



South Carolina
Forestry Commission



BUDGET REQUEST

FY2024-25

ABOUT US

SCFC ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Our history, mission, vision and values

The SC Forestry Commission's general duties are defined in State Code 48-23-90. In summary, the code requires the agency to make an annual report to the General Assembly on "forest conditions ... including recommendations to the public as to reforestation. ... to prevent, control and extinguish fires, including the enforcement of ... laws pertaining to the protection of the forests and woodlands give such advice, assistance and cooperation to private owners of land and promote ... appreciation by the public of the advantages of forestry and the benefits ... cooperate with the federal government in the distribution of funds allotted to the State for forestry ..."

Mission: Our mission is to protect, promote and enhance South Carolina's forests for the benefit of all.

Vision: Healthy forests, resilient communities, impeccable service

Values: Safety | Integrity | Community | Service | Commitment

Key officials

Scott Phillips
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* key contact for legislative issues

Cathy Nordeen
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Major program areas

Forest Protection

- Wildland Fire Suppression
- Dispatch operations
- Law Enforcement

Forest Management

- Landowner Assistance
- State Forests
- Urban & Community Forestry
- Forest Health (insects & disease)

Forest Development

- Industry recruitment
- Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA)
- Water quality protection (BMPs)
- Nursery & Tree Improvement

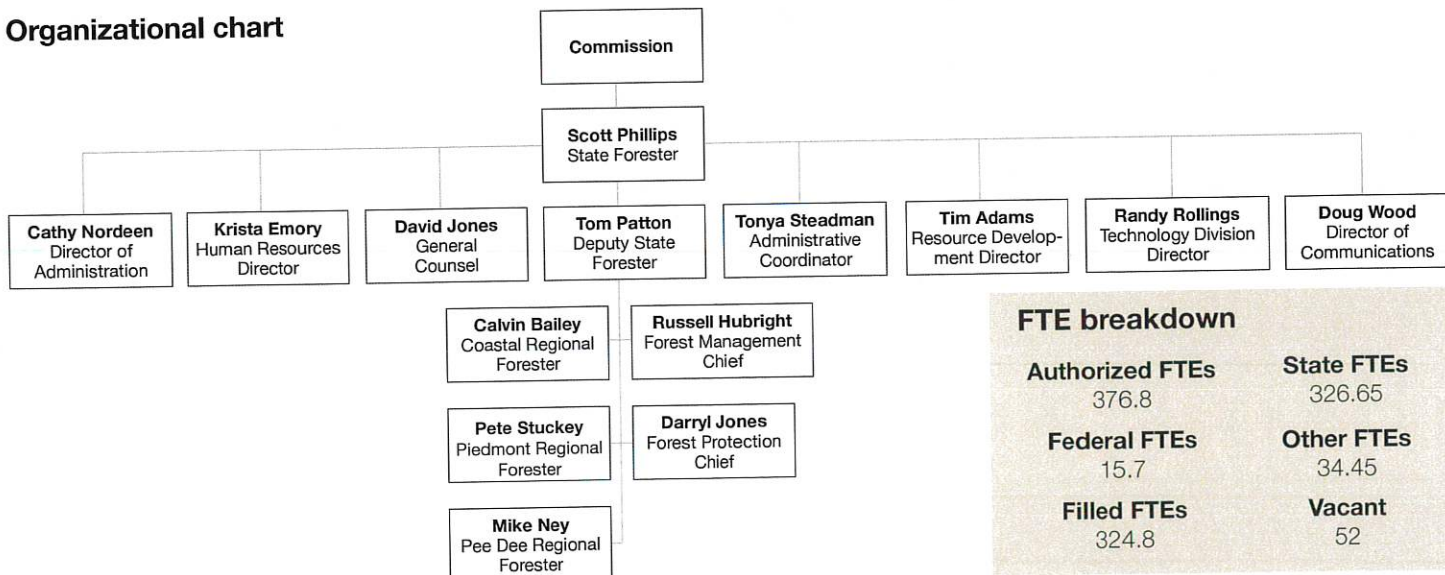
Communications

- Public information
- Environmental education
- Media relations
- Creative services

Technology

- I.T. services
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- Telecommunications

Organizational chart



FTE breakdown

Authorized FTEs	State FTEs
376.8	326.65
Federal FTEs	Other FTEs
15.7	34.45
Filled FTEs	Vacant
324.8	52



SCFC BUDGET REQUEST

FY2024-25, PRIORITIZED SUMMARY

Priority 1: Recruitment and retention

Entry-level salaries for wildland firefighters, law enforcement officers, dispatchers and pilots are not competitive with comparable positions within private industry or state and federal government. Compensation inequities between SCFC Class I law enforcement officers and those at other state agencies still need to be addressed.

