



The Tallassee-Glover Tract

Athens-Clarke County, Georgia

Ecology, Topography, History, and Land Use

compiled by Karen Porter
September, 2011



The Tallassee-Glover Tract

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Odum School of Ecology

The University of Georgia

September 20, 2011

To: To Whom It May Concern

From Karen G. Porter, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
Odum School of Ecology

Re: Preliminary information on ecology, topography, history and land use

The 570-acre tract near Tallassee Shoals on the Middle Oconee River includes habitats and environmentally sensitive aquatic and plant communities that I have not seen in other parts of Athens-Clarke County and that are rare in the region. Many are indicators of high quality long-lived environments: a diverse and mature oak-hickory forest, Heritage trees, an extensive holly forest, and cool spring-fed streams with species that only live in clean water. There is a notable absence of privet.

I believe that this is the result of history, land use practices and topography. Compared with the rest of ACC and the region, much of the tract has had minimal disturbance. The attached 1938 USDA aerial photograph shows hardwood forests that persist today. In contrast, the majority of land in ACC was cleared and farmed. Members of the Fowler family, the first non-Native landowners, have owned this land for nine generations and one member currently has a grass-fed beef farm on part of the original property. Recent owners of the Tallassee-Glover Tract have kept it intact making the forest some of the oldest in the County.

There is significant topographic relief with ravines bounded by steep slopes, some of which drop 100 feet in an equivalent linear distance. (A figure showing streams and topography is attached.) Several of the slopes are north facing. This orientation creates cool microclimates that can support species uncommon to this area. Spring-fed streams in the ravines have aquatic indicator species that are found only in clean water. Insects and bird abundances suggest that this is an area of high biodiversity. Over 55 butterfly species have been collected on this and adjacent land and there are only 35 more in the state. Thirty-six bird species were seen in a morning walk.

The Upper Forks of the Oconee River, which converge in Athens GA, provided rich resources that supported large Creek populations and promoted strong relationships through trade. This region was sacred and called "Beloved Land". Tallassee was a Creek settlement located around the shoals in the Middle Oconee. Fishing weirs found in Tallassee Shoals today were probably part of an extensive fishery for Shad that ran up the Oconee from the coast to spawn. Shards of pottery and massive quartz cairns have recently been found on the tract. Tallassee Mico, sometimes translated as King, and other Creek leaders negotiated with the British and Americans to keep control of the Upper Forks of the Oconee and the Oconee River basin, even meeting with

President Washington in New York City to sign the Treaty of 1790. Eventually the region was taken over by American settlers forcing the Creeks to fight for and eventually lose their Beloved Land.

