# South Carolina Conservation Bank (P400) Ways and Means Criminal Justice Subcommittee FY 24-25 Budget Hearing January 23, 2023

# SOUTH CAROLINA CONSERVATION BANK

#### Agency Attendees

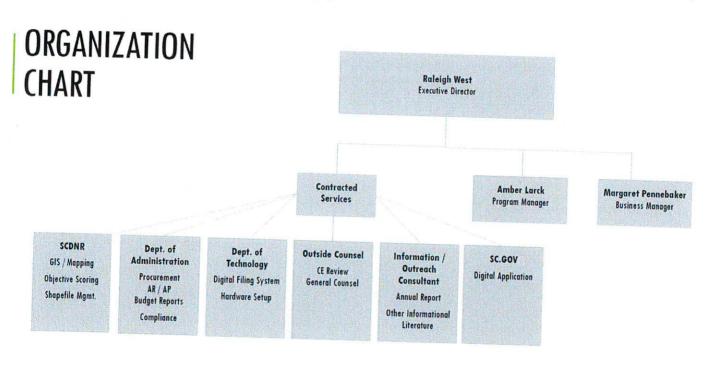
Michael G. McShane, Board Chairman
J. Raleigh West III, Executive Director
Amber J. Larck, Program Manager

#### Agency Information

Agency Mission: To improve the quality of life in South Carolina through the conservation of significant natural resource lands, wetlands, historical properties, archeological sites, and urban parks.

#### FY 2022-23 Accomplishments

- 48 SCCB projects conserved 20,566 acres across South Carolina.
  - 17 State Land Expansion Projects (10 SCDNR, 5 SCPRT, 2 SCFC)
  - 8 Urban Parks
  - 2 New Liberty Trail Projects
- Every \$1 of SCCB grant dollars protected \$3 worth of properties.
- 86 miles of river and creek frontage protected.



#### FTE Information

#### Filled: 3

- Agency Head
- Program Manager I
- Administrative Coordinator II

#### Vacant: 2

- Program Manager II
- Attorney III

#### **Budget Request**

These funds allow the Conservation Bank to preserve and conserve more significant properties for future generations to enjoy and accomplish its mission to improve the quality of life in South Carolina through the conservation of significant natural resource lands, wetlands, historical and archaeological properties and urban park.

- \$5 Million Recurring
- \$22.5 Million Non-Recurring

### Carryforward Information

	South Carolina Conservat	ion Bank
	Carryforward Summary	
Fund	Fund Description	FY 2024 Carryforward
		Balance
unds for norm	nal agency operations	
1001000	General Fund	215,765
		223,703
	ervation Grants	
	General Fund	9,299,192
10050023	General Fund Non-Recurring	3,142,585
42C30000	Conservation Bank Operations	
45D70000	Conservation Bank Trust	5,120,997
		112,683
	Total Carryforward	17,891,223

AGENCY NAME:	SC CONSERVATION BANK	
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# FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

	THE OF EXATING REQUEST
AGENCY PRIORITY	<u> </u>
in the second of	
	Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.
	Conservation Grant Funding
	Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.
ing the standard control of the standard con-	
	General: \$5,000,000
AMOUNT	Federal:
	Other:
	Total:
	What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2023-24? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.
	General:
NEW POSITIONS	Federal:
-1211 + Opt 110113	Other:
	Total:
	Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.
	Mark "X" for all that apply:
	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	E 1 1 000 1000/CITOIIIIEII IIBAAY AVIOTINA MAG SALLI.
FACTORS	Two managed change in eligibility/enrollment for avieting
ASSOCIATED WITH	ron mandated program change in service levels or an
THE REQUEST	1 Toposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for and the
	Consulted DTO during development  Related to a Non Requiring
L.	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority #
	Mark "X" for primary applicable States 1 Professional Pro
	Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:  Education, Training, and Human Development
ENTERPRISE	Healthy and Safe Families
STRATEGIC	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
OBJECTIVES	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	X Government and Citizens
_	CONTROL CONTRO

AGENCY NAME:	SC CONSERVATION BANK	
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#### ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

This funding request supports all agency goals and objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan Template of the FY2023 Accountability Report. This funds request advances the agency's objectives by allowing the Conservation Bank to permanently conserve, preserve and protect significant natural resources, farmlands, forestlands, wetlands, open lands, historic and archaeological sites, and urban parks statewide through conservation easements, low interest loans and purchase of land for the purpose of improving the quality of life in SC for current and future generations.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the FY 2023-24 Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

## RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS

These funds would be distributed to the qualified entities that have submitted applications to the Conservation Bank seeking funds as established by criteria in the statute and by Board decision. The funds would be allocated only after all required due diligence items have been submitted and approved by the Conservation Bank.

