The Nature Conservancy



South Carolina

2026 IMPACT REPORT

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends:

There are a lot of reasons I love calling South Carolina home. I love strolling through a lush hardwood forest in the Upstate and seeing sparkling dots of sunlight dart across the shaded ground. I love inhaling the rich scent of fallen needles in a native longleaf pine grove in the Midlands and recognizing the whistle of a red-cockaded woodpecker. I love watching the sun set over a Lowcountry salt marsh, tall grasses swaying in the breeze, and yes, even the smell of pluff mud in my nose. Our state is full of natural wonders—and thanks to you, they'll be here for generations to come.

By far, though, the best part of South Carolina is the people. Our friends and neighbors here are passionate and dedicated when it comes to conserving our lands and waters. I can't thank you enough for it, and for trusting us to help carry out that mission.

Thanks to you, 2026 brought a slew of new conservation milestones in South Carolina. I hope you'll take a moment in this busy season to read through this 2026 Impact Report and then share it with your friends and family. You should feel extraordinarily proud of all the amazing conservation wins you made possible this year.

The projects in this report are just a portion of the work you supported this year. Thank you for all you do for South Carolina and for the future generations who will inherit our state and our world.

Warmly,

Dale Threatt-Taylor
Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy in South Carolina

COVER: Waccamaw River Heritage Preserve © Kris Meade
THIS PAGE: Burning in the Southern Blue Ridge © Cara Chancellor/TNC; Dale Threatt-Taylor © Paul Nurnberg

Project Spotlight

Trail Improvements at Four Preserves

We love sharing the news when your support allows The Nature Conservancy to acquire land (see pages five and nine in this report for recent announcements!). Equally important, though, is what happens *after* land has been protected. Stewardship is often a larger job than the original real estate deal.

Stewarding protected land includes caring for on-site natural resources, such as using controlled burning to make forests healthier. On lands open to the public, it also includes creating a good visitor experience. Clear, safe public access takes time, money and boots on the ground. Natural wear and tear, as well as storms and other phenomena, mean that work is never done.

Thanks to a grant from the Duke Energy Foundation and support from our members, TNC was able to improve trails at four preserves this summer:

- The grant funded two interns from the Southeast Conservation Corps for three weeks at our Blue Wall and Nine Times Preserves. At Blue Wall, they improved 1.1 miles of trail corridor. At Nine Times, they improved the tread on 0.5 miles of our Rocky Bald Loop Trail.
- With additional funding, we then sent the crew to Peachtree Rock Heritage Preserve, where they improved and re-blazed 7.8 miles of trail.
- Finally, they journeyed to Sandy Island Preserve, where they improved 12.8 miles of trail corridor.

We're grateful for your support and look forward to welcoming you back on these improved trails. Plan your visit at **nature.org/SCpreserves**.



Improved trail at Nine Times Preserve © Brinton Shinn/TNC



YOUR IMPACT: PROTECTING LAND

You Opened New Upstate Trails

This August, the new Henry Passage of the Palmetto Trail opened near Marietta, S.C. It features 800 feet of elevation change over 1.5 miles and guides hikers through various Southern Blue Ridge forest types. Ultimately, it will connect to the Gap Creek Passage and other trails within Jones Gap State Park.

While building a mountain trail is a long and arduous process, the effort to open this piece of land to the public was even more so. It began in 1978, when conservationist Tommy Wyche presented a vision to the South Carolina Parks, Recreation and Tourism Commission to protect a stretch of 40,000 acres between the Table Rock and North Saluda Watersheds—an area he dubbed the "Mountain Bridge Wilderness."

Over the next 25 years, most of the large tracts in the Mountain Bridge Wilderness were protected. In 2005, though, one holdout caught the eye of TNC scientists: Gap Creek. This 955-acre tract featured beautiful cascades, wildflower-sprinkled forests and close enough proximity to Jones Gap State Park that it could one day be added to the park's trail network. After 12 years of research, meetings and negotiations—and thanks to your incredible support—TNC purchased Gap Creek in November 2017. Two years later, it was transferred to State Parks.

The Henry Passage is the first trail to open on the former Gap Creek property, which also has several rare flat sections that will be used to create additional parking for increased public access.

MILESTONES ▼

1,945 Acres near Joanna, S.C., transferred from TNC to the U.S. Forest Service in September, to be added to the Sumter National Forest. TNC protected a 2,280-acre tract in the area in early 2023 and previously transferred 335 acres from that purchase to Laurens County to create a new park.