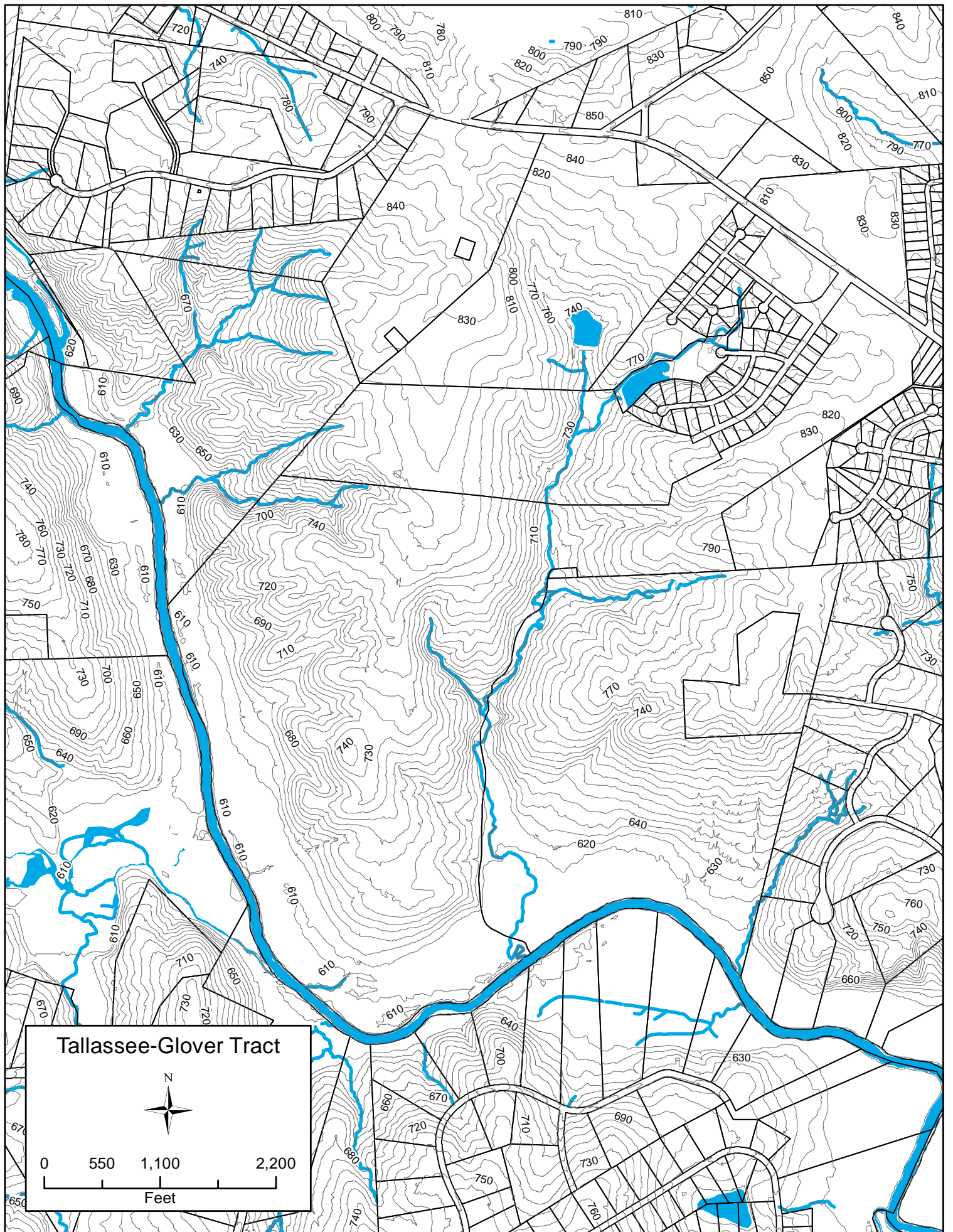
This tract has a combination of topography, unusual habitats, biodiversity and history that is rare in this area. I am sure that it can be a site of significant research and it is a unique and valuable educational resource.

Attached figures:

- Topography, streams and parcel lines on the Tallassee-Glover Tract. The stream systems shown in blue are on the northwest and east sides of the property. The Middle Oconee River in bold blue flows along the west and south boundaries.
- The 1938 USDA Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service aerial photograph of the area with the Middle Oconee River on the west and south of the tract. The original dam on Tallassee Shoals appears in the upper left. Extensive hardwood forests appear dark and cleared agricultural land appears light in the photograph.



Hopthle Mico, or the Tallassee King of the Creeks,
by John Trumbull. Trumbull sketched Mico's likeness upon
the occasion of his visit to George Washington in 1790.
- courtesy New York Public Library





Tallasee-Glover Tract, Oct. 8, 1938
USDA Agricultural Adjustment Agency ATG-3-96 1:20,000



Odum School of Ecology

The University of Georgia

Memo Date: September 13, 2011

Memo To: Whom it May Concern

Memo From: James W. Porter, Ph.D.
Meigs Professor of Ecology
Associate Dean, Odum School of Ecology

Memo Re.: Tallassee-Glover Tract

Conservation interest in the Tallassee-Glover Tract is a very exciting development. This kind of large, contiguous tract of old-growth forested land is exceedingly rare in the Georgia Piedmont, and certainly unique in Athens-Clarke Co. I have been collecting butterflies there and in the adjacent conservation development at Kenny-Ridge for about five years. What started out as an amateur hobby has turned into a professional pursuit as the stunning biodiversity of the butterfly fauna here has emerged. Of the 90 butterfly species found in Georgia, this land has at least 55. We are still counting. I believe that there are more butterfly species here than anywhere else in Athens-Clarke Co. Several exceptionally rare species (specimens figured below are from this land), such as the Great Purple Hairstreak (Left Below), Henry's Elfin (Middle), and the Green Hairstreak (Right) are found here, but (as far as I can tell) nowhere else in Athens-Clarke Co.

