

Land Conservation in South Carolina

Molly Espey
Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

June 1, 2001

Research sponsored by the Sustainable Universities Initiative, a joint effort by Clemson University, the Medical University of South Carolina, and the University of South Carolina

Introduction

Rapid growth in South Carolina has led to increased concern about land use patterns, preservation of open space, and urban sprawl. Several programs and initiatives exist at both the federal and state level to encourage conservation through direct purchase, provision of financial incentives to private landowners, and education about stewardship.

The objective of this study is to summarize federal, state, and private land conservation efforts in South Carolina, focusing on incentives for conservation on private land, and to provide Internet links to more information about conservation efforts at each of these levels. The report will begin by describing federal and state land ownership in South Carolina. Next the efforts of private land trusts operating in the state will be described and links provided where available. Following that, federal programs to encourage land conservation and improved land stewardship on private lands will be outlined and links will be provided to more detailed information. Then state programs to encourage land conservation and improved land stewardship on private lands will be outlined with links for more details again provided. Finally, a list will be provided of some of the other organizations and individuals active in land conservation or improved stewardship in the state.

Land Ownership

South Carolina has a total area of 19,374,080 acres. About 5.7% of this total is owned by the federal government (Bureau of Land Management 2000) and another 5.5% by the state government (www.state.sc.us/sclac). These acreages are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Land Acreage in S.C. 1999

Federal	1,107,347
State	989,835
Other	17,276,898
Total	19,374,080

Federal acreage:

Nearly all of the federal land in the state of South Carolina is managed by four agencies: the Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Defense (DoD), Energy (DOE), and Interior (DOI). USDA land, the largest portion at about 55% of the federal total, is comprised of the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests and is managed for a variety of uses, including timber and wood production, watershed protection, habitat for wildlife and fish, and outdoor recreation.

DOE land at the Savannah River Site constitutes close to 15% of the total federal acreage in South Carolina. While one doesn't usually associate a former nuclear materials manufacturing facility with land conservation, the site is home to the bald eagle and several endangered species, including the red-cockaded woodpecker, the shortnose sturgeon, peregrine falcon and wood stork. Other wildlife commonly found on the site include alligators, whitetailed deer, wild turkeys and otters.

Lands under the management of the DOI include National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges and make up close to 15% of the federal total in S.C. National Park Service lands in South Carolina are generally of historical interest, with two National Historic Sites, one National Historic Trail, one National Military Park, one National Battlefield, and two forts designated as National Monuments (Moultrie and Sumter). Only the Congaree Swamp National Monument is part of the NPS system for its natural rather than historical significance.

National Wildlife Refuges in the state include Savannah, Tybee, Pinckney Island, Ace Basin, Cape Romain, Santee, and Carolina Sand Hills. South Carolina is also home to a nationally designated Wild and Scenic River (the Chattooga River) and National estuarine research reserves near the mouth of the Edisto River and the Waccamaw River near Winyah Bay.

For more information:

Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/>

Savannah River Site: <http://www.srs.gov/general/srs-home.html>

National Park Service in S.C.: <http://165.83.219.77/parksearch/state/state.cfm?statevar=sc>

State Acreage:

The state agencies of most relevance to land conservation and management are the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism (PRT), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Forestry Commission (SCFC), and Clemson University. PRT manages forty-six parks throughout the state as well as the State Trails program, a cooperative effort designed to create a system of interconnected trails and greenways across the state.

DNR lands include acreage in the ACE Basin Project, the Santee Coastal Reserve, and Jocassee Gorges. The Ashapoo, Combahee, and South Edisto (ACE) Basin Project is a corporate effort among Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect these estuaries near Beaufort. The Santee Coastal Reserve is located in Georgetown and Charleston Counties and is made up of 7,500 acres on the mainland and nearly 12,000 acres on two barrier islands. The Jocassee Gorges, about 43,500 acres in size, is located in the upstate

in the Blue Ridge Escarpment. DNR has also acquired 47,000 acres under the Heritage Trust Program, creating sixty-two Heritage Preserves across the state. The expressed purpose of this program is "to inventory, evaluate and protect the elements considered the most outstanding representatives of our state heritage."

The S.C. Forestry Commission manages three state forests. Harbison, near Columbia, is the smallest at just 2,176 acres. Manchester, east of Columbia in Sumter County, is 25,000 acres in size. Sand Hills is the state's largest forest at 46,000 acres and is located in the north central part of the state near the border of North Carolina.

Besides the main campus, county extension offices, and various other properties, Clemson University owns and manages 17,500 acres of forestland that provides prime wildlife habitat for a wide variety of species and a diversity of recreational opportunities.

For more information:

State Parks: <http://www.southcarolinaparks.com/>

State Trails Program: <http://www.sctrails.net/Trails/>

ACE Basin Project: <http://www.walterboro.org/ACE-Basin/index.html>

Santee Coastal Reserve: <http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/wild/santee/santman.html>

Jocassee Gorges: <http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/wild/jocassee/index.htm>

Heritage Trust Program: <http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/wild/heritage/preserve.html>

S.C. Forestry Commission: <http://www.state.sc.us/forest/>

Clemson University Experimental Forest: <http://depts.clemson.edu/natres/special.htm#cef>

Other - Cities, Counties, and Local Land Trusts

Virtually every county and municipality in the state also owns land preserved as open space, most commonly recognized when maintained as community parks. In addition, at least twenty-one land trusts operate in South Carolina, protecting land as open space by working with landowners who wish to donate or sell conservation easements (permanent deed restrictions that prevent harmful land uses), or by acquiring land outright. In 1998, The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) national survey of land trusts documented fourteen land trusts in the state owning 5,000 acres outright with another 22,100 acres under easement. The LTA data indicates that the number of land trusts operating in South Carolina has increased by 50% since 1998, but data on acreage in 2001 is not available.

