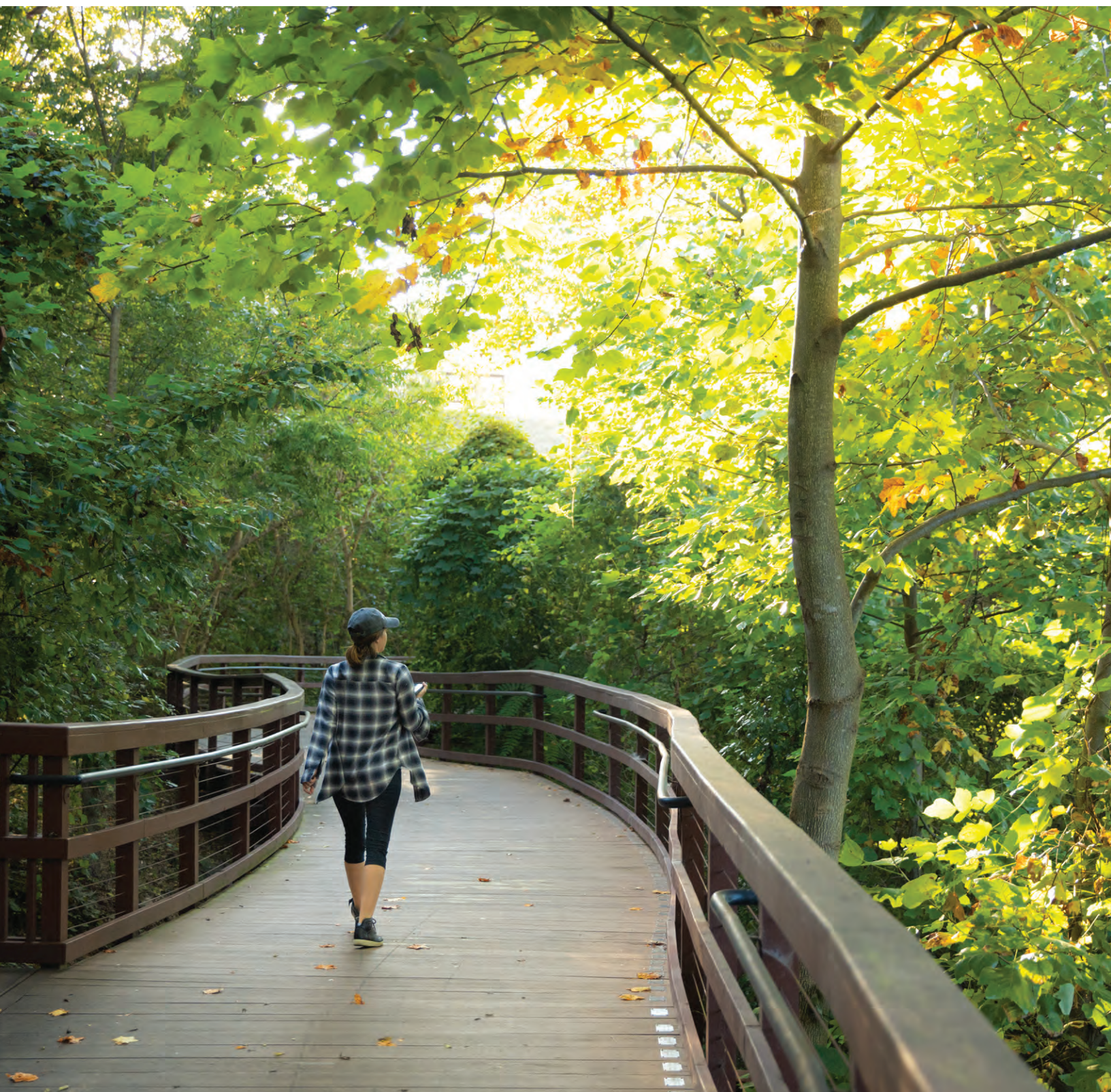


SOUTH CAROLINA  
**CONSERVATION BANK**

ANNUAL  REPORT





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SC Conservation Bank provided funding for Quail Forever to acquire Bobwhite Hills, a 774-acre wild quail preserve.

6

## **CONSERVING OUR COAST**

Supporting the benefits natural beauty brings to residents and visitors

10

## **TIMELESS TRADITIONS**

Improving habitat while promoting outdoor pursuits is a team effort

14

## **STRIKING A BALANCE**

Public and private land conservation pair to deliver ecosystem successes

18

## **FY 2022 CONSERVATION MAP**

Where we work



Photo by Mac Stone

The Tyger River Confluence at Nesbitt Shoals is located at the convergence of the North and South Tyger Rivers in Spartanburg County. Its location, geology, and history make this a unique opportunity to conserve a part of Spartanburg County's natural beauty while simultaneously offering outstanding recreational access for the public and the protection of local water quality.

