

MUSGROVE

ST. SIMONS LAND TRUST



A MESSAGE FROM BEN SLADE

This fall, I will be stepping down as executive director of the St. Simons Land Trust. This job has been one of the most satisfying undertakings during my long career of civic engagement in the Golden Isles.

Why has this work been so rewarding? There are several key elements that have led to our success since the Land Trust was formed in 2000.

First, there has been a growing consensus that without a dynamic program of land conservation, we will lose the essential qualities that make St. Simons such a wonderful place to live and visit. The next few years are crucial if we are to preserve the natural and scenic quality of our island home.

Second, the Land Trust has attracted a remarkable group of volunteers in many capacities. From our very engaged board of directors to the hundreds of volunteers, the list is inspiring. St. Simons is full of volunteers with an array of talents and a willingness to share with others.

Finally, our properties are open for regular enjoyment by residents and visitors of all ages. Our current project, Musgrove, will be a 260-acre park in the center of the island, and will allow everyone to experience and learn about our incomparable natural environment.

Ultimately, I hope our work will promote a feeling of responsibility in residents and visitors alike for the preservation of the special environment of this barrier island, now and forever.

Ben Slade, Executive Director, St. Simons Land Trust



Imagine a place where every resident can walk or ride easily from their home to a park or natural area for recreation and respite. Where children can ride their bikes safely from parks to wilderness areas, on trails and to fishing docks.

Where visitors experience the natural richness and wildlife of our rare ecosystems, and take home an impression of St. Simons that inspires them to take conservation action in their own community.

Imagine a community of people who value the natural and scenic character of St. Simons Island, and who care deeply about the natural and cultural assets of the island. These engaged stewards of the island educate others through their actions and their ethics. The St. Simons Land Trust's efforts have impact beyond St. Simons, and our work inspires a conservation ethic in present and future generations.

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LAND TRUST ACQUIRES PORTION OF MUSGROVE PROPERTY

The St. Simons Land Trust recently purchased 58 acres of Musgrove, the former home of Nancy Reynolds Bagley and of her son, Smith Bagley, on St. Simons Island.

In a three-phase agreement with the sellers, the acquisition is the first of three parcels that will total 260 acres of the 450-acre property. With this purchase, the first 58 acres will be protected in perpetuity. The family compound, which is frequently featured during the annual Christ Church Tour of Homes, is not included in the purchase agreement.

The current purchase includes 1,000 feet of deep-water frontage on Musgrove Creek and is the first of three closings scheduled for the coming two or more years. In support of the first two phases, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program is providing two \$1 million grants. Commitments from Land Trust board members and all other donors now amount to over half of the required \$10.65 million to complete all three planned purchases. The seller will return sufficient funds from the sales price to the Land Trust to create a stewardship endowment to go toward managing the 260-acre property.

The seller is the Brenn Foundation (www.brennfoundation.org), which was established by the late Smith Bagley (grandson of R.J. Reynolds) to focus on public policy issues such as the environment, human rights, and civic engagement. To preserve Musgrove and to raise additional funds to support their mission, the Brenn Foundation sought a transaction with the Land Trust.

"We commend the Brenn Foundation for their commitment to the perpetual conservation of this historic and ecologically significant land," said Frances McCrary, chairman of the Land Trust board of directors.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) agreed in December to hold a conservation easement on the property. A conservation easement offers a permanent legal guarantee that the property will never be developed.



“WE COMMEND THE BRENN FOUNDATION FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE PERPETUAL CONSERVATION OF THIS HISTORIC AND ECOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT LAND.”

"The Musgrove property is a significant addition of habitat to the permanently protected lands in the Altamaha estuary and the entire coast," said Jason Lee, program manager in DNR's Wildlife Resources Division. Lee noted that the total property to be purchased by the Land Trust includes nearly 200 acres of maritime forest, 60 acres of rare pond pine flatwoods and rare plants. "The state-held conservation easement guarantees proper management of these habitats," he added. "Georgia DNR is excited to partner with the Land Trust in this conservation effort."

With the addition of nature trails, the property will eventually become a public park. However, public access will not be available until all three parcels have been acquired.

"Once we have acquired all 260 acres, the Land Trust will have protected 1,036 acres on the island," noted McCrary.

THE CAMPAIGN TO PRESERVE MUSGROVE

GOAL: \$11 MILLION

The total cost of the Musgrove property is \$10.65 million. Once the purchase of all three parcels is complete, the sellers will return a sufficient amount (\$1.5 million) to the St. Simons Land Trust to create a stewardship endowment for maintaining the park in perpetuity.

By raising \$11 million for the project, the St. Simons Land Trust will have additional funds for initial improvements at the site to prepare for public opening. To date, the Land Trust has raised \$5.6 million toward this goal.

MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE

A longtime Land Trust supporter has provided a membership challenge to encourage the community to endorse the Musgrove purchase specifically and to assist in the work of the Land Trust generally.

