATION BANK 4

FERRIS FARMS 5

FIGHTING BAYOU 6

OXBOW GROUP, LLC 7

RAY MABUS 8

CHARLES & MARGARET PICKERING 9

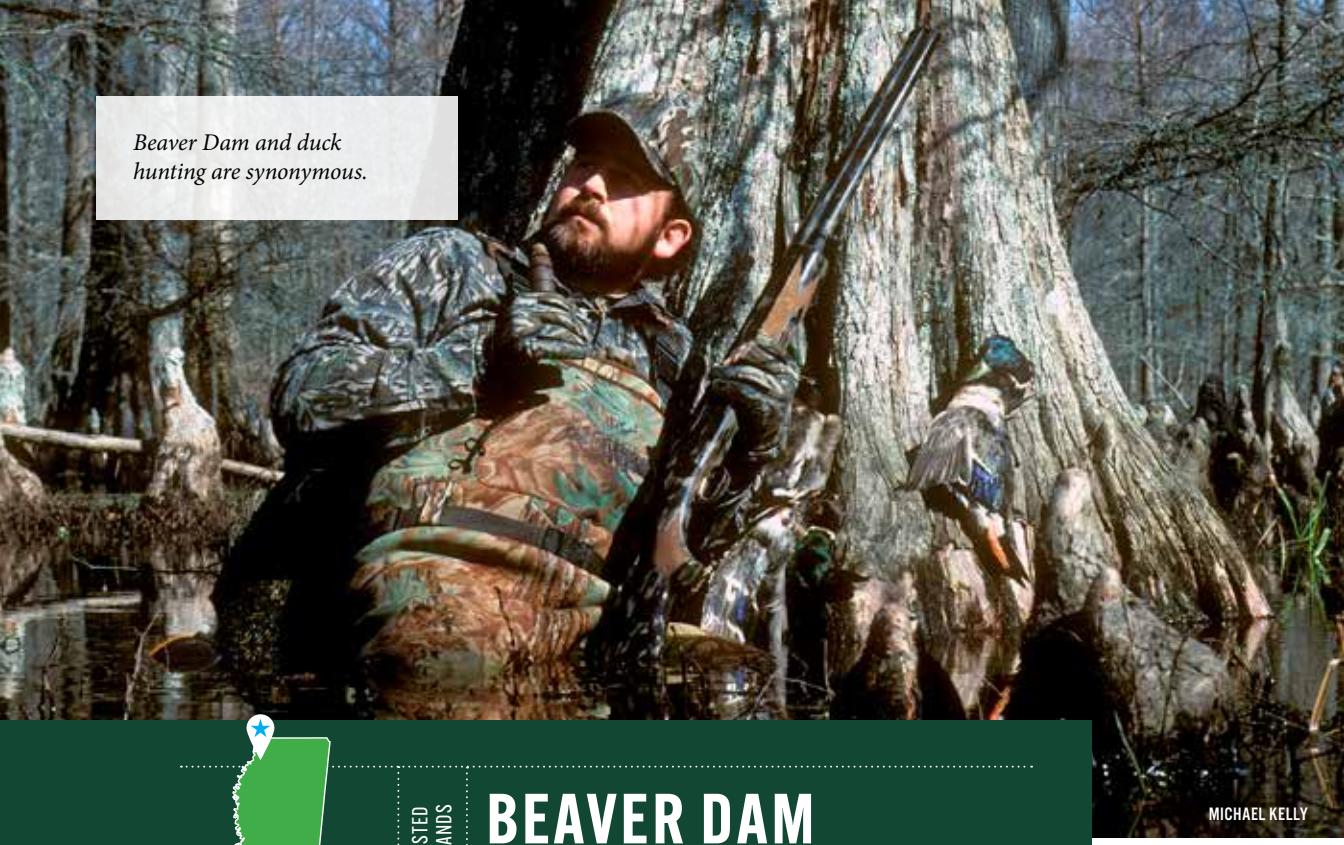
TARA WILDLIFE 10

WETLANDS SOLUTIONS MITIGATTION BANK 11

WRENWOODE NATURAL AREA 12

The 12 landowners profiled in the following pages have used conservation easements to ensure their specific land use objectives in the future. The properties described in these profiles vary from a few acres of mixed upland hardwoods and pine to several thousand acres of pristine bottomland hardwood forest.

Any tax benefit associated with using a conservation easement is unique to the terms of the agreement and the landowner's tax situation. Landowners should discuss the benefits of conservation easements with experienced professionals to determine their impact on specific tax situations.



Beaver Dam and duck hunting are synonymous.

MICHAEL KELLY

FORESTED WETLANDS

BEAVER DAM

159 ACRES | TUNICA COUNTY, MS

Nash Buckingham's Beaver Dam was a duck club organized in 1882. It was the property of the Owen family. Nash Buckingham, a renowned and well-loved outdoor writer, frequented Beaver Dam.

The conservation easement is approximately 159 acres in the historic Mississippi River Alluvial Floodplain in Tunica County.

Tunica County is mostly agricultural, producing cotton, corn, soybeans, and rice. However, Tunica County has experienced significant development due to legalized gaming along the Mississippi River and its tributaries, particularly in the county's western portion.

Tunica County has six casinos, associated hotels, and other amenities. These facilities are primarily in the Robinsonville area, 10 miles from the property.

The easement is divided into various but separate land use and habitat/ecological complexes. Most of the property is forested wetlands, while the rest is open water.