S.C. Land Trusts Listed by the Land Trust Alliance:

Aiken County Open Land Trust
Beaufort County Open Land Trust
Black Creek Land Trust (Darlington)
Congaree Land Trust
Edisto Island Open Land Trust
Friends of the Reedy River
Hilton Head Island Land Trust
Katawba Valley Land Trust

Kiawah Island Natural Habitat Conservancy
Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust (Berkeley)
Lowcountry Open Land Trust
Nation Ford Land Trust (York County)
Naturaland Trust (Western South Carolina)
North American Land Trust (national)
Pacolet Area Conservancy, (Greenville and Spartanburg Counties and North Carolina)
Palmetto Conservation Foundation (Columbia)
Pee Dee Land Trust (Darlington)
South Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust
Spartanburg Conservation Endowment
The Nature Conservancy (national)
Upstate Forever

For more information: <http://www.lta.org/findlandtrust/SC.htm>

Incentives for Conservation and Improved Stewardship on Private Lands

A number of federal and state programs exist that provide financial incentives for private land conservation and improved stewardship of land. Many of these programs were created during the past decade or so in response to the increasing public demand for protection of open space and conservation of wildlife habitat. In addition to financial incentives, a number of programs at both the federal and state level provide education and technical expertise to private landowners interesting in protecting habitat or improving their land management. Most of the federal programs are operated out of the USDA through the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Farm Service Agency.

Federal Incentives for Private Conservation under the USDA

Financial Incentive Programs:

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)
Farmland Protection Program (FPP)
Conservation Farm Option (CFO)
Stewardship Incentive Program

Technical Assistance Programs:

Conservation Technical Assistance
Environmental Quality Incentives Program
Soil Survey Programs
Conservation Plant Materials Centers
Watershed Surveys and Planning
Conservation of Private Grazing Lands Initiative
Stewardship Incentive Program

In South Carolina in 2001, there were 21,247 acres under contract through the CRP program. This program provides for annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource conserving covers on eligible farmland. Another 15,024 acres were enrolled in the WRP in 2001. This program provides financial compensation for the restoration and protection of wetlands on private property.

Other federal programs:

The programs at the Environmental Protection Agency tend to focus more on pollution and human health than land conservation, but some may indirectly affect things related to land conservation such as wildlife habitat and water quality. Programs focusing on industry partnerships for improvements in environmental quality can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/epahome/industry.htm> while programs aimed at state, local, and tribal governments can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/epahome/partners.htm>.

Finally, the primary federal land management agencies (USFS, NPS, USFWS, and the Bureau of Land Management) all provide educational programs and materials about habitat enhancement and conservation.

For more information:

WRP: <http://www.wl.fb-net.org/>

CRP: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crpinfo.htm>

WHIP: <http://wl.fb-net.org/whip/> or in S.C.: <http://www.wl.fb-net.org/whip/sc.htm>

USDA Conservation Programs: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Anchor-CRPCConservation>

S.C. Natural Resource Conservation Service: <http://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov/sc/home.htm>

State Programs for Private Conservation

Most state level conservation oriented programs are organized within the DNR and provide education and technical expertise rather than direct financial incentives. DNR's Land and Water Stewardship Program, for example, operates several programs focusing on improving both land and water stewardship. Conservation District office personnel throughout the state work with DNR and NRCS to promote the conservation of our soil, water, and natural resources by providing technical assistance, cost-share opportunities, and educational programs. Several other programs focus on education and research about wildlife diversity. More information can be found at <http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/etc/conservation.html>.

The Forestry Commission also provides technical expertise to landowners regarding forest management, urban forestry, forest fire protection, insects and diseases, reforestation, and environmental education. For more information, see <http://www.state.sc.us/forest/refserv.htm>.

Private Nonprofit Organizations

A large number of private nonprofit organizations provide research, education, and financial incentives for land conservation and wildlife habitat improvement. The list below is not comprehensive. Additions are welcome. Email to mespey@clemsun.edu.

Ducks Unlimited

The Natural Conservancy

The National Wild Turkey Federation
National Audubon Society
American Whitewater
National Park Trust
National Parks Conservation Association
Sierra Club
The Wildlife Land Trust
Trust for Public Land
National Wildlife Federation
South Carolina Wildlife Federation
Adopt-a-Stream Foundation
Trout Unlimited
Purple Martin Conservation Association
North American Bluebird Society

Private Landowners

Most of these programs, whether federal, state, or private nonprofit, turn to private landowners to produce end results. It is virtually impossible to document every single effort at land conservation or habitat protection or improvement in the state, but it might be worth beginning a list of relatively large landowners doing their share for protection of land in the state. This list will be started by some of my personal contacts and experiences. Additions are welcome. Contact me at mespey@clemson.edu.

Tourist Sites:

Magnolia Plantation near Charleston
Drayton Hall near Charleston

Timber Companies:

Westvaco

Industry

Chem-Nuclear's Craig Pond (a Carolina bay) in Barnwell
Crescent Resources, the land management branch of Duke Power

See also programs such as the S.C. Wildlife Federation's Wildlife and Industry Together (WAIT). This program assists corporations, employees, facility neighbors and other groups to develop environmental projects in partnership with each other.

<http://www.scwf.org/about.htm>

Individuals:

Cypress Bay Plantation, Cummings, South Carolina

Hunt Clubs