- The number of qualified candidates for open forestry positions in the agency has fallen nearly 58% from 9.5 applicants/posting in FY2021 to 4 applicants/posting in FY2023.
- The entry level salary for SCFC Class I officers is 7.3% below the minimum starting salary recommended by DSHR for Class I officers. According to the 2023 DSHR law enforcement compensation study \$50,000 is the minimum starting salary necessary for state agencies to compete for Class I officers.
- Currently 6% of the agency’s frontline firefighter positions are vacant, with average position being vacant nearly 7 months.
- 33% of the agency’s fire dispatcher positions are vacant. In FY2023 the agency’s turnover rate was 112% for dispatcher positions.

Additionally, the high number of employees eligible to retire exacerbates the situation and necessitates expanded recruiting, safety and training efforts. Currently 25% of agency employees are beyond eligibility to retire and 41% can retire within 5 years.

Fully funding this request will provide \$1.205 million to increase salaries for our most critical positions. It will also shift four FTEs to more stable state funding and provide three new FTEs to bolster recruitment, safety and training efforts.

Requested amount:

- General recurring: \$2,020,000
- Federal authority: \$2,500,000

FTEs:

- +7 (state)
 - -3 (federal)
 - -1 (other)
-
- 3 (total)**



SCFC BUDGET REQUEST

FY2024-25, PRIORITIZED SUMMARY, continued

Priority 2: Forest inventory and analysis (FIA)

SCFC's Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA) program is responsible for collecting the forest resource data that is used by companies looking to establish or expand their forest products-based operations in South Carolina. FIA is the sole source for this data, which is critical information for the states \$23.2 billion forestry sector and the more than 100,000 South Carolinians employed within this sector.

The FIA program is understaffed and has had difficulty filling vacancies due to low recruitment response and/or lack of qualified applicants, resulting in longer times to fill vacancies. Additionally, a federally mandated increase in workload has extended the amount of time it takes to collect data on an annual cycle. Currently the program has a backlog of 482 plots, which equates to nine-and-a-half months of labor.

Fully funding this request will provide 2 FTEs and operating funds to form a fourth FIA crew.

Requested amount:

- General recurring: \$220,000

FTEs:

- +2 (state)



Priority 3: Law enforcement vehicle + supplies

This request is a companion to the recruitment and retention budget request. Should the law enforcement investigator position be funded, one-time funding will be needed to supply the tools necessary to do the job, including purchasing a vehicle and other supplies for this officer.

Requested amount:

- General non-recurring: \$63,000



Priority 4: FIA crew vehicle + supplies

This request is also a companion to the recruitment and retention budget request. If the funding to establish a fourth FIA crew for the agency is approved, this money will help supply the necessary tools for the FIA foresters to do their jobs.

Requested amount:

