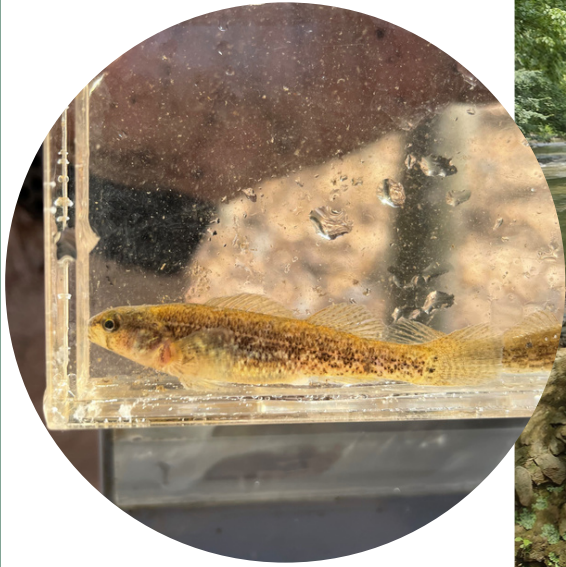




freshwater
LAND TRUST®

2023 Annual Report





DEAR FRESHWATER LAND TRUST COMMUNITY,

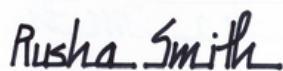
I hope you had a safe and healthy end to 2023 and a wonderful beginning to this year! With your support, Freshwater Land Trust (FLT) had numerous moments to celebrate throughout 2023 in land conservation and stewardship, our Red Rock Trail System® (RRTS), and within our office. I am thrilled to share the year's accomplishments with you.

In 2023, FLT, in its 27th year of existence, continued to be a leader for the protection of critical lands and waterways and community-building trail development in our area. In January, we launched an ambitious four-year strategic plan that we developed in consultation with community leaders. By the end of 2023, we achieved many of our goals for the year, including conserving four additional properties in three different counties, with two of those counties being new to our expanding Central Alabama footprint (Choctaw and Etowah). Project Litter Gitter, our trash collection initiative in local creeks and streams, continues to thrive with private and government donors stepping in to sponsor those devices after the conclusion of FLT's three-year EPA grant, resulting in over 25,000 pounds of litter (almost 13 tons) being collected and removed from our waterways since December 2019.

FLT also unveiled the new Red Rock Action Plan last fall, which will guide RRTS development decisions over the next 15 years and result in almost \$25 million of health, transportation, and economic development benefits annually. Specifically, the Red Rock Action Plan identified seven priority trail projects for RRTS to create a 36+-mile loop around the greater Birmingham metropolitan area, connecting Ruffner Mountain in the east through Railroad Park downtown to Red Mountain Park in the west. Of those trail projects, the Civil Rights Trail (CRT) and Valley Creek Rails-to-Trail (VCT) are at the top of the list. FLT assisted the City of Birmingham in its successful bid to receive a \$21 million federal grant for the Civil Rights District, which includes the CRT and will connect City Walk BHM to Morris Avenue and 20th Street to Legion Field. The VCT is a "rails-to-trail" project that will connect the existing High Ore Line Trail and Red Mountain Park to the CrossPlex, touching almost 60,000 Birmingham residents, as well as residents of Midfield, Fairfield, Brighton, and Lipscomb. Congresswoman Terri Sewell has already secured \$4 million in federal funding for the VCT. In June, FLT added an additional two miles to the Five Mile Creek Greenway Trail in north Jefferson County, creating the longest RRTS trail at 8.25 miles one-way and attracting national attention from elite runners that have chosen to host a Boston Marathon qualifier on it.

As if all of that is not enough, the RRTS was featured in two national magazine publications: *Rails to Trails* and *Garden & Gun*. Further, we had our most successful Land Aid to date at Avondale Brewing, featuring three bands with over 1,200 tickets sold. Lastly, we expanded our FLT family with three new staff hires! Our Land Stewardship, RRTS, and Outreach and Communications teams each welcomed a new Coordinator.

We look forward to continuing this momentum in 2024 as we further our mission to conserve and care for environmentally significant land in Central Alabama and connect the RRTS throughout Jefferson County. Thank you for your support in 2023; we look forward to another great year!



