

# THE OZARK HOLLER

Ozark Land Trust Newsletter

Winter 2024

## A Promise... From Us to You

This 40th Anniversary year of Ozark Land Trust's work on behalf of Ozark lands has shown a major commitment by you, our dear supporters, to the continued protection of the extraordinary natural resources, working lands and breathtaking scenery where we live, work and play across the region.

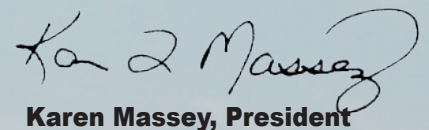
You have helped us secure OLT's work for the long-term by contributing to our Promise to the Future campaign, building our operating endowment for the years to come. Your contributions have been the foundation upon which our conservation work over the last four decades has been possible, and now you have given us stability to continue and grow that work well into the future.

And it's our mission to demonstrate the same commitment to you as you've made to us. We are currently working with landowners on protection efforts that should bring our total of Ozark lands protected to about 40,000 acres over the next several years. We're working with a number of landowners, agency and nonprofit partners to not only perform this permanent protection work, but to engage in conservation practices to restore and protect some of the most beautiful and important lands and waters in the Ozarks.

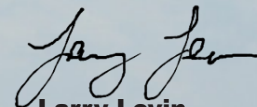
In this special issue of the Ozark Holler, you'll read about some of our leaders, both professionally and in the community, who have made our land trust goals a reality. And to bridge the past and future, you'll

read an interview with our founder, Gregg Galbraith, and our current president, Karen Massey, discussing where we've come from and where we're headed. A video of that interview will be available online as well.

Enjoy this issue, and we send our very best wishes to you for a peaceful and happy new year, and a wonderful 2025!



**Karen Massey, President**



**Larry Levin,  
Executive Director**



# From 1984 to 2024 and Beyond

## A Chat with our Founder and our Current President



By Denise Henderson Vaughn

Gregg Galbraith started it with a fire in his heart and Karen Massey is carrying the torch today. The two are the founder and current president, respectively, of Ozark Land Trust.

These two – representing where OLT started and where we are now - sat for a culminating interview in our series with OLT presidents who've served during the organization's four decades.

### **KAREN MASSEY STRATEGIZES FOR OLT'S FUTURE**

Karen Massey grew up in Ozark, Mo., playing and swimming in nearby Bull Creek, Finley River and Table Rock Lake.

With a leadership role in her professional life in energy planning, Karen is tuned into big-picture considerations such as climate and conservation. She joined the OLT board in 2019, and has been president since 2022.

“When I think of home,” Karen said, “I think of the vistas, the views that you see over the Ozark Mountains. I still love that.”

However, “there’s so much development happening in that area where I grew up, today, that it really means a lot to me to be

able to protect those views,” she said, “so future generations have that ability to play in streams that are clear and safe, and to be able to see the amazing beauty of the Ozarks.”

Massey’s personal goals align directly with OLT’s work. Protected land has grown to more than 32,000 acres, and in 2019 gained national accreditation, which was just extended to 2029. That recognition has strengthened partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Missouri Department of Conservation and other agencies and funders.

“These partnerships and others can help achieve so much more than any of us could alone,” Karen said, “and that’s something to celebrate.”

Karen is excited about the Promise for the Future Campaign, which is providing donations for an endowment, “so that money is there when things are really tight.”

“We saw what happened during Covid. If a big game changer like that happens in the future, something that disrupts everything, we need to be able to pay our staff,” she said. “It’ll also allow us to have a greater impact, so we can keep going out and meeting with new landowners for potential projects, working with different partners. It really sets that foundation for what we want to do for the future.”

In planning for the years ahead, Karen said, Ozark Land Trust needs to think strategically about what properties to protect. “There are so many amazing places in the Ozarks, but we have limited resources.”

“We need to think about ‘what are the conservation values that make a property really special?’” she said. “Are they priority watersheds? Are they springs? Is it an endangered species? What geological features are really special about a property? Maybe a high value property in a woodland area is different than an agricultural property or a prairie property.”