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

The Conservation Bank's principal purpose and program is to review and award competitive grants to qualified governmental and non-profit entities to purchase interests in land for conservation purposes, which constitutes the vast majority of our expenses. The Bank also incurs expenses associated with routine administrative and operational activities. The Conservation Bank previously only received funds from the Documentary Deed Stamp Tax but, as of FY 17-18, its funding derived from General Fund appropriations.

#### JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST

Historically, third party funding requests to the Bank have greatly exceeded our annual appropriations. We expect that same dynamic to play out in FY24, with several large conservation transactions anticipated to materialize in the coming months. Additionally, numerous federal programs have increased funding for conservation projects, provided they meet certain thresholds for non-federal matching partners. The Conservation Bank is one of the most efficient and reliable sources of non-federal match that can help attract federal dollars to South Carolina. Given recent increases in federal conservation programs, we anticipate corresponding increases to the Bank to support non-federal matching requirements.

Decreases to the Conservation Bank's budget would limit partner organizations' capabilities to protect significant natural resource lands, wetlands, historical and archaeological properties and urban parks throughout the state, and to attract federal dollars that would otherwise dramatically leverage the State's contributions.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

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## FORM B2 - NON-RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	2
	Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.
TITLE	Conservation Grant Funding  Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.
AMOUNT	\$22,500,000  What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2023-24? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.
FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST	Mark "X" for all that apply:  Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience X Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program IT Technology/Security related Consulted DTO during development Request for Non-Recurring Appropriations Request for Federal/Other Authorization to spend existing funding Related to a Recurring request – If so, Priority #
ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:  Education, Training, and Human Development Healthy and Safe Families Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security Public Infrastructure and Economic Development Government and Citizens

#### ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

This funding request supports all agency goals and objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan Template of the FY2023 Accountability Report. This funds request advances the agency's objectives by allowing the Conservation Bank to permanently conserve, preserve and protect significant natural resources, farmlands, forestlands, wetlands, open lands, historic and archaeological sites, and urban parks statewide through conservation easements, low interest loans and purchase of land for the purpose of improving the quality of life in SC for current and future generations.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the FY 2022-23 Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of

AGENCY NAME:	SC CONSERVATION BANK	
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these funds be evaluated?

#### RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS

These funds would be distributed to the qualified entities that have submitted applications to the Conservation Bank seeking funds as established by criteria in the statute and by Board decision. The funds would be allocated only after all required due diligence items have been submitted and approved by the Conservation Bank.

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated — using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

The Conservation Bank's principal purpose and program is to review and award competitive grants to qualified governmental and non-profit entities to purchase interests in land for conservation purposes, which constitutes the vast majority of our expenses. The Bank also incurs expenses associated with routine administrative and operational activities. The Conservation Bank previously only received funds from the Documentary Deed Stamp Tax but, as of FY 17-18, its funding derived from General Fund appropriations.

Historically, third party funding requests to the Bank have greatly exceeded our annual appropriations. We expect that same dynamic to play out in FY24, with several large conservation transactions anticipated to materialize in the coming months. Additionally, numerous federal programs have increased funding for conservation projects, provided they meet certain thresholds for non-federal matching partners. The Conservation Bank is one of the most efficient and reliable sources of non-federal match that can help attract federal dollars to South Carolina. Given recent increases in federal conservation programs, we anticipate corresponding increases to the Bank to support non-federal matching requirements.

#### JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST

Decreases to the Conservation Bank's budget would limit partner organizations' capabilities to protect significant natural resource lands, wetlands, historical and archaeological properties and urban parks throughout the state, and to attract federal dollars that would otherwise dramatically leverage the State's contributions.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. Does this non-recurring appropriation request create an annualization or need for recurring funds?

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## FORM C - CAPITAL REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	N/A
, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.
TITLE	N/A
	Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.
AMOUNT	
	How much is requested for this project in FY 2023-24? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.
CPIP PRIORITY	
	Identify the project's CPIP plan year and priority
	Identify the project's CPIP plan year and priority number, along with the first year in which the project was included in the agency's CPIP. If not included in the agency's CPIP, please provide an explanation. If the project involves a request for appropriated state funding, briefly describe the agency's contingency plan in the event that state funding is not made available in the amount requested.
OTHER	
APPROVALS	
in the second	What approvals have already been obtained? Are there additional approvals that must be secured in order for the project to succeed? (Institute and Institute
<u> </u>	be secured in order for the project to succeed? (Institutional board, JBRC, SFAA, etc.)
<u>.</u>	
LONG-TERM PLANNING AND	
SUSTAINABILITY	
	What other for I I

What other funds have already been invested in this project (source/type, amount, timeframe)? Will other capital and/or operating funds for this project be requested in the future? If so, how much, and in which fiscal years? Has a source for those funds been identified/secured? What is the agency's expectation with regard to additional annual costs or savings associated with this capital improvement? What source of funds will be impacted by those costs or savings? What is the expected useful life of the capital improvement?

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Provide a summary of the project and explain why it is necessary. Please refer to the budget guidelines for appropriate questions and thoroughly answer all related items.

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## FORM D - PROVISO REVISION REQUEST

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Number	
	Cite the proviso according to the renumbered list for FY 2023-24 (or mark "NEW").
TITLE	
——————————————————————————————————————	Provide the title from all TIV 2022 24
	Provide the title from the FY 2023-24 Appropriations Act or suggest a short title for any new request.
BUDGET PROGRAM	
	Identify the associated budget program(s) by name and budget section.
RELATED BUDGET	
REQUEST	·
	Is this request associated with a budget request you have submitted for FY 2024-25? If so, cite it here.
REQUESTED	
ACTION	
	Choose from: Add, Delete, Amend, or Codify.
OTHER AGENCIES AFFECTED	
• `	Which other agencies would be affected by the recommended action? How?
SUMMARY &	
EXPLANATION	
LAFLANATION	
1	

Summarize the existing proviso. If requesting a new proviso, describe the current state of affairs without it. Explain the need for your requested action. For deletion requests due to recent codification, please identify SC Code section where language now appears.

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PROPOSED PROVISO TEXT				
PROVISO TEXT				
	1			

Paste FY 2023-24 text above, then bold and underline insertions and strikethrough deletions. For new proviso requests, enter requested text above.

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# FORM E - AGENCY COST SAVINGS AND GENE

CONTINGENCY PLAN			
TITLE	Agency Cost Savings and General Fund Reduction Contingency Plan		
AMOUNT	8262 925		
AMOUNT	\$362,835  What is the General Fund 3% reduction amount (minimum based on the FY 2022-23 recurring appropriations)? This amount should correspond to the reduction spreadsheet prepared by EBO.		
ASSOCIATED FTE REDUCTIONS	None.		
	How many FTEs would be reduced in association with this General Fund reduction?		
	The General Funds identified support many activities including general operating expenses as well as funding grants that the SC Conservation Bank Board approves.		
PROGRAM/ACTIVITY IMPACT			

What programs or activities are supported by the General Funds identified?

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A reduction in General Fund Appropriations would inhibit the SC Conservation Bank from further fulfilling its mission to improve the quality of life in South Carolina through the conservation of significant natural resource lands, wetlands, historical properties, archeological sites, and urban parks.

SUMMARY

Please provide a detailed summary of service delivery impact caused by a reduction in General Fund Appropriations and provide the method of calculation for anticipated reductions. Agencies should prioritize reduction in expenditures that have the least significant impact on service delivery.

The SC Conservation Bank does not have any recurring costs or operating expenses that exceed \$50,000.

