

OSSABAW ORACLE

A Publication of the Ossabaw Island Foundation

December 2020



What Does The Future Hold For Ossabaw's Protected Status?

Your activism defeated a 2020 Georgia bill threatening the island's Heritage Preserve protection. But, our work is not over.

Thank you from the Ossabaw Island Foundation (TOIF) and from Eleanor "Sandy" Torrey West for your advocacy opposing 2020 Georgia legislation HB 906. This bill threatened Ossabaw Island's protected Heritage Preserve status. If passed, HB 906 would have given the State of Georgia a pathway to subdivide and sell, to a private individual or corporation, up to 15 acres of Ossabaw Island and any Heritage Preserve in the state. Georgia's 122 Heritage Preserves encompass 335,000 acres of land, including Ossabaw Island.

In 1978, the State of Georgia made a commitment to Mrs. West and her family, who sold Ossabaw to the state for half its value and donated the other half. In return, the state of Georgia committed "to protect, conserve, and preserve the natural and cultural resources of [Ossabaw] Island for the benefit of present and future generations" in perpetuity, through designation as Georgia's first Heritage Preserve. The rigorous protections provided by the Heritage Preserve are what convinced Mrs. West and her family to sell Ossabaw Island to the state as their legacy.

HB 906 was a threat to this commitment.

On March 12, despite TOIF efforts to oppose HB 906, the state House of Representatives passed the bill with only seven "nay" votes. It moved over to the Senate on March 13.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Georgia General Assembly suspended its session on March 14; it reconvened on June 15. Although many believed that the session would only focus on the 2020-21 state budget, HB906 showed signs of coming to life before the required adjournment of the session by June 30.

In May and early June, TOIF Trustees, staff, and our partners met and corresponded with a broad coalition of Georgians to share information on the threat posed by HB 906 to Ossabaw and the other protected natural and historic state-owned places.

Legislators received over 20,000 comments from over 2,000 citizens via emails and phone calls. (source: One Hundred Miles 18-Month Report). News stories, letters to the editor, op-ed essays, and editorials ran in multiple news outlets in Georgia. Social media posts from individuals and organizations kept the issue in the public eye. Even President Jimmy Carter took a stand, sending a letter opposing HB 906 to Georgia's Senate leadership.

Continued on page 10

Revealing the Voices & Mystery of Ossabaw Island



Executive Director's Letter

In 2020 on Ossabaw Island, despite the pandemic, we've stayed focused on our purpose: sharing and protecting Ossabaw Island. When the year began, we had no idea how different that would be from what we've done in years past.

Sharing Ossabaw in 2020.

Since early March, the pandemic caused many trip cancellations that extended through the fall. From March through June, sixteen trips (from day trips to weekends to week-long retreats and workshops) canceled in a 13-week period. We worked to figure out how best to reorganize island visits in accordance with state guidelines. In June, we resumed hosting partner groups and TOIF trips. We've reduced our group sizes and we've increased the number of trips for some popular workshops. We've adopted sanitization and physical distance practices, making for a more intimate Ossabaw Island experience.

In the summer of 2020, we reimagined the 19th annual Ossabaw Island Pig Roast & Art Auction. In October, instead of one big HOG of a party, we hosted Three Little Pig Roasts — three 25-person parties held over three days, plus a separate Creative Day Trip for donor artists. The art auction was entirely online this year, making it available to anyone. We even had a Pig Roast-to-Go take out option for people who preferred to stay on the mainland. Thank you to everyone who sponsored, donated artwork, attended the parties, picked up take-out, volunteered, and bid on artwork.

Protecting Ossabaw in 2020

In this Oracle, you can read about how TOIF and our many partners worked hard this year to defeat HB 906, a real threat to Ossabaw's Heritage Preserve protections.

