

FY2024 State Budget Proposals

Low Country Land Trust **Concept 1: Land Conservation Capacity Building (\$1,500,000)**

There has never been a greater need or more support available for the protection of SC's iconic and irreplaceable natural resources and landscape. The level of public support for and landowner interest in conservation projects and land deals is unsurpassed. We need to scale up our capacity by at least 25% to take full advantage of this moment.

The Challenge: Governor McMaster has set a conservation goal to double the amount of protected land (public or private) by 2050.

What do we need to meet this challenge? More boots on the ground.

Closing a conservation easement requires three magic ingredients: landowner interest, sufficient incentives, and the organizational capacity to get it done. We have the first two ingredients in higher quantities than ever before. We have more potential deals than we can handle; landowner and business interest is at the highest it has ever been. There's also more funding available for conservation projects than ever before, with three new ballot measures providing an additional \$190+ million in greenbelt funding in Beaufort, Berkeley, and Dorchester counties, in addition to the substantial amount already available in Charleston County. This is matched by the increased investment in the South Carolina Conservation Bank, not to mention federal sources as well.

The number of acres or projects we can close on is not contingent solely upon how much funding is available to fund deals. The number of conservation easements we can place on private properties or fee simple deals we can acquire is directly subject to our capacity as a nonprofit organization to shepherd these conservation opportunities to their fruition.

Our challenge is that while funding exists, it is limited to the purchase price of land and conservation easements themselves, and can't be used for the capacity needed to get the deals done. It doesn't matter if the landowner is willing if no one's there to shake their hand and take the easement to the finish line.

The Solution: A catalyst fund for building organizational capacity.

We have no shortage of project options. We have no shortage of interested parties. However, we *are* short on time, and we must expand the resources we are able to commit to

seeing these unprecedented opportunities through to their completion. We're asking for a one-time investment in land protection capacity to sustain the goal Governor McMaster has set forth to ensure that South Carolina's vital natural resources are protected forever.

A one-time investment of **\$1,500,000** will create a catalyst fund enabling Lowcountry Land Trust to conserve more land, faster. Our approach to land conservation is highly efficient, but the needs are increasing in urgency and complexity. Strengthening our organizational capacity will allow us to activate more experts in the field, immediately increasing our portfolio capacity by 25-50%. It will also enable us to be nimble and entrepreneurial, combating potential threats before they evolve beyond our ability to impact them.

Lowcountry Land Trust is actively fundraising to grow capacity through a 30-month effort, and will match this one-time investment from the state of South Carolina with \$3,000,000 in private donations. This increased capacity will provide South Carolinians a significant and meaningful return on investment.

Why Lowcountry Land Trust?

Lowcountry Land Trust is the largest, local land trust in South Carolina. Our project area is the entire South Carolina coastal plain- the geography most threatened by incompatible development, increased flooding, and rising sea levels. We have a proven track record of working with corporations such as Boeing, Volvo, Waste Management, the South Carolina Port Authority, and others on complex mitigation projects to benefit Lowcountry residents and add to the state's publicly owned natural resources.

We are the most experienced and action-ready. The only thing stopping us from scaling up to meet the Governor's impressive conservation goal is our need to grow our operations to support the work we have in front of us. We have the opportunities, public support, and proven track record to get this work done. We strive to grow over the next five years to meet the Governor's challenge, but we simply don't have five years to spare.