AGENCY COST SAVINGS PLANS

What measures does the agency plan to implement to reduce its costs and operating expenses by more than \$50,000? Provide a summary of the measures taken and the estimated amount of savings. How does the agency plan to repurpose the savings?

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## FORM F – REDUCING COST AND BURDEN TO BUSINESSES AND CITIZENS

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TITLE	N/A
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Evano	1 your your was to quest.
EXPECTED SAVINGS TO BUSINESSES AND	
CITIZENS	
	What is the expected savings to South Carolina's businesses and citizens that is generated by this proposal? The savings could be related to time or money.
	Mark "X" for all that apply:
FACTORS	Repeal or revision of regulations.
ASSOCIATED WITH	Reduction of agency fees or fines to businesses or citizens
THE REQUEST	Greater efficiency in agency services or reduction in compliance burden.  Other
Manager	
METHOD OF CALCULATION	
CALCULATION	
	Describe the method of calculation for determining the expected cost or time savings to businesses or citizens.
REDUCTION OF	
FEES OR FINES	
	Which fees or fines does the agency intend to reduce? What was the fine or fee revenue for the previous fiscal year? What was the associated program expenditure for the previous fiscal year? What is the enabling authority for the issuance of the fee or fine?
	N/A
REDUCTION OF REGULATION	
er en	Which regulations does the agency intend to
	Which regulations does the agency intend to amend or delete? What is the enabling authority for the regulation?

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유민 생활한 왕인기가				
SUMMARY				
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				1
Provide.	an explanation of the	proposal and its		

Provide an explanation of the proposal and its positive results on businesses or citizens. How will the request affect agency operations?

AGENCY NAME:
AGENCY CODE:

**SC Conservation Bank** 

P400

SECTION:

053

## AGENCY'S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

## **The SC Conservation Bank**

## Title 48 Chapter 59

## S.C. Code of Laws Act 200

#### Mission statement:

To improve the quality of life in South Carolina through the conservation of significant natural resource lands, wetlands, historical properties, archeological sites, and urban parks.

#### Objectives:



- Protect significant natural resource areas and wildlife habitats
- Protect water quality
- Maintain the State's forest lands
- Protect farmlands, especially family farms
- Protect and enhance the State's natural beauty
- Protect and enhance significant historical and archaeological sites
- Enhance public access for outdoor recreation and preserve traditional uses such as hunting, fishing, and other types of outdoor recreation
- To encourage cooperation and innovative partnerships among landowners, state agencies, municipalities, and non-profit organizations.

## **About the SC Conservation Bank**

In 2000, work began on an effort to determine what lands in South Carolina were significant and how they could be protected and sustained. This effort resulted in the Land Legacy Initiative. This initiative was a grassroots effort that combined many individuals, groups, and businesses to identify barriers to land protection efforts and identify specific solutions to remove the barriers. Considerable time and effort were

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dedicated to studying how similar states were addressing robust growth. Several key themes emerged:

- To promote the well-being and quality of life in South Carolina, greenways, open space, and parks in urban areas must be preserved.
- Funding for the preservation of, and public access to, wildlife habitats, natural
  areas, historical sites, sites of unique ecological significance, forestlands, farmlands,
  watersheds, open space, and urban parks is a critical need.
- The protection of open space is best accomplished in a voluntary manner between willing buyers and willing sellers to ensure that the State continues to enjoy the benefits of wildlife habitats, and healthy streams, rivers, bays, and estuaries; for recreation purposes, scientific studies, and aesthetic appreciation, and to maintain the State's position as an attractive location for visitors and new industry, and to preserve the opportunities for future generations to access and benefit from these outstanding natural and historical sites.

The Initiative determined that the State needed to establish an ongoing funding source to



acquire these real estate interests and that it was critical to encourage cooperation and innovative partnerships among landowners, state agencies, municipalities, and non-profit organizations to work together to meet these objectives. The South Carolina General Assembly, in a bipartisan effort, agreed passed the South Carolina Conservation Bank Act, introduced

by Representative Chip Campsen from Charleston. The Act was signed and ratified by the Governor in April 2002.