“The more property in an area you can protect, the more connectivity you have for species to go from property to property,” Karen notes. “We should try to protect habitat for birds along flyways.” Karen also notes the importance of wildlife protection because “the climate is changing and we’re seeing impacts on many species now.”

In another consideration for the future, Karen said, “I think about ‘who’s next?’” She hopes OLT can connect with the younger generation “and get them excited about nature.” She envisions working with partner organizations so young people “can understand why it’s so important to protect some of these lands.”

### **GREGG GALBRAITH RECOUNTS OLT’S BIRTH AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT**

In 1982 Gregg Galbraith, a Carthage, Mo., native, returned to his homeland after 10 years working on the East Coast and making several trips to Asia.

Back in the Ozarks, Gregg said, “things had changed.” He encountered a community of back-to-the-land folks who were interested in environmental issues. He attended their annual gathering, the Ozark Area Community Congress (OACC, pronounced “oak”), where the focus was bioregionalism, which meant “how you relate to the land, how you live with the land,” he said. It

recognizes the Ozarks as a bioregion, “with characteristics that are unique to it, separate from other lands around it.”

At OACC, Gregg found people wanting to live in low-impact communities that protect the environment. However, “nobody there knew how to organize a community land trust.”

There, Gregg met benefactress Ella Alford, who wanted to initiate a community land trust at Hawk Hill, 240 acres she owned in eastern Douglas County. The following year, 1983, Ella sponsored Bob Swann, a pioneer of the community land trust movement, to attend OACC.

Gregg listened attentively to Swann’s presentation at OACC, as he described a novel legal framework in which two interrelated nonprofit organizations could own a property and lease portions of it to members of a community land trust.

“The light bulb clicked on for me,” Gregg said. “And then everything else just took off.” In 1984, Ozark Regional Land Trust was incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit Missouri corporation. But his vision was not limited to protecting one piece of land. He thought, “it needs to be an umbrella that can facilitate many projects.”

In keeping with OACC’s bioregional focus, “we identified ORLT with the whole bioregion,” he said. He envisioned “a grassroots organization that could effectively protect land, but not just wild lands, also working lands that people live on.”

“It was a leap into the unknown” but supported by “a lot of enthusiasm, a huge amount of interest,” he said.

About ORLT’s genesis, Gregg said “we wouldn’t be here except for Ella” because she brought in Bob Swann. As planned, her Hawk Hill property became the first project. A community land trust, it offered long-term leases on designated land parcels, so members could build houses and utilize the property, but it also included a large common area, a bottomland meadow and creek frontage. All the land was protected with a conservation-oriented land use plan that prohibits future private subdivisions, he said.

The word got around and ORLT developed quickly. “People were knocking at the door constantly,” he said, asking how they

could protect land they owned, or form a community.

Later on, Ella Alford made another substantial contribution when she put 3,200 acres of Alford Forest in northern Ozark County under ORLT protection. This working forest, a demonstration of sustainable forestry and the use of carbon credits, is a showcase of natural features, Gregg said, with a diverse landscape containing upland forests, glades, bottomland, creek frontage, and an extensive (gated) cave.

In hindsight, Gregg acknowledges that his 1980s, early-30s self may have been “a bit naive and idealistic.” He said, “we started the organization with inspiration and moral support and very little financial support, but it really didn’t take a lot of money.” In his years as executive director, he wasn’t paid any salary.

Gaining credibility was tricky in the early years. For probably the first eight years, Gregg said, “every single landowner that we worked with would say, ‘how are we going to know you’ll be here in 20 years?’ We were talking perpetuity, which is a little longer than I even know what that is. But landowners took the same leap of faith that we did.”

