



freshwater
LAND TRUST®



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Conserving land.

Building trails.

WORDS FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Freshwater Land Trust® (FLT) continued to develop and expand its conservation, stewardship, and trail development programs throughout 2024. We have previously benefited from your commitment to environmental preservation and recreational access to beautiful outdoor spaces in Central Alabama for everyone, so we wanted to share some recent accomplishments with you.

In the span of a year, we conserved land in three new counties: Cherokee, Lowndes, and Pickens, expanding our conservation footprint to 14 counties. We closed on seven properties equaling 1,436 new acres, which brings our total property conserved to 12,000 acres throughout Central Alabama.

The Red Rock Trail System® (RRTS) is also moving forward at a record pace by implementing the Red Rock Action Plan (RRAP) that was announced in 2023. As you will recall, the plan identifies the next seven priority trail projects within the RRTS to create a 36-mile loop around the greater Birmingham metropolitan area, connecting Railroad Park to Ruffner Mountain and Red Mountain Park.

Now more than ever, our work is critical to ensure that Alabama's biodiversity is protected and that our communities are linked to further enhance the beautiful place where we are fortunate to live, work, and play.



Rusha Smith

Rusha Smith is a native of Anniston, Alabama. She attended Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, and returned to Birmingham in 1991 to attend Cumberland School of Law, from which she graduated in 1994. She was a partner at Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP (Bradley) for almost 25 years and joined FLT in June 2019 as its Executive Director. In her role with the local nonprofit, she oversees a staff of nine people while helping the organization further its mission to conserve, connect, and care for land and water in Central Alabama, creating dynamic green spaces for future generations.

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS

In the last two years, FLT made marked strides toward the priorities and goals outlined in our 2023-2027 Strategic Plan:

OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Completed 150 miles of Red Rock Trail System ☒

Built another 2 miles of Five Mile Creek Greenway in North Jefferson County ☒

Partnered with City of Birmingham to apply for a large transportation grant for Civil Rights District trails ☒

CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Hired Land Stewardship Coordinator ☒

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

Improved attendance at FLT events ☒

Created better public understanding of FLT's involvement in the Red Rock Trail System ☒

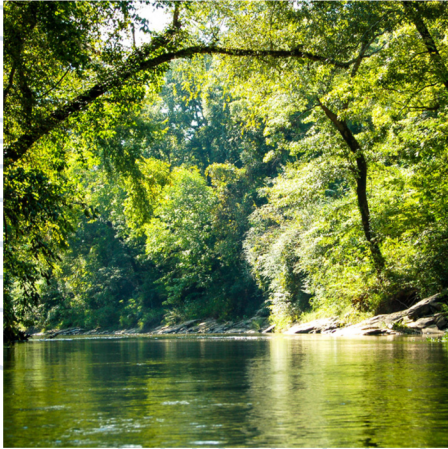
ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Generated \$10 million in funding for Red Rock Action Plan ☒

"Our 2023-2027 Strategic Plan laid out a specific and ambitious role for Freshwater Land Trust in protecting Alabama's natural assets. Remarkably, and well ahead of schedule, we are on our way to reaching our goals with already 160 miles of urban trails built and 12,000 acres of land conserved in 14 counties. I'm confident we will exceed our goals!"

-Jeanne Jackson, 2024 Chair of Board of Directors

Making



1,436

**Acres conserved in Central
Alabama in 2024**



5,000 +

**Pounds of litter removed from local
waterways through Project Litter
Gitter and related efforts in 2024**



1,300 +

**Participants at FLT events in 2024,
including our signature Land Aid
concert and Endangered Species Tour**

Waves



\$40+ million

**Fundraised for Red Rock Action
Plan priority corridors**



400

**Individuals we worked with in
volunteer capacity, including
invasive species removal, litter
cleanup, and Adopt-a-Trail**



1,000

**Native species planted on our
Valley Creek CU1 Property**

Building Trails

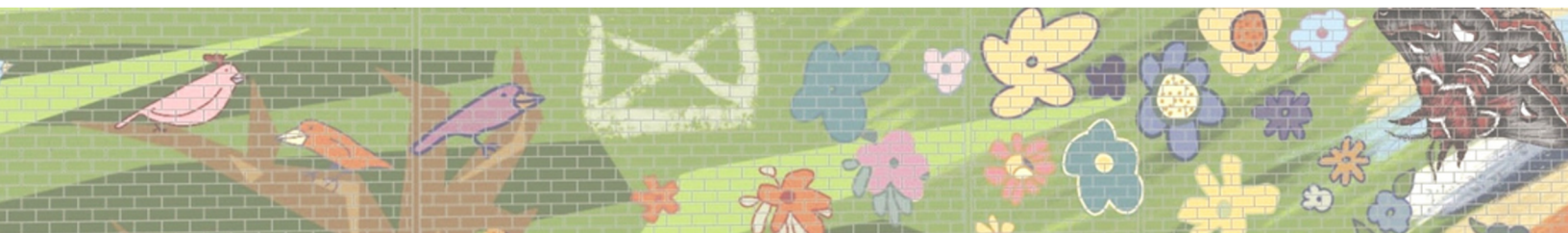
Developments in Red Rock Trail System® in 2024