The Bank Board, which now consists of 11 members and 3 ex-officio members, was appointed and an Executive Director was hired. Two years were spent studying other states, setting board policy, and establishing the grant application process until fiscal year 2004-05 began. Funding began in July 2004 and since that time the Bank has actively pursued its mission.

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## **SC Conservation Bank Statistics**

Through June 30, 2023, the SC Conservation Bank has protected 422 properties totaling nearly 360,000 acres across the state at an average of \$539 per acre.

The Bank collaborates with landowners, other state agencies, local governments, and non-profit land trusts to help leverage Bank grants with other funds. During FY 2023, multiple partners made significant contributions through bargain sales and matching funds allowing SCCB to continue to leverage grant awards and bring more conservation dollars to South Carolina.

The Bank, through is competitive grant awards process and statutory authority to award funds to both qualified governmental and non-profit entities, is uniquely positioned to protect natural resource lands, wetlands, historical and archaeological properties, and urban parks throughout the state, and to attract federal dollars that dramatically leverage the State's contributions. The Bank will coordinate and collaborate with other resource agencies to maximize the most cost-effective options available for land acquisition with the greatest public benefit. Such collaboration ensures that land acquisitions support agency objectives, the State's broader conservation objectives, and demonstrate a satisfactory degree of financial leverage, partnerships, and other indicators of quality as determined by the Bank and the resource agency.



## Aiken Land Conservancy

Dear Chairman Lowe and Representatives Howard and Moss of the House Ways and Means Criminal Justice Subcommittee,

Thank you for your service in the South Carolina General Assembly. I'm writing on behalf of the board leadership and members of Aiken Land Conservancy to respectfully request your support for the South Carolina Conservation Bank in the state budget this year.

The mission of Aiken Land Conservancy is to preserve Aiken's unique character, and its natural and historic resources, for present and future generations through advocacy and land protection. Our board includes community leaders from Aiken and Edgefield, and we have 366 members supporting our mission.

Aiken Land Conservancy owns outright, or holds conservation easements on, over 5,000 acres that help to protect working forests and farms, historic Horse District properties, streams and rivers, public lands, and significant wildlife habitats. Aiken is a unique and desirable place to live, and we are working hard to help keep it that way.

The S.C. Conservation Bank is an essential tool in achieving our mission. Recently, Aiken Land Conservancy received a \$1.9M grant from the S.C. Conservation Bank to protect 2,657 acres north of Aiken with a conservation easement. This project, a close partnership with the City of Aiken, will conserve land surrounding Mason Branch Reservoir, which provides nearly 20% of Aiken residents with their drinking water. Furthermore, the property will be open to the public which will provide a tremendous recreational resource to residents and visitors alike.

I respectfully encourage your support for the S.C. Conservation Bank's full budget request in the FY '24-25 State Budget. As a source of statewide match funding and leverage, the Conservation Bank is an essential and powerful tool in conserving our state's natural legacy. In the past 20 years, the Bank has facilitated protection of over 365,000 acres. Since FY 19, the Bank has helped protect 74,993 acres with a collective fair market value over \$419.6M with \$64.8M in competitive grants. In that same time, the Bank has awarded 77% of its funding (\$50.3M) to projects that expanded or created new access to 24,876 acres of public lands.

I welcome the opportunity to be a resource to you and encourage you to please reach out to me if I can be of assistance as you take on the tough task of legislating and developing a State Budget this year.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely

Peter Kleinhenz Executive Director

Aiken Land Conservancy

Office: 300 Park Avenue Aiken, South Carolina 29801 1.855.ALC.LAND www.conservealken.org

Malling: PO Box 3096 Alken, South Carolina 29802 mail@ conservealken.org





January 24, 2024

RE: Support for the S.C. Conservation Bank in the State Budget

Dear Chairman Lowe and Representatives Howard and Moss of the House Ways & Means Criminal Justice Subcommittee:

Thank you for your service in the South Carolina General Assembly. I'm writing on behalf of the board leadership and supporters of Lowcountry Land Trust to respectfully request your support for the S.C. Conservation Bank in the state budget this year.