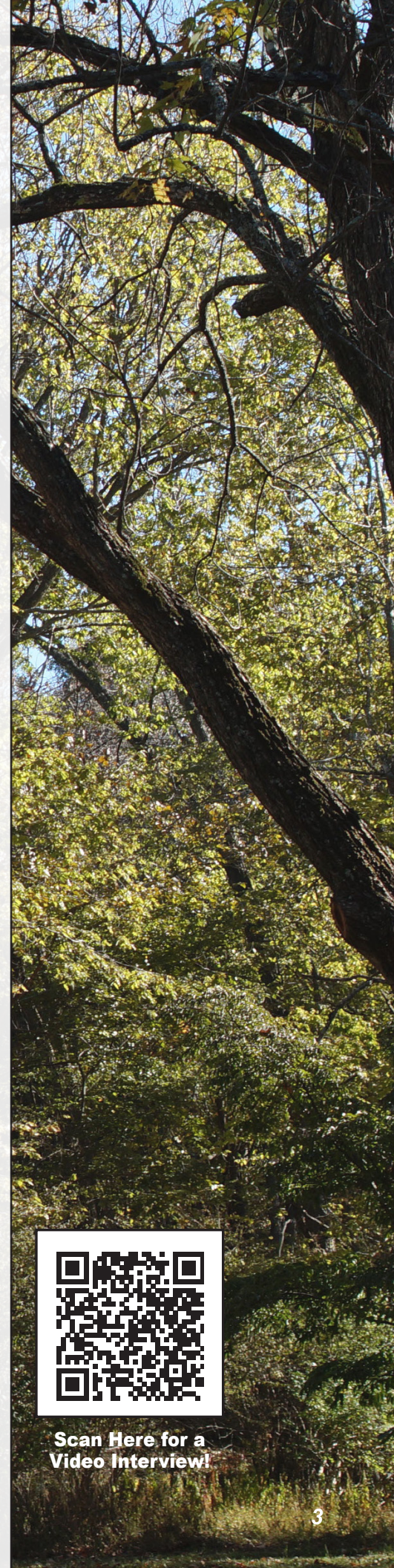
## **DAWN OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS**

When Ozark Regional Land Trust started, conservation easements were virtually unknown, Gregg said. So when people wanted to protect land, the options were community land trusts or nature preserves.

“In the first 10 years, all the projects were geared towards us owning the land,” he said. New Pear Farm, Ninestone, Sweetwater and Hawk Hill were all community land trusts. Early lands obtained for preserves included Sarcoxie Cave and Spring, Woods Prairie, Amy’s Woods, Nature Haven, Oak Hill Nature Preserve and Hogscald Hollow.

During those years, laws concerning conservation easements were unclear, but they came into better focus after a national commission proposed the Uniform Conservation Easement Statute

**See Founder... page 12**



**Scan Here for a Video Interview!**

# More Than Conservation

## Former President Jeff Winzerling Appreciates the People of OLT

“The rivers and streams are interwoven with the Ozarks.”

For former board president Jeff Winzerling, those rivers are just what spring to mind when he thinks of the Ozarks. And when he thinks of Ozark Land Trust, he thinks of conservation close to home and working with private property owners.

Winzerling is the president of Universatile Development—which is dedicated to urban redevelopment projects—and the principal of Envoy Commercial Real Estate—a St. Louis brokerage firm which focuses on serving the needs of office and industrial clients. He received his Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics from Northwestern University in Chicago.

“For me, what was really attractive about Ozark Land Trust is that it was the opposite and complement of what I do in my urban redevelopment business,” Winzerling said. “To me, the places that are most important to, most compelling, and mean the most to people are vital urban places and intact natural places. Ozark Land Trust’s ecosystem-wide preservation was just a really nice balance to what I was doing at the other end.”

Winzerling served on the OLT board for nine years, three of those as president. He served mostly on the fundraising and outreach committee. One of his main goals in that was to change the branding from Ozark Regional Land Trust to Ozark Land Trust, which was a very challenging issue for the board. At that point, they also added “conservation close to home” to their branding.