52 Number of South Carolina General Assembly members who signed a letter asking our state's federal delegation to engage in bipartisan efforts to protect public and working lands. The letter was spearheaded by TNC, National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

Aerial view of Gap Creek © Mac Stone; INSERT: Cascade at Gap Creek © Mac Stone



YOUR IMPACT: SAFEGUARDING FRESH WATER

You Protected Clean Drinking Water

Seven miles north of Aiken, S.C., lies a 400-acre reservoir that supplies more than 20 percent of the city's drinking water. In 2016, its future was thrown into doubt. The Mason Branch Reservoir is nestled almost entirely within a "C" shape created by a surrounding 2,200-acre piece of land. That tract's previous owner set off alarm bells when they announced a plan to develop the property into a 4,000-homesite golf and equestrian community. Developing the land would remove the water-filtration benefits provided by the surrounding forests, while also introducing new sources of pollution. Thankfully, the City of Aiken was able to purchase the surrounding tract in 2020, and in 2023, Aiken Land Conservancy placed a conservation easement on it to forever limit future development.

The crisis had passed, but a movement to protect the city's water supply had begun. This October, TNC closed on a parcel adjacent to the city-owned lands, the 549-acre Hilton tract. Protecting these acres safeguards two miles of frontage on Shaws Creek, into which the Mason Branch feeds and which supplies additional drinking water to the area. It also increases the forest buffer around the reservoir to keep the water clean.

A bonus for residents is that both the lands surrounding the Mason Branch Reservoir (currently Shaws Creek Preserve) and the Hilton tract may soon be open to public access. TNC and the City of Aiken plan to transfer their parcels to the South Carolina Forestry Commission to create a new regional state forest.

MILESTONES

762 Acres that TNC contributed to the newly opened Black River State Park near Georgetown, S.C. TNC also owns and manages an additional 1,736 acres as its Black River Preserve along the state park's river route.

12.5M Acres covered by TNC's new In-Lieu Fee mitigation program. Companies and state agencies can purchase mitigation credits to compensate for development that impacts streams and wetlands; the credits then are used to protect and restore freshwater resources in this self-sustaining program.

Kayakers on Black River © Cara Chancellor/TNC; INSERT: Shaws Creek © Aiken Land Conservancy



YOUR IMPACT: SUPPORTING HEALTHY OCEANS

You're Improving Fisheries Data

Keeping a fish population sustainable means balancing the number of fish being caught by anglers with the number left in the water to reproduce and feed other marine and bird life. Part of that equation is protecting fish spawning areas. Fish return to the same places year after year in large numbers and at predictable times of year; allowing fishing in those areas at those times can quickly unbalance a population by removing large numbers of reproductive-aged fish from the sea.

In some places, scientists know where those spawning grounds are located. For example, TNC recently collected data to inform management decisions at three Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZs) off the coast of North and South Carolina and Florida.

In other places, we're less certain where fish spawning habitat is situated. Thanks to funding from the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE) and your support, TNC's regional oceans program embarked this year on a five-year project to identify, verify and monitor fish spawning aggregations in the U.S. Gulf. Staff from TNC in South Carolina are an integral part of this effort, which combines data collection from the field with cooperative engagement with local anglers. Information collected will be used to model how future changes in habitat are likely to impact local fish populations.

MILESTONES ▼

74.5 Percent of female fish sampled from the Georgetown Hole SSMZ off South Carolina that were actively spawning. Fish were sampled in 2023 and 2024 and included scamp, gag grouper and blackfin snapper. The findings were presented to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to evaluate continued protections for the area.

3 Acres of marsh restored to date behind TNC's 15 living shoreline projects statewide. Salt marsh is vitally important to birds and marine life, in addition to helping to protect the coastline from erosion and storm surge.

Scientists deploy a submersible camera to monitor fish spawning behaviors at a Spawning Special Management Zone © William Heyman

You're Opening a New State Forest

In May 2025, TNC closed on 2,700+ acres of Chelsea Plantation in Jasper County. The property was in the crosshairs of Lowcountry developers, who had proposed 438 residential homes, 597 apartment units and 11,000 square feet of commercial space for the tract. In response, residents formed a "Keep Chelsea Rural" movement; the pushback delayed development plans until TNC could purchase the property. Funding was made possible thanks to an extraordinary push by individuals and foundations, who granted 10 loans and many generous gifts.