**The SC Conservation Bank Act  
Title 48 Chapter 59  
S.C. Code of Laws Act 200**

**MISSION**

To improve the quality of life in South Carolina through the conservation of significant natural resource lands, wetlands, historical properties, archaeological sites, and urban parks.

**CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

- Wildlife Habitat
- Water Quality
- Forest Lands
- Farmland
- Scenic Vistas
- Historical and Archaeological Sites
- Hunting and Fishing Opportunities
- Public Outdoor Recreation

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- J. Raleigh West III, Executive Director  
Amber J. Larck, Program Manager  
Margaret Pennebaker, Business Manager

The South Carolina Conservation Bank publishes its Annual Report in January to report on the previous fiscal year. This report is printed in limited quantities but is available in digital format on the agency's website, [sccbank.sc.gov](http://sccbank.sc.gov).

*Cover and other photos were noted, provided courtesy of Mac Stone.*



## LETTER *from the* DIRECTOR

J. RALEIGH WEST III

Having spent most of my career in the nonprofit and now government arena, I can tell you that the strength of any organization rises and falls with its leadership. Fortunately, I find myself blessed with a Board and staff who genuinely believe in the cause of conservation and graciously offer their support to me to advance the work of the Bank. Without a doubt, our agency would not have the standing it does today were it not for each member, and for that I am truly appreciative. I would like to offer a few observations about where the conservation movement finds itself and the urgency of the moment.

First, I believe we must adjust our expectations of what it will cost to conserve land in South Carolina in the coming years. There has been a noticeable paradigm shift since the pandemic began in land costs. What does that mean for the Bank if that bears some truth? Effectively, it means that while our budget more than doubled this year, our relative buying power may not have had the same proportional increase.

Second, I am constantly shocked by the blast radius of urban sprawl into the rural areas of the state. You can now feel residential developments from the Charlotte market creeping into Kershaw County farmland. Dense apartment buildings are being constructed at the Orangeburg County line, presumably to support the Charleston market. Columbia seems to press to Ridgeway in Fairfield County and past Leesville–Batesburg to the west. Aynor is now a suburb of Myrtle Beach, and it's not that far from there to Marion County.

While I certainly stand firm on the idea that growth is good, it seems to me like it's all coming so fast now that I worry that a lot of areas meriting conservation will get lost in the shuffle. With that, I feel a sense of great urgency to deliver conservation results at a deliberate but accelerated pace.

Third, I am increasingly convinced the fate of our rural lands will be set within my probable lifetime. We used to say we had a hundred-year window to protect all that needs protecting, but I think that window will be nearly shut by 2050. Counties containing urban centers have only a handful of remaining large tracts that are not protected or slated for development. The counties touching those have a few more, but many of those can be similarly described. It's not too great a leap to presume that, at present growth and conservation rates, that same dynamic will play out in most of what we now think of as rural counties over the next generation or two.

To me, that means we need to encourage our applicants to continue looking for landscape-scale conservation projects and to also keep in mind that what we save today for a few hundred dollars an acre may, in time, prove to be one of the smartest investments our state has ever made.

J. Raleigh West, III  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

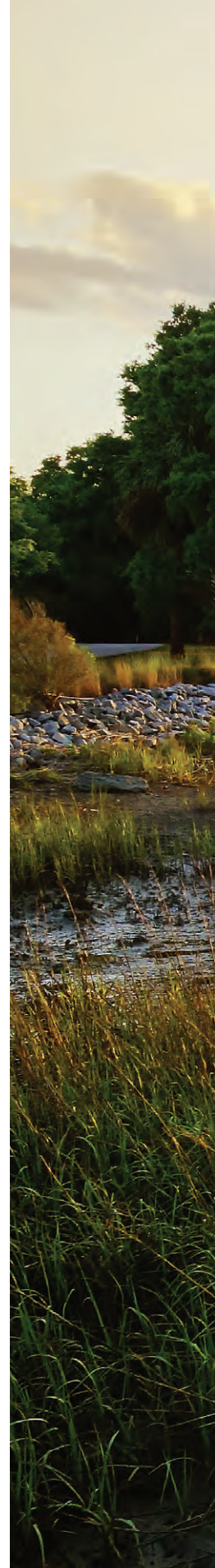
FEATURE

# Conserving our Coast

**The partnership between South Carolina and USFWS  
continues to lead coastal conservation efforts**

South Carolina's coast, with its sandy beaches, blackwater rivers and unbroken marshes, conjures the imagination with scenes of cordgrass, ebbing tides and gently flowing creeks.