Most of this standing water has no vegetation as it is frequently flooded. However, the area can be planted during drier periods when flood waters recede, thereby enhancing the habitat for wildlife such as migrating waterfowl.

One of several bears found on Caulk Island.

MISSISSIPPI LAND TRUST

MIXED HABITAT TYPES

CAULK ISLAND LAND & TIMBER CO.

10,712 ACRES | DESHA COUNTY, AR

The Caulk Island property is in the southeast portion of Desha County, Arkansas, on the east side (Mississippi Side) of the Mississippi River and the unprotected (batture) side of the Mississippi River mainline levee system.

Lake Whittington forms part of the boundary of the island. This lake, formerly Bolivar Bend, was cut off from the main channel of the Mississippi River by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1937.

Though the property is within the boundaries of Arkansas, the land is accessed through Mississippi. The easement is approximately 10,712 acres and is Mississippi Land Trust's largest easement.

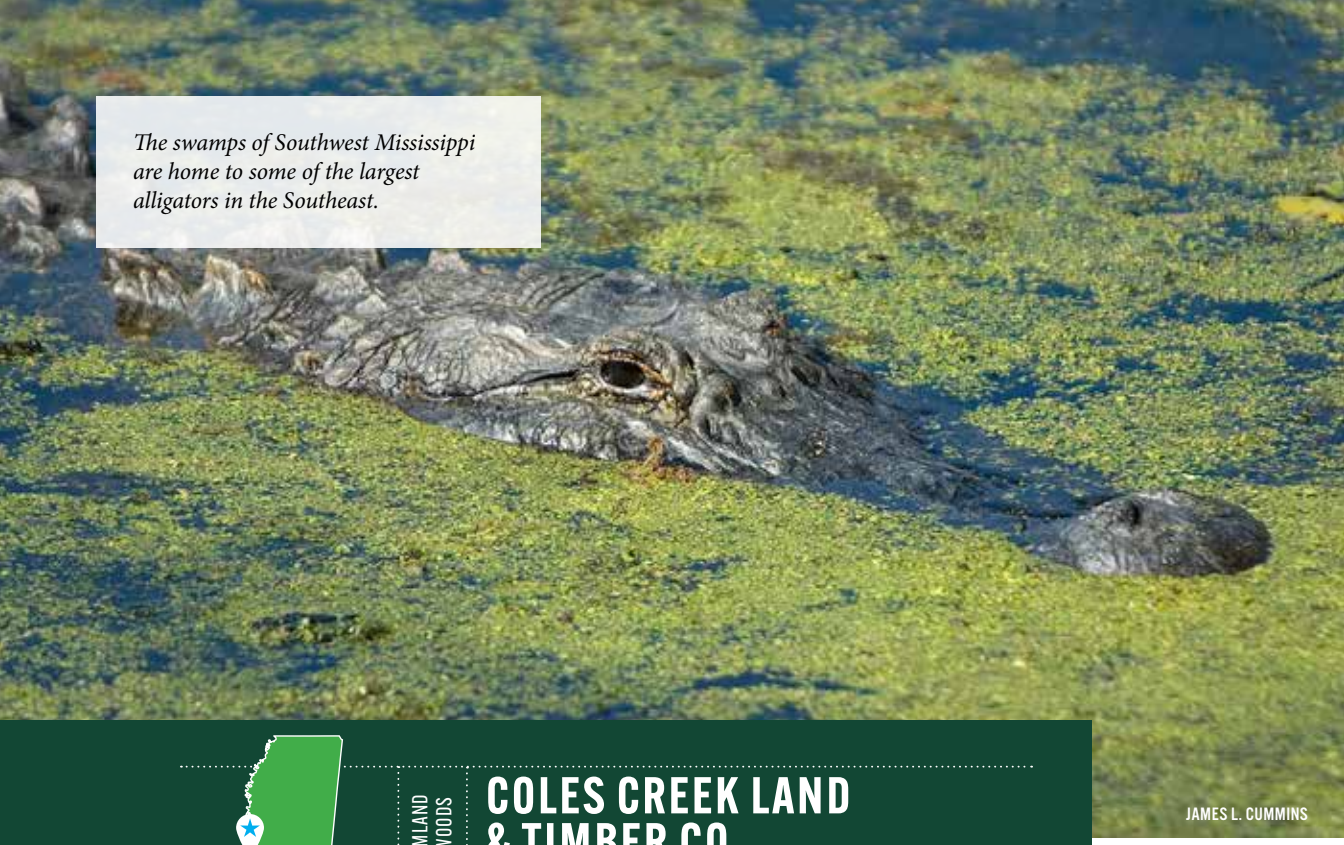
This property consists of

- bottomland hardwoods (45%)
- emergent forest/shrub/scrub (21%)
- open water (13%)
- hardwood restoration (8%)
- cottonwood plantation with hardwood under-planting (6%)
- open field (3%)
- out parcels (2%)
- pine forests (2%)

Caulk Island's owners have consistently applied silviculture techniques to enhance the forest. These include reforestation, under-planting, timber-stand improvement, herbicide treatment of undesirable forest competitors, and tree shelter installation. A monument has been placed to commemorate the reforestation efforts at Caulk Island.

The owners promote hunting on Caulk Island to provide recreational opportunities, owner equity, and wildlife population control through sustainable harvest. The property has a high-quality white-tailed deer population.

Caulk Island is also home to nesting bald eagles and a black bear population.



The swamps of Southwest Mississippi are home to some of the largest alligators in the Southeast.

