



From the mountains to the sea and the river bottoms to the agricultural fields, South Carolina's open spaces define our quality of life, shape our traditions, and drive an \$85 billion timber, farming, and tourism economy. No one has a greater role in shaping the landscape of our state, than family landowners. More than 60% of the forest and farmland in the state is owned by private individuals.

The South Carolina Land Trust Network is a collection of land trusts from across the state which work hand in hand with conservation-minded landowners who voluntarily choose to chart a legacy of conservation by protecting their property with a conservation easement or selling their property for conservation uses.

In the following pages, we will help you navigate the complexities of land protection by shedding light on two land protection options: conservation easements and fee simple sales, while introducing you to organizations that grant and hold conservation easements or purchase land for conservation purposes.

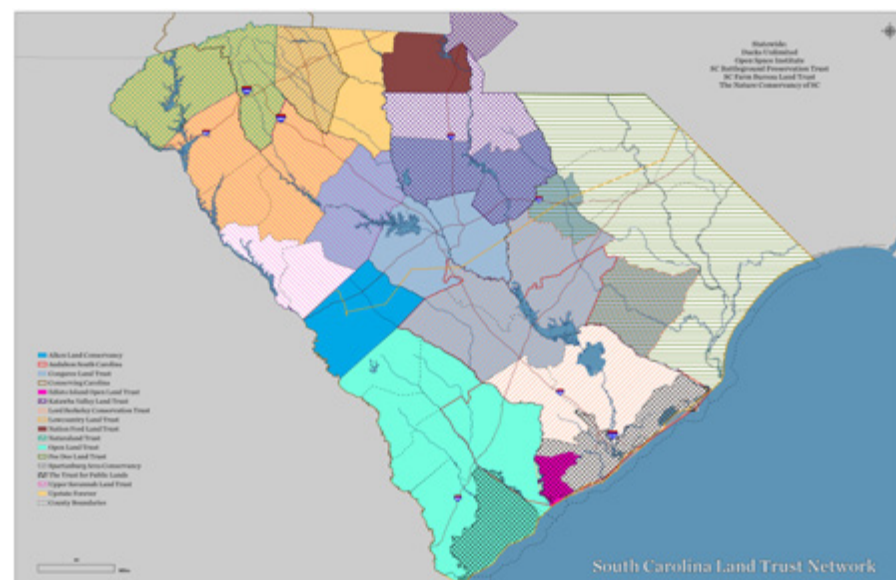
We hope this guide will inspire you to take the next step in defining your personal land legacy by reaching out to your local land trust for more information.

Disclaimer: This handbook is not intended to replace or substitute any language, terms, or content in your conservation easement document nor provide legal advice.

What is a land trust?

A land trust is a nonprofit organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by acquiring land or conservation easements.

South Carolina Land Trust Network members generally work in geographies defined by watersheds. Some organizations that hold conservation easements also work statewide.



The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation. It is awarded to land trusts that primarily work on easements and who meet the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. Each accredited land trust completes a rigorous review process and joins a network of organizations united by strong ethical practices. This trusted network of land trusts has demonstrated fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions, and lasting stewardship of the lands they conserve.



Our Affiliate Members:

Berkeley County Greenbelt Program	Charleston County Greenbelt Program
Beaufort County Greenspace Program	York County Forever
Dorchester County Greenbelt Program	Oconee County Conservation Bank Board

Conservation easements & fee simple acquisition

Land protection is a deeply personal decision for landowners. The reasons for exploring a lasting conservation solution are as diverse as the properties themselves. Whether you seek to define your personal land legacy, desire to protect a special place for future appreciation, capture tax benefits, or a combination of all three, it's important to thoroughly explore options and find the best partner to help you achieve your desired outcomes.

Conservation easements are the most commonly used tool for land protection in South Carolina. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal

agreement between a landowner and a qualified land trust that permanently limits undesirable uses on a property in order to protect specific conservation values identified in the easement.

Conservation easements typically prevent land uses such as residential subdivisions, commercial or industrial operations, and mining, while allowing you to continue to use your land for traditional rural uses, such as farming, grazing, hunting, and timbering. The terms of a conservation easement are negotiable, based on your intentions for your property and the conservation values being protected. A conservation

easement only allows public access if you desire it and include it in the easement terms. You may sell, gift, or will your property to heirs – the agreement is a permanent part of the deed and remains with the land.

Some landowners prefer to sell or to donate their land for long-term conservation use. In those cases, the landowner negotiates a sales price with the land trust or conservation organization. This is referred to as a fee simple acquisition. This approach is most often used when a landowner decides they do not want to own the property and they prefer it to be protected. Commonly, properties that adjoin state parks, wildlife management areas, national wildlife refuges or other publicly held land are great options for this type of acquisition.

Examples of retained rights:

The landowner retains all rights and responsibilities that are not specifically prohibited or restricted by the conservation easement.

- *Agricultural activities*
- *Timber management including harvesting*
- *Hunting, fishing*
- *Limited number of subdivisions*
- *Limited number of homes or outbuildings*

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

is/does:

- ✓ Voluntary
- ✓ Unique to reflect landowner needs and desires
- ✓ Protects conservation values
- ✓ A permanent legal agreement
- ✓ Compatible with agriculture and forestry, as desired by landowner

is not/does not:

- ✗ Allow public access unless granted by the landowner
- ✗ Prohibit the sale or transfer of the property

Assembling your team:

A conservation easement is a permanent legal document with possible financial and tax implications. It's important to seek counsel from a certified public accountant, appraiser, and attorney who have experience with conservation easements.