Georgia's Heritage Preserve (HP) protections are defined in the state code, "to be held by the state in trust for the benefit of the present and future generations of the people of the State of Georgia... [for] the best and most important benefit to the public." State law requires that HP lands can only be transferred to counties or municipalities; requires that only the legislature can approve the transfer of those lands or the removal of the HP designation; defines what the land can be used for if transferred to a city or county, and requires that counties and cities return the land to the state if they no longer want it.

The purpose of HB-906 was to eliminate these procedures that safeguard against selling HP-designated land. The impetus for the bill was the proposed sale of one, perhaps two, state-owned Heritage Preserve historic properties. Supporters of the bill wanted the process to be easy and low-profile. Our position is that the existing Heritage Preserve legislation contains all needed provisions for possible transfer of HP property, with the added protections of transparency (via required public hearings in the counties where HPs are located) and responsiveness to the public (via the required vote in the General Assembly.) It's not a simple process, but it's not intended to be.

A faster, less transparent way to erode the protections on hundreds of thousands of acres of important sites, including Ossabaw Island, is not in the interest of the majority of Georgians; it serves the interests of a few who prefer not to share their plans in a more public setting.

Looking ahead.

As we approach 2021, we are grateful to Ossabaw's many friends for your flexibility as we pursue new ways to share and protect Ossabaw Island.

Elizabeth DuBose
Executive Director
Ossabaw Island Foundation

Ossabaw Fund Contributors

Thank you for your donations to the Ossabaw Island Foundation's Ossabaw Fund, June – October 2020.

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Jeffrey & Laurie Rubnitz in memory of Arnold & Lorlee Tenenbaum, and in honor of Bobby Segall, Robin Brody, and Steve Greenberg.
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Lucky the Ossabaw Pig

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Robin Ray in memory of Roger Parker.
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Barbara Vaughn

Woodstork

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Leigh Goff
Dr. & Mrs. Nicholas Henry
Mr. & Mrs. William Trosch

Snowy Egret

Team Callahan at Keller Williams Realty

Great Egret

Brook Reynolds



Visit Ossabaw Island in 2021!

Photo by Julian Buckmaster

For the trips listed below, the maximum group size has been reduced in order to maintain physical distancing on the boat and in our buildings. All check-in activities will be done using safety protocols. Sanitation procedures have been implemented. All visitors are required to wear their own masks during check-in,

on the boat and inside the buildings, and maintain 6-foot distance from all other visitors unless they are members of your household. Our highest priority is the safety of our visitors and staff. Thank you for your understanding as we all work together to make your Ossabaw Island experience the best it can be.

How to Register: The following trips are sponsored by The Ossabaw Island Foundation and are open to the public. Fees vary. To register, visit ossabawisland.org or 912-344-3900. Pre-registration required.



Photo by Elizabeth DuBose

Wild Night on Ossabaw: New Year's Eve Overnight Trip

Thur. December 31, 2020 – Fri. January 1, 2021

Spend New Year's Eve on Ossabaw Island on an overnight trip, with music and tales of Ossabaw Island around the fire pit after dinner. Plus, a midnight champagne toast to welcome 2021.

Super Museum Sunday on Ossabaw Island

Sun. February 7

Visit Ossabaw Island as part of Georgia History Festival's statewide Super Museum Sunday event. This afternoon walking tour of Ossabaw's history is free-of-charge for island admission, with only a \$40 boat fee.

Fall in Love...With Ossabaw! Valentine's Day Weekend

Fri. February 12 – Sun. February 14

A Valentine's Day Weekend for those who love and long for Ossabaw Island. Island-themed Saturday night dinner includes Nell Ford Torrey's Mystery Cake, an Ossabaw tradition. Warm your heart by the fire pit with island stories old and new. Sweethearts or singles, all are welcome.

Day Trip Tour of Ossabaw Island's North End

Sat. March 27

Travel by pontoon boat with Captain Mike Neal of Bull River Cruises to the island's North End for an interpretive tour that includes ecology and history.