JAMES L. CUMMINS

BOTTOMLAND HARDWOODS

COLES CREEK LAND & TIMBER CO.

1,355 ACRES | ADAMS COUNTY, MS

Coles Creek Land and Timber Company is located approximately 10 miles north of Natchez, Mississippi. This 1,355-acre tract is in a strategic area of the Mississippi Flyway.

About 500 acres were reforested to bottomland hardwoods in 2001. Coles Creek's owners strive to provide diverse habitat types to ensure the needs of all animals, not just waterfowl, are met. They have restored habitat for threatened and endangered species like the least tern and Louisiana black bear; migratory bird species such as the prothonotary warbler; and resident wildlife species including turkey, squirrel, and white-tailed deer.

One natural moist-soil impoundment and one deep-water area are maintained on the Coles Creek property. The shallow-water impoundment provides habitat for shorebirds, waterfowl, and aquatic species. The deep-water area offers alligators complete protection from human depredation and disturbance. In 2001, the landowners undertook an extensive nest box program for wood ducks and prothonotary warblers.

The easement prohibits clearcutting trees or draining wetlands on the property; however, oil and gas exploration, drilling, and production are permitted. The members may build hunting blinds and maintain roads to reach them, but other development is restricted.

Coles Creek Land and Timber Company donated the easement to benefit their property's bottomlands for wildlife and future members. Jeff Clark, a club member, says, "We gave the easement because we love Coles Creek. We know that areas of this type tend to disappear if they are not protected. This is one of the few bottomland hardwood areas of its size and quality in Southwest Mississippi."

Longleaf pine savanna was restored on the Dead Tiger Mitigation Bank.

RANDY BROWNING

PINE SAVANNA

DEAD TIGER MITIGATION BANK

1,387 ACRES | HANCOCK COUNTY, MS

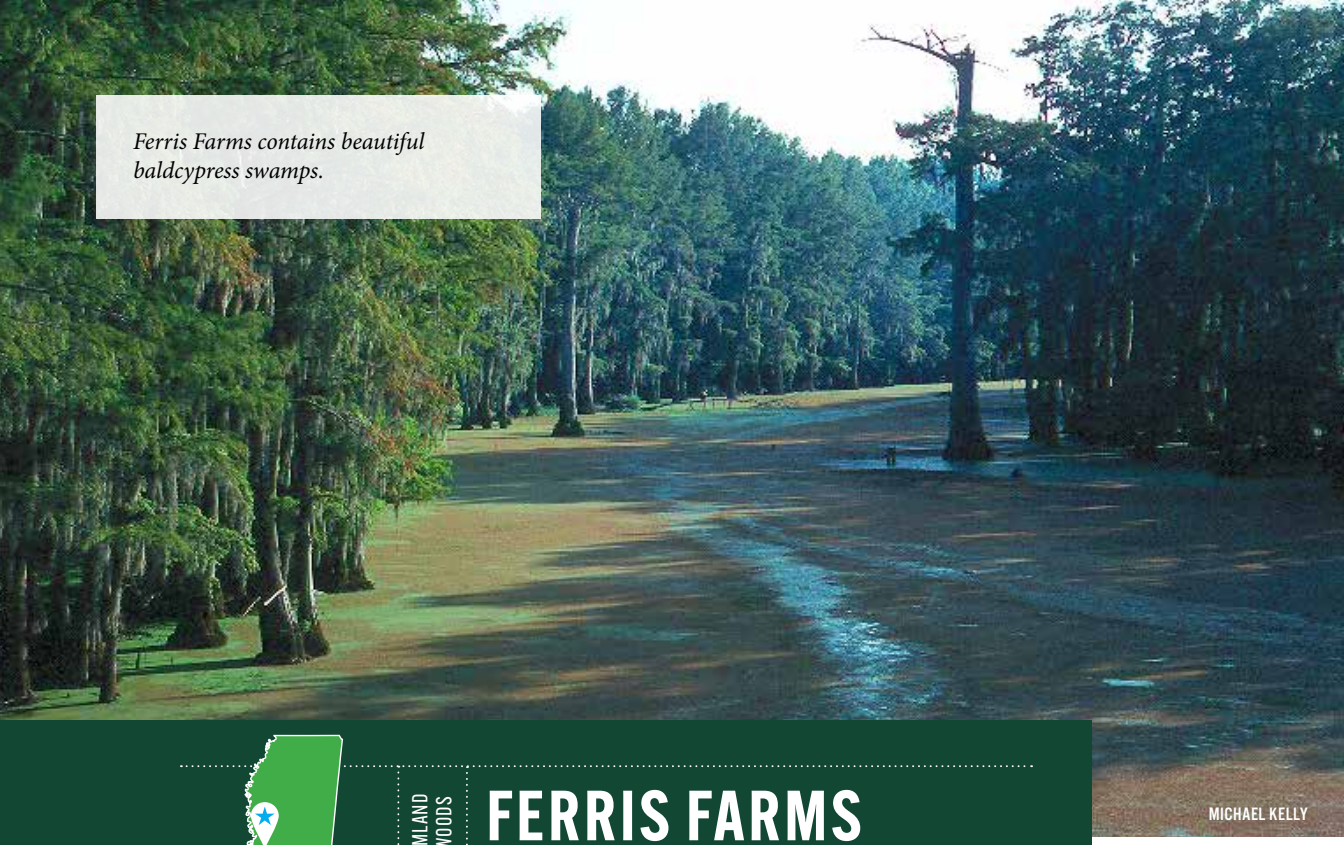
The Dead Tiger Mitigation Bank was organized to compensate for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits for unavoidable negative impacts to wetlands and streams.

