

Lisa Matthews Memorial Bay

Members will remember that SCNPS is the proud owner of a 52 acre Preserve located in Bamberg Co., SC. The Preserve consists of a wonderful diverse Carolina Bay surrounded by degraded uplands. The most important feature of the property, and our primary management responsibility there, is maintaining and increasing a population of federally endangered *Oxypolis canbyi* (Canby's Dropwort) that occurs in the bay. We also need to maintain the high quality of other wetland vegetation and restore the surrounding uplands. Those uplands were for the most part a low diversity loblolly pine plantation when The Nature Conservancy bequeathed the property to SCNPS. We are in the process of converting this back to longleaf pine habitat which, in all probability, represented the majority of the original upland vegetation. The main importance of the upland restoration is to allow us to reintroduce a natural fire regime wherein fires lit in the uplands might penetrate into the bay margin or entirely across the bay during dry periods. Burning the bay is likely to be critical in preserving the herbaceous character of the habitat and assuring its suitability for the endangered *Oxypolis*.

The SCNPS Board of Directors voted at their June 22, 2006, meeting to name this property the Lisa Mathews Memorial Bay in memory of Lisa Mathews, a valued member who died in an automobile accident. Lisa's husband Terry donated \$7,500 to the Society in her memory for use in the bay project. That donation serves as the foundation for the Lisa Mathews Memorial Fund which we will draw on to finance restoration and maintenance. Your contributions to this fund will be appreciated. Our goal is that this cache will grow into an endowment that will assure that, once restored, the rare quality of this property is maintained in perpetuity.

Our initial expenses, primarily legal fees and other title transfer costs were covered by generous contributions by a few of our members. Jeff Glitzenstein successfully competed for a US Fish & Wildlife Service grant, and in 2005 SCNPS was awarded a \$10,000 matching grant by that agency to help with the bay restoration. We retained the services of Guy San Fratello, registered Forester and land manager to help with the project. Guy's first action on behalf of the Society was to oversee the logging of most of the planted loblollies. Profits from the sale of that timber were adequate to satisfy our share of the matching grant, with some left over to pay a few of the miscellaneous expenses not covered by the grant. Remaining loblollies are scheduled to be harvested August 21 & 22, 2006. The goal of that harvest is primarily restoration, and little profit will be realized from the sale of the timber. Some of the trees closest to the bay are most problematic to enhancement of the Bay habitat and the *Oxypolis* population were growing on soil too wet for commercial harvest. We hired a labor crew to remove "weed" hardwood trees around the margin of the Bay.

In late February 2006 Guy San Fratello and his son with assistance from Jeff Glitzenstein and John Brubaker burned the majority of the upland portion of the Preserve. The fire did in fact consume most of the logging debris and exposed much mineral soil for restoration plantings, but due to wind conditions areas closer to the highway could not be burned. Our plans are to burn those remaining areas one day in the September 9 – 16, 2006, timeframe. Volunteers would be a great help with this prescribed burn. No experience is necessary; this will be an exciting learning exercise. Contact John Brubaker if you'd like to participate.

Wiregrass (*Aristida beyrichiana*) was a dominant understory plant over much of the range of longleaf pine, most likely including our Preserve. As the name suggests, wiregrass is a fine wiry grass renowned for high silica content in the leaves and extreme flammability. It is sometimes referred to as a keystone species because of its role in facilitating fire. Aware that wiregrass was prolific at the nearby SC Department of Natural Resources Heritage Trust Aiken Gopher Tortoise

Preserve, we petitioned that agency for permission to collect seed of that and other species from the Preserve. Because wiregrass sets seed well only after a burn, we asked SCDNR to do a growing season prescribed fire in preparation for our collection. Our request was granted and last year Jeff Glitzenstein with the help of many SCNPS volunteers collected wiregrass seed and seed from other important herbaceous species characteristic of undisturbed longleaf pine understory. That seed was distributed to several nurseries where propagation has been so successful that some 80,000 wiregrass and 10,000 other species will need to be out-planted this fall and winter. That is more than twice the number we had budgeted for our use; we're about \$8,000 over budget on the cost of the plant plugs. That does not include the cost of planting. We are investigating opportunities to sell surplus wiregrass plugs to others engaged in restoration projects. However, contributions that allow us to acquire and pay for the planting of as much of this available supply will be of significant benefit to our project. Planting will commence in mid September and continue through December, 2006. Obviously, professional help will be necessary to achieve this task, but we plan to do as much as possible with the help of volunteers. The Lowcountry Chapter has a planting outing scheduled for September 23, 2006. Contact John Brubaker if you're interested in participating in this ongoing project.

On October 3, 2005, Jeff Glitzenstein and John Brubaker conducted a complete inventory of *Oxypolis canbyi* at our Preserve. A total of 217 plants, 202 in flower, 15 non-flowering, were counted. This represents a robust population, apparently the largest and most vigorous remaining population of this federally endangered species in SC. Nevertheless, the Dropwort population and other herbaceous vegetation are threatened by overly dense *Taxodium ascendens* (pondcypress) and hardwood tree and shrub encroachment. Probably the most pressing issue is fire in the Bay. We had hoped that the Bay might be burned by now. With much luck the prescribed fire scheduled for early September, 2006 will carry through at least the *Oxypolis* habitat. If we are not able to burn through that habitat this growing season there is concern that we may be endangering the *Oxypolis* population, the main reason for our assuming management of the Bay Preserve. Jeff and John intend to re-check the status of the population soon, and do some chainsaw work to remove woody encroachment in the vicinity of the *Oxypolis* clumps.