Moth collecting in this area has already uncovered 685 species. Possibly more than 1000 will be found. These numbers are not just impressive, they demonstrate the existence of a "biodiversity hotspot" which is worthy of preservation. Alternatively, the loss or destruction of this tract of land would be a major blow to this region's biological diversity and ecological integrity.

I applaud conservation efforts for this tract of land. I will contribute both time and money towards its preservation. This one is important!





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September 15, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to hike with a small group over many miles of the 570-acre tract of land between the Middle Oconee River and Tallassee Road near the Rivercliff neighborhood just downstream from Tallassee Shoals in northwestern Athens-Clarke County. The tract is not only very beautiful, but also very valuable from the standpoint of conserving land that stands in high-quality forest near the Oconee River.

Both the topography and the forests of the tract are impressive. The oak-hickory forest (dominated by White Oak) along rolling hills above the river floodplain throughout the western portion of the property appears quite mature for our area. The Northern Red Oak-dominated canopy above the grove of mature American Holly on a long, wide east-facing slope above the large stream on the eastern side of the tract appears even more impressive in height. The few small areas currently or formerly planted in pine on some of the tracts' uplands detract only slightly from the overall forest quality of the tract.

The northwestern part of the tract, meanwhile, is home to steep ravine slopes along small, spring-fed streams flowing westward to the Middle Oconee River. It is rare to see ravine slopes like these so close to the river and within an intact wooded river corridor anywhere in the upper Oconee River basin. I would be surprised if they are not found to be botanically significant. Additionally, the vigorous flow of one of these small streams during the drought conditions when I visited is a testament to the intact, healthy hydrology that's in place in such a well-wooded area. (In my opinion it would best, even and especially in planning any potential trails for this area, to avoid the installation of any paved surfaces, as such would be a detriment the hydrology of the area as well as its general character.)

This small stream anecdotally demonstrates the fact that this well-wooded area probably possesses very good capacity for groundwater recharge – an important consideration in a section of the Middle Oconee watershed just a few miles upstream of an Athens-Clarke County drinking water intake. It is a reminder, also, that the smart land-conservation plans in place along the upper North Oconee River and Sandy Creek in Athens-Clarke County ought to be mirrored along the Middle Oconee River too. With this goal in mind, a brief glance at aerial photography reveals the entire river corridor near Tallassee Shoals – this tract included – to be a prime target area for river-related land conservation. I hope it can be permanently preserved.

Sincerely,

Ben Emanuel

A Considerable Tract of Country

“However trifling it may appear on the map, it is a considerable tract of country.”

In 1790, the people of the Muscogee-Creek Nation were anticipating the results of their peace embassy to New York, sent there on invitation to meet with President Washington and his cabinet, and end their protracted war with Georgia over the Oconee River basin. Central to peace was a final settlement and demarcation of a boundary between the Creek Nation and the State of Georgia. The Creek delegates knew what compromises would be acceptable to their people, and largely achieved these goals, including the recovery of lands along their southern border with Georgia. Back in the Creek Nation, the provisions, including one establishing the Oconee River as the western limit to Georgia settlement, were well received by assembled leaders. However, when the treaty line was explained, the council found Georgia’s boundary to extend across the Oconee headwaters to the South Fork, or Apalachee River. This was out of the question for many of the leading headmen, and in a dramatic show of protest, they threw their tobacco into the council fire in disgust. Their view prevailed in subsequent assemblies and the standing of at least one Creek leader was irreparably damaged over the issue. As far as the Creek Nation was concerned, Georgia would have nothing west of the North Oconee River.



Hopothle Mico, or the Talassee King of the Creeks, by John Trumbull. Trumbull sketched Mico’s likeness upon the occasion of his visit to George Washington in 1790.