Executive Director

A Year of Accomplishments

Red Rock

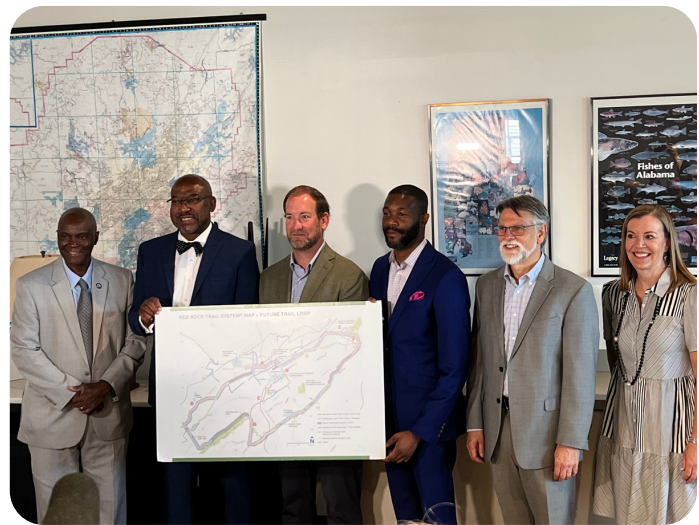


January- New seating and signage were installed on the Red Rock Trail System®. The designs for the signage were created by Robert Finkel, Program Chair of the Graphic Design Program at Auburn University's School of Industrial and Graphic Design.



April- The Rotary Club of Birmingham commemorated 10 years since it committed to developing the Rotary Trail as a centennial gift to the City of Birmingham.

June- A two-mile extension of Five Mile Greenway makes it the longest in the Red Rock Trail System®.



August- FLT announced the Red Rock Action Plan, a proposed 36-mile trail loop connecting the cities of Birmingham, Fairfield, Homewood, and Irondale within 15 years.

October- Congresswoman Terri Sewell gave \$4 million in federal funding for the Valley Creek Rails-to-Trail project, which will create 4.5 miles of off-road trails in west Jefferson County.

October- Bryant-Jordan Trail Spur opens on Kiwanis Vulcan Trail.

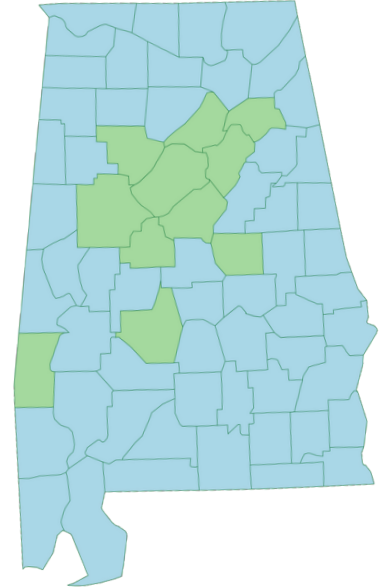


Land Conservation Acquisitions

February- A conservation easement was placed on University of Alabama property, including 1,452 feet of the Cahaba River, which is designated critical habitat to ten federally endangered species.

April- FLT placed a conservation easement on a 362-acre mitigation bank within the middle Tombigbee-Chickasaw watershed to further enhance and restore wetlands and streams.

December- 86 acres were added to an existing conservation easement, totaling 178 acres of a parcel within the Turkey Creek watershed in Pinson.



WHY IT MATTERS

The Cahaba River is Alabama's longest free-flowing river, the primary source of drinking water for the Birmingham area, and the most biodiverse river of its size in North America. It is also home to 128 species of native fish, including ten federally endangered fish and mussel species. Currently, one of the biggest threats to the Cahaba River is erosion.

Buffers, also known as riparian buffers, are important to stream ecosystems because they control erosion, provide wildlife habitat, and help prevent nonpoint source pollution by absorbing nutrients and stabilizing stream banks.

Placing conservation easements along the Cahaba River, such as the UA property, helps protect this important watershed by preventing practices that harm stream buffers. With each easement along the Cahaba River, we are improving water quality and wildlife habitat.

References: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Cahaba River Society and the Triangle Land Conservancy



Stewardship

Partners in this project included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Wilbanks Engineering and Environmental Solutions, Vulcan Materials, and Emily Godsey.

In November, FLT's Land Stewardship team completed a stream restoration project on a conservation property in west Birmingham. Rock vanes were installed to raise the water level at a culvert on a section of Seven Springs to improve fish passage for the endangered watercress darter.

Before: The culvert sat about one foot above surface of water, making it impossible for the darter fish to navigate this section of the spring.



After: Water level was raised to 0.3 feet from the mouth of the culvert, allowing the darters to make their way upstream.

Project Litter Gitter

January- Project Litter Gitter hit a milestone of 20,000 pounds of trash removed from waterways.