Every land trust has its own set of internal processes & timelines.

In general, you can expect these five stages for a conservation easement:

1. INITIAL STEPS

During your initial meeting, or often – several meetings, your land trust representative will seek to get to know you better, understand your property’s current uses, and conservation values and your personal long-term goals for your property including what uses or management you want to see continue. This is a good time to consult with your trusted advisors including participating family members, tax accountants, and appraisers. The land trust will also discuss the long-term stewardship of the terms of your conservation easement and how to support that relationship through a stewardship gift. Based on your input, the land trust staff will translate your interests into conservation easement terms and begin to draft the easement.

2. DUE DILIGENCE

As with any real estate transaction, conservation easements require steps that are collectively referred to as “due diligence.” You, as the landowner, are responsible for providing a current survey, a written appraisal, and working with an attorney to complete a title search. If there is a mortgage, lien, or other special circumstances, you may be responsible for additional due diligence. Your land trust partner will work with you to ensure that your due diligence is thorough and will stand the tests of time.

3. FINAL DRAFTING AND APPROVALS

The final easement is prepared by land trust staff and approved by landowners. A baseline documentation report, or BDR, will also be prepared to memorialize the current details of your property such as structures and improvements, natural features, vegetation, and conservation values.

4. CLOSING

The closing is the culmination of many months of work and the beginning of a new relationship with your land trust! You and the land trust will sign the conservation easement and baseline report and the documents will be recorded with the County Register of Deeds office. You’ll also consider the amount you would like to contribute to a stewardship fund, to support the future costs of permanently monitoring and enforcing of the conservation easement.



Photo © : Alex Reynolds

5. ONGOING MONITORING

The land trust is now responsible for annual property visits to ensure the terms of the conservation easement are upheld and to document any changes to the property.

The donation of a conservation easement or bargain sale of a fee simple acquisition may provide substantial tax benefits through the reduction of federal income and estate taxes, and South Carolina income and property taxes.

Federal and South Carolina tax laws allow the donor of a qualified easement to claim the value of the easement as a charitable contribution for income tax purposes. A landowner gets no deduction for selling the easement for fair market value.

For charitable contribution purposes, the easement value is generally based on the difference between the fair market value of the property before the easement and the value of the property after granting of the easement (except in instances where there is a substantial record of sales of easements comparable to the donated easement). The difference between the “before” value and the “after” value is the amount that may be treated as a charitable contribution for income tax purposes.

For example, suppose that an individual owns a 1,000-acre property valued at \$2 million (“before” value) and places a qualified easement on the property, relinquishing rights such as a residential subdivision development. Suppose that when the property is reappraised considering the conservation easement terms, the value is reduced to \$800,000 (“after” value). The difference in the values with and without the conservation easement represent a charitable donation, in this hypothetical case \$1.2 million.

The decrease in property value associated with a conservation easement may also provide estate tax and property tax relief.

Tax laws are complex and subject to change. It’s critical that you enlist the assistance of a certified public accountant knowledgeable in conservation easements to understand how these opportunities apply to your specific financial situation.

Protecting special habitats, forest cover for flood control or water quality, special scenic, natural, or historic areas can be a public benefit and may be recognized as a charitable contribution.

To qualify for a federal income tax deduction, an easement must provide a public benefit through permanent protection of at least one of the following important conservation resources:

1. The protection of a relatively natural habitat of fish, wildlife or plants, or a similar ecosystem
2. The preservation of open space, including farm and forestland, for the scenic enjoyment of the general public or pursuant to an adopted governmental conservation policy
3. The preservation of an historically significant land or building
4. The preservation of land for public outdoor recreation or education.



Photo © : Alex Reynolds

Conservation easement grant funding

The South Carolina Conservation Bank, county/local conservation funds, private foundations, and federal organizations have limited funding available to pay for a portion of the conservation easement value. This funding is highly competitive and incentivizes the protection of unique or rare habitats, historical sites, geological features, and public accessibility. Your land trust is knowledgeable about grant opportunities that may apply to your situation.



Land Trust Profiles

In the following pages, we'll introduce you to partners in land protection across the state and some of their landowner partners. Most land trusts work in certain counties defined by watersheds. Others work statewide for specific purposes such as Ducks Unlimited, Open Space Institute, The Nature Conservancy, and South Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust.

Photo ©: Mac Stone

New Haven Farm Aiken Land Conservancy

New Haven Farm can be found driving along the “equestrian corridor” of Highway 302. The 267-acre property is owned and managed by Dr. Shelley Onderdonk and Adam Snow, an equine veterinarian and retired polo player respectively. New Haven Farm is a working horse farm, with about half of the property consisting of hay fields and horse paddocks. As passionate horse people and dedicated conservationists, Shelley and Adam made the decision in 2018 to put their property under easement with the aim of preserving the natural, scenic, and aesthetic character of the property.

Shelley and Adam chose to work with the Aiken Land Conservancy due to the organization’s well-established reputation of working with a diverse range of properties. It was important for the owners to protect their land from future development, while continuing to serve its purpose as a productive working horse farm and a place for their family to enjoy recreational activities.