Ossabaw Island Descendants Heritage Day

Sat. May 8

Did your parents, grandparents or other ancestors live, work or own land on Ossabaw Island from 1760 - 1980? Were they tenant farmers, enslaved people, Torrey Family employees, land owners, Freedmen, hunting guides, timbermen, or cattlemen? This springtime gathering brings Ossabaw's people together for a day of food, friendship, history, and remembrance.



Photo by Elizabeth DuBose

Get Creative on Ossabaw: Day Trip

Sat. June 5

Paint, sketch, write, or take photos on Ossabaw Island. Let the island be your muse. After a brief history presentation, you'll have several hours to wander the North End on your own and make art.

Lift Every Voice: Ossabaw Island and Pin Point Fee-Free Day Trip

Sat. August 14

This morning walking tour of the North End Plantation site provides an overview of Ossabaw's African-American and Gullah-Geechee culture and history; followed by an afternoon visit to the Pin Point Heritage Museum in the community established by formerly enslaved people from Ossabaw Island.

Turtle Hatching Day Trips or Weekend Trips

Sat. August 21 Day Trip

Sun. August 22 Day Trip

Fri. September 3 – Sun. September 5.

Weekend Two-Night Trip

Accompany Georgia DNR Sea Turtle Conservation Program interns as they inventory loggerhead turtle nests for eggs and live hatchlings on Ossabaw Island's South Beach. In 2020, 541 sea turtle nests were documented on Ossabaw. Weekend trips include an ecological tour of Ossabaw, led by coastal ecologist/ naturalist John "Crawfish" Crawford.



Photo by Elizabeth DuBose

A Hands-On Indigo Dyeing Experience: Ossabaw Island Indigo Day Trips

Fri. September 17 & September 24

Sat. September 18, Sun. September 19 & September 26

Elizabeth DuBose and Mark Frissell share the history of Ossabaw indigo, provide instruction on creating fresh leaf indigo dye vats and guide participants through the dyeing process.

To sign up for emails on the latest information on Ossabaw events, text OSSABAW to 22828 from your phone.

2020 by the Numbers



Actions to protect Georgia's Heritage Preserves! Voices in opposition to HB 906.

20,000 comments sent to Georgia legislators from more than **2,000** citizens.

10,000 signatures on change.org petition, *Save Butler Island, stop HB 906.*



virtual lectures over six weeks: *Coastal Nature, Coastal Culture: Conversations on Georgia's Environmental Histories* in partnership with The Learning Center at SCI in Savannah, GA.



Hosted 1,000 visitors for 81 program days and nights on Ossabaw Island.

Ossabaw Island in a COVID-19 world:
1,200 fewer visitors; 199 fewer program days and nights; 16 canceled groups over 13 weeks.



butterflies counted by 33 citizen scientist volunteers over 11 weeks. Gulf Fritillary (1,664), Cloudless Sulphur (376), Monarch (75). *data collected over 11 weeks of a 14 week survey.



new Ossabaw films.

- *Georgia Outdoors*, "Ossabaw" gpb.org/television/shows/georgia-outdoors
- *Ossabaw Island Flyover*, Emory Center for Digital Scholarship southernspaces.org/2020/ossabaw-island-flyover



Ossabaw Island Foundation & Education Alliance Partners

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Sea Turtle Conservation Program