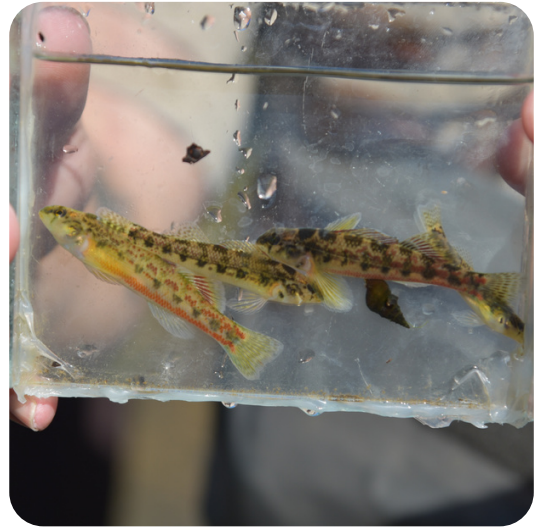
July- A Litter Gitter was installed in Pinson's Beaver Creek. It is the first in the Turkey Creek watershed!



Endangered Species Tour

Our annual Endangered Species Tour in September took over 30 participants to five different sites that are habitat to the endangered rush, vermilion, and watercress darters. Two of these tiny fish, the vermilion and watercress darters, only exist in Jefferson County waters. We were proud to include our Turkey Creek conservation property on this year's tour, where we successfully restored streambanks to benefit the beautiful vermilion darter that lives there.

Dr. Bernie Kuhajda, Aquatic Conservation Biologist with the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute, joined us to safely seine (net) for the fish, along with Jeffrey Drummond, long-time friend of FLT and Biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Other presenters included Nelson Brooke from Black Warrior Riverkeeper and representatives from Alabama Power Company. Transportation and lunch were provided by the Alabama Forestry Foundation.



LAND AID



The 14th Annual Land Aid Concert at Avondale Brewing was our best yet--featuring Yonder Mountain String Band, Railroad Earth, and Keller & The Keels. This event raises funds for FLT's land conservation efforts and the Red Rock Trail System®.



IMPACT

10,427

Total acres

500-750

**Average new
acres conserved
each year (417 in
2023)**

608,000

**Metric tons of CO2
sequestered***

15

**Workdays on
properties in
2023**

200

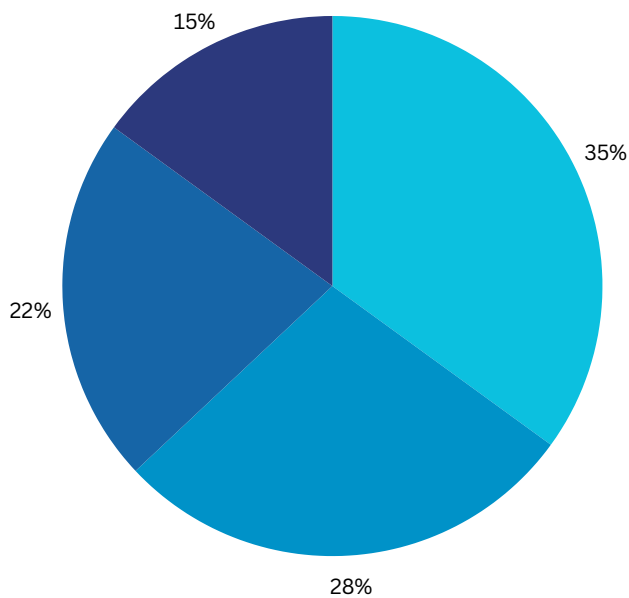
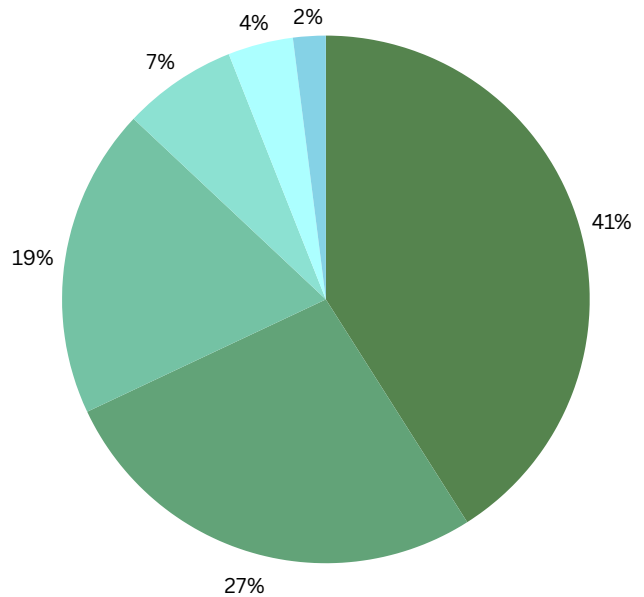
Volunteers