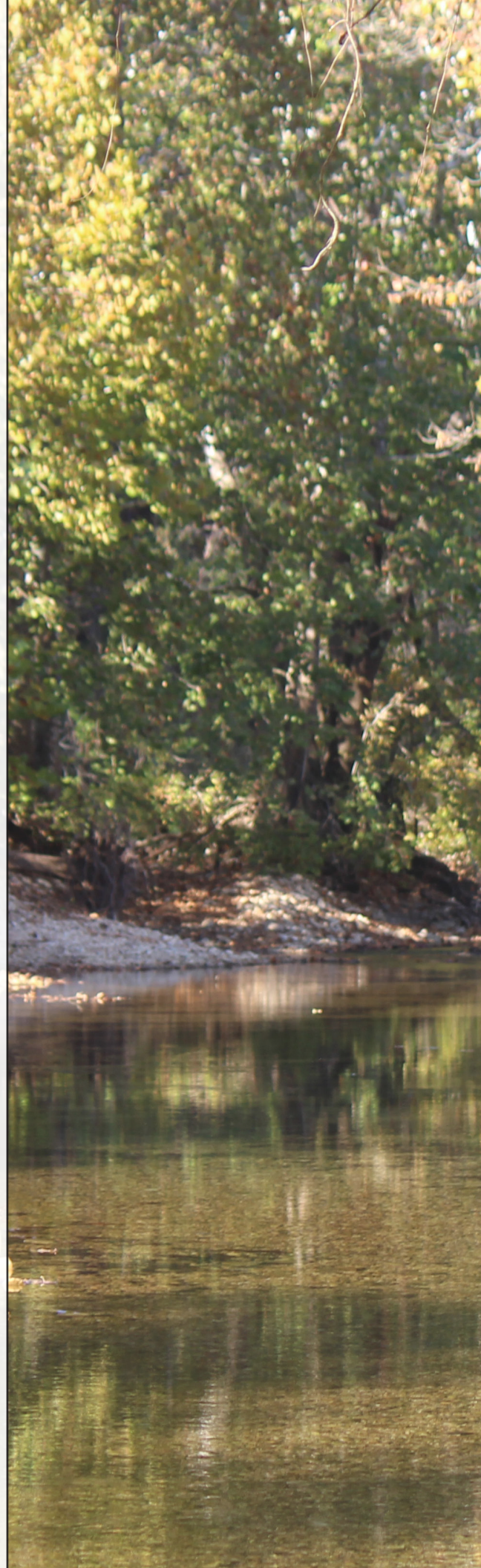
“Ozark Land Trust is the one that is doing that conservation work in your backyard,” Winzerling said, “and that struck me as a unique advantage.”

Another advantage Winzerling said sets OLT apart from other conservation groups is working with private landowners.

“That’s just an unfathomable well of opportunity,” he said. “Those two things I would say are the most important. It’s the conservation close to home, and it’s working with conservation-minded private property owners.”

Winzerling looks back at OLT and sees how a bootstrap organization grew more sophisticated and professional over time. Ultimately, though, the success of OLT is because of the people. Winzerling explored the big difference between why people get involved and why they stay involved.

“I think people get involved because they care about outdoor spaces. They care about their own particular stream. They care about some particular species. People have the thing that’s their hook that gets them interested in something like that. Some people just want to say yes to a board opportunity. There’s a finite number of them out there, and you don’t always get invited, and so just say yes to a board opportunity,” he said. “But what keeps people coming back to the fourth meeting in the fourth year in the fourth decade is the relationships with the people that are made inside that organization.”



# More Than A Passion

## OLT is a Way of Life for Former President Andy Thomas



***The rivers, the birds, the trees — that's what comes to mind when Andy Thomas thinks of the Ozarks.***

After 27 years on the board and four years as president, the passion for Ozark Land Trust is still alive in Andy Thomas.

“Ask my wife, it’s part of my life,” Thomas joked. “I have pulled way back from what I used to do when we were all volunteers. When we started, we were just great people with great ideas. We had no money. We just had ideas. Now, to have seen this group grow is just so rewarding and mind blowing. You know, I hate to say it, but it could have gone bust, and it didn’t because of people and good energy and, you know, some fundraising.”

Thomas is Research Assistant Professor in Horticulture / Agroforestry at the University of Missouri’s Southwest Research Center at Mt. Vernon. He conducts research on a wide variety of horticultural crops and crop production techniques, including extensive work regarding elderberries, and resulting in more than 50 peer-reviewed scientific publications. He received his B.S. in Horticulture from the University of Missouri and his M.S. in Agronomy from Iowa State University.