- courtesy New York Public Library

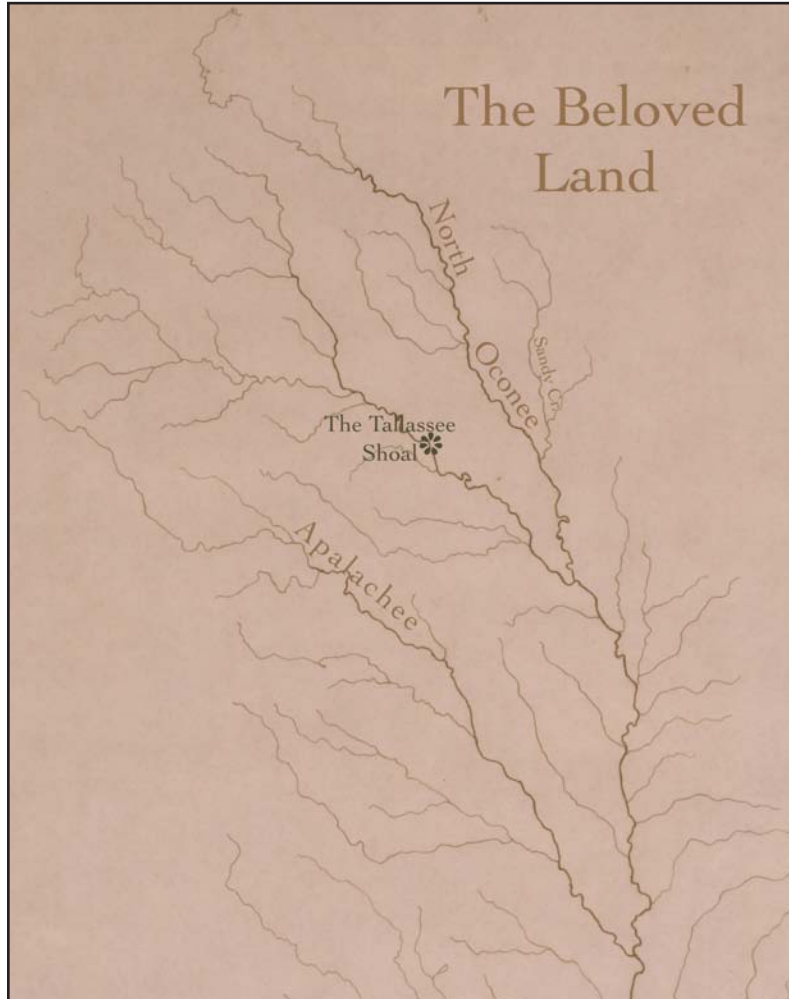
Although trifling when seen on a map, the land in the Forks of Oconee was Atchakee—Sacred, Beloved, Holy Ground. Through the heart of this country, which today incorporates the counties of Clarke, Jackson, Barrow, Oconee and Banks, flows the Middle Oconee River. A major shoal along its course bears the name Tallassee.

This was the name of a large Creek Tribal town located near the center of the Nation. The special interest which the people of Tallassee and Creek leaders like Tallassee Mico held for the Oconee Forks, strongly indicates that the town maintained winter settlements here from which its people fished, hunted, traded. These winter settlements at the shoals may have served Tallassee Mico’s vision of restoring the “Beloved Path”—trade with Georgia, and hunting rights east of North Oconee.

The bond which Tallassee and other Creek towns held for the Forks suggests a far older link. Ruins of ancient fish weirs are visible in the river bed, pottery shards are readily found where the grounds have been disturbed, and notable cairns of select white quartz, all are evidence of this older bond. Bottomlands here are choice agricultural sites and clay deposits are abundant in the river banks.

As early as 1773, before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Georgia leaders had learned of the unyielding devotion which the Creek people held for the Oconee country. It was then that Creek leaders informed Georgia of the Oconee’s “Beloved” status—a status reserved for the exceptionally valuable. The earliest Georgia surveys of the Oconee valley occurred during the Revolution which provoked a violent response by the Creek people, and played a role in bringing them into an otherwise exclusively Anglo civil war.