What makes New Haven special is the interconnectedness of each ecosystem as one blends into the next. Venturing along a path from the pasture into the woods, a variety of oak trees stand, offering a smooth transition from pasture to forest. The oaks intermix with hickory and longleaf pine as the forest becomes thicker. Further along the ground transitions into wetland, eventually leading to the bank of Shaw Creek.

The property stretches alongside a mile of Shaw Creek, a major tributary for the Edisto Watershed. The easement on this property secures critical habitat in the area by protecting a multitude of ecosystems for biodiversity to flourish. Additionally, this property safeguards key sources of drinking water for the community. New Haven Farm is an excellent example of the way human livelihoods and environmental protection can work cohesively together to preserve the history and ecology of a beloved place.

The Aiken Land Conservancy was founded in 1991 by Harry Shealy and Iris Freeman with the mission to conserve Aiken’s green spaces from overdevelopment. Today the ALC prioritizes conservation holdings that support community projects and the overall betterment of Aiken. For more information visit: conserveaiken.org



Hardscramble Congaree Land Trust

A philanthropist with a keen interest in science, the late Margaret “Peggy” Lloyd purchased 853 acres between Camden and the Wateree River with the vision to manage the property guided by a strong land ethic. She enlisted a team of professional land managers, naturalists, and ecologists to create management plans for the property, known as Hardscramble. Together they constructed plans to honor the land and create a sanctuary for longleaf pine, bald eagles, and other species seeking shelter from the encroaching development in the area.

In 2006, Ms. Lloyd donated her beloved Hardscramble to Clemson University for the purpose of research, education, and ecological conservation. Immediately following the acceptance of the land, Clemson partitioned 753 of the 853 acres to be placed under easement with Congaree Land Trust. The easement prohibits commercial development, agriculture, or timber harvesting, honoring Ms. Lloyd’s

vision for Hardscramble. Today, the property is used by Clemson University students for research and educational purposes. The public is invited often to explore the property with plans in place to broaden the scope of community engagement.

Hardscramble is a special property that represents one woman’s dream of fostering research and environmental education in the state of South Carolina, by way of her gift of the land, for years to come. In addition to gifting Hardscramble, Margaret Lloyd also passed along her outlook on our human relationship with nature. Referred to as “Margaret’s Guiding Principle,” Clemson uses Ms. Lloyd’s teaching of compassion and respect for nature to be the guiding inspiration for learning, teaching, and stewardship of Hardscramble. In this way, Ms. Lloyd’s legacy lives on, with her passion for the land she nurtured for sixty years continuing to inspire generations to follow.

Congaree Land Trust was founded in 1992 by seven individuals with a commitment to conserving the natural and scenic lands of central South Carolina. Operating in 15 counties, Congaree Land Trust has partnered with landowners to conserve over 90,000 acres of significant habitats, farms, forests, natural areas, and open spaces. Their services include conservation easements, agricultural easements, mitigation easements, and public land projects. For more information visit: congaareilt.org



Kirkfield Ducks Unlimited

Situated in the ACE Basin surrounded by tens of thousands of acres consisting of protected wetlands and waterways lies Kirkfield. Owned by Todd and Peggy Watkins, Kirkfield is a 165-acre property of rice fields and wetlands, pine woods and open pastures. A shared love of sporting and wildlife drew Todd and Peggy Watkins to this property, tucked away amid pristine, undeveloped land and water. Peggy, an acclaimed wildlife artist, found Kirkfield to be a well of inspiration for future paintings. She and Todd fell in love with the incomparable scenic views that make the lowcountry of South Carolina so special.

Sandwiched between E.F. Hollings National Wildlife Refuge and Nemours Wildlife Foundation, the property had long been eyed by the ACE Basin Task Force as one of the last unprotected parcels of land in the area. Todd Watkins also recognized this, sharing his thoughts in an interview with Ducks Unlimited, “We’re a little postage stamp

piece of property down here. We were the one little outcast that wasn’t under a conservation easement, so when we bought the property, we knew that was the direction we wanted to go.” Working with Ducks Unlimited the Watkins placed Kirkfield in an easement solidifying its future as part of the protected ACE Basin landscape.

Since their purchase of the property in 2016, the Watkins have noticed a steady increase of wildlife on their property. The preservation of Kirkfield has wider implications for the ecology of the area and beyond, T. Edward Nickens explains in the article *Legacy for Landowners*, “Kirkfield could provide connection— as a corridor for wildlife, as a stopover for migratory birds on a continental scale, and as a piece of framework that keeps the ACE Basin whole and unsullied.” As one more piece in the puzzle of the ACE Basin, Kirkfield exemplifies the importance of connecting protected areas together.

Ducks Unlimited was founded in 1937 in response to the declining rates of waterfowl populations across the United States. Over the years it has built itself into one of the largest and most effective private waterfowl and wetlands conservation organizations internationally. For more information visit ducks.org

Sunny Side Edisto Island Open Land Trust

Carroll Belser and husband, Dr. Sidney Gauthreaux, are the owners of Sunny Side, a property nestled within Edisto Island with Live Oaks, farmed land, and historical remnants throughout. Both ornithologists by profession, the two wanted to preserve the property Carroll had inherited, with the assurance that the cultural and natural resources of the land would remain for years to come. In 2009, a year after moving to Sunny Side permanently, Carroll and Sid placed the property under easement with the Edisto Island Open Land Trust through a bargain sale donation.