The bank is located within the buffer zone of the Stennis Space Center. The buffer zone restricts residential and commercial development, which will aid the bank's long-term success.

This mitigation bank consists of approximately 1,387 acres of longleaf/slash pine savanna, cypress/pine savanna, and land along the Dead Tiger Creek.

Historically, longleaf covered 90 million acres. Longleaf was the dominant species on more than 60 million of these acres. Today, residual stands of longleaf occupy less than 3 million acres. This mitigation bank will protect and restore this highly degraded ecosystem.

Although the Mississippi Land Trust does not administer the mitigation bank nor own the credits, the perpetual conservation easement placed on the bank by the Trust ensures that the mitigation will last in perpetuity. The bank is restoring pine savanna habitat through planting and fire management.



Ferris Farms contains beautiful baldcypress swamps.

MICHAEL KELLY

BOTTOMLAND HARDWOODS

FERRIS FARMS

2,114 ACRES | WARREN COUNTY, MS

The late Grey Ferris of Vicksburg donated a 2,114-acre conservation easement with bottomland hardwoods and a small portion of pasture.

The Mississippi Land Trust and Ferris negotiated the conservation easement terms together. This binding agreement prohibits any development not compatible with a relatively natural preserve. The property's roads, walking paths, and a small shed can be maintained. A camp house can be built, but no commercial structures can be constructed. The terms of the conservation easement protecting the property reduced its appraised value and property taxes by more than 60%.

According to Ferris, "Those of us who are blessed with the ownership of natural resources have a responsibility of being good stewards of the land. We should all strive to ensure that we leave our lands in better shape than we found them."

The land was purchased in 1918 by E.B. Ferris, the founding director of Mississippi's Agricultural Experiment Stations. He employed his vast knowledge of diversified agricultural practices to manage his farm.

The Ferris family pioneered the use of agricultural conservation techniques. They terraced the fields and provided other erosion control measures to protect the farm. Their son, Grey Ferris, left his law practice in Vicksburg in 1974 to return to the farm where he worked and lived with his family.

Today, Ferris Farm has grown to over 6,000 acres. All cropland was converted to pasture, and more than 1,000 cows are on the property.

"If you are a landowner in Mississippi and care about fish and wildlife resources, you need to consider a conservation easement," concluded Ferris.

Fighting Bayou is one of the finest duck hunting clubs in America.

MICHAEL KELLY

WETLANDS

FIGHTING BAYOU

2,895 ACRES | LEFLORE COUNTY, MS

Fighting Bayou is one of America's finest duck hunting clubs, located 17 miles northeast of Greenwood. It is part of a major flyway for migrating ducks and geese. Its wetlands, some of which are created by flooded rice fields, are a favorite stop for wintering waterfowl.

"We became involved in the farming business because the ducks on this property were extraordinary," stated Billy Van Devender, a club member. Working and operating a farm was a lot of work, but Van Devender and the other members enjoyed caring for the property and hunting ducks on cool winter days.

In 1997, the club applied for the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Although the stewardship has been a blessing for migrating birds each winter, the program's value to ducks and geese could be improved.

Fighting Bayou members recognized that this land would be a good candidate for the WRP. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can pay Mississippi landowners for a perpetual conservation easement. WRP participants receive technical and financial assistance for habitat restoration and improvement projects. The club enrolled 2,895.1 acres of soybean land in the WRP.

NRCS and the landowner are required to agree on a management plan for WRP property. Fighting Bayou's plan divides the property into shallow wetlands, green tree reservoirs, and bottomland hardwood forests. Financial assistance from the WRP paid for reforestation and wetland restoration.

"We're excited that we can keep the property as long as we want without putting more money into it. Without the WRP, we would not have as good of habitat," explains Van Devender.

The diverse habitat types of the Oxbow Group's property are heavily utilized by wild turkey.

MICHAEL KELLY

DIVERSE ECOLOGICAL COMPLEX

OXBOW GROUP, LLC

207 ACRES | MADISON COUNTY, MS

The Oxbow Group, LLC, owned by Eddie Briggs, contains approximately 207 acres. It is located within the Big Black River Drainage Basin and bordered to the north by Bear Creek, a principal tributary of the Big Black River. Bear Creek provides a substantial portion of the stormwater drainage from the central and northern parts of the country.