Certainly, this idyllic landscape is visually striking, but it provides more than just picturesque vistas. It also forms a vital ecosystem that protects the mainland from storms and flooding, purifies our drinking water, and offers places for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation. By conserving our coast, we ensure the survival of both its natural beauty and the benefits for the people who live here.







In 2020, Governor Henry McMaster authorized the SC Conservation Bank (Bank) to sponsor applications for the USFWS National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, which Congress created to promote conservation of wetlands in the rapidly urbanizing areas along our coastlines. Since then, South Carolina has received over 8 million dollars in federal grant money from the program to be directly applied to coastal land conservation.

Through a partnership with U.S Fish and Wildlife, “the Bank has achieved outstanding success in conservation”, stated USFWS wildlife biologist Jason T. Ayers, “Nationally declining wetlands, endangered species habitat, and miles of river frontage have all been permanently protected by the Bank through multiple Service awarded Coastal Grants. In addition, conservation gaps have been filled, protected wildlife corridors established, and extensive lands procured as public lands for the perpetual benefit of the citizens of South Carolina.”





The Black River Park and Trail Network will connect publicly accessible sites along 70 miles of the Black River.



Previous grants through this program have supported public access and land acquisitions throughout the coast of South Carolina, spanning from Horry to Jasper County. Some of the most recent parcels of land acquired through this program are for a new state park on the Black River State Park in Williamsburg County and Oaks Plantation in Charleston.

FEATURE

# Timeless Traditions

Photo by Sarah Nell Blackwell



Brandywine's Dakota Prairie Storm, "Kodi" sits upon the flush of a Bobwhite Quail.

South Carolina has a rich history of sporting traditions. However, it faces new challenges as more people realize the appeal of South Carolina. SC ranks in the top 5 of states with the highest rate of population increases since the COVID pandemic began. The continuous influx of new residents presents a two-pronged challenge to hunting and fishing. It brings mounting pressure on our rural landscapes, where most of our sporting traditions occur, with the construction of new subdivisions and shopping malls, while at the same time increasing demand on already established public lands and fisheries.

The dynamic of ever-eroding rural landscapes coupled with spiking demand for all things outdoors has generated a sense of urgency for conservationists to expand and protect lands that provide opportunities for hunting and fishing, particularly for the public. Safeguarding these places is vital for the people of South Carolina to ensure the survival of their outdoor recreation pastimes.

The SC Department of Natural Resources (DNR) maintains hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands for hunting and fishing known as Wildlife Management Areas



Photo by Sarah Nell Blackwell



Photo by Sarah Nell Blackwell

(WMAs). The Bank has aimed to help DNR enroll new lands in the WMA system as the primary vehicle for expanding public access to sporting and fishing activities. This past year we helped create new opportunities for folks to trout fish in the Upstate, hunt wild quail in the midlands, and pursue waterfowl along the coast. These projects will help ensure the survival of these sporting pastimes for South Carolinians for generations to come. As we continue to grow, the Bank will work with our partners to protect the public lands that are so critical to the survival of our sporting and fishing traditions.





Photo by Mac Stone



Conservation easements on privately owned land help secure the integrity of adjoining public lands and greenways. Here, approximately half a million people per year enjoy the 23-mile long Swamp Rabbit Trail against a backdrop of protected native habitat.

## FEATURE

# Striking Balance

**Private land conservation elevates the quality of public preserves by bolstering the overall amount of diverse habitat for plant and animal species and protecting the broader ecosystem.**

The interplay of private and public conservation projects is part of a broader strategy aimed at enhancing the quality of public lands by securing the surrounding ecosystem, achieving cost-effective, landscape-scale results, and attracting matching federal dollars to leverage up our state's investments in our environment.

The 5,347-acre Waccamaw River Heritage preserve is buffered by thousands of acres of privately-owned land protected by conservation easements.



Photo by Mac Stone

In recent years, the Bank has awarded 74% of its funding (\$23 million dollars) to projects that expanded or created new access to 12,800 acres of public lands. The balance (\$8.25M) protected 39,000 acres of privately-owned lands. The Bank aims to blend opportunities for the public to experience our state’s magnificent natural areas with new state parks and preserves while simultaneously protecting the larger ecosystem in concert with nearby private landowners.