“I remember campouts and staying in people’s cabins and going on wagon rides and meeting

landowners,” Thomas said. “I remember one time, you know, sitting at a campfire in a circle and just talking about how we can protect land. A lot of those staying overnight in someone’s cabin on the river evolved into land protection and evolved into OLT. Just by meeting people and making those relationships was basically how this group was built.”

When Thomas thinks of the Ozarks, he thinks of the rivers, the birds, the trees. But with his line of work, he also appreciates the agriculture of the Ozarks.

“We have to grow food,” Thomas said, expanding on the idea of working lands. “We have to grow healthy food, and we have to grow it sustainably. So it’s interesting, Ozark Land Trust has a few easements that are very specifically agricultural, and those were kind of different for us. I’m all for it. I think it’s really important. It is kind of stretching things for us, broadening what we can do.”

Reflecting on the history of OLT, Thomas honored people “on whose back OLT was built,” like Greg Galbraith and Abigail Lambert. Looking to the future of OLT, Thomas is excited to see continued growth off of the foundation others have built.

“Conservation easements is most of what we do now,” Thomas said. “We have thousands of acres of land that we own, and I would like to see more of that. I would like to see us own more land as nature preserves, but be able to

manage those with the highest ecological integrity. That’s a goal that everyone’s working really hard at, but I would like to see that up a notch. Then we would be capable of protecting more lands as nature preserves that we can own, but that requires resources and more work. So that would be a goal of mine in the future, to see that part of OLT grow and expand.”

Maintaining ecological integrity means carefully managing land to protect fragile habitats, prevent further erosion and maintain the natural balance. This includes controlling invasive species like Johnson grass that could disrupt native ecosystems, but doing so in a way that uses modern tools and approaches when necessary—such as selective herbicides—while minimizing harm to the environment. It’s about finding a balance between conservation and practical management to ensure the land remains healthy and resilient.



**Andy Thomas**

“It’s just a matter of doing our best to manage what we have in the best way we can,” Thomas explained.

To Thomas, what sets Ozark Land Trust apart is the flexibility they can have while maintaining a high level of professionalism.

“Another thing about OLT is that, yes, we have our own goals and ideals, but our job is to work with landowners and facilitate their interest in protecting their land. We are kind of a service organization that allows people to protect their land, and that’s great.”



**Scan Here for a Video with Andy Thomas!**

# From Protection to Governance

## Former President Jacob Reby Helped Shape Organization for OLT

In his time as president and on the board of OLT, Jacob Reby sought to “bring more organization to the organization.” Coming onto the board, he met a group of passionate conservationists that taught him what it meant to truly care about and protect the environment.

“It was a lot of work for a lot of people,” said Reby, a longtime partner at the Lewis Rice lawfirm. “And I don’t think there wasn’t a person that didn’t do an unbelievable job of being a dedicated board member when I was involved, and a lot of them are still on the board, which is really a great tribute to the organization and how much people truly care about it.”

Reby works as senior counsel with Lewis Rice, concentrating his practice in structuring, negotiating, drafting and closing a wide variety of real estate, corporate and financing transactions. With his experience in law and business, Jacob brought his expertise in both business and land transactions to the OLT board. During his tenure as president in the early 2010s, he was instrumental in many of the procedures in place today.

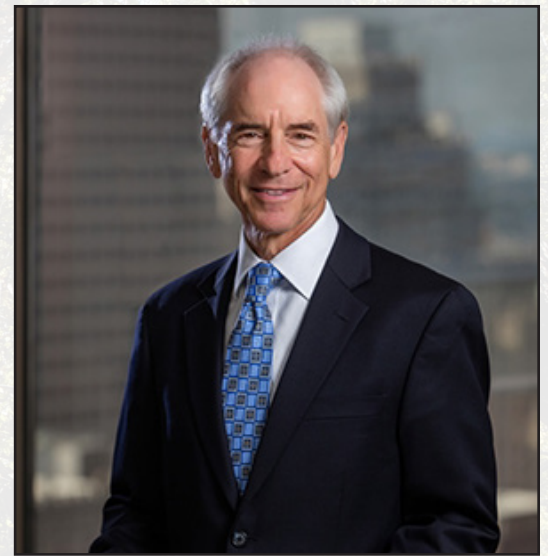
“I’m a pretty intellectually curious guy,” Reby said, “so, to me, it was very interesting to learn all about conservation easements. [OLT Former Executive Director] Ted Heisel would do these major write ups about them. I didn’t know such a thing existed, but I learned. And I thought that was a lot of fun for me.”