It was in the interests of peace and the restoration of trade that Tallasee Mico met with Georgians after the Revolution in the fall of 1783. State leaders needed land to meet their obligations to veterans who fought for Georgia's independence. And so it was with caution, that Tallasee Mico promoted a compromise: the state would gain land on the eastern bank of the Oconee, for restoring the "Old Beloved Path," linking Georgia and the Creek nation in new bonds of friendship and trade. In laying the foundation for this peaceful and profitable relationship, he made two important reservations for his support: hunting rights would continue in the ceded lands until actual settlement, and Georgia must accept the "first water" of Oconee as the boundary line. Georgia honored



none of his conditions and breaking established protocol never troubled itself with gaining the Creek Nation's ratification of the proposed treaty. For the Georgians, Tallasee Mico's signature was enough, and immediate surveys began under armed escort. Repeated warnings from Creek councils were not taken seriously, and promotion of new Georgia land for Anglo settlement went forward. Beginning in 1786, the Oconee War broke up Georgia's new settlements and nearly ruined the state's economy.

This was the war which brought Georgia to unanimously adopt the Constitution in anxious expectation of federal intervention. This was the war which the Washington Administration aimed to end with the treaty in New York, only to provoke civil unrest and disobedience among Georgians who saw the Creek treaty as a federal land theft. From the 1790 meeting in New York to the fall of 1792, the treaty slumbered, and in spite of the presence of federal peacekeepers in the valley, crossing the Oconee became a double-dare for Georgians and Creeks alike. As for the boundary, a federal survey stalled at the Oconee Forks while the headwaters remained under Creek dominion until the following winter.

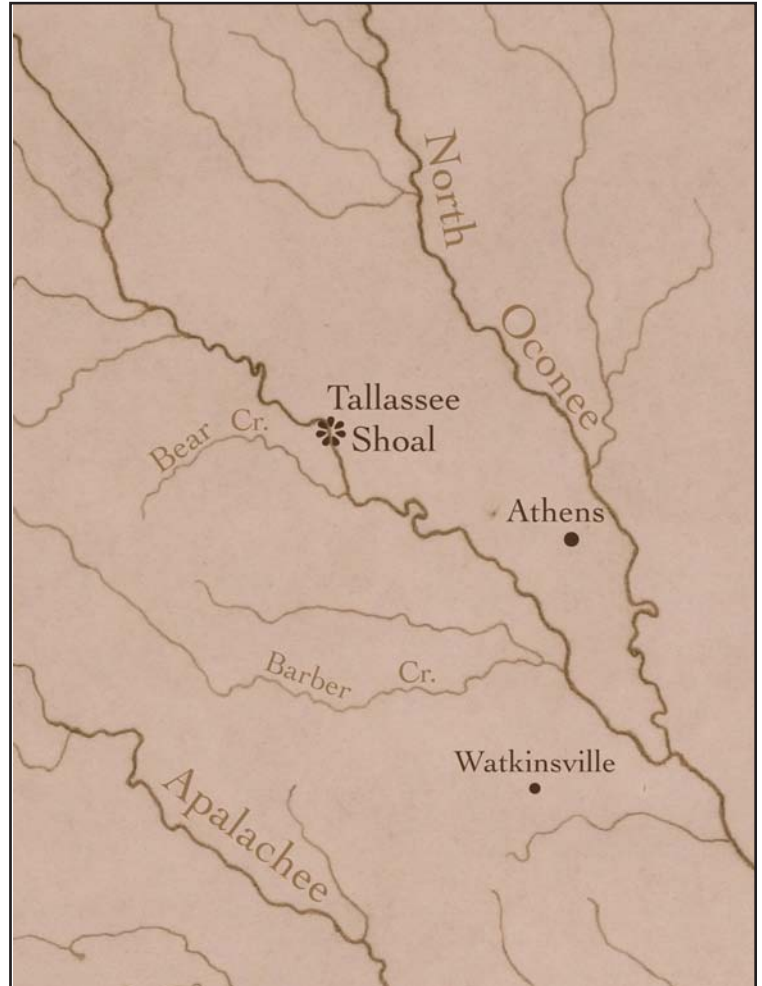
"I hear from the Indians, respecting the inhabitants on the Oconee driving great gangs of cattle over on this side in the fork of Julla Packa (Apalachee), and from that up, forty or fifty miles higher; besides that the white people had built two or three houses on this side. . . I heard, that the Cowetas were just going out to drive off all the stocks and kill some of the inhabitants. . . I have had more complaints laid before me of the like nature. . . that the white people came and encamped out, thirty or forty miles on this side of the river, and hunted, with fire, and all day with rifles, and destroyed the game so bad, that they can hardly find a turkey or a deer to kill, and with great gangs of dogs hunting bear; this the Indians say they cannot put up with. . . (American State Papers, Indian Affairs, Vol. 1, p. 381)

With clear provocation and policy, Georgia militants vandalized the Beloved Forks igniting the wrath of Creek hunters. Tallasee Mico, disillusioned by Georgia's ill treatment, emerged as a champion of the lands. We don't know if he personally joined the Creek cattle drive, but he certainly saw the scalps of Georgians found over the "first water" of his Beloved Forks. The man who fostered friendship with Georgia in its darkest hours of war--honoring his father's wishes to do so--lived the balance of his life its implacable enemy.