- ◆ \$21.6+ million RAISE grant for Civil Rights Trail
- ◆ \$11.7 million RAISE grant for Fairfield Trail
- ◆ \$1.1 million to acquire 3-mile inactive rail line for Valley Creek Rail-to-Trail project
- ◆ \$2.3 million to design and construct Shades Creek Trail in Birmingham



48 trailhead signs,
450 trail blazes and EMS signs, and
24 health signs were installed
throughout RRTS as a continuation of
FLT's wayfinding signage initiative

Stunning mural project on Hugh
Kaul Trail was completed in
collaboration with Workshops
Empowerment (WE) & Studio By
The Tracks, which is located
behind the WE building in Avondale



Building Trails

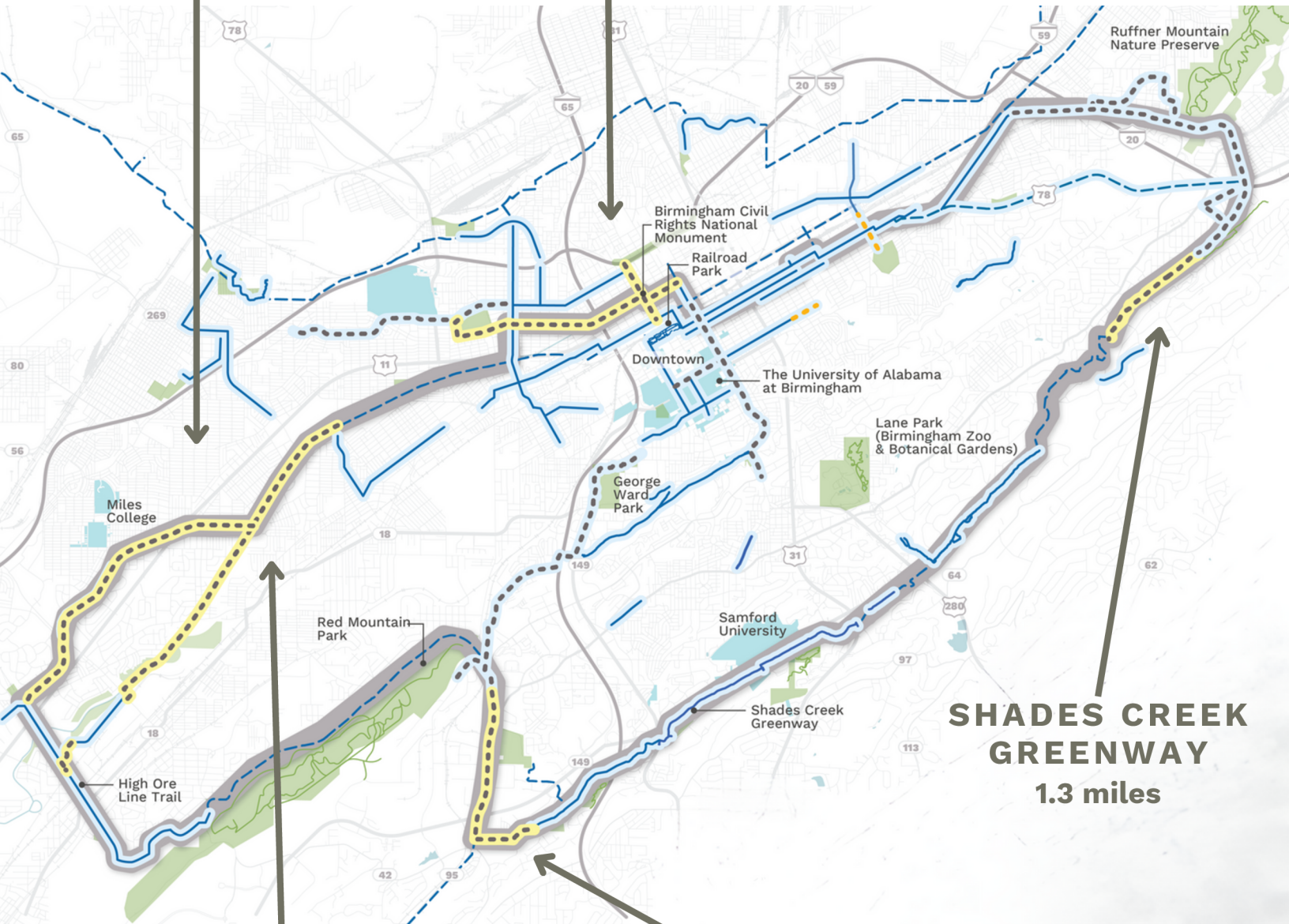
Trails in Progress

FAIRFIELD TRAIL

4 miles

CIVIL RIGHTS TRAIL

3.16 miles



VALLEY CREEK RAIL-TO-TRAIL

4.5 miles

WEST OXMOOR TRAIL (PHASE I)