- General non-recurring: \$84,000



Total SCFC FY2024-25 budget request: \$2.387 million

FINANCIAL UPDATE

BUDGET EXECUTION, FY2022-23/FY2023-24

Major Budget Categories	Fiscal Year	General Funds Appropriations	General Funds Expenditures	Federal Funds Appropriations	Federal Funds Expenditures	Other Funds Appropriations	Other Funds Expenditures
Personal Services	2022-23	\$13,819,344.00	\$12,628,522.00	\$1,028,518.00	\$746,791.00	\$1,390,000.00	\$815,459.00
	2023-24	\$16,407,920.00	\$5,822,202.00	\$1,028,518.00	\$362,976.00	\$1,390,000.00	\$412,900.00
Other Operating	2022-23	\$4,743,655.00	\$5,370,962.00	\$3,299,567.00	*\$1,700,810.00	\$7,878,713.00	\$5,690,424.00
	2023-24	\$5,428,655.00	\$2,247,371.00	\$3,899,567.00	\$859,512.00	\$7,878,713.00	\$1,695,729.00
Special Items (Forest Renewal and Projects)	2022-23	\$200,000.00	\$200,000.00			\$825,298.00	\$701,367.00
	2023-24	\$200,000.00	\$163,448.00			\$820,000.00	\$49,986.00
Distrib. to Subdivisions	2022-23	\$125,000.00	\$125,000.00	\$1,200,475.00	*\$1,118,414.00	\$1,100,000.00	\$844,943.00
	2023-24	\$125,000.00	\$22,810.00	\$800,475.00	\$398,020.00	\$1,100,000.00	
Fringe Benefits	2022-23	\$7,204,126.00	\$6,551,955.00	\$435,000.00	\$352,141.00	\$510,000.00	\$464,820.00
	2023-24	\$9,010,311.00	\$3,118,015.00	\$435,000.00	\$170,696.00	\$510,000.00	\$210,379.00
Non-recurring	2022-23	\$4,500,000.00	\$4,500,000.00			\$4,504,617.00	\$191,637.00
	2023-24	\$6,525,000.00	\$1,000,000.00				
Carry-forward	2022-23	\$2,133,511.00					
	2023-24	\$2,697,980.00					
TOTALS	2022-23	\$32,725,636.00	\$29,376,439.00	\$5,963,560.00	\$3,918,156.00	\$11,704,011.00	\$8,517,013.00
	2023-24	\$40,394,866.00	\$12,373,846.00	\$6,163,560.00	\$1,791,204.00	\$16,203,330.00	\$2,560,631.00

* Additional federal authority was a one-time increase for IJJA funds. Permanent additional federal authority was requested and approved for FY 2024.

BUDGET REQUEST BREAKDOWN, FY2024-25

Priority	Type	Title	General-recurring	General-non-recurring	Other	Federal	Total	FTEs			
								State	Other	Federal	Total
1.	Recurring	Recruitment & Retention	\$2,020,000			\$2,500,000	\$4,520,000	7.00	-1.00	-3.00	3.00
2.	Recurring	Forest Inventory & Analysis	220,000				\$220,000	2.00	0.00	0.00	2.00
3.	Non-recurring	Law enforcement vehicle + supplies		\$63,000			\$63,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
4.	Non-recurring	FIA vehicle + supplies		\$84,000			\$84,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST							\$4,887,000	9.00	-1.00	-3.00	5.00

* Additional federal authority



PROVISO REQUESTS

43.1 - Grant funds carry-forward

Proviso Text: The Forestry Commission is authorized to use unexpended federal grant funds in the current year to pay for expenditures incurred in the prior year.

Year introduced: 1996 / Years in budget: 28

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.2 - Retention of emergency funds

Proviso Text: The Forestry Commission is authorized to retain all funds received as reimbursement of expenditures from other state or federal agencies when personnel and equipment are mobilized due to an emergency.

Year introduced: 2000 / Years in budget: 24

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.3 - Commissioned officers' physicals

Proviso Text: The Forestry Commission is authorized to pay the cost of physical examinations for agency personnel who are required to receive such physical examinations prior to receiving a law enforcement commission.

Year introduced: 2006 / Years in budget: 18

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.4 - Compensatory payments

Proviso Text: In the event a State of Emergency is declared by the Governor, exempt employees of the Forestry Commission may be paid for actual hours worked in lieu of accruing compensatory time, at the discretion of the agency director, and providing funds are available.

Year introduced: 2012 / Years in budget: 12

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.5 - Sale of promotional items

The Forestry Commission may sell promotional items that advocate for forestry and forest culture, including items featuring the South Carolina Forestry Commission Forest Life brand and logo, for the purpose of generating funds for agency operations. Unexpended funds may be carried forward from the prior fiscal year into the current.

Year introduced: 2022 / Years in budget: 2

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.6 - Firefighting equipment & response carry-forward

Proviso Text: The Forestry Commission is authorized to carry forward any unspent funds appropriated for firefighting equipment into the current fiscal year to be expended for the same purpose.

Year introduced: 2023 / Years in budget: 1

Requested Action: Retain/Codify



PERFORMANCE UPDATE

SUMMARY OF FY2022-23 ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

Accomplishments

As documented in the agency's FY2022-23 Accountability Report, the Forestry Commission's accomplishments are numerous and varied, with notable progress being made toward each of the five goals around which our newly revised strategic plan is based. Organized by the five principal areas, or goals, of our agency's multifaceted mission – Enhance Public Benefits From Trees And Forests, Protect Forests From Harm, Conserve Working Forests, Raise Awareness About Our Forests, and Strengthen The Commission For The Future – the plan lays out explicit strategies supporting each goal, and the achievement of each of the strategies is gauged by a combination of individual and composite key performance indicators (KPIs). FY2021-22 was the second full year under which agency operations were evaluated according to the goals set forth under this new plan.