Carroll and Sid share a deep connection to Edisto Island, its people, and the culture. For Carroll, her connection to this land extends back to before the Civil War and most prominently to her great grandfather, Townsend Mikell, who built the plantation home on Sunny Side in 1870. The priority to protect their family’s land for generations to come is shared with the rest of Carroll’s family, of

which four have placed their adjacent properties under easements with the Edisto Island Open Land Trust. Together the properties, separate but united under easement, form an extended area of preserved land on Edisto.

Sunny Side has everything EIOLT looks for in a conservation easement property. The views on the property are idyllic of a southern landholding with waterfront views of Store Creek. It is owned by a family with deep ties to Edisto Island, who are actively involved in community efforts to preserve Edisto’s unique character and charm. The tabby structures of a cotton gin and the original tabby barn found along Store Creek, hint at the farm’s past as a hub for sea island cotton agriculture. Much life has been lived on this property and it can be felt walking along the creek or through the open fields of crops. With this feeling is a satisfaction of knowing the memories of the place are not going anywhere.

Founded by Edistonians who wished to prevent inappropriate development and loss of the Island’s culture, the Edisto Island Open Land Trust is dedicated to the preservation of Edisto Island and all that makes the sea island special. For more information visit: edisto.org



Ivy Place Katawba Valley Land Trust

In the late 1800's, Dr. James D. Nisbet purchased the land, now known as Ivy Place, from Adam Ivy. For the forty years prior, the property located in the Piedmont region of South Carolina, had served as a homestead for Ivy and his family. Upon purchase of the property, Dr. Nisbet retired and moved south from New York City to transform the land into a working dairy farm. It served its purpose as such until the death of Dr. Nisbet and his wife in the late 1950's. For many years after the property sat vacant.

Fast forward to today and the land has become revitalized with human activity by the descendants of Dr. Nisbet. The 700-acre property is currently owned by siblings who all share fond memories growing up on the land hunting, fishing, farming, and hiking. It continues to operate as a family run farm and serves as a place for family gatherings. In recent years, Ivy Place has also opened itself up to the surrounding community for weddings and events, strawberry

picking, and even as a day camp for children to attend.

To ensure Ivy Place remains in the Nisbet family for future generations and avoids the surrounding pressure of development, the siblings agreed to place the property under an easement with Katawba Valley Land Trust. "This place along the Catawba River is special to us and has natural and cultural significance," shared Genie Graham, daughter of Jim and Genie Nisbet White, "We are excited that we are able to place our land in a conservation easement". The wider Nisbet family has also contributed their part in securing protection of land in the area with over 1000 acres and 3.7 miles alongside Catawba River placed in conservation easements with Katawba Valley Land Trust. Conserving the land for the next generations is a mission the Nisbet family believes in and with the help of Katawba Valley Land Trust it has become a reality.



Inspired to protect significant natural and cultural areas of Lancaster County, Lindsay Pettus enlisted the help of his friends and fellow conservationists to found the Katawba Valley Land Trust in 1992. Since the founding the land trust has protected more than 12,000 acres of land in Lancaster and the surrounding counties. For more information visit: kvlt.org

Indigo Park Kiawah Conservancy

A long-time resident of Kiawah Island, Candice Dyal felt strongly compelled to give back to her community. In 2010, she purchased Indigo Park for development. During the planning phase of her LEED Certified community, Candice saw a need for land preservation and for community engagement with the environment. She set aside 3 acres of marsh front and maritime forest as a wildlife sanctuary and nature park for the residents. Working with Kiawah Conservancy, an organization she has a long-standing relationship with, Candice put Indigo Park Nature Area under easement, cementing it as protected land from future development.

The preservation of Indigo Park is particularly significant for the bobcat, a threatened species on Kiawah Island. The property is located between Important Bobcat Areas (IBA) 19 and 20, areas designated by the Town of Kiawah Island as critical habitat for

the species. The preservation of Indigo Park creates a permanent wildlife corridor for the bobcat to safely travel from one IBA to the next. The property also provides added shelter and food sources for the bobcat and could one day be designated as an IBA. Indigo Park is also a sanctuary for the other wildlife of Kiawah Island and a place for native flora to flourish.

Walking through the Indigo Park Nature Area provides a welcome reminder of just how beautiful and unique the Lowcountry of South Carolina is. From the ospreys resting in the towering pines, to the elusive bobcat lurking in the salt-shrub thicket, Indigo Park humbles all that walk through it to the reality in which we live in, an area far older than those of new arrival. Today, this land acts as a viewing area for the Kiawah community to enjoy and be reminded of the land that was here before them and the wildlife that needs a space to survive and thrive too.

The Kiawah Conservancy's mission is to measure, manage, improve, and advocate for the ecological health of Kiawah Island and its environs. Founded in 1997 to preserve the natural habitat of Kiawah Island, the Conservancy has successfully preserved 65 properties, totaling in 2,286 acres of pristine barrier island habitat. For more information visit: kiawahconservancy.org



Old Santee Canal Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust

The Old Santee Canal tract, a relic from a time long ago, sits on a 645-acre property of forestland with two miles running along the Santee River. The property is owned by the children and their spouses of the late South Carolina governor James B. Edwards; Ken and Cathy Wingate, James and Jenny Edwards, Jr., and Dr. Bert Pruitt. Together the family decided to ensure the protection of the inherited property that Edwards once held so dear. In 2020, they placed the Old Santee Canal property under easement with the Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust.