- Current Land Trust members at all levels who increase their membership gifts by Dec. 30, 2016, will earn a dollar toward the \$11 million campaign for each dollar of increase. A membership increase of \$50, \$500 or \$5,000 yields the same amount to the campaign.
- Community residents and visitors wishing to join the Land Trust for the first time or after a lapse in membership will trigger a gift from the challenge equal to the amount of their full new membership.

NAME _____

Please print your name as you wish it to appear in Land Trust publications.
 Please list me as "anonymous"

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

PHONE _____

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MY CHECK IS ENCLOSED for \$_____

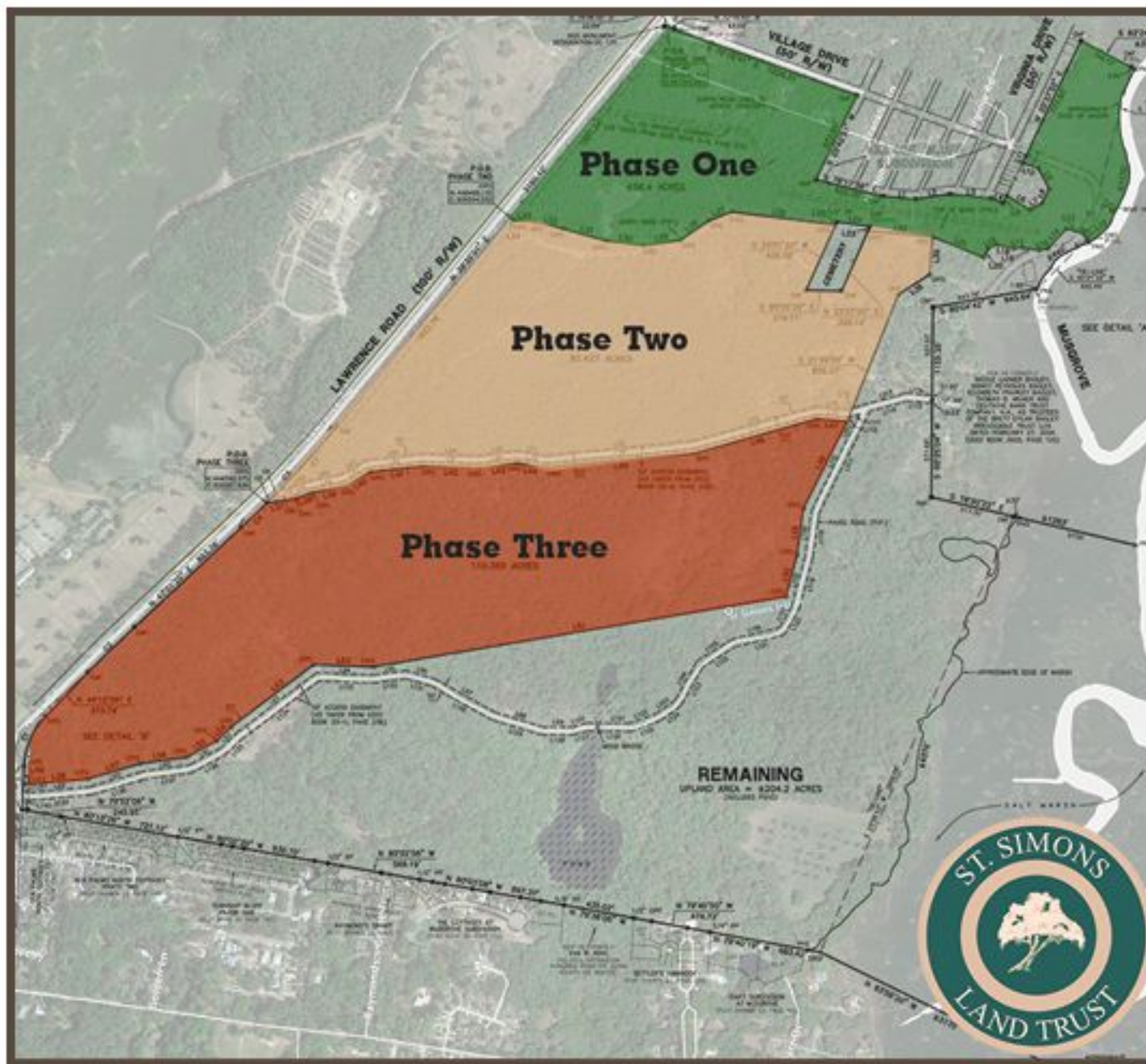
PLEASE CHARGE MY VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS

NAME ON CARD _____

CARD NUMBER _____ EXP. _____

Meet the challenge! Become a member of the Land Trust or renew your membership today, and help us fulfill our mission.

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



MAP OF MUSGROVE PROPERTY: ACQUISITION IN THREE PHASES



“ WITH THE ADDITION OF NATURE TRAILS, THE PROPERTY WILL EVENTUALLY BECOME A PUBLIC PARK. ”

A CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP TO PROTECT A RARE AND BEAUTIFUL SITE

Musgrove contains some of the most ecologically significant habitats in Georgia.