Conservation easements provide the most cost-effective way to achieve wide-scale conservation. In recent years, the Bank’s grants that supported private land protection cost roughly 10% (\$205/acre) that of grants to acquire more public land (\$2,039/acre). By blending our investments into both private and public lands, we can spread the impact of our dollars over a larger landscape.

Additionally, the generosity of our private landowners helps make our state more attractive for federal grants. In the case when our grants support private land conservation, the landowner voluntarily contributes a great deal of value by way of a bargain sale. Federal grant programs consider these philanthropic gifts of value as non-federal match, the abundance of which renders any application from SC more competitive. That is a large part of our recent success with these programs [see page 18-19 for our FY22 “By the Numbers” information].



Photo by Mac Stone





The Bank helped Naturaland Trust acquire Big Rock. At the summit, climbers can see a landscape of parks and privately protected land.

Photo by Mac Stone



### LIBERIA COMMUNITY Historic Soapstone Church Cemetery

Welcome to one of the oldest African-American church congregations in the Upstate of South Carolina. Founded after the Civil War in 1865, the land provided by their former masters, the Liberia community grew around the Soapstone Church. Built on an outcropping of the granite rock, the sanctuary overlooks a magnificent view of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Facing unique challenges in the Jim Crow South, Liberia's members lived with their white neighbors in a complicated blend of social segregation with geographical integration, exchanging territories for maintaining local traditions. For example, examine the one-room, 1.6-acre Community schoolhouse on the original site, and consider the challenges of learning in this segregated building. Adjacent to the school, services toward the woods church (initially segregated building). Adjacent to the school, services toward the woods church (initially segregated building). Adjacent to the school, services toward the woods church (initially segregated building).



Feel free to explore the unmarked graves in the historic stone cemetery. The one-room schoolhouse, the historic African-American preaching shack, and the church grounds, with the stunning view of the mountains. Please respect the site and do not remove any historic, archeological or geological materials. Please preserve this special place for future generations to enjoy.

Provided by Upstate Forever

F Y 2 0 2 2

# BY THE NUMBERS

**30**  
SCCB GRANTS FOR  
**9,714**  
ACRES CONSERVED

FAIR MARKET VALUE:  
**\$29,673,859**

**Soapstone Baptist Church was established more than 150 years ago in Liberia, a small community settled by formerly enslaved African Americans and their families looking to start new lives in freedom after the Civil War.**

On its namesake soapstone outcropping and perched atop a ridge looking toward fields, forests, and the Blue Ridge Escarpment, the church has served the community as a place of worship, fellowship, and education for well over a century.

Mable Owens Clarke, sixth generation steward and matriarch of Soapstone—was integral to the project. For more than two decades, Mable conducted a monthly fish fry that drew appetites from across the region to raise funds to pay off the church’s mortgage. She continues to fulfill a promise made to her late mother to keep the doors of Soapstone open and preserve the church’s legacy. The conservation easement placed on the church property ensures that the six acres on which the historic church, schoolhouse, and slave cemetery rest are permanently protected from future development



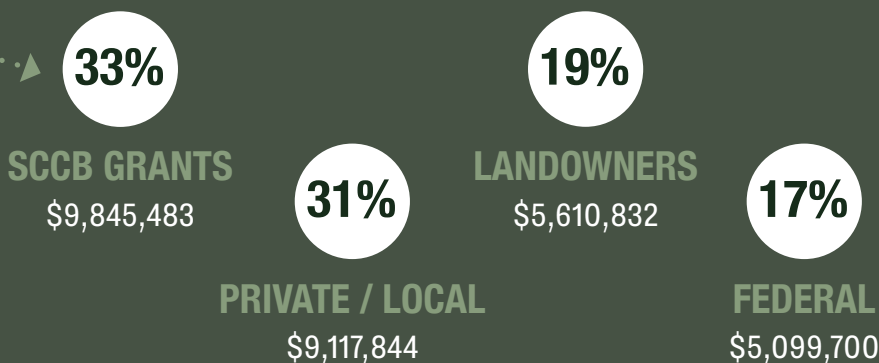
Provided by Upstate Forever



Provided by Upstate Forever

(L) Mable Owens Clarke gestures toward an interpretive sign at the Historic Soapstone Church Cemetery. She was awarded the prestigious Order of the Palmetto in November of 2022 in recognition of her role in permanently protecting the church and six acre property from future development.

EVERY **\$1** OF SCCB GRANT DOLLARS PROTECTED **\$3** WORTH OF PROPERTIES



# FY 2022 GRANTS

## 1. Altamont Ridge

10 acres / Greenville County / Naturaland Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$90,000

The acquisition of Altamont Ridge expands Paris Mountain State Park and protects the view of the mountain for the greater Greenville area.

