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New Conservation Easement Protects Endangered Watercress Darter in Birmingham

[Freshwater Land Trust](#) (FLT) has closed on a 26.1-acre conservation easement in the Powderly neighborhood in Birmingham, AL. The property is home to the watercress darter, a federally endangered and state protected fish species with only six known habitats in the world, all of which are in Jefferson County. FLT was able to secure long-term stewardship funding to help facilitate property management thanks to its partner on the project, [Black Warrior Riverkeeper](#).

Emily Godsey bought this property in 2018, and she then immediately called FLT to start the process of conserving it. She knew it had high conservation value and was a great opportunity to help protect the watercress darter. Now, Godsey has generously donated it as a conservation easement to FLT, which will protect the land from development in perpetuity. Godsey will retain ownership of the property.

“This is how I see part of my legacy,” said Godsey. “I want to make sure this land is protected forever regardless of who holds it. It’s highly important to me to pass it on to my kids and make sure it’s conserved as it moves across generations.” Godsey comes from a family of long-time conservationists, especially her grandmother, “Bubby,” who shared her love for all things nature with Godsey.

FLT’s Land Stewardship Director, Sam McCoy, assessed the property and documented that it contains 228 feet of Seven Springs, the known watercress darter habitat in this area. It also contains over 2,400 feet of two other streams, including Nabors Branch and an unnamed stream that feed into Valley Creek in the Black Warrior River watershed.

“A primary purpose in pursuing this property is so that we could subsequently perform habitat restoration,” said McCoy. “Conserving this property will help reduce future erosion and sedimentation of the waterways and maintain the watercress darter habitat.”

As the holder of the conservation easement, FLT will work closely with Godsey to implement best management practices to potentially include removing invasive vegetation, addressing erosion issues, opening the canopy to allow more sunlight to reach the stream, and assessing a culvert for upstream fish passage. The stewardship funding for the property management comes from supplemental environmental project (SEP) funding given to FLT after the Black Warrior Riverkeeper’s successful completion of a pollution lawsuit.

“This conservation easement is potentially pivotal for the endangered watercress darter,” said Charles Scribner, Executive Director of Black Warrior Riverkeeper. “We are pleased to see yet another one of our pollution lawsuits result in funds going to the Freshwater Land Trust’s great work in this community.”

Beyond working with Godsey and Black Warrior Riverkeeper, FLT will also continue to partner with [Faith Apostolic Church](#), who owns an adjacent upstream property, and the [U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) to help manage this watercress darter habitat.

For information about conserving land with Freshwater Land Trust, [click here](#).

To view Sam McCoy's photo of the newly protected area, [click here](#).

To view Black Warrior Riverkeeper Nelson Brooke's photo of a watercress darter [click here](#).

To view Nelson Brooke's photo of the easement signing, [click here](#). Description: Carolyn Buck (Red Rock Trail System Director, Freshwater Land Trust) notarizes the Seven Springs property's conservation easement while partners smile at this great news for the watercress darter. Seated: Emily Godsey (the property owner who donated the easement, holding her daughter, Daphne) and Elizabeth Sims (Land Conservation Director, Freshwater Land Trust). Standing: Rasha Smith (Executive Director, Freshwater Land Trust) and Charles Scribner (Executive Director, Black Warrior Riverkeeper).