

ATHENS LAND TRUST | UOSPS 2016

Abstract of proposed talk

Athens Land Trust conserves, empowers and sustains communities through responsible and visionary land use. As part of that mission, ALT has been protecting private and public land in the Upper Oconee watershed for twenty-two years. These parcels constitute over 3,550 acres of permanently protected land and provide nearly \$7.5 million annually in benefits such as air quality, biodiversity protection, water quality and recreation to the Upper Oconee watershed.

As development of the region has accelerated, the importance of preserving natural areas and the ecosystem benefits they provide has only increased. However, the work of land conservation is made difficult by the absence of a dedicated funding mechanism. As a result, many landowners who would otherwise be willing to conserve their land are unable to do so because of the financial constraints.

In Oconee County, ALT worked with the community to create a program whereby a small percentage of the county's SPLOST money is set aside for farmland protection. This money is leveraged 2:1 by a federal match from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Since 2004, ALT and Oconee County have protected working farms in the county using this unique funding system. ALT is now partnering with NRCS to grow the ACEP program and help other communities establish a farmland protection program. In doing so, more communities and more landowners will be able to receive money to protect their land and everyone in the watershed will benefit from the conservation of this important resource.

Presenter

Krisztian Varsa, Athens Land Trust

conservation@athenslandtrust.org

706-613-0122

There are no special audio/visual requirements beyond the standard equipment.