## 2. Calico Vineyard

113 acres / Greenville County / Upstate Forever  
SCCB Grant: \$225,000

This family-owned vineyard grows vine-ripened black Spanish grapes, blackberries, blueberries, and a variety of muscadines. Conserving it helps stabilize the agricultural land base in the Upstate and secures water quality along 4,000 feet of streams associated with McKinney Creek.

## 3. Cedar Mountain

141 acres / Greenville County / Naturaland Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$500,000

This project's name relates to the property's undulating ridgeline that summits at 1,765 feet at Cedar Mountain. The acquisition of the surrounding lands will conserve habitat for numerous rare plant and animal species, protect mountain views from Old Highway 25, and improve access to an adjacent popular biking trail.

## 4. Gobblers Roost

1,020 acres / Laurens and Newberry Counties / Upstate Forever  
SCCB Grant: \$393,506

Gobblers Roost keeps 1,020 acres in sustainable forestry, protects an historic corner store in Newberry County, and creates a new canoe public access point on Bush River.

## 5. Graham Family Tract

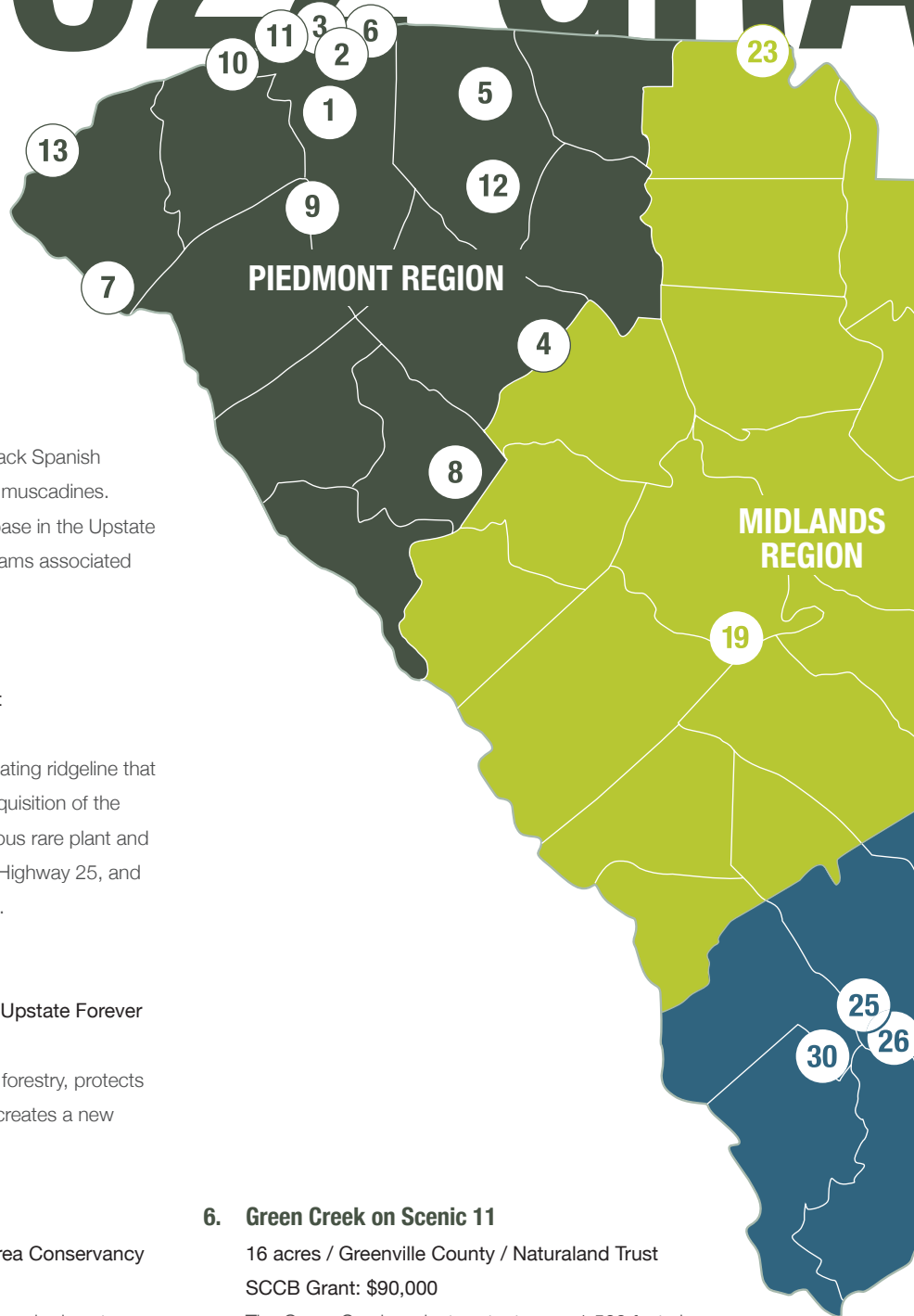
21 acres / Spartanburg County / Spartanburg Area Conservancy  
SCCB Grant: \$242,000

This project expands the Upper Chiquapin Greenway in downtown Spartanburg, an important urban park and greenway that, along with the adjoining arboretum and other protected lands, creates a natural landscape at the northwestern entrance into town.