Ken Wingate shared his expectations for the property at the celebration held for the preservation of the land, “One of our hopes is that in partnership with the Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust, we all together can maintain these historic sites and to allow the public to come and periodically see, learn, enjoy, and be excited about the history this property represents.”

The Santee Canal took seven years to build with construction starting in 1793 and ending in 1800. Stretching 22 miles, the canal connected the Santee and Cooper Rivers, providing direct access between Charleston and areas further inland. The canal was in use fifty years before drought, and then flooding from the construction of Lakes Marion and Moultrie, destroyed most of it.

Dr. Richard Porcher, a scholar, educator, and conservationist co-authoring a book on the canal explains why the easement on this property matters. “Preserving a place like the Old Santee Canal is critical. It is part of our history. It is part of who we are,” Dr. Porcher states, “This was the lifeline for the economy of South Carolina for more than 50 years and served a critical role in bringing all the wares from the upcountry to Charleston. Being able to preserve a structure like this, is really preserving who we are.”

Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust has protected over 40,000 acres of family farms and forests, rivers and streams, and historic sites since its founding in 1992. The mission at Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust is to conserve the natural environment, cultural and historic sites, and productive lands that anchor the community's sense of place. For more information visit: lordberkeley.org



Sheldon Plantation Lowcountry Land Trust

Christine Jacobs purchased Sheldon Plantation with an understanding of the cultural and ecological significance of the area. The 240-acre property of open pine savanna, mixed upland forest, and various wetlands, surrounds the property of Old Sheldon ruins, a historical landmark of the lowcountry. With this knowledge, Sheldon Plantation was bought by Jacobs with the full intention of protecting the property from future development. Once purchased, Jacobs contacted the Lowcountry Land Trust, and in 2022 an easement was placed on Sheldon Plantation guaranteeing it safe from development forevermore.

Driving along Old Sheldon Church Road, sheltered by Live Oaks draped in Spanish moss reveals the Old Sheldon Church ruins, an iconic site in South Carolina. A popular landmark along this Scenic Byway, the area is important to many locals and is listed as a National Historic Site on the National Register of Historic Places.

“Old Sheldon Church is a local and national treasure,” Christine shares,

“I am honored and proud to protect this newly acquired portion of Sheldon Plantation and to be a small part of the larger plan to preserve and protect the Ace Basin. LLT, as a group, was not only helpful but a great resource as we sought to protect this land for generations to come. Together with the Parish of St. Helena we share the common goal of protecting this sacred land in perpetuity.”

The protection of Sheldon Plantation reinforces the integrity of Beaufort County's historical, natural, and rural resources, and adds to the remarkable mosaic of protected lands in the ACE Basin. It lies in the Broad-St. Helena Watershed of Beaufort County and contains wetland tributaries that flow into the headwaters of Huspa Creek. The property features diverse ecosystems and a wealth of wildlife. Through the forethought of Jacobs and collaboration with Lowcountry Land Trust this important piece of land will remain intact, protected forever.

Founded in 1986, Lowcountry Land Trust is a non-profit organization with the mission to honor the relationship between people and land by protecting irreplaceable Lowcountry lands and treasured places. Working in all 17 counties of the South Carolina Coastal Plain, LLT holds conservation easements on more than 150,000 acres. For more information visit: lowcountrylandtrust.org



Smith Ford Farm Nation Ford Land Trust

Along the Broad River in rural York County lies a farm rich in historical and ecological significance. Currently owned by Annie Laura and Joseph Hamrick, the 458-acre Smith Ford Farm has been in the Hamrick family for over one hundred years. The house on the property was built in 1790, and since its construction, the land has been used for farming and animal husbandry. The historical significance and family ties were the leading motivators for Annie and Joseph to place an easement on their property with Nation Ford Land Trust.

The land of Smith Ford Farm holds generations of history within it. The land's history can be traced to pre-colonial times when Native American tribes frequented the area of the Broad River the Hamrick's property touches. Arrowhead artifacts from several eras have been found throughout the farm. The presence of troops during the Revolutionary War and Civil War are also ingrained in the land. The SC Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology has designated

the property as an eligible historic landmark.

Smith Ford Farm stretches over a mile alongside the riverfront of the Broad River. The ecosystem along the bank of the Broad River is a significant focus area for Nation Ford Land Trust. Additionally, the property has a thriving piedmont ecosystem rich in mixed hardwood of white oak, maple, and American chestnut. The land is thick with the growth of trees and plants, having long been undisturbed, it demonstrates the deep hold nature has on the property.

Views of the vast, open fields accompany a person on their walk through the pastures of cattle grazing. Passing the house built in an era of a time long passed, there is a sense of traveling back in time. Smith Ford Farm lends itself as a beautiful blend of human and natural history carried forward into the present and future.