More than a decade of diplomacy and warfare defined the struggle for the Forks. Its significance can be found in some surprising places. Spanish governors in both Pensacola and New Orleans, promised Creek leaders that their claim would be defended in ongoing Spanish-American talks. News of Georgia's incursion across the North Oconee reached the Ohio Valley, adversely affecting peace talks between Tribal leaders and United States officials at Niagara. Chief Brant of the Six Nations explained:

“. . . at the rapids of the Miami (River), messengers from the Creek nations arrived there, and brought authentic information of the white people having encroached upon that part of the confederacy. This intelligence at once gave a change to the face of the proceedings, and, probably, was the sole cause of the abrupt termination of the negotiations for peace. . .” (ASP, Indian Affairs, p. 478)

The last military engagement over the Forks occurred in the Spring of 1794, when Georgia militia were routed by Creek warriors near High Shoals on the Apalachee. By then, the balance of power in America was changing. Increased political pressure from the United States, a growing militancy in Georgia, failing Creek allies and an unwise war with the Chickasaws brought Creek leaders to surrender what they had so passionately held. At the Treaty of Colerain in 1796, the Creek delegation aggressively sparred with both U. S. and Georgia commissioners in nearly three weeks of intense diplomacy. Once again, the Creeks prevailed on several notable fronts, but bitterly failed in their bid to retain the Beloved Forks. Witnessing the distress of the Creek representatives, and understanding the significance of the moment, the U. S. commissioners pressed the issue, bluntly asking, *“Is this the assent of the nation?”* The interpreter responded, *“Yes. I am asked to speak the sense of the (Creek) representation, and it is this: The matter in question has been laid before them, since they have been here. It was a strange and a hard matter; a thing which they had not explained to them in New York, and could not explain to the nation. It was with the utmost reluctance that they consented to give the land away; it was like pulling out their hearts, and throwing them away.”*



Steven Scurry
Athens, Ga.
Nowhere Shire
Sept. 2011

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Old trees, clear streams — a rare tract

By Lee Shearer

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CONSERVATIONISTS WORKING TO SAVE LAND IN A-C

Local and state conservationists hope to save what they believe may be the largest chunk of undeveloped private land in Athens-Clarke County, or maybe in much of Northeast Georgia — a 570-acre tract slated to go on the real estate market next year.

Partly bounded by Tallassee Road, the Kenney Ridge conservation subdivision and the Middle Oconee River, the land is remarkable for features such as century-old forests, dozens of butterfly species and clear streams, said retired University of Georgia ecologist Karen Porter, one

of the people working to preserve the acreage.

The oldest available aerial photographs of Athens-Clarke County show the land was forested back in 1938, when much of the county, and the rest of Northeast Georgia, was covered in eroding cotton farms.

The tract doesn't even have much privet, the invasive shrub that plagues river floodplains throughout Northeast Georgia.

And besides its ecological value, the tract was an important — even sacred — spot for the Creek Indians who once lived in the area, according to Athens historian Stephen Scurry,

See **CONSERVATIONISTS** on A8



A 570-acre chunk of undeveloped land in Athens-Clarke County features century-old forests and clean-running creeks. • Lee Callaway/Correspondent

CONSERVATIONISTS WANT TO SAVE RARE TRACT from A1

who has helped Porter and others gather information about the land, owned by the Glover family of Atlanta.

The owners want to see the land preserved, and contacted the Athens Land Trust earlier this year to tell them about their plans and hopes that the land could stay in its natural state, said Nancy Stangle, the trust's executive director.

She praised the family for its willingness to work with conservationists to keep the land undeveloped — and for offering the tract at a low price of \$1.5 million.