1.3 Miles
(in early stages)

SHADES CREEK GREENWAY

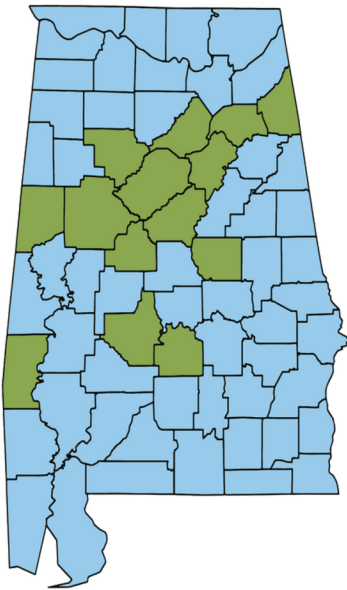
1.3 miles



Conserving Land

12,000

**ACRES CONSERVED
TO DATE**



Increased conservation footprint by 1,436 acres and 3 new counties: Cherokee, Lowndes, and Pickens

Received funding from Alabama Scenic River Trail's AL Waterway Enhancement Program for two canoes



Presented Shady Spot Pale Ale, inspired by Shades Creek, with TrimTab Brewing Company



Received Governor's Award by AL PALS (People Against a Littered State) for our continued litter reduction and prevention efforts



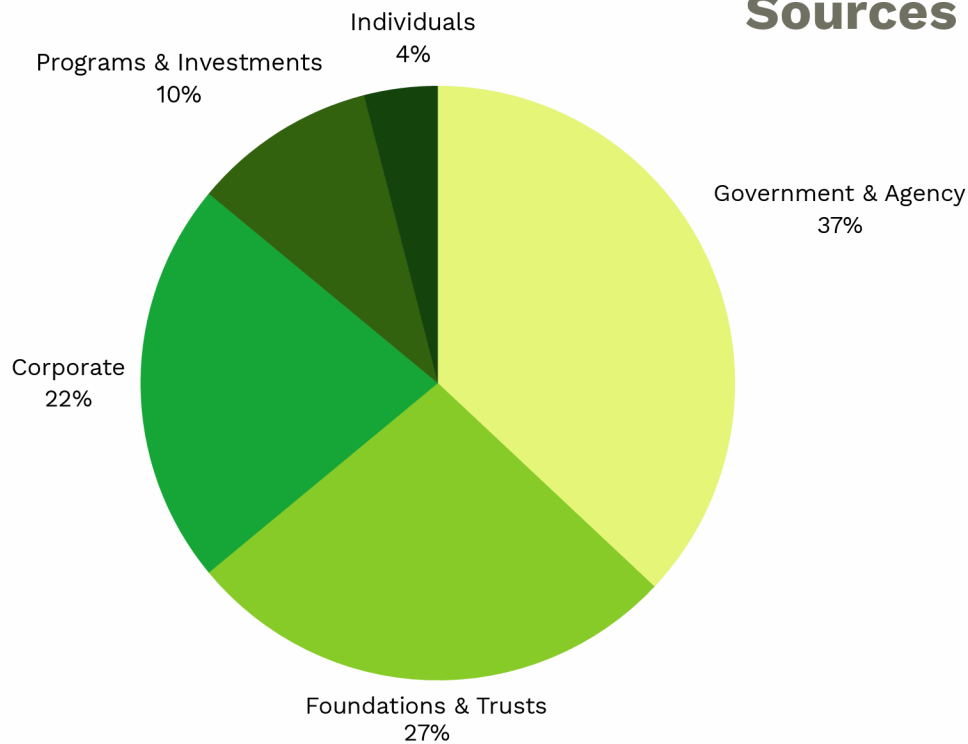
Continued extensive habitat restoration work at Seven Springs, home to the federally endangered watercress darter

“Our deep love for our land led us to see our relationship to it as one of stewardship rather than ownership. We are now pleased to pass this stewardship to the Freshwater Land Trust in order to ensure its preservation for generations to come.”