Wildlife Resources Division

Board of Regents of the State of Georgia

Georgia Southern University

University of Georgia

Center for Archaeological Sciences

Marine Extension Center and Aquarium

Skidaway Institute of Oceanography

UGA Press

Savannah State University

Department of Marine & Environmental Sciences

Coalition to Save Butler Island

Coastal Museums Association

Georgia Conservancy

Georgia Outdoors

The Learning Center at SCI

Moon River District

One Hundred Miles

Pin Point Heritage Museum

Ossabaw Island Writers' Retreat

The Landings Association

Wesley Gardens & Retreat Center

2019/2020 Financial Report

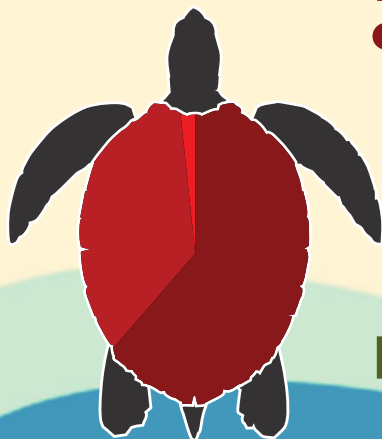
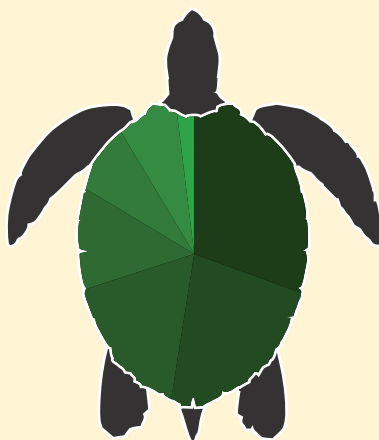
REVENUE • \$364,500

- \$112,000 Pig Roast
- \$79,500 Donations
- \$64,000 Grants
- \$50,000 On-Island Revenue
- \$28,000 Interest & 2017-2019 Net Revenue
- \$24,500 CARES Loan/Grant
- \$6,500 Books & SWAG Sales

EXPENSES • \$359,100

- \$220,600 On-Island Expenses
 - cleaning, maintenance & repairs of buildings & equipment
 - transportation to/from Ossabaw
 - on-island staffing
 - Pig Roast expenses
- \$133,500 General & Administration
 - staffing
 - printing & postage
 - Annual Meeting expenses
 - audit fees
- \$5,000 Use Agreement Fee
 - paid to the State of Georgia

NET REVENUE • \$5,400





THANK YOU TO OUR 2020 OSSABAW ISLAND THREE LITTLE PIG ROASTS SPONSORS

Patricia Barmeyer & Ward Wight • Archie & Sally Davis
Georgia Power • Taqueria del Sol

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Photos by Stacey Wells Photography



Save the date!

Ossabaw Island Pig Roast & Art Auction Weekend, October 22-24, 2021.



Woodcut by John McWilliams



HB 906 from Page 1

Important early opposition to HB 906 came from The Georgia Conservancy and One Hundred Miles. A new entity, the Coalition to Save Butler Island Plantation, formed in McIntosh County (coastal Georgia) to combat the real threat posed by HB 906 to an African-American/Gullah Geechee heritage site, proposed for purchase by a private developer for use as a distillery. This property transfer and development plan was the impetus for the bill.

The Chatham County delegation to the state assembly got involved, in particular Rep. Jesse Petrea. Ossabaw Island is in his district. Although he voted in support of HB 906 in March, he “made sure the bill was killed when the House resumed in Atlanta.”

“All of these sites, including Ossabaw... and many other of our barrier islands on the Georgia Coast, are very important and we would never want to pass anything that somehow the language might allow someone to misuse it,” said Rep. Petrea.” (WTOC News, June 19, 2020)

With such broad opposition, and almost no visible support, no senator was willing to champion the bill, and it died when the session adjourned on June 25.

Since June, TOIF has continued to participate in the Coalition to Save Butler Island as a collaborating member. We have communicated with historic preservation and environmental organizations across the state to share our concerns about the possibility of a similar bill in 2021.

The 2021 session of the Georgia General Assembly will convene on Monday, January 11. Typically, November and December are an important preparation period for possible new legislation.

Going forward, your activism will still be needed, especially if a new bill is proposed that threatens the HP protections. If you aren't on our email list, text OSSABAW to 22828 to begin the easy email sign-up process, or call 912-344-3900, or email info@ossabawisland.org to request being added. We appreciate your activism opposing HB 906, and your support for our work as we protect and share Ossabaw Island.