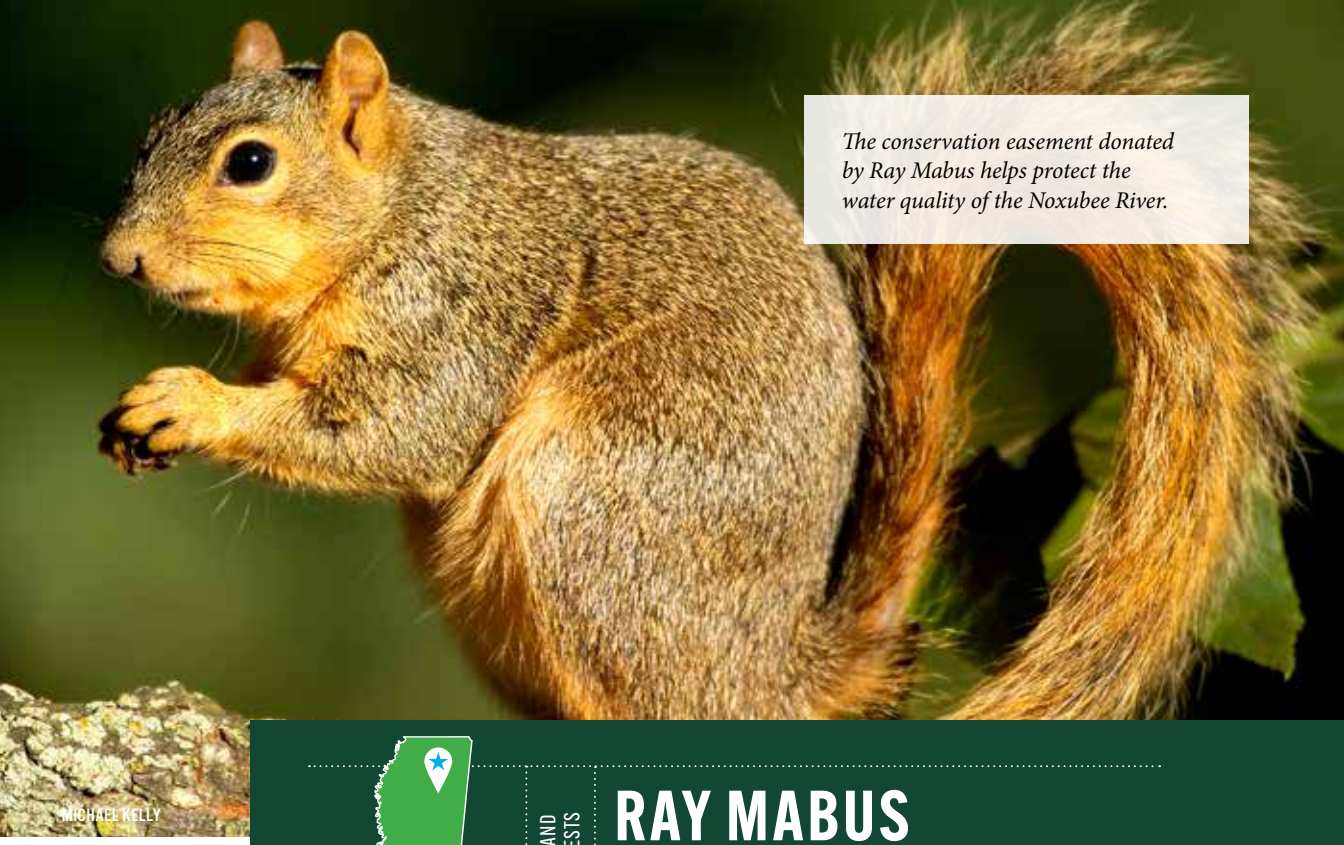
The Oxbow Group property has a diverse ecological complex. There is bottomland hardwood forest, loblolly pine, open field/wildlife food plots, a bottomland hardwood reforestation/restoration area, and a cemetery with grave markers from the 1800s.

The mixed bottomland hardwood forest is adjacent to and includes the riparian zones along Bear Creek and its tributaries. The open field/wildlife food plot areas are next to the mixed bottomland hardwoods and loblolly forests so that they enhance the management flexibility and diversity of the property.

The bottomland hardwood reforestation/restoration area is an example of the rich habitat diversity within the easement area. This area which was planted in row crops and small grains, was left fallow and allowed to propagate naturally with native species, primarily loblolly pine and various oaks.

The property has diverse plant and animal life. There are good populations of white-tailed deer and wild turkey on the property. Both resident wildlife and migratory waterfowl are available to hunt.

The streams that intersect the Oxbow Group property drain into the Big Black River. This river supports two state-listed mussel species, pyramid pigtoe, and rabbitfoot.



The conservation easement donated by Ray Mabus helps protect the water quality of the Noxubee River.