This August, TNC placed a conservation easement on Chelsea, held jointly by Open Land Trust and the U.S. Navy, to forever protect the land from development. (A conservation easement stays with the land even when it is resold, meaning no future owner can develop it beyond the terms of the agreement.) TNC then transferred Chelsea to the South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC), which plans to open the acres to the public as a state forest.

Chelsea's protection is a win not only for rural character and public access, but also for military resilience. The property is in the heart of the Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape, an area of more than two million acres of forests and marshes that support training activities for Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island and Naval Support Facility Beaufort.

TNC also closed in August on the adjoining 212-acre Chelsea West property, which will be sold to the SCFC later on to be added to the new state forest.

MILESTONES ▼

554 Acres burned last November by participants of TNC's Southern Blue Ridge Prescribed Fire Training Exchange. This intensive fire workshop helps develop the wildland fire workforce, while also increasing local capacity for controlled burning. The burns improve wildlife habitat and reduce severe wildfire risk.

6 South Carolina counties in which the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has contracted with TNC to work on forest recovery following Hurricane Helene. TNC will implement controlled burns on USFS lands in the Andrew Pickens and Long Cane Ranger Districts of Sumter National Forest.





Burn at the 2025 Prescribed Fire Training Exchange © Cara Chancellor/TNC; View at Chelsea Plantation © David Bishop/TNC



YOUR IMPACT: CREATING RESILIENCE

You Protected Military Readiness

Of all the threats facing the United States Marine Corps, erosion may seem low on the list. But it's not one the leaders of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Beaufort can ignore. Rising tides and storm surges eat at the base's shoreline and inundate roads. The Laurel Bay housing complex, where many marines and their families live, is particularly at risk.

In 2022, TNC met with MCAS leaders to talk about making the base more resilient. They settled on a large-scale living shoreline to protect Laurel Bay. A grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) funded the project, which kicked off with the first volunteer work day in the spring of 2024.

After two years and 25 total work days—featuring volunteer teams from the U.S. Marine Corps, Sustainability Institute, Boeing SC, University of South Carolina and the local community—the last one of 36,604 Oyster Castles™ was placed this October. These specialized structures are made of a mixture of cement and oyster shell and provide an ideal surface for new oysters to grow. Their interlocking edges provide structural support while still allowing water to flow through.

The final reef is 2,000 feet long and protects the shoreline by dissipating wave energy and encouraging sediment build-up and marsh regrowth behind the reef. Oyster reefs also create a vital habitat for crabs and young fish and filter the water to keep it cleaner.

MILESTONES ▼

6 Number of projects identified for the first round of TNC's Community Assistance Program for living shorelines. In partnership with the South Carolina Office of Resilience (SCOR) and funded by NOAA, the program helps with assessment, permitting, design and installation of living shorelines for under-resourced landowners and communities experiencing erosion.

10+ Acre size of project being considered for TNC's Coastal Resilience Implementation Plans, an effort in partnership with SCOR and supported by NOAA. The plans will identify opportunities for landscape-scale nature-based solutions that can be used to connect individual projects and increase their impact.

Volunteers laying Oyster Castles™ at the MCAS living shoreline © Paul Nurnberg

You're Storing Carbon and Creating Public Access

Horry County residents and visitors will soon have more than 4,600 new acres of places to hike, fish, paddle, hunt and enjoy the outdoors. This April, TNC acquired four former timber properties totaling 4,625 acres. After state approval, they will be added to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources' (SCDNR's) Heritage Preserve Program.

Three of the properties—totaling 4,025 acres—will become part of SCDNR's Waccamaw River Heritage Preserve, increasing the preserve's size by nearly 60 percent. TNC previously helped protect more than 3,500 of the preserve's existing 7,000 acres, through several land protection projects dating back to 1993. The fourth property totals 600 acres and will form the backbone of a future 6,000-acre acquisition at Gunter's Island that will be included in SCDNR's Little Pee Dee Heritage Preserve program.

In addition to future public access, protection of these four properties:

- Increases habitat for black bear, migratory songbirds, wood ducks, barred owls, otters, raccoons, turtles and more.
- Filters stormwater runoff and helps keep water clean.
- Preserves intact floodplains that store floodwaters during heavy rain events.
- Sequesters approximately 6,300 metric tons of carbon per year by letting old-growth bottomland hardwood forests grow without being cut.