Nation Ford Land Trust was established in 1989 with the belief that heritage is the community's most precious resource. Since its founding, NFLT has dedicated its work to the preservation of open spaces, natural beauty, and the scenic heritage of York County. For more information visit: nationfordlandtrust.org



Groton The Nature Conservancy

Groton has been a part of the Winthrop family for generations. Formerly a working plantation, it was purchased in 1906 by Robert Dudley Winthrop to be repurposed as a hunting retreat. Today, the Winthrop family still uses the property for hunting and as a gathering place for their large and extensive family.

The property is substantial, at over 21,000 acres, it extends from high upland sandy hills of longleaf pine and hickory to dark floodplain swamps of cypress and black gum. It stretches 20 miles along the Savannah River, making conservation of the property important to secure clean drinking water to over a half a million residents of South Carolina and Georgia.

To ensure that the legacy and value system would continue as the family expanded, placing a conservation easement on the property was a strategic solution. The Groton Land Company, owned by the Winthrop family, realized financial benefits

through cash and tax credit sales that could help sustain the property. In 2002, the Groton Land Company donated a 7,438-acre easement on the river front to The Nature Conservancy. 17 years later, in 2019, they placed a second easement on 13,869 additional acres of the property. Totaling 21,307 acres of protected land, Groton is the largest easement on a private land holding in South Carolina.

Walking along this property one is hit with an overwhelming sense of awe. The history of the land can be felt. Cemeteries and relic homes are scattered across the landscape. The property is expansive, moving gradually from longleaf pine savannas to miles of bottomland hardwood forest. It is a well-managed property, one of the best in the Southeast, and is an example of what a forest can be with gentle and consistent management.

The Nature Conservancy has been working in South Carolina for the past 50 years to conserve the lands and water on which all life depends. Their goal has shifted over the years from preserving individual properties to protecting entire natural systems. For more information visit: nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/south-carolina/



Three Sisters Farm Open Land Trust

In 2004, going against the current of development in Beaufort County, Mary O. Merrick entrusted the Open Land Trust with placing her family's property, Calhoun Plantation, under easement. Calhoun Plantation has been owned and run by the Merrick family since 1848, initially growing cotton, rice, corn, and other crop staples.

Located on the outskirts of the town of Bluffton, the 145-acre property falls within the Okatie River corridor. With the rapid development of Bluffton, the water quality in the Okatie River has declined largely in part due to freshwater runoff from roads and houses diluting the brackish estuarine water of the river. The preservation of this land aides in slowing the urban growth in the Okatie River corridor and ensures parts of the area will be protected from future development.

The decision to put the property under easement was made by Mary and her family with community-centered thinking in mind, "After quite a bit of thought and consultation with my

children, we decided we wanted to preserve this land as we had inherited it. We didn't feel that it was our privilege to do anything else than that. And we're very happy we did".

The farming legacy of the land lives on with the establishment of Three Sisters Farm on the property by Merrick's three daughters, Mary Connor, Beth Lee, and Priscilla Coleman, ten years ago. The farm is USDA Certified Organic and relies on sustainable farming practices to grow their crops. Vegetables, berries, herbs, flowers, sugarcane, indigo, and mushrooms are grown on the farm and sold to local restaurants, at farmer's markets, and through a community supported agriculture program.

Furthermore, Mary's son, Chuck Merrick, and his wife Diane started U Pick Daffodils in 2017, offering the opportunity for the community to come pick a bouquet of daffodils from Calhoun Plantation to welcome the start of spring. It is Merrick family's strong values and stewardship ethics that have produced a multi-generational legacy of family and community on the land they call home.

Established in 1971, the Open Land Trust is South Carolina's oldest land trust. It protects land in seven counties in the southern lowcountry, by prioritizing working and family land, ensuring regional water quality, providing local produce, and protecting forever the landscapes that define who we are. For more information on OLT visit: openlandtrust.org



Lewisfield Plantation Open Space Institute

If land could talk the Lewisfield Plantation would tell stories of Patriot victories during the Revolutionary War, enslaved and emancipated Africans, and a topography that changed drastically from ancient bottomland hardwoods to rice impoundments in the 1800's. Today, Lewisfield Plantation's fate has been secured as land that will continue to tell the stories of the past 300 years, now protected forever through the efforts of many.

The preservation of Lewisfield Plantation is a story of collaboration. With the encroaching development in Berkeley County, it was crucial for conservationists to act fast. However, the conservation purchasers could not afford to purchase the entire property of Lewisfield on their own. The Open Space Institute stepped in and purchased Lewisfield Plantation in 2018 with funds from the South Carolina Department of Transportation. Working with the Lowcountry Land Trust, the OSI placed the 600-acre property under

easement, safeguarding it from future development. With the easement in place, OSI turned the property over to Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust for ownership and management of the tract of land.

Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust has planned to offer public access space for outdoor recreation, nature study, and historic research. The preservation of Lewisfield is also important from an environmental standpoint. The property provides breeding and roosting grounds for neotropical songbirds, the threatened wood stork, and the endangered northern long-eared bat.

The protection and establishment of Lewisfield Preserve contributes to the 50,000-acre protected landscape along the Cooper River, forming a nearly unbroken 30-mile protected corridor of the river that extends up the historic East Branch. The Lewisfield Preserve represents the latest – and one of the final – pieces of the conservation puzzle along this section of the Cooper River.