MICHAEL KELLY

UPLAND FORESTS

RAY MABUS

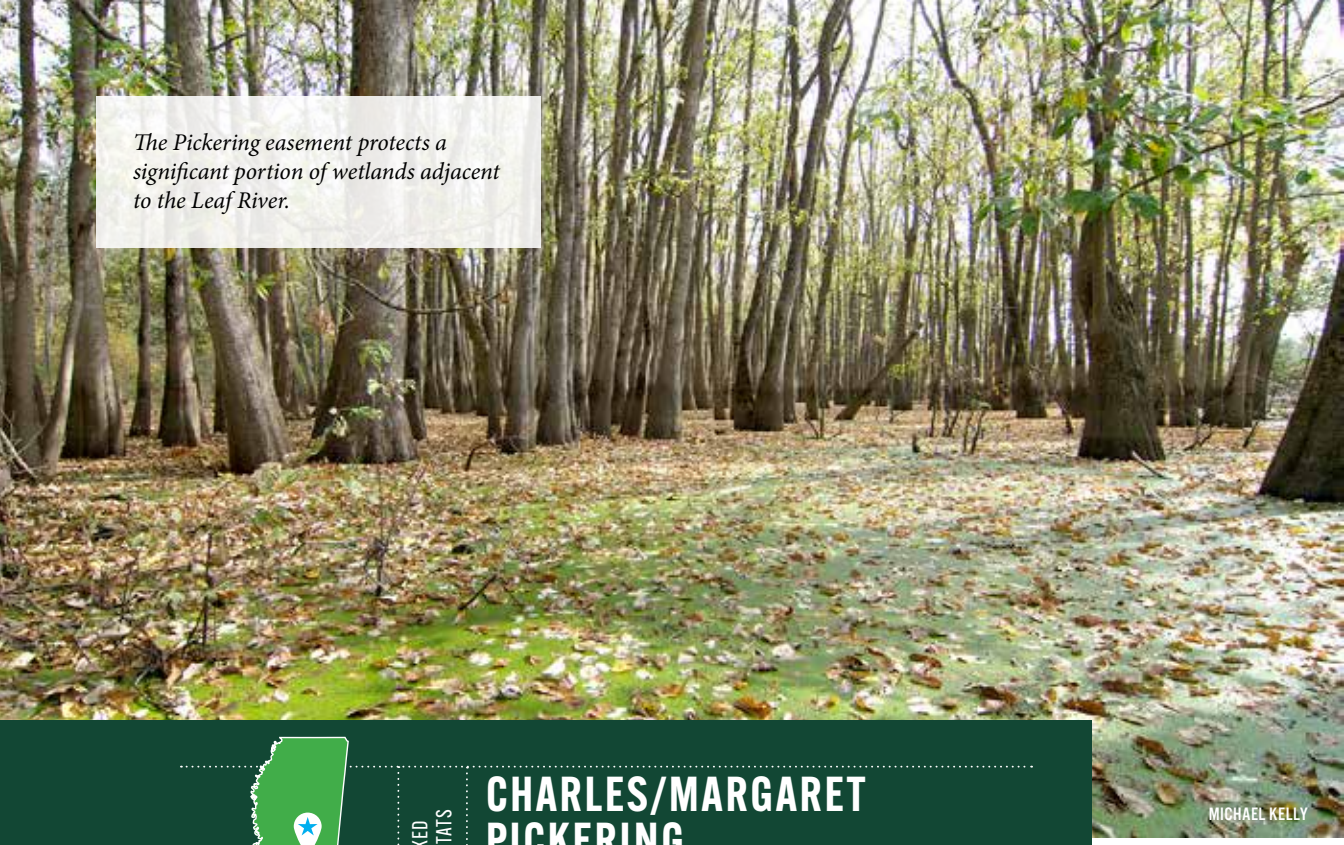
43 ACRES | CHOCTAW COUNTY, MS

Ray Mabus of Ackerman donated a conservation easement on land in Choctaw County in the east-central portion of Mississippi. The easement donated by Mabus is within the Sand Creek drainage basin, a tributary of the Noxubee River. It is adjacent to the Yockanookany River drainage basin, which is a tributary of the Pearl River.

This property, formerly the E. E. Mabus Nature Area Property, contains about 43 acres. John Rhinehart Mabus acquired it via fee purchase during the late 1800s. The property left the family sometime between 1913 and the mid-1930s. Raymond E. Mabus, Sr. purchased it in the mid-1930s. Raymond E. Mabus, Jr. acquired the property through his father's will in 1987.

The Mabus Property is in an upland site, with its natural drainage ways/cove areas largely intact. Oak-hickory is the climax forest type in this physiographic region. Nevertheless, the ecological nature of the Mabus property is such that a variety of successional features exist, including mixed pine-hardwood, upland hardwood, and cove hardwood.

So many acres in Mississippi were converted to loblolly pine plantations, the upland hardwood and mixed hardwood/pine habitat that this conservation easement is made up of needs to be protected.



The Pickering easement protects a significant portion of wetlands adjacent to the Leaf River.

MICHAEL KELLY

MIXED HABITATS

CHARLES/MARGARET PICKERING

390 ACRES | JONES COUNTY, MS

This property is owned by Charles W. Pickering, Sr., and his wife, Margaret Ann Pickering. It is approximately 390 acres and contains three primary habitat types. They are loblolly pine plantations, mixed bottomland hardwood forestland, and food plots/wildlife openings.

Approximately 227 acres of the Pickering property are loblolly pine plantations. Fish ponds have been drained and re-forested. About 142 acres of the property are mixed bottomland hardwood forests and are included within the historic Leaf River floodplain area. The remaining 21 acres are utilized as food plots and wildlife openings.

The food plots/wildlife openings serve several functions. They attract wildlife, act as fire breaks and open space, and provide the opportunity to watch wildlife. These openings are planted annually or more frequently with a mix of plants. No commercial crops are grown, and wildlife is the chief beneficiary.

Several wetlands maintain a transitional wetland character throughout the year. Seasonal backwater flooding is common and occurs via overland flow and through existing depressions, borrow sites, and old meander channels.

Parts of this property are along the Leaf River, and this easement helps protect the river and the wildlife and fisheries resources associated with it.

The diverse habitat types on the property support a diversity of wildlife. The following species could be found on the property, the threatened gopher tortoise, the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, the endangered Louisiana quillwort plant, the threatened yellow-blotched map turtle, the threatened Gulf sturgeon, the black pine snake, the pearl darter, and the bald eagle.

Tara Wildlife is world renowned for its trophy white-tailed deer.

BRUCE REID

BOTTOMLAND HARDWOODS

TARA WILDLIFE

6,488 ACRES | WARREN COUNTY, MS

Willow Point South, part of the Tara Wildlife easement, is approximately 6,488 acres within the Mississippi River alluvial floodplain. The Mississippi River floods part of the property annually. Most of the property lies on the unprotected side (batture) of the mainline Mississippi River levee system.

Tara Wildlife's mission is to manage its natural resources in an ecologically and economically sustainable manner while promoting conservation awareness and the wise use of those natural resources within a framework of both consumptive and non-consumptive opportunities.