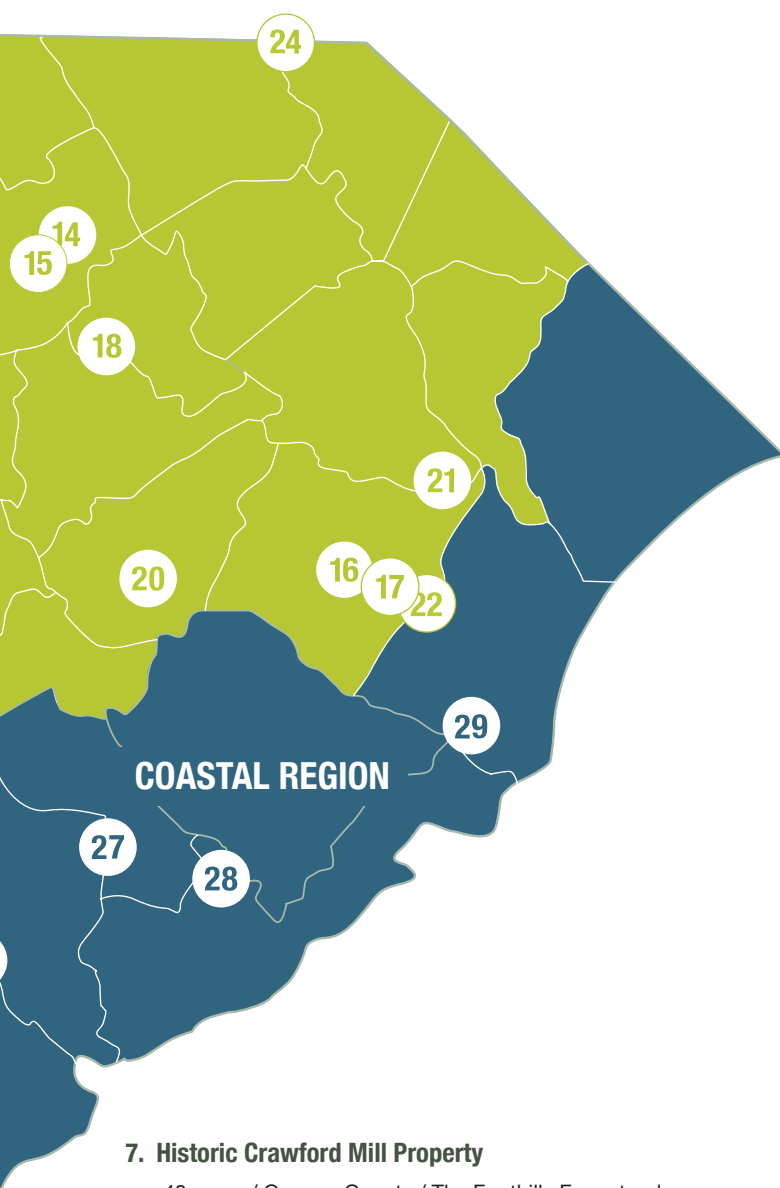
## 6. Green Creek on Scenic 11

16 acres / Greenville County / Naturaland Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$90,000

The Green Creek project protects over 1,500 feet along the Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Highway, buffers DNR's adjoining Chestnut Ridge Heritage Preserve and supports water quality in the in the headwaters of Green Creek, a major tributary to the South Pacolet River.



# PLANTS



## 7. Historic Crawford Mill Property

40 acres / Oconee County / The Foothills Farmstead  
SCCB Grant: \$250,000

The Historic Crawford Mill project will establish a passive park to showcase the region's important agricultural heritage and rich Native American history, including ancient petroglyphs and an historic grist mill, and it will provide opportunities for the public to hike by four cascading waterfalls on Fair Play Creek.

