

# south carolina update

from the Executive Director



*Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment*

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## Expansion and acquisition mark success for South Carolina

This is a pivotal moment for conservation in South Carolina, one marked equally by unprecedented opportunity and urgency. The Nature Conservancy in South Carolina is meeting these new challenges, because business as usual is not good enough.

I am pleased to report the opening of a project office in Greenville, which gives the Conservancy a presence in the Upstate as we expand our work in the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment and Piedmont areas. The Conservancy has already protected almost 40,000 acres within this delicate ecological system, but we are in a race against time to finish the job. Our doors officially opened in June, with Kristen Austin as the project director. A project office in this community demonstrates the Conservancy's long-term commitment to work in the Upstate, and enhances our ability to

collaborate effectively with other conservation groups. These partnerships will be critical to our success in the future, as they have been in the past.

One of our greatest challenges is the unprecedented sell-off of land by timber companies. This land is becoming available as South Carolina is facing unprecedented population growth with 200 acres a day changing from rural to urban use. Three companies, MeadWestvaco, International Paper and Plum Creek, are among the largest landowners in South Carolina, controlling some 1,438,000 acres across the state. Due to changes in global trade for wood and paper products, they are selling substantial portions of their land. More tracts are coming on the market at a faster pace and at higher costs than ever before, and with more competition from private developers. The fact that much of this critical forest land happens to be near rapidly expanding urban areas only heightens our sense of urgency. But, I am pleased to report that we are making headway.



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to **preserve** the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the **diversity of life** on Earth by protecting the **lands and waters** they need to survive.

The Conservancy recently completed the purchase of 8,541 acres from Plum Creek Timber Company, which included tracts in the ACE Basin and in the Sewee to Santee region, two of our priority action sites. This deal highlights both our progress as well as the complex issues we face.

The Plum Creek properties were purchased by The Nature Conservancy for \$13.2 million, with generous support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. All of the acreage will be protected by conservation easements or resold to the U.S. Forest Service for inclusion in the Francis Marion National Forest. These strategic areas include forests and hardwood-dominated wetlands along the Santee River, and other river corridors in the ACE Basin. However, these significant tracts represent only a fraction of the at-risk areas already, or soon-to-be, on the market.

Another success story is our purchase in July of 678 acres within the Francis Marion National Forest from International Paper. It will be resold to the U.S. Forest Service. The land is important for its longleaf pine forest, which once covered 92 million acres from Virginia to Texas and is one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in North America. Today, only 3 percent is left.

The current dynamics are seriously stretching The Nature Conservancy's financial and human resources, yet our commitment is unwavering. We are doing everything we can to respond to this unparalleled opportunity to protect South Carolina's last great places. I am grateful for and encouraged by the support of our many friends, donors and conservation partners, as well as the zeal of my staff, as we work to achieve our mission. I invite you to join our efforts in preserving our natural heritage for our children and future generations. The time is now.

Mark L. Robertson  
Executive Director



To learn more about our work in South Carolina or to register for our Great Places Network, please visit [nature.org/southcarolina](http://nature.org/southcarolina)

Photos, Top: Immature Anhingas  
Bottom: Longleaf Pine Forest