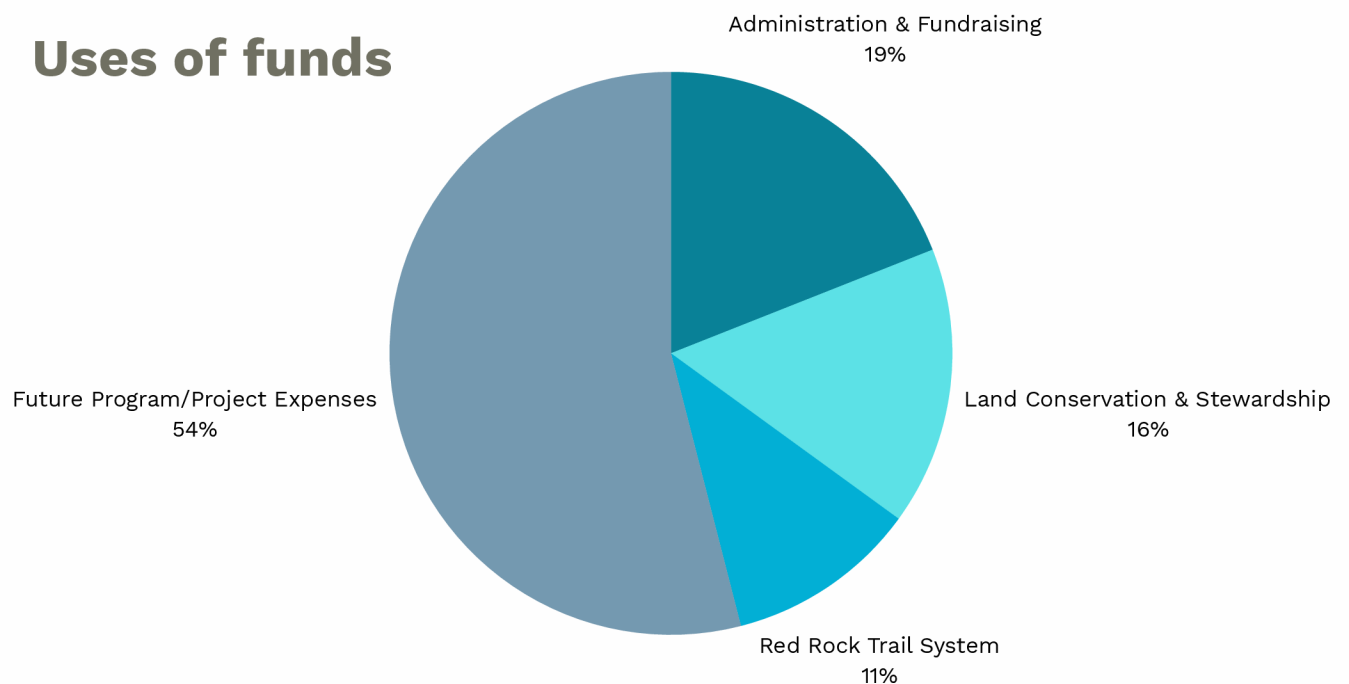
**-Bill Blackerby, on the donation of
23 acres surrounding Mardis Mill Falls**

Finances

Sources of funds



Uses of funds



Staff

Rusha Smith

Executive Director

Carolyn Buck

Red Rock Trail System Director

Anna Massa Pires

Red Rock Trail System Coordinator

Elizabeth Sims

Land Conservation Director

Sam McCoy

Land Stewardship Director

Spence Overton

Land Stewardship Coordinator

Rebekah Correia

Outreach and Communications Director

Savannah Thompson

Outreach and Communications Coordinator

Jennifer Andress

External Affairs and Special Projects Director

Kathryn Lavender

Finance and Administrative Director

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Levitate Legal & Consulting

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Spire, Inc.

Barrie Stokes

Protective Life Corporation, retired

Reginald J. Torbor

Pylon Building Group

Dr. Mark Wilson*

Baptist Health - Princeton Hospital

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Robin A. Wade, III

Frank. M. Young, III

*added in 2025. We also want to thank and recognize Tina Simonton, who left her position as Finance and Development Director in 2024 after nine years with FLT.

Corporate Partners

Alabama Power Foundation

Altec/Styslinger Foundation

Balch & Bingham

Bass Pro Shops

Bhate

Bradford Building Co.

Bradley

Brasfield & Gorrie

Bryant Bank

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Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Alabama**

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Drummond Company, Inc.

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EBSCO Industries

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Maynard Nexsen

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Precision Coil & Rotor

ProAssurance

Protective Life Foundation

REI

Schoel Engineering

Spire Serves

SPM

Starnes Davis Florie

Stifel

Vulcan Materials Company

Vulcan Value Partners

Wells Fargo Foundation

The Westervelt Company



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