## 8. Mays-Epworth Conservation Area (Turner)

216 acres / Greenwood County / Upper Savannah Land Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$86,500

The "Mays-Epworth Conservation Area" is named for the historic Epworth Camp Meeting site and to honor the landscape where civil rights leader Dr. Benjamin Mays spent his early life. The Turner property expands a 1,500-acre conservation corridor consisting of open fields, pine timberland, and hardwood bottoms, and supports habitat for the Carolina Heelsplitter in the headwater streams of Cuffeytown Creek.

## 9. Piedmont Manufacturing Company YMCA

1 acre / Greenville County / Piedmont Historical Preservation Society / SCCB Grant: \$76,500

This project protects an historic YMCA building, which the local historical society will convert into a museum that will showcase the town's rich history as a mill village, and complements the ongoing restoration plan for downtown Piedmont.

## 10. Piney Mountain

41 acres / Pickens County / Naturaland Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$130,000

The Piney Mountain project expands Table Rock State Park, protects vistas of the towering mountains along Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Highway and buffers the headwater streams of Weaver Creek, which flows into the Oolenoy River.

## 11. River Falls

171 acres / Greenville County / Naturaland Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$650,000

The River Falls tract expands the footprint of and, importantly, adds new access and more vehicular parking capacity to Jones Gap State Park and provides opportunities for public trout fishing along the Middle Saluda River.

## 12. Tyger River Confluence

201 acres / Spartanburg County / Upstate Forever  
SCCB Grant: \$157,500

This project conserves an historic farm at the confluence of the North and South Tyger Rivers, where they form the Nesbitt Shoals. This stunningly beautiful property will provide outdoor recreational activities, including new access points to the river.

## 13. Whetstone Hill

38 acres / Oconee County / Upstate Forever  
SCCB Grant: \$34,500

The Whetstone Hill tract helps consolidate the conservation corridor formed around Sumter National Forest in Oconee County, protect wildlife habitat and sustain water quality in the Chattooga Wild & Scenic River.

**14. Battle of Hobkirk Hill: A**

5 acres / Kershaw County / SC Battleground Preservation Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$148,500

**15. Battle of Hobkirk Hill: B**

2 acres / Kershaw County / SC Battleground Preservation Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$75,000

These acquisitions expand the protected footprint of the Hobkirk's Hill Battlefield in downtown Camden and will soon be incorporated into The Liberty Trail, a statewide driving tour which preserves, interprets, and promotes key battlefields of the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution.

**16. Black River State Park: Phase II**

816 acres / Williamsburg County / Open Space Institute  
SCCB Grant: \$435,000

**17. Black River State Park: Phase III**

738 acres / Williamsburg County / Open Space Institute  
SCCB Grant: \$450,000

These acquisitions along the Black River expand SC's newest State Park, which will open opportunities for residents and visitors alike to enjoy camping, kayaking and birdwatching while also protecting 6.88 miles of river frontage and over two square miles of coastal-plain bottomland hardwood habitat, a boon for innumerable plant and wildlife species.

**18. Bobwhite Hills**

774 acres / Lee and Sumter Counties / Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever / SCCB Grant: \$850,000

Bobwhite Hills is Quail Forever's first acquisition in South Carolina and demonstrates their partnership with local conservationists to stabilize populations of wild quail in the state. The longleaf pine savannah provides excellent native habitat for many significant flora and fauna species, especially upland game birds, and will be enrolled into SCDNR's Wildlife Management Area program and the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative.

**19. North Fork Edisto Tract**

37 acres / Lexington County / Congaree Land Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$49,950

The North Fork Edisto Tract consists of mature bottomland hardwood and upland pine forests, which extend along 2,000 feet of the North Fork Edisto River.

**20. Toner Tract**

336 acres / Clarendon County / Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$84,068

The Toner tract project protects prime soils in the farming communities outside of Summerton and provides diverse wildlife habitat for numerous game and non-game species alike.

**21. Wall Farm**

97 acres / Florence and Williamsburg Counties / Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust / SCCB Grant: \$29,169

The Wall Farm project complements ongoing conservation efforts in the Black River and Black Mingo Creek Focus areas, which aim to sustain water quality, prime soils, and wildlife habitat in both watersheds.

**22. Watson Farm**

702 acres / Williamsburg County / Pee Dee Land Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$235,000

The conservation easement on Watson Farm protects 2.8 miles of the Black River, the focus of a new river-based state park. It also establishes a sanctuary of mature bottomland hardwoods and cypress-tupelo swamp, which provides invaluable wildlife habitat and flood-mitigating benefits for the more developed areas downstream along the coast.