Photo by Sherrie Jamison

Eleanor “Sandy” Torrey West, age 107, applauds the “Ossabaw Army” for defeating HB 906 in June.



Photo by Mike Neal

Ossabaw Donkey Love!

To adopt, gagives.org/story/Donkey
New donkey “adopters” since June

Liz Ambos
Charlene Balmer in honor of Jenny Balmer Clemens.
Patricia Cassidy
Tenise Fagan dedicated to my ancestors - the Taylors and the Deas.
Marc Hanson in honor of Dottie T. Leatherwood.
Patti Heleva in honor of Jeff Muzzy.
Chris LaReau
Connie Rudd
Christine Savage
Cheri Sinopoli
Ken & Jacqueline Sirlin
Mark Stephens in memory of Steve Stephens.
Don Teuton
Sophia Thompson
Kit Wilson

New Rock Group Member

The Ossabaw Rock Group is our name for friends who donate rocking chairs for the Club House and Boarding House porches.

Thank you to our newest Rocker:
The Tighe Family

They join 20 other Ossabaw Rockers who've given porch chairs to TOIF.

To join:
gagives.org/story/OssabawRocks



JIMMY CARTER

June 15, 2020

To Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan

The State of Georgia is blessed with an unparalleled variety of ecosystems, from the mountains to the coast. I am proud of the lasting legacy created by the State's acquisition of significant lands for conservation, hunting and fishing, recreation, and historic preservation during my term as Governor and am pleased that my successors have continued this important work.

The Georgia Heritage Trust Act of 1975 was established to "preserve certain real property...that exhibits unique natural characteristics, special historical significance, or particular recreational value" and has been an important tool in the State's land acquisition efforts, as it allows the State to assure those willing to donate or sell their lands that the property "shall be held by the state in trust for the benefit of the present and future generations of the people of the state of Georgia." That commitment from the State was an essential element in the negotiation of the acquisition of Ossabaw Island from Eleanor Torrey West and the Torrey family by Gov. George Busbee. Under the Heritage Preserve Act, the ownership and use of Ossabaw Island, and any other property dedicated as a Heritage Preserve, could be altered, but only after public hearings, approval by both houses of the General Assembly and by the Governor.

HB 906, now under consideration by the Georgia Senate, would breach the commitments made to Mrs. West and many others who have conveyed land to the State as Heritage Preserves. Under HB 906, up to 15 acres of lands and structures dedicated as Heritage Preserves could be conveyed, not only to a local government but even to a private entity, without any review by the General Assembly and with little public notice or input.

I urge you to halt any further consideration of HB 906 by the Senate. If there is a Heritage Preserve site or structure that should be removed from the strict protection of that designation, it should be fully considered, on a case-by-case basis, by the General Assembly and the Governor, as provided in the Heritage Trust Act of 1975.

Sincerely,

Cc: The Honorable Brian Kemp
Commissioner Mark Williams
Senator Tyler Harper



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“Adopt” an Ossabaw Island Donkey for \$25

Tuesday, December 1, support the Ossabaw Island Foundation as part of **#GivingTuesday**.

A donkey adoption makes a great gift.

GAGives.org/story/Donkey

ABOUT OSSABAW ISLAND:

Ossabaw Island is a 26,000-acre undeveloped barrier island on the Atlantic Ocean, owned by the State of Georgia and located in Chatham County. Georgia's first Heritage Preserve, accessible only by boat, is undeveloped and set aside by an Executive Order for natural, scientific and cultural study, research and education; and for environmentally sound preservation, conservation and management of the island's ecosystem.

The Ossabaw Island Foundation (TOIF) is a non-profit 501 (c) 3. Through a partnership with the State of Georgia, TOIF inspires, promotes, and manages exceptional educational, cultural, and scientific programs that are designed to maximize the experience of Ossabaw Island, while minimizing the impact on the island's resources.

Contact us:

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