Reby sees the overlap of business and environment, as well as the challenges that come along with it.

“I think businesses have to be environmentally aware,” he said. “If you’re not, you could be fined, you could be protested, there’s a lot of bad things that can happen if you’re not environmentally aware. So as a business person, you have to make a lot of business decisions on things that relate to the environment. Now, you know, almost all business decisions are gray. There’s very little that’s black and white. They have to consider, here’s the issue, here’s what it costs, here’s the potential benefits, here’s the potential detriments. And you make a decision and you go with it, and

sometimes you’re right, sometimes you’re wrong. But I think that it is very clear that almost all businesses, in my experience, when they make a business decision that will impact ground, land or their surroundings, they think about it, because it’s going to be impactful for the future of their asset.”

Reby recognized that the people involved with OLT and their passion for the mission truly set the organization apart. People like Andy Thomas, who currently sits on the OLT Board and has, with



**Jacob Reby**

one small gap period, for 29 years. People like Executive Director Ted Heisel, or board member Steve Schueppert, or longtime OLT staff member Abigail Lambert, or all of the other people who have served or currently serve in some capacity with Ozark Land Trust.

“There was nobody on that board that didn’t love it,” Reby said. “Which is really nice, which is a good thing. Not all boards can say that; sometimes it’s more a job than a passion. This is a passion, and when I was there, it just needed a little organization to go along with the passion.”



Scan Here for  
a Video with  
Jacob Reby!



# OZARK LAND TRUST

Protecting the Ozarks for 40 Years

*Highlights from OLT's 40th Anniversary Event*



*OLT's celebrated our 40th birthday in Springfield/Ozark, MO on October 18 and 19. Friday, the celebration started with an outdoor reception at Wire Road Brewing in Battlefield, MO. Pictured top, Saturday started with a tour of Garrison Springs, MO, led by Loring Bullard. Following was a luncheon at Finley Farms, where we honored Sara Parker Pauley (pictured middle), outgoing Director of the Missouri Department of Conservation.*



*After lunch, Founder of OLT Gregg Galbraith (pictured bottom) gave a presentation about the Ozark bioregion and the history (and future) of OLT. The event ended at Bull Creek, where attendees could tour a beautiful 450-acre property that is in the process of being permanently protected.*



# Life, Land and Nature

## Former Exec Ted Heisel Refelcts on his OLT Role



**Ted Heisel**

By Ted Heisel

Nature has always been a source of inspiration and spiritual fulfillment for me. Hiking through undisturbed old growth forests or paddling through remote swamps have provided the most contented moments of my life. These moments are harder and harder to come by in our modern landscape dominated by humans as it is. We live in the so-called Anthropocene, an era where human influences have stretched to nearly every corner of the globe with radical and usually destructive impacts on nature.

Growing up on the outskirts of St. Louis left me with an ever-present fear of the “bulldozer just over the hill.” A comparison of today’s landscape with that of 40 years ago proves that indeed there often was such a bulldozer idling in wait. It is easy to lose perspective about these changes to our landscape, much like the frog in boiling water. Incremental change over time has a way of masking its significance, a phenomenon called the shifting baseline syndrome. In fact, the amount of developed area in the U.S. continues to increase by about 500,000 acres each year.

These deep-seated feelings for nature and concern for the future are what

led me (and many others) to seek jobs in the conservation field, including my stint as director of Ozark Land Trust from 2008 to 2012. It is why I continue to help OLT as a member and volunteer. It is also why many landowners, in acts of great generosity and altruism, have chosen to donate lands or conservation easements that forever limit development on their small part of the globe.