*Data from TNC's Resilient Land Mapping based off of land size and type

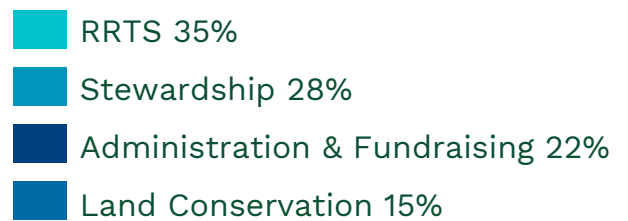


FINANCES

Income: \$2,424,757



Expenses \$1,604,846



GET INVOLVED

DONATE

When you give to Freshwater Land Trust, you invest directly in Central Alabama, in the water you drink, in the trails that connect us, and in the woods, rivers, and parks you love. Freshwater Land Trust is a 501(c)(3), so your contribution is tax deductible. Contributions can be sent by check to P.O. Box 337, Birmingham, Alabama, 35201, by credit or debit card via a secure online form, by initiating a transfer of stock, or by planned giving.

FRESHWATER FANS

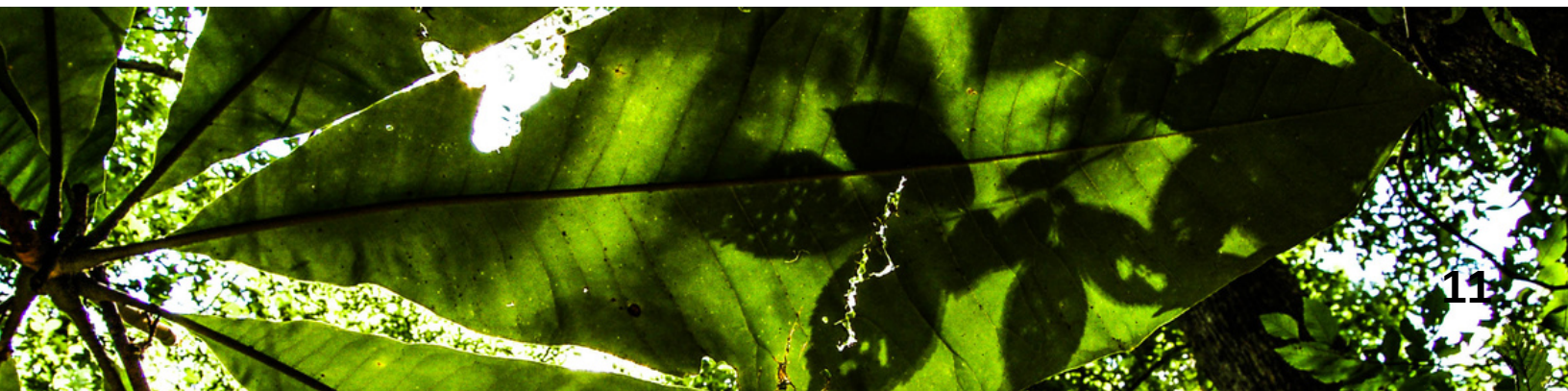
Freshwater Fans are individuals who want to give back to nature with the goal in mind of a greener, cleaner, and more accessible world. As a Freshwater Fan, you provide critical support for conservation and outdoor recreation throughout Central Alabama. Individuals who give from \$25 to \$1,000+ in a calendar year automatically become a Freshwater Fan for one year and can opt-in to receive benefits.

VOLUNTEER

Freshwater Land Trust offers different volunteer options to get involved, such as Adopt-a-Trail, group service days, and cleanups with partner organizations.

EVENTS

You can subscribe to our e-newsletter to stay up to date on all events offered! Events include charity bingo nights, giveback socials, running and walking groups, guided hikes, and river cleanups.



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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are foundational values of Freshwater Land Trust and primary drivers of our work in the community and our workplace culture. A central tenet of our mission is to provide outdoor spaces and recreational opportunities to everyone in our geographical footprint, regardless of their location, income level, neighborhood demographics, or physical ability. As a result, our work helps grow the collective consciousness for protecting and enjoying the natural environment and strengthen social bonds between diverse populations. We intentionally seek work in marginalized communities in order to help build a more inclusive community in the Greater Birmingham and Central Alabama area.

As an organization, FLT believes that each of our employees brings unique and special skills, perspectives, and experiences to the table, and we strive to maintain a culture that allows our employees to thrive, succeed, and contribute to Freshwater Land Trust's mission to their fullest potential. FLT provides equal employment opportunity to all individuals and does not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or bullying based on race, color, religion, gender, sex, pregnancy, national origin, marital status, citizenship, age, disability, veteran or military status, genetic makeup, sexual orientation or any other legally-protected characteristic.



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