



The Nature Conservancy in South Carolina

2026 South Carolina Legislative Platform

Executive Summary

At The Nature Conservancy, we believe that South Carolinians recognize and respect their ties to nature. Our local lands and waters are part of who we are and what we do – from hunting and fishing to farming, forestry and transportation.

TNC values collaboration and the pursuit of durable conservation policy. We will continue to lead with data, tools and information to work toward effective, pragmatic solutions. We will remain solution-oriented and non-partisan.

In 2026, we aim to build on South Carolina's strong conservation legacy through dedicated support of our partners and the momentum of Governor McMaster's last year in office.



April Donnelly

Director of Government Relations
adonnelly@tnc.org
703-587-3778



2026 South Carolina Legislative Priorities

Sharing Our South Carolina Conservation Ethic

2026 is the final year of the two-year state legislative session for the 126th General Assembly. It is also an election year for every member of the S.C. House, Governor, Congressional House members and one of our U.S. Senators. As a result, TNC-SC has an opportunity to engage both sitting and prospective legislators and elected officials with an encouraging message about how conservation benefits Palmetto State residents and businesses. In 2026, we will:

- Promote protection and restoration projects, as well as the science that underpins them, through direct legislative engagement.
- Demonstrate how conservation is compatible with working lands, recreation, development, resilience and prosperous communities.

Enhancing Conservation Policy and Finance Mechanisms

The 2026 legislative session brings opportunities to improve incentives that encourage landowners to consider voluntary long-term land protection in exchange for realized value through tax credits. Modest adjustments to these programs have the potential to unlock additional acres for conservation along South Carolina's scenic rivers and in areas highly susceptible to

conversion from working forests or agricultural use. In 2026, we will:

- Partner with the S.C. Land Trust Network to improve the S.C. Scenic Rivers Act. Program improvements will further secure key river corridors and expand opportunities for land protection by enhancing incentives to landowners through an improved tax credit.
- Advance legislation to improve the S.C. Conservation Easement Tax Credit (H.3409). Adjusting the tax credit to track more closely with inflation and current property values will incentivize and encourage private land protection statewide.

Investing in Statewide Conservation Funding and Partnerships

TNC deeply values the partnership and expertise of our state natural resource agencies. We are proud to work side-by-side with them in our Lowcountry pine forests and salt marshes, on the fire line of controlled burns in the Piedmont, along the streams of the Southern Blue Ridge and in the halls of the State House. In the coming year, we endeavor to partner with them in support of Governor McMaster's Legacy for Landscapes initiative to increase the pace and scale of land protection statewide. We will continue to support funding for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, S.C. Conservation Bank, S.C. Office of Resilience

and the S.C. Forestry Commission, as well as for enhanced investments in land protection, forest management, habitat restoration and coastal stabilization across the state budget. In 2026, we will:

- Capitalize on the Governor's Legacy for Landscapes initiative to advance relevant policy measures and funding requests, in conjunction with state agency partners and other conservation organizations.
- Support the S.C. Conservation Bank, creating a shared appreciation for the valuable role it plays in conserving critical landscapes statewide, at a fraction of the normal cost of land protection.
- Champion the SC Land Trust Network as a trusted resource for elected officials to seek information and insight on policy questions and connect with local land trusts.
- Support expansion of conservation technical assistance resources available to South Carolina agricultural producers in partnership with the SC Association of Conservation Districts and the SC Department of Natural Resources.



Encouraging Natural and Nature-Based Approaches to Natural Resource Challenges

TNC-SC is committed to advancing a science- and nature-based approach to resource management and the alleviation of challenges impacting people and communities across the state. Surface water availability, repeated flooding, coastal inundation and erosion, sedimentation and wildfire are all threats that can be addressed at least in part by maintaining and restoring natural systems and processes. In 2026, we will:

- Continue to track the WaterSC process, led by the S.C. Department of Environmental Services, and the draft State Water Plan. We will provide information and resources to state legislators, including Senate Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee members and Surface Water Study Committee members.
- Partner with the S.C. Office of Resilience, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, hunting and fishing organizations and others to consider the future of state wetlands protection. We will seek a better understanding of present obstacles in discussion with the agriculture, business and economic-development communities, working in

good faith toward realistic, effective solutions to secure wetlands for flood defense, habitat protection and water quality.

- Connect legislators and staff with opportunities to appreciate policy and budget impacts by engaging live-and-in-person with conservation and restoration work, such as prescribed burns, aquatic connectivity and land protection. This will be accomplished through field visits organized alongside state and federal agency partners, local land trusts and other groups.

OUR APPROACH TO PUBLIC POLICY

TNC supports public policy initiatives that:

- Promote more efficient resource management,
- Are ambitious but practical, with long-term benefits,
- Take advantage of the power and value of nature while respecting people's needs,
- Use market mechanisms to achieve resource management goals,
- Emphasize cooperation across agency, political and organizational boundaries, and
- Recognize public sector fiscal constraints.

About The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Founded in the U.S. in 1951, TNC works in 50 states and 70 countries to make a lasting difference. Collaboration has been at the heart of TNC's work in South Carolina for more than 55 years, starting with our first project to create the Francis Beidler Forest with the Audubon Society.

TNC partners with local landowners, communities and businesses to implement practical conservation solutions that benefit people and nature. We are supported by 1 million members worldwide and local boards of trustees in each state and country where TNC works.