Goal 1: Enhance Public Benefits From Trees And Forests

- More than \$124 million in capital investment projects announced in FY23. Announced projects will create 500 new jobs. There were 11 forest products-based announcements in the previous fiscal year.
- Total timber production from South Carolina forests increased 15% in 2021 to 880 million cubic feet and was valued at more than \$1.16 billion. Sawlogs are the state's leading forest product by volume, and production increased 24% to 390 million cubic feet between 2020 and 2021.
- For FY23 the Forest Markets Development Index, which quantifies agency efforts to retain and grow markets for forest products, was 6.25. This is 25% above the annual target. The successful recruitment of a Forest Products Marketing Specialist in October 2022 allowed staff to operate at full capacity the last two quarters of the fiscal year, and staff provided 237 business assists during the fiscal year, which was a 60% increase over FY22.
- For FY23 the Forest Ecosystem Benefits Index was 6.74, which is nearly 4% above the annual target. The agency's Environmental Management Program provided 21.5 hours of instruction during 13 training programs reaching 561 loggers, landowners, and forestry professionals. Best Management Practices (BMP) Foresters completed 218 BMP courtesy exams to aid in ensuring compliance. Compliance on sites that receive a courtesy exam remains very high at 100%.

Goal 2: Protect Forests From Harm

- The agency purchased 10 safer enclosed-cab dozers, toward the 160 target, in FY23. The agency needs to procure 11-12 dozer units each year based on the 15-year safe service life for this firefighting equipment.
- For FY23, the SCFC responded to 1,050 wildfires that burned 6,9203 acres. Fifty-six percent of these fires were caused by debris burning, the number 1 cause of wildfires in SC.
- Average wildfire response time was 37.8 minutes in FY23, which is within the target response time of 38 minutes. This metric is 1% above the five-year average. In FY21 the agency revised its target, increasing it from 35 minutes to 38 minutes, due to long-term firefighter vacancies and the resulting larger coverage areas.
- For FY23 the Wildfire Prevention Index was 8.48, which is nearly 27% above FY22. Wildfire prevention efforts have continued throughout the state including presentations that reached 225 people, 8 cooperator meetings for Community Wildfire Protection Plan developments and 11 community outreach events with 3,865 in attendance. Staff performed 62 community wildfire risk assessments in association with both Firewise USA communities and fuel mitigation grants, which funded 1,752 acres of prescribed burning along with firebreak installation for a total of \$288,638 in grant funds.

Goal 3: Conserve Working Forests

- The agency assisted 1,886 landowners during FY23, which is 21% below the annual target of 2,400. However, this is more than 44% below historical metrics. In FY01 the agency assisted 3,370 landowners. Shortfall is due to reduced capacity and recruitment/retention issues.
- Achieved a 97% customer satisfaction level for forest management assistance for FY23 (96% in FY22).
- Reforestation was completed on 8,925 acres via the Forest Renewal Program (FRP) during FY23. FRP is a cost-share program that incentivizes private investments in forestry to increase the productivity of SC's forests. To date, more than 392,000 acres have been reforested using FRP assistance.
- The State Forest system generated more than \$3.5 million in total revenue, primarily from the sale of forest products and paid more than \$800,000 to schools in counties where they operate. The agency operates its State Forests 100% from revenue generated by the management of these properties using no state-appropriated funds to support their operation.

Goal 4: Raise Awareness About Our Forests

- Available federal grant funding was used to hire two FIA Foresters in temporary grant positions to bolster plot production. FIA plot production was 89% of the target for FY23, which is up 16% from last fiscal year but is still short of the production necessary to maintain a 5-year inventory cycle due to difficulties filling vacancies. However, accuracy scores remain very high (>97%).
- The outreach effort index for FY23 is 9.45, which is more than 25% above the FY22 results. Of particular note was the agency's YouTube channel experiencing a 60% growth in its subscribers during FY2022-23. The production of three times as many videos posted in FY2021-22, prime among them the second-most-watched video in agency history, drove this dramatic increase. Also, SCFC's website was visited by over 30,000 more unique users than it had the previous fiscal year.
- Agency-led forestry education programs reached 6,364 participants during FY23. This is 42% above FY22.
- The agency hired a full-time social media coordinator for its C&PI Division to increase agency outreach capacity and better leverage social media to advance agency messaging.