When I arrived at the land trust in 2008, it had never had a full-time executive director. Gregg Galbraith founded the organization in 1984 and had served as its president and de facto staff director ever since, all while running his flooring business in Carthage, Missouri. But by the early 2000s, the pace of projects and future ambitions had grown to a point where OLT needed someone focused on running it full-time. With backing from a generous and longstanding foundation supporter, OLT decided to take the plunge and hire a paid executive director.

The job at OLT seemed like an enticing and potentially rewarding challenge at the time I applied, which proved true over the next five years. Transitioning from a founder-led and largely volunteer organization to one that is more staff-driven often involves some growing pains. It was a period of significant change, with the board and small staff sorting out their respective roles, as well as intense focus on improving internal systems for file maintenance, accounting, and easement monitoring. Moreover, 2008 brought the Great Financial Crisis just as OLT was taking a leap forward. Would individuals and foundations continue to give as many people lost jobs and the value of their investments was cut in half?

The challenges of the transition and the financial crisis were weathered and, as a testament to the popularity

of land conservation, a string of productive years ensued from 2009 to 2011, with more than two dozen new conservation easement projects coming to fruition during that time. There were conservation easements placed on highly visible lands along the Meramec and James rivers, large blocks of forest in the Missouri River Hills, and groundwater recharge areas for caves inhabited by the threatened Ozark cavefish. The Department of Conservation and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service played an important role in these successes, providing grant funds for projects that protected important wildlife habitat.

A sad turn of events through the death of my wife Susan combined with the admitted wear and tear of leading a small nonprofit caused me to step aside in late 2012. It has been encouraging to see where OLT has gone in the years since. In addition to many new projects conserving more than 5,000 additional acres, the organization has achieved some other notable milestones. A years-long effort to upgrade internal systems led to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission bestowing its seal of approval on the organization in early 2019, giving donors and landowners an extra sense of comfort about the capability and stability of OLT. OLT also now participates in the conservation defense insurance program known as Terra Firma, a supplement to its stewardship fund as a method of ensuring the continued protection of lands and conservation easements. In more recent years, increased focus on fundraising and project-development has led to an expansion of the organization’s staff and hence capacity to conserve more land. As one of only a small number of land trusts in Missouri and Arkansas, OLT must continue growing in the future if we are to safeguard a meaningful amount of the Ozark landscape.



# From Agency to Nonprofit

## Peggy Horner brought key skills from MDC to OLT's work

By Peggy Horner

Working for Ozark Land Trust was the pinnacle of my conservation career. As I child, I knew from my early reckoning that I wanted to be a wildlife biologist, and I succeeded in achieving that dream first as a researcher tracking black bears in mountains of North Carolina, then focusing on endangered species, with Texas Parks and Wildlife for eight years, then the Missouri Department of Conservation for 13 years. It was at MDC that I had the revelation that in order to protect endangered species – and all wildlife, including their habitats – it was the land that needed to be protected.

MDC does a great job conserving public land for public use, but I wanted to help permanently protect private land. I gradually shifted my focus on developing partnerships with organizations that conserved private land, and helped secure funds that would do both – protect endangered species and the land upon which they depend.

The natural progression for me was to work for a land trust. I was so thrilled to shift my career when I was hired at OLT as the Stewardship Director in April, 2013. It was a short stint, however, as I became the Executive Director three months later. I had a steep learning curve going from state agency biologist to a land trust director, but I loved the challenge. What I brought with me were all the state, federal and other nonprofit partnerships I had built while working at MDC. I knew that OLT needed to be a stronger partner at the table when ecosystem-wide decisions were made. We had a unique niche to fill – permanently protecting private land, and I knew how to apply for state and federal grants.

OLT had been established as a solid organization under the leadership

of the two former Executive Directors, Gregg Galbraith (one of the founders of Ozark Regional Land Trust in 1987), and Ted Heisel, but we lacked the national stamp of approval as an accredited land trust. To build stronger partnership and prove our solid foundation, the OLT staff, board and I began the rigorous process of achieving this and became the first land trust based in Missouri to be accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in 2019. And yes, our partnerships became stronger as we were recognized as being the leader in using conservation easements on private land as a means of permanent protection. Accreditation needs to be reviewed and re-evaluated every five years, and OLT just completed this review, and their accreditation now runs to 2029.

