

**PROFILES OF CONSERVATION EASEMENT DONORS
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ALL PROFILES WRITTEN BY FRANK MCINTOSH

PAUL COWLEY

Paul Cowley says of himself, “If I have a fault, it’s that I like to roam.”

That begins to explain how a landscaper (running his own crew at 16) and stone mason (“working 60 hours a week when it was warm enough to work”) from upstate New York arrived on the banks of the Satilla River in Camden County, Ga. via the Pebble Beach Links in California, where he was a greenskeeper.

Paul’s landscape and greenskeeping background eventually lead to a career as a golf course designer and that path brought him to the southeast, a hotbed of golf design at the time. He has worked with Davis Love III, on many projects over the last 15 years, as well as projects of his own.

Paul says his love of roaming is how he became a swamp rat. “Everyone’s image of swamps is of an impassable landscape; but down along the Satilla the regular floods keep the understory open. You can cover a lot of ground in there, particularly compared to some of the higher areas.”



Paul Cowley and Shelley Hice

Wandering the flood plains—some were part of properties that he first began acquiring in the 1990s and others were neighboring lands that were just too enticing not to nose around in a little—Paul formed a vision of how to protect these amazing habitats that became what he refers to as the “five-acre plan.”

“I sold five acre lots to five friends as part of my first 65 acre purchase,” Paul notes. “This worked well so I teamed up with close friends to further our conservation vision on a larger scale.”

This collaboration became the Great Satilla Preserve (GSP), on which a nearly 2,000 acre conservation easement in Camden County, Ga. was donated to the Georgia Land Trust in 2006. The sale of lots on associated uplands allowed the donors to retire the note on the property and for Paul to work toward achieving more of his dream of “protecting high and low river swamp from ever being logged again.”

That dream helped drive another partnership that donated a 300-acre Satilla Bluff Preserve conservation easement adjacent to GSP to the Georgia Land Trust in 2008. This donation preserves the five acre plan, with landowners in the associated uplands having use of the protected lands for peaceful recreation, access to the river and some limited timber operations. “The plan with the timber is to selectively harvest the rest of it and then encourage the regeneration of the natural regime. Fortunately, much of the property has not had so many rotations of logging that the understory has been destroyed.”

Cowley’s love of the area is not limited to swamps and bottomlands. He is also an admirer of the longleaf ecosystem. Areas within these Satilla easement properties that will support longleaf, including some fine sandhill areas, will be restored to longleaf.

Cowley and Shelley Hice, a long-time partner in various projects, are working to share their enthusiasm for these habitats via education and outreach.

They have formed the Jaxon Hice Satilla River Center, an educational/interpretive facility located on a tract adjacent to the Great Satilla Preserve. Named for Shelley's late husband, the Center will feature rustic cabins for visiting students, artists, and attendees of various meetings envisaged for the center.



Boon's Lake on easement property

The center will also house an organic community farming operation and will provide a focal point for efforts toward achieving another of Cowley's visions, a protected corridor along the Satilla from Highway 301 to Woodbine (around 90 miles) and eventually to Waycross.

At present, the Center is primarily a non-profit with a site and a vision, with a self-described "broke philanthropist" as one of its prime movers; but as Cowley notes, "At one point the Great Satilla Preserve and Satilla Bluff Preserve were nothing more than pipe dreams and now we've accomplished them.

"We have a track record, and we hope we can network it and achieve even more. And if we never get anything else done, at least we can say, look what we *did* manage to do."

Knowing Cowley's energy and need to roam, we imagine he will get a lot more done.