The Open Space Institute of South Carolina specializes in the fee simple purchase of strategically important land. It plays the role of negotiating contracts, taking intervening title, and identifying funding for significant landscape scale conservation projects. The OSI works collaboratively with landowners, agencies, and other land trusts to bring the necessary funding to bear to save the most important places in South Carolina. For more information visit: openspaceinstitute.org/states/south-carolina



Graceland Pee Dee Land Trust

Steve Jones has spent most of his life on his beloved family property, Graceland. The property was given to Steve's father, Ronald Jones, as a thank you for a lifetime of dedication and work upon his retirement from managing Mt. Pleasant Plantation. The Jones family affectionately named the property Graceland after Steve's mother, Grace Jones. Steve remembers many childhood memories of days spent with his father on the property, learning the values of land stewardship. After the passing of Ronald and Grace, Steve and his two sisters inherited Graceland. Collectively, they agreed on the importance of ensuring Graceland's preservation for years to come, a decision driven by their connection to the land through memories, family ties, and stewardship.

For the placement of the easement, Steve wanted to work with a local land trust whose employees shared a similar connection to the Pee Dee Watershed as himself. He wanted an organization that was well established, stable, and would be able to offer support to the future stewards of

Graceland. More than ninety percent of Pee Dee Land Trust's conservation easements are held on working farms and forests. Pee Dee Land Trust was a natural fit for Steve to partner with and in 2007 an easement was placed on Graceland. After his positive experience, Steve became an ambassador for the Pee Dee Land Trust and served on the trust's Board of Directors from 2013 to 2022.

The 980-acre property is located north of Andrews in Georgetown County. Running along the Scenic Black River for over two and half miles, Graceland sits in the middle of the new Black River State Park Water Trail. This property is an excellent example of a river property in the Pee Dee Watershed that has been well stewarded to provide its landowners with both the ability to enjoy the natural beauty and recreational activities, while also serving as a financial resource.

Since its formation in 1999, Pee Dee Land Trust has been working to conserve, and promote an appreciation of, the significant natural, agricultural, and historical resources of the Pee Dee Watershed area. Spanning nine counties, PDLT has worked with private landowners to permanently protect high conservation properties encompassing over 40,000 acres to date. For more information visit: peedeelandtrust.org



South Tyger River Blueways Tract Spartanburg Area Conservancy (SPACE)

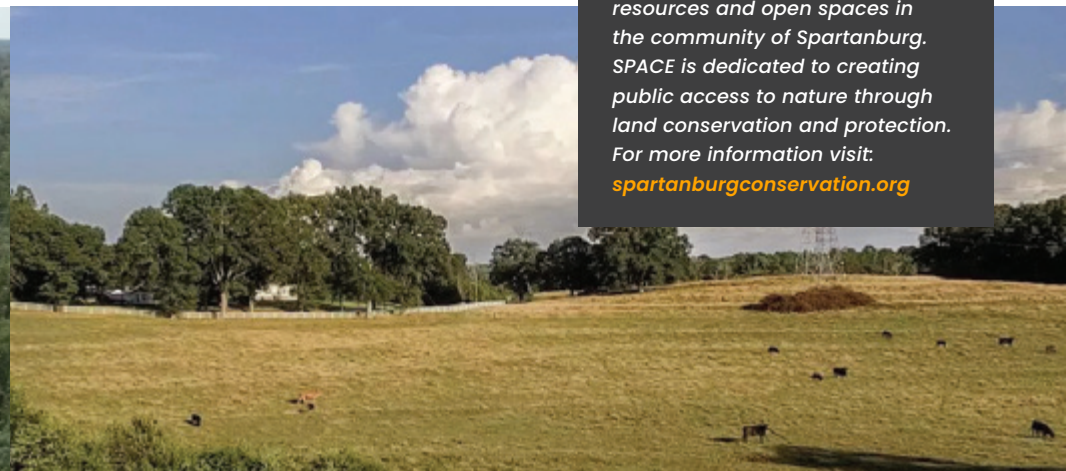
Lisa Cooley Scott believes accessibility of blueways for recreation is vital to a community. The former mayor of the small town of Duncan in Spartanburg County, Lisa owns just shy of 53-acres of undeveloped farmland, the last undeveloped tract in town. Known as the South Tyger River Blueways Tract, the property stretches along 3,200 feet of the South Tyger River and allows passive recreation for paddlers with an adjacent acre providing public parking and river access. The majority of the property is a working cattle farm that extends to the banks of the South Tyger River.

Lisa made the decision to protect her property through an easement with SPACE. By doing this she hoped to leave an enduring legacy of conservation in the Town of Duncan and permanently protect an important section of the river with public access to the water secured. SPACE has a history of conserving land that is accessible to the public and with the blueways access a priority to Lisa, SPACE was the right match for her in helping place an easement on the South Tyger River Blueways Tract.

Having worked in the public office, Lisa appreciates the balance between development and conservation. The conservation of her property was a way to ensure that balance would endure on a local level. The combination of agriculture, recreation, and natural preservation, along with vital development nearby, serves as a reminder to residents that these ideas can coexist in a relatively small space and work harmoniously to serve the needs of the local community.

SPACE's creativity is the driving factor in preserving land that meets the needs of the landowner and serves the community. Executive director of the land trust, Sam Parrot shares how this project embodies SPACE's mission, "The vision of a paddler setting off on an adventure yards from a herd of cattle and in the shadow of important economic and civic development is symbolic of SPACE's creative spirit, and achieving that goal for this landowner is a great representation of what we can achieve."