The purchase is part of the larger Atlantic Conservation Coalition, a four-state partnership of state agencies and nonprofits working together to protect and restore vital coastal habitats, peatlands and forests across the eastern United States.

This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement 3D25824 to the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does the Environmental Protection Agency endorse trade names or recommend the use of commercial products mentioned in this document, as well as any images, video, text, or other content created by generative artificial intelligence tools, nor does any such content necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency.

MILESTONES ▼

124,735

Native longleaf pine seedlings planted across South Carolina in 2026 as part of TNC's Plant a Billion Trees program. Trees store carbon by using sunlight to convert carbon dioxide into sugars, which then become building blocks for the tree's trunk and branches.

10 Percent of 2030 climate pollution reduction goal achieved thus far across four TNC state programs, funded by an Environmental Protection Agency grant. In South Carolina, the goal is being reached primarily through conservation of bottomland hardwood forests. Other states are restoring peatlands and coastal habitats to sequester carbon.



Gunter's Island © Kris Meade

JOIN US

Help us continue your conservation legacy.

More than 55 years ago, a group of people like you—passionate about protecting South Carolina's lands, waters and wildlife—united to protect the future of our state. Those early volunteers formed The Nature Conservancy in South Carolina.

Since then, you have been at the center of our story, helping to protect more than 420,000 acres of our state's natural lands and waters, from the picturesque Blue Ridge mountains to the stunning marshes and dunes along our coast.

Learn more about ways you can help meet South Carolina's most pressing conservation needs and be a part of continuing this proud legacy.

For more information, please contact Executive Director Dale Threatt-Taylor at d.threatttaylor@tnc.org or 843-937-8807.



A yawning barred owl © David Leeming/TNC Photo Contest 2023

Make a Difference

There are many ways to give to The Nature Conservancy. TNC's giving options may offer tax savings, income for life and other potential benefits for both you and our natural world.

Gifts of Cash

To support TNC's most pressing priorities in South Carolina, please use the enclosed envelope or give online securely at **http://nature.org/donatesc**

Gifts of Stock

Gifts of appreciated stock, bonds or mutual funds are a smart and simple way to support TNC. These gifts allow you to give more with less, because you may be able to take an income tax deduction and avoid capital gains taxes.

Gifts of Real Estate

TNC accepts donations of full or partial interest in real estate, which can be urban or rural, developed or undeveloped, commercial, residential or industrial. Real estate can be an advantageous gift because it may eliminate or reduce capital gains tax, as well as provide a charitable tax deduction. Due to the costs of evaluating a potential gift of real estate, its minimum value must be $100,000.

IRA Distribution

Direct distributions from your IRA to TNC can be made without incurring income tax on the withdrawal and can help satisfy your Required Minimum Distribution in an impactful way.

Donor-Advised Funds

Through TNC's Donor Advised Fund, you make a charitable gift when the time is best for you and then advise us how you would like your donation to be used. You can participate in TNC's donor-advised fund with a minimum initial contribution of $100,000.



The Legacy Club

Naming TNC in South Carolina as a beneficiary in your estate plan is a powerful way to support nature for generations to come. If you've already done so, please tell us about your gift. We would love the chance to recognize you and to ensure your wishes are honored.

If you wish to include TNC in your will or estate plan, or to designate us as a beneficiary of your retirement accounts or life insurance, please name us as:

The Nature Conservancy, a nonprofit corporation, organized and existing under the laws of the District of Columbia, and with principal business address of 4245 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 100, Arlington, Virginia 22203-1616.

Our tax identification number is 53-0242652.

Use of Your Gift

TNC uses gifts to support global conservation priorities unless otherwise specified by the donor. If you would like your gift to be used at a place or for a program that matters to you (such as a state or country), please contact us to ensure that your wishes can be met.



The Nature Conservancy cannot render tax or legal advice, and this information is not intended as such. If you are interested in having a conversation about giving to TNC, please reach out to Executive Director Dale Threatt-Taylor at d.threatttaylor@tnc.org or 843-937-8807.

Gopher tortoise © Marc Del Santro; Pitcher plants in South Carolina © Reg Daves

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Nature Thanks You!

Look inside for 2026 conservation highlights you made possible.



Black bear © Dave Shaffer/TNC Photo Contest 2022