The positive impact of its preservation extends not just to the immediate area of the property, but up the Altamaha River Corridor and to the river’s estuary and delta, five miles to the north. This alone endows the land with the highest priority for protection.

“The Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have determined that Musgrove warrants protection due to its unique habitats and their location at the nexus of the Altamaha River and Coastal Georgia,” says Jason Lee, program manager in DNR’s Wildlife Resources Division.

In addition to the funding the Georgia DNR has helped to secure for Musgrove, the Land Trust has benefitted and will continue to benefit from the invaluable scientific expertise the DNR brings. DNR has an ongoing role in the Land Trust’s management of Cannon’s Point and its many rare habitats. The partnership is further strengthened with the Musgrove acquisition. “The Musgrove property is an ecologically important addition to the conservation landscape and is a critical piece for the state’s conservation priorities,” says Lee.



nesting ground and habitat for coastal species such as osprey, wood storks, painted buntings, and diamondback terrapins. Its shoreline is also home to rare plants like Florida privet and climbing buckthorn.

The extremely rare habitat and geographic features at Musgrove give the land special significance for environmental conservation. For example:

- The coexistence of mature maritime forest and pond pine wetlands is an exceedingly rare feature, found today on only two other Georgia barrier islands (Cumberland, Sapelo).
- Much of the land is composed of non-tidal forested wetlands that are in national decline, calling for intensive efforts to save and preserve them.
- The unusual topography acts to defend against erosion, storm surge, and sea level rise.
- The distinctive marsh edge habitat, which supports marsh foraging birds with essential structure for nesting and roosting, is rapidly declining due to development within the region.
- It supports essential habitat for fisheries as well as threatened, endangered, and protected species.



“ THE MARSH SHORELINE PROVIDES AN IMPORTANT HABITAT FOR COASTAL SPECIES. ”

The Musgrove property is made up of maritime forest, rare freshwater wetlands, rare coastal shell midden woodlands, Florida scrub communities, tidal creeks, and saltmarsh. Its marsh shoreline provides an important



A BIT OF HISTORY

The Musgrove property was formerly one of the St. Simons Island plantations that grew long-staple cotton until their abandonment in the early days of the Civil War.

The name Musgrove honors a noted Colonial-era interpreter and businesswoman named Mary Musgrove. Musgrove was born 'Coosaponakeesa' in 1700 to a Creek mother and an English trader along the Ocmulgee River. She changed her name to 'Mary' following her education in an English school in South Carolina. At age 16, she married John Musgrove, and together they ran a successful trading post in Savannah and acquired lands in coastal Georgia. Musgrove also became famous as an interpreter and go-between for the colonists in their dealings with Native Americans.

Between the 1790s and the 1860s, hundreds of enslaved African-Americans lived and worked on St. Simons Island's 14 plantations. The island is the ancestral home of many Gullah-Geechee who are still living in coastal Georgia. A Geechee Cemetery located on the east side of Musgrove is still retained and maintained by those descendants.

In the 1930s, Nancy Reynolds Bagley, daughter of the tobacco titan R.J. Reynolds, built a compound on the Musgrove site. Today, the built portion of the property (not part of the Land Trust purchase) is run as a non-profit retreat and conference center.

The Land Trust has plans to partner with the Coastal Georgia Historical Society to capture and share elements of the site's history for the public to enjoy.



A WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

Millions of islanders and visitors have driven, biked, or walked past Musgrove with no opportunity to explore its extensive beauty. The Land Trust's goal is to enable every one of them to experience this rare land.

The long-term plan is for a small waterfront access area to be nestled within the 260-acre wilderness, which will be crisscrossed by hiking and biking trails. This waterfront area is expected to stand on its own as one of our community's must-do destinations – a keystone in the island's network of public parks and natural areas. The land surrounding the waterfront area will remain important natural habitat, protected by a conservation easement held by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Public hiking and biking at Musgrove will create new opportunities for healthy outdoor activity in our community. The trails will bring us closer to the Land Trust Strategic Plan vision of "2000 acres protected and connected" by a system of trails throughout the island. The Land Trust has already linked its parks with more than 10 miles of trails on the island; Musgrove will provide additional connectivity to this island-wide trail system.

"With more than three miles of paths already on Musgrove, we're committed to holding ecological disturbance to a minimum when we establish new trails," says Greer Brown, former Land Trust Board Chairman and Chair of the Musgrove Campaign Committee.



“ THIS AREA IS EXPECTED TO STAND ON ITS OWN AS ONE OF OUR COMMUNITY'S MUST-DO DESTINATIONS. ”

KAYAK TRAILS

Musgrove Creek, Village Creek and the saltmarsh area contain numerous waterways and rivulets that act as kayak trails – more opportunities for everyone to be active while exploring nature.

Upon public opening, slated for 2018 after the funds have been raised to acquire all 260 acres, a boat ramp will cater to kayaks, paddleboards, and small motorized boats. This will accommodate the Department of Natural Resources' emergency and research vessels.

A proposed fishing dock along Musgrove Creek will invite visitors to enjoy the peace of the surrounding tidal marsh, marine and avian life.