**23. Woodsend Park and Open Space**

86 acres / York County / Nation Ford Land Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$1,000,000

The Woodsend property is a local scenic landmark with rolling pastures, ponds, and views of Crowders Creek. Its acquisition will establish a county park and open space in a rapidly urbanizing landscape, which will include a greenway with trails and equestrian activities.

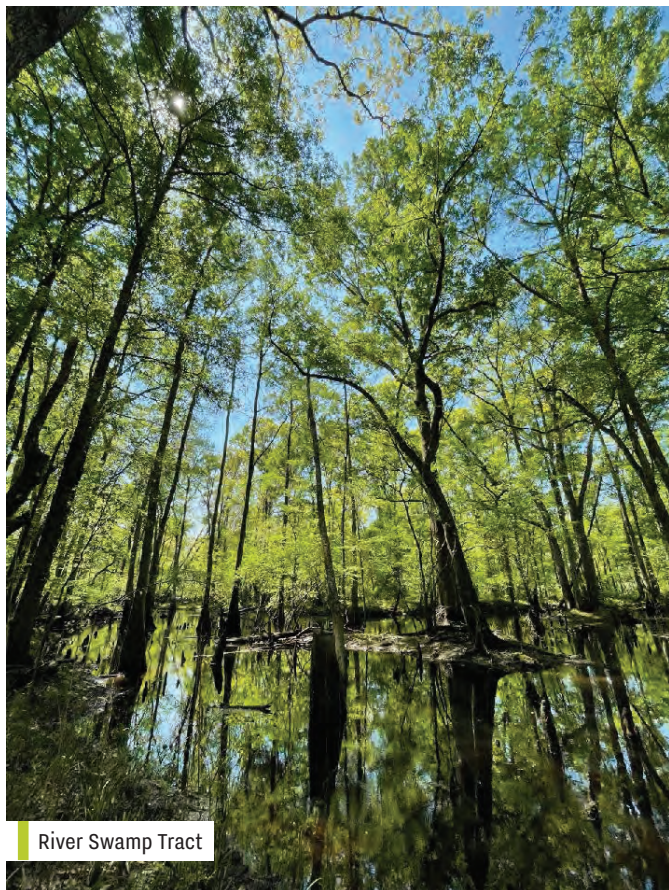
**24. YLASI Property**

315 acres / Chesterfield County / Pee Dee Land Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$150,000

YLASI is a Native American word meaning "many good things to eat". The scenic beauty of the Upper Pee Dee River certainly embodies that description. The conservation easement on this tract preserves 1,500 feet of frontage on the river and exceptional habitat for migratory waterfowl, wild turkey, songbirds and other priority wildlife species.



YLASI Property



River Swamp Tract



Slater Duck Ponds

## 25. Combahee Scott

209 acres / Colleton County / Open Land Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$79,620

## 26. River Swamp Tract

1,018 acres / Colleton County / Open Land Trust  
SCCB Grant: \$345,000

The adjoining Combahee Scott and River Swamp Tract properties are conserve scenic vistas and wildlife habitat on the Combahee River, support SC's sustainable forestry industry, and consolidate a 12,000-acre, 15 mile-long conservation corridor around the ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge.

## 27. Good Hope Landing Tract

148 acres / Colleton County / SCDNR  
SCCB Grant: \$170,000

The Good Hope Landing Tract will expand the Edisto River WMA, protect ancient bottomland cypress swamp along 1.08 miles of the Edisto River, and improve public access for fishing, hunting and water-based recreation.

## 28. The Oaks

204 acres / Charleston County / Open Space Institute  
SCCB Grant: \$290,000

The Oaks consists of maritime forest, mixed pine-hardwood forest, freshwater forested wetlands, and brackish marsh along the historic

Ashley River Road. Its protection will help reduce the impact of storm surges, stabilize the fragile riparian ecosystem along the scenic Ashley River and provide habitat for threatened wildlife species near the rapidly urbanizing area south of Charleston.

## 29. Santee Island (Santee Delta WMA Addition)

1,862 acres / Georgetown County / SCDNR  
SCCB Grant: \$850,000

This project expands DNR's footprint along the Santee Delta at the confluence of the North and South Santee Rivers. The South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative Blueprint ranks it as the "highest priority" for connectivity, reptile and amphibian abundance, and quality habitat for forested wetland birds.

## 30. Slater Duck Ponds

336 acres / Jasper County / Open Space Institute  
SCCB Grant: \$1,678,670

The acquisition of Slater Duck Ponds complements the ongoing effort to save thousands of adjoining acres along the Coosawhatchie River, provide new public recreational opportunities for hikers, bird watchers, and wildlife enthusiasts, and creates new public hunting opportunities within DNR's highly popular Category 1 waterfowl program.