OLT also became a leader in working with other nonprofit land conservation organizations. I helped initiate the Missouri Land Trust Coalition while at MDC, but it became a larger organization when I could focus on the Coalition as the OLT Executive Director. Since it was the only coalition of land trusts in the region, it also included land trusts from several surrounding states. We held workshops for both private landowners and government officials on the use of conservation easements to protect private land, as well as trainings and information sharing among the staff of the land trust members.

When I started at OLT, we had a very good, but lean staff of three conserving and stewarding properties across the Ozarks in Missouri and Arkansas -- the Huzzah Watershed Director, a Stewardship Director and the Executive Director. We needed help to continue our mission, and two positions were added – a Conservation Director



**Peggy Horner**

who would focus exclusively on land transactions, and an Office Manager to handle details that would relieve the Executive Director to focus on the partnerships, accreditation and advancement. We were still lean, but became even more efficient and effective. By the time I left, OLT had about 29,000 acres of land under its stewardship through conservation easements and ownership.

After achieving accreditation, it was a good time for me to refocus my energies to help my aging parents during their final years in Maine, so I retired early. When I look back on my tenure at OLT, I have immense gratitude and remember the many private landowners, supporting members, staff and board members who helped make OLT a leader in private land conservation in the Ozarks. I was blessed to have been part of its strong conservation history, and know that going forward, OLT will continue to adapt to the challenges of climate change and land conservation, and will lead the way in partnerships with private landowners, government agencies and other conservation organizations.

# Thanks to Our Generous Donors

*We are so grateful to all those who continue to support conservation in our beautiful Ozarks by making a gift to Ozark Land Trust. This list recognizes those who have given to us during 2023 and 2024 whose gifts were received as of November 26, 2024.*

*Happy holidays from all of us at Ozark Land Trust.*

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## Founder... continued from page 3

in 1981, followed by federal tax reform in 1986, which spelled out tax deduction guidelines for easements.

By the 1990s Ozark landowners began asking for conservation easements, Gregg said. In 1995, ORLT's first one was established at Tall Pines, a two-acre parcel in Ozark County owned by Ella Alford.

## TRANSITION

With the addition of conservation easements to ORLT's toolbox, the workload grew substantially, and the organization began to pay support staff, Gregg said. Jan Hinsey was the first, in 1998, followed by Sweetwater co-founder John Cutler, a workhorse who pioneered a GIS system for mapping conservation easements. Abigail Lambert joined ORLT as a staff member; she is still developing projects in the Meramec watershed today along with other support work.

Gregg says he was happy as a volunteer. "It was a huge amount of work that I did in my spare time, but it was very gratifying." However, by 2008, he said, "the organization grew so much that we decided it was absolutely necessary to transition to a paid executive director.

Gregg was ORLT's executive director for 25 years. "It grew and grew. By the time I stepped down in 2008, we were protecting 18,000 acres." Today, that acreage exceeds 32,000.

In 2019, the organization changed names, dropping "Regional" to become simply Ozark Land Trust.

## A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Gregg believes it is time for OLT to update its original bioregional vision. "In today's interconnected world, the health of all bioregions has an impact on our Ozark bioregion, and vice versa, due to worldwide socio-economic activities," he said. "Unchecked, our activities will result in irreversible environmental changes that will affect the health and well-being of all creatures, including ourselves."

"When we started, we protected land one project at a time, one landowner at a time," Gregg said. "Then, there was no email, GPS, websites, or smart phones. We would meet with landowners face-to-face." But "today, it's a whole another world, and development is rapidly expanding."

OLT has evolved up to a scale that it could affect wider areas, Gregg believes, saying "We need to look at the bigger picture, not just pieces." Now, instead of individual properties, "we should be looking at bioregionally designed strategies for landscape-scale protection, including protection from climate change." He'd like to see OLT target large areas that would provide wildlife corridors and sustain entire ecological communities.

Under that scenario, he concluded, OLT's impact might expand greatly. Individual properties could become part of a larger mosaic in which "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."



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To help people protect and conserve the natural resources and beauty of the Ozarks and to advocate for land conservation.

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