The mission of SPACE is to promote, protect, and preserve natural resources and open spaces in the community of Spartanburg. SPACE is dedicated to creating public access to nature through land conservation and protection. For more information visit: spartanburgconservation.org



Shealy Farm South Carolina Farm Bureau Land Trust

The Shealy Farm is located in the community of Jalapa in Newberry County just northwest of Columbia. The Shealy family home where Kathryn Shealy, current owner and a retired educator, moved with her mother and father when she was a little girl. After the passing of her parents, Kathryn maintained the home and leased the surrounding fields to local farmers to keep the property active. Today, the farm's incredibly fertile soil produces corn, soybeans, and cotton by two area farmers.

Ms. Shealy resides in the family homeplace and has even helped catalog a history of the Jalapa community. When asked why she chose to protect her family's farm with SC Bureau Land Trust, Ms. Shealy

had this to say: "I grew up on the farm and loved walking in the woods, wading in the creeks, riding my horse and watching the cycle of planting and harvesting. It was a wonderful childhood, and I wanted to preserve that opportunity for others. As I witness the loss of farmland today, it saddens and concerns me. Realtors and solar companies are relentless with their efforts. I felt that I must protect the land for agriculture." In partnership, SC Farm Bureau Land Trust and Ms. Shealy protected just over 340 acres of productive agricultural land and in this rapidly growing region of South Carolina.

As one of the first state Farm Bureaus in the nation to launch such a program, South Carolina Farm Bureau is committed to helping farmers preserve their livelihoods by protecting one of their most necessary assets – the land they farm. Our Land Trust will give agricultural landowners peace of mind knowing their land is protected and its purpose preserved for future generations.



Upper Savannah Land Trust

"No one parcel can tell our story! There are many stories behind our work." This was the reply from Wade Harrison, Upper Savannah Land Trust Executive Director, who grappled with the task of choosing just one easement to profile for this project. For Wade, while each landowner and property were unique, they all shared binding threads of commonality in land protection.

Of the 130 conservation easements held by Upper Savannah Land Trust, the vast majority are owned by farm and forest landowners committed to the long-term continuity of a rural landscape. For these landowners, tracts of land that grow food and timber, have a wide array of wildlife, and protect streams, soil, and scenic beauty are what land conservation is all about.

While all share similar values for preservation of their land and rural livelihoods, they are a diverse group. From longtime owners of small family farms, investors in timber and recreational land, neighborhood associations conserving common greenspace, to protectors of ecologically or historically significant

places, this diversity of landowners make the Upper Savannah Land Trust what it is today.

There are many motivating factors for land protection, but the overarching notion is that the best purpose for wild land is to hold space for nature to continue and thrive, while also securing sustainably managed resources for human benefit. These are not mutually exclusive of one another, but often work together.

Often surrounding and adjoining land protected through Upper Savannah Land Trust are other protected areas, often open to public access and recreation. "They are often sharing boundaries," Wade writes, "and stories." While different tracts of land are protected by different organizations, the land itself knows no boundaries. Wildlife roams from one property to the next, trees extend their branches over property lines, and the history of the place is better understood when looking at the bigger picture of the landscape as a whole.

The Upper Savannah Land Trust's mission is to encourage and pursue the conservation of natural, historic, and scenic lands in the western piedmont region of South Carolina. Accommodating working land is a priority of USLT, building a strong relationship with the farmers and foresters of the area. For more information visit: scuslt.com



Grant Meadow Upstate Forever

Hoyt Grant, a landowner in Pickens County with an acute awareness of the outstanding beauty of his land and the surrounding area, has made it his mission to ensure his land is protected for generations to come. Grant Meadow, Hoyt's 57-acre property, sits nestled between the base of Table Rock and the Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Highway.

Grant Meadow has been in the Grant family since Hoyt's father bought the property in 1950. "I took an interest in it early on helping clear it and fence it for pastureland, which started my appreciation and love for this land," Hoyt remembers, "being close to Table Rock State Park, my family enjoyed spending time and making memories there." Hoyt continues to maintain the field, barn, and home site, finding joy in how his property adds to the scenic vista of Table Rock.

Members of the conservation team and volunteer committees of Upstate Forever have cultivated a long-standing relationship with the Grant family. It was this strong bond that made Upstate Forever a natural partner for the protection of this

special property. In 2013, Hoyt and his late wife Laura, placed 36-acres of Grant Meadow under their first conservation easement through Upstate Forever. In 2020, Hoyt granted an additional 21-acres of the property through a second easement. The South Carolina Conservation Bank helped with funding for both easements.

"I knew I wanted to keep it protected for the future. The view is a favorite photo spot for visitors young and old, and I feel very blessed to have a part in protecting its beauty." Hoyt Grant has become a clear and constant voice supporting the protection of this land and his hard work secures Grant Meadow's iconic scenic vista for photographers and passersby alike. This land is a special gateway of vision between the fields to the mountain, drawing people to study the profound landscape, take a deep breath, and stand tall.

Upstate Forever is a nonprofit conservation organization that has worked since 1998 toward the vision of an environmentally healthy, economically prosperous Upstate that offers a high quality of life now and for future generations. For more information visit: upstateforever.org



Photo ©: The Nature Conservancy