Through partnerships with numerous conservation groups, Tara is active in

- black bear restoration
- management of neotropical bird habitat
- protection of nesting bald eagles
- wildlife and wetlands habitat management
- preservation and restoration of bottomland hardwood forests

Tara is committed to managing, developing, and sustainably using a broad spectrum of natural resources. Tara recognizes the importance of wildlife, timber, water, wetlands, agriculture, and recreation in maintaining a high quality of life for current and future generations.

Tara has extensive experience with conservation issues and shares its wildlife and habitat management expertise with others. Through educational and direct-performance activities that conserve land and protect wildlife, Tara also promotes an appreciation of the environment. This property is a model center for studying habitat and the animals that are part of the ecosystem.

Tara Wildlife is rich in plant and animal diversity. Its properties have excellent populations of white-tailed deer with live weights of up to 320 pounds, and bucks over 200 pounds are common.

Bottomland hardwood trees were restored on the Wetlands Solutions Mitigation Bank.

WILDLIFE MISSISSIPPI - ROB BALLINGER

UPLANDS

WETLANDS SOLUTION MITIGATION BANK

149 ACRES | GEORGE COUNTY, MS

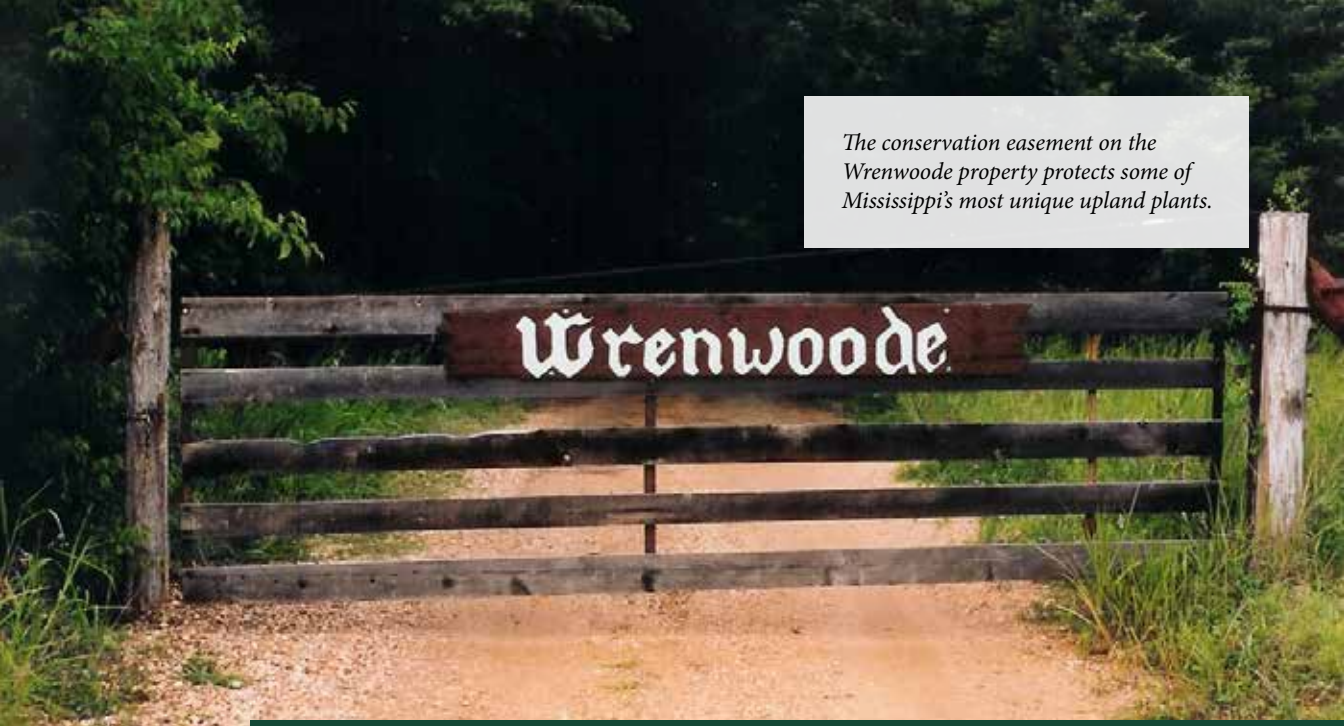
The Wetlands Solutions Mitigation Bank in George County was developed to provide mitigation for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits for unavoidable impacts to wetlands.

The purchase of the George County site for habitat restoration, enhancement, and preservation of bottomland hardwoods and wetlands, prevented it from being broken up and sold into smaller parcels for residential development.

The bank's restoration, enhancement, and preservation activities will generate wetland credits that can be sold to others to offset unavoidable wetland impacts within the geographic service area. A conservation easement secures perpetual preservation.

Historically, this site has been a bottomland hardwood system in the Pascagoula River floodplain. The bank's objective is to restore and replicate the historic bottomland hardwood conditions. All credits are bottomland hardwood wetland credits and will be used to offset impacts on similar habitat in the area.

There are 149 acres of uplands in the bank, but there are no available credits for non-wetland acres. However, the ecology and function of the two habitat types are interdependent. This mixture of upland and wetland habitat on the site increases the overall biological diversity.



The conservation easement on the Wrenwoode property protects some of Mississippi's most unique upland plants.