Goal 5: Strengthen The Commission For The Future

- Successfully recruited an attorney position to serve as the agency's general counsel and primary point of contact for legislative matters. The agency also successfully recruited six Assistant Unit Forester positions during FY23. However, the Assistant Protection Chief, Staff Forester, pilots and dispatchers positions received in the FY22 budget remained unfilled at the end of the fiscal year.
- Agency efforts to address compensation issues in recent years have improved retention efforts. However, the overall turnover rate for FY23 is 11.9%, which is 2.7% higher than FY22. Due to workforce challenges, competitors for forestry workers have increased their compensation packages, and the number of qualified candidates for open forestry positions in the agency has fallen nearly 58% from 9.5 applicants/posting in FY21 to 4 applicants/posting in FY23. For forester positions the agency averaged 2.9 qualified applicants/posting. Results from the 2021 employee engagement survey indicated that employees continue to be dissatisfied with compensation, and non-competitive salaries are one of the agency's biggest barriers to recruitment and retention.
- Biannual "pulse" employee engagement surveys continue to show improvement. The spring 2023 survey achieved a 70% response rate and resulted in an employee engagement index of 7.83 compared to 7.78 for the same period in 2022. These short surveys provide more frequent feedback from employees to allow the agency to better monitor employee engagement as we seek to continually improve the agency's work environment.

93.8. (DOA: Sale of Surplus Real Property) Up to fifty percent of the proceeds, net of selling expenses, from the sale of surplus real properties shall be retained by the Department of Administration and used for the deferred maintenance of state-owned buildings. The remaining fifty percent of the net proceeds shall be returned to the agency that the property is owned by, under the control of, or assigned to and shall be used by that agency for nonrecurring purposes. This provision applies to all state agencies and departments except: institutions of higher learning; the Public Service Authority; the Ports Authority; the MUSC Hospital Authority; the Myrtle Beach Air Force Redevelopment Authority; the Department of Transportation; the Columbia State Farmers Market; the Department of Agriculture's Columbia Metrology Lab building and property; the Charleston Naval Complex Redevelopment Authority; the Department of Commerce's Division of Public Railways; the Midlands Technical College Enterprise Campus Authority; the Trident Technical College Enterprise Campus Authority; the Commissioners residence at the Department of Corrections and the Educational Television Commission's Key Road property.

The Educational Television Commission shall be authorized to retain the net proceeds from the sale of its property on Key Road, and such proceeds may be used for the renovation of the ETV Telecommunications Center and other maintenance and operating expenses. If it is determined that sufficient net proceeds are not to be derived from the sale of its property on Key Road to cover the cost of all renovations of the Telecommunications Center, the property on Key Road shall not be sold. Any proposed sale hereunder shall, prior to said sale, be submitted to the Department of Administration for approval as being in compliance with the requirements of this subsection.

The Department of Corrections shall be authorized to retain the net proceeds from the sale of the residence provided for the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and use such proceeds for deferred maintenance needs at the Department of Corrections.

The Forestry Commission shall be authorized to retain the net proceeds from the sale of surplus land for use in firefighting operations and replacement of firefighting equipment, or acquisition of such lands as in the judgment of the Commission are desirable for State forests.

The Department of Natural Resources shall be authorized to retain the net proceeds from the sale of existing offices originally purchased with a federal grant or with restricted revenue from hunting and fishing license sales for the improvement, consolidation, and/or establishment of regional offices and related facilities.

The Department of Agriculture, the Educational Television Commission, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Forestry Commission shall annually submit a report, within sixty days after the close of the fiscal year, to the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee on the status of the sale of the identified property and a detailed

accounting on the expenditure of funds resulting from such sale.

This provision is comprehensive and supersedes any conflicting provisions concerning disposition of state-owned real property whether in permanent law, temporary law or by provision elsewhere in this act.

Any unused portion of these funds may be carried forward into succeeding fiscal years and used for the same purposes.