What happens next is still not clear. Stangle and others have met with the Athens-Clarke County government, which has money set aside for greenspace acquisition. Meetings also have been held with the Georgia Conservancy.

Part of the land may wind up being developed as a conservation subdivision, where a small part of the land is cleared for houses but most is kept natural. Some of the acreage might become part of the county's greenway.

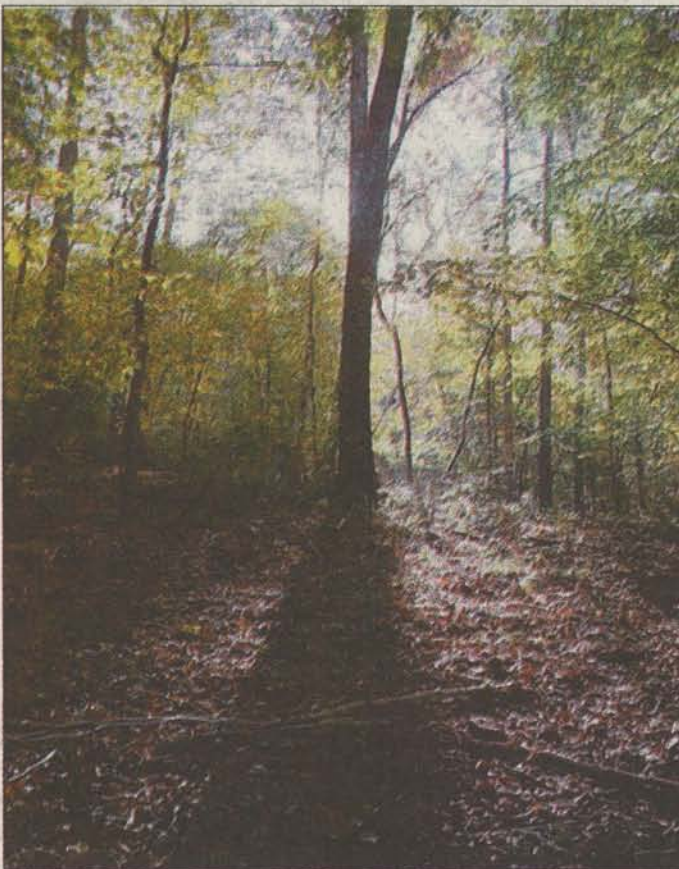
Those important details won't be decided anytime soon, so the Athens Land Trust hopes to get a short-term loan to acquire the land while members hash out a plan.

"The organization believes this is a rare opportunity and is working in conjunction with (Athens-Clarke County), other environmental organizations, and neighbors to see it protected," said Athens Land Trust board member Lara Mathes in a statement. "Athens Land Trust has met with The Conservation Fund about a bridge loan that would provide funding to acquire the property so that conservation options can be explored."

The Conservation Fund helps groups like the Athens Land Trust protect land by providing money to hold land off the market temporarily.

The state's oldest conservation organization, the Georgia Conservancy, will also play a role, said Shannon Mayfield, the conservancy's director of land conservation.

Mayfield toured the land recently with the group's



Lee Callaway/Correspondent

The Glover family of Atlanta, owners of the 570-acre tract, hope to see the land preserved.

"To see an old-growth forest as intact and large as this is very unusual in this part of Georgia."

— Pierre Howard, president of the Georgia Conservancy, the state's oldest conservation organization

president, Pierre Howard; Howard now thinks this is one of the most important tracts of undeveloped land in the state, Mayfield said.

"To see an old-growth forest as intact and large as this is very unusual in this part of Georgia," he said.

And this particular tract would be very appealing to developers if it goes on the market — some of Athens' most expensive houses are in subdivisions next to this tract, he said.

"This would be a very attractive development par-

cel, but this is an opportunity to get the land conserved and protected," he said.

Ben Emanuel, Oconee River Project Coordinator for the Altamaha Riverkeeper, also walked the land recently.

He was impressed by the clean water in the streams, upstream of one of Athens-Clarke County's drinking water intakes.

For the most part, the little creeks still had strong flows despite the drought.

"The hydrology is well-preserved. All that water is moving very slowly. It's well-filtered," he said. "It's the kind of forest that you don't see in many places along the Oconee River."

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