MISSISSIPPI LAND TRUST

OLD-GROWTH FOREST

WRENWOODE NATURAL AREA

177 ACRES | MONROE COUNTY, MS

In 1945, the Presbytery of Mississippi purchased 177 acres for a summer camp and conference center. This land is about 11 miles east of Okolona and 4 miles west of Amory,. The Presbytery constructed a lake and made other improvements. In 2000, the Presbytery of Mississippi donated the property to the Wrenwoode Trust and a perpetual conservation easement to the Mississippi Land Trust.

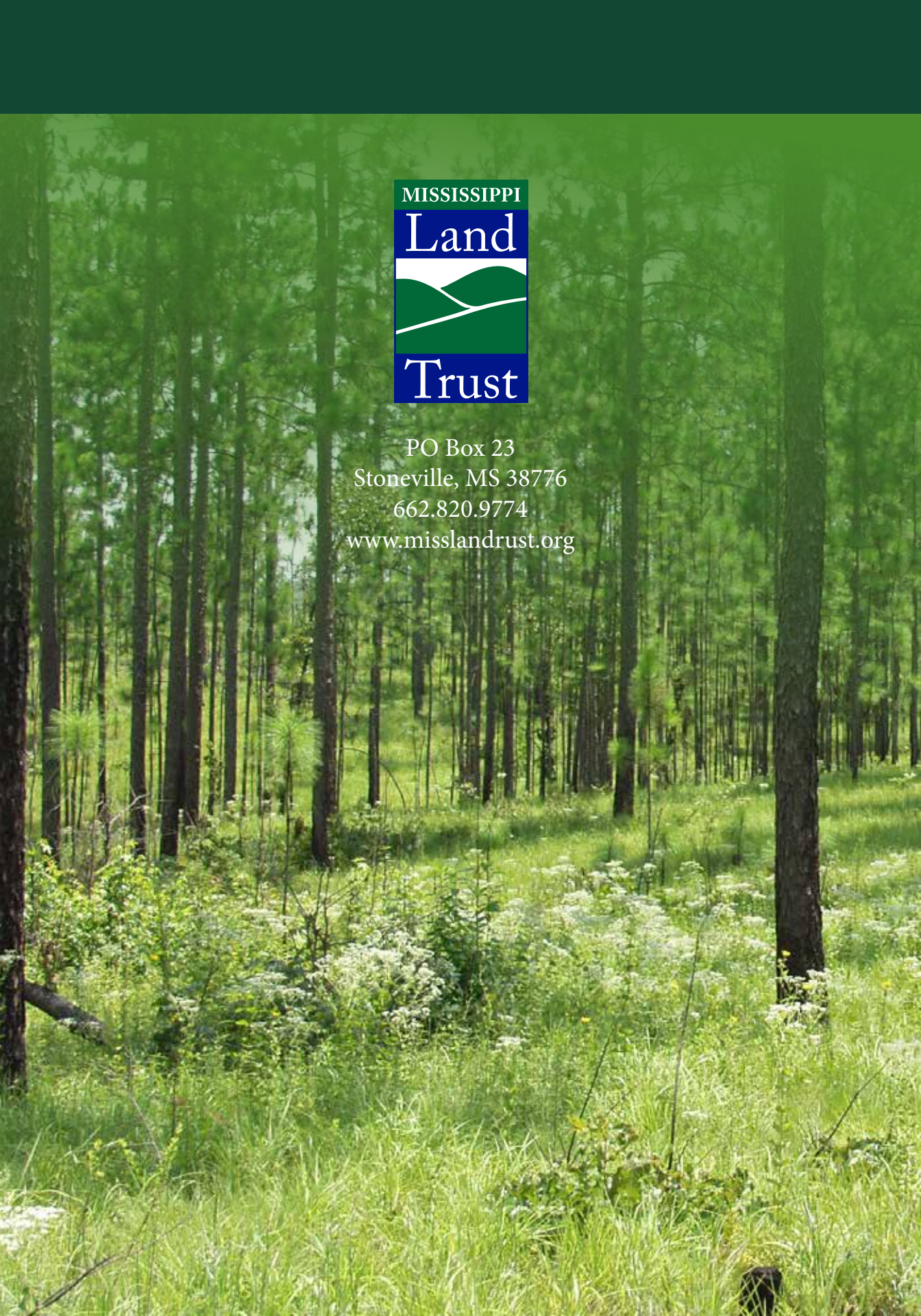
This property has significant conservation value due to its topography, old-growth forest, high plant diversity, and isolation. The maximum elevation of the property is around 300 feet, and it has one of Mississippi's tallest bluffs at 70 feet.

Several plant communities are found on the property. Twenty plants on the Mississippi Natural Heritage Program's Special Plant List have been recorded on the property. In addition, American ginseng, three birds orchid, shadow witch orchid, and climbing milkweed are found in the area.

The relatively old-growth forest of the Wrenwoode Natural Area is of exceptional ecological quality. This forest has not been disturbed for more than 60 years. The forest has an American beech with a diameter of nearly 48 inches and four Canadian hemlocks about 50 feet tall, the largest of this species in Mississippi.

The area provides prime wildlife habitat because of its rough topography and isolation. It offers excellent recreational opportunities, including hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing, limited hunting, and nature study. Few areas in Mississippi provide a view like the bluff across the floodplain.

The easement prohibits most commercial activities on the property. The camp facilities can be rebuilt and added to, but they cannot be significantly enlarged. The desires of the Presbytery are preserved in perpetuity.



MISSISSIPPI
Land
Trust

PO Box 23
Stoneville, MS 38776
662.820.9774
www.misslandrust.org