The mission of Lowcountry Land Trust is to protect land and water forever, nurture relationships between people and place, and connect conservation to community. Our board includes community leaders from coastal South Carolina and Columbia, and we have thousands of citizens who annually support our work and mission. Lowcountry Land Trust works in 17 counties within our state's coastal plain and has protected more than 162,000 acres over its 37-year history.

The S.C. Conservation Bank is an essential tool in achieving our mission. In 2023, the Bank helped us bargain purchase a 654-acre timber property in Colleton County, a 109-acre recreational property in Georgetown County, and a significant cultural and historical site in the Beefield Settlement Community in Charleston County. Another grant will protect land on Johns Island for a waterfront public access park.

I respectfully encourage your support for the S.C. Conservation Bank's full budget request in the FY '24-25 State Budget. As a source of statewide match funding and leverage, the Conservation Bank is an essential and powerful tool in conserving our state's natural legacy. In the past 20 years, the Bank has facilitated protection of over 365,000 acres. Since FY 19, the Bank has helped protect 74,993 acres with a collective fair market value over \$419.6M with \$64.8M in competitive grants. In that same time, the Bank has awarded 77% of its funding (\$50.3M) to projects that expanded or created new access to 24,876 acres of public lands.

I welcome the opportunity to be a resource to you and encourage you to please reach out to me if I can be of assistance as you take on the tough task of legislating and developing a State Budget this year. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ashley Demosthenes

Hely Demostrones.



808 Lady St Suite D Office 13 Columbia, SC 29201 803-403-5470 Sc.audubon org

January 22, 2024

Honorable Philip Lowe Chairman, Criminal Justice Subcommittee House Ways and Means Committee

Dear Chairman Lowe and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am writing to you today to express Audubon South Carolina's strong support for the South Carolina Conservation Bank and their FY 2023-2024 budget request which is being presented to the Senate Finance Natural Resources and Economic Development Subcommittee. Audubon South Carolina has been a proud and longtime partner with the Conservation Bank over the years in efforts to conserve those areas of our state important both to communities and birds.

As a landowner and manager of more than 30,000 acres, we understand firsthand the importance of strategic investments to not only protect birds, but also mitigate flooding and support livelihoods. As a source of statewide match funding and leverage, the Conservation Bank is an essential and powerful tool in conserving our state's natural legacy. Since its inception in 2002, the Bank has facilitated protection of over 354,016 acres at an average cost of around \$550 per acre. The Conservation Bank has become the preeminent state agency supporting private and public land preservation in South Carolina and offers taxpayers the best bang for the buck when it comes to land protection and conservation of our State's natural resources.

Our natural resources drive South Carolina's \$29 billion dollar tourism industry, which accounts for one in every ten jobs in our state. The Conservation Bank is a critical tool to strategically conserving those natural resources for the benefit of birds and people for generations to come.

On behalf of Audubon's nearly 30,000 statewide members, we appreciate the Subcommittee's past recognition of the tremendous job the Conservation Bank does, often under difficult circumstances and tight budget times, and would ask that you favorably approve the Bank's full budget request for the upcoming fiscal year.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Haynes Executive Director

Audubon South Carolina



#### The Nature Conservancy in South Carolina 1417 Stuart Engals Blvd, Ste. 100

Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464

Tel. (843) 937-8807 nature.org/southcarolina

January 22, 2024

**Caroline Mauldin** Charleston, S.C.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES** 

Dear Chairman Lowe and Representatives Howard and Moss of the House Ways & Means Criminal Justice Subcommittee,

William "Billy" Webster Greenville S.C. Vice-Chair

I'm writing on behalf of The Nature Conservancy to encourage your continued support for the S.C. Conservation Bank by considering the agency's full budget request as you work on developing the FY '24-25 state budget.

**Kay Grinnell** Hilton Head Island, S.C. Treasurer

As a source of statewide match funding and leverage, the Conservation Bank is an essential and powerful tool in conserving our state's natural legacy. In the past 20 years, the Bank has facilitated protection of over 365,000 acres. Since FY '19, the Bank has helped protect 74,993 acres with a collective fair market value over \$419.6M with \$64.8M in competitive grants. In that same time, the Bank has awarded 77% of its funding (\$50.3M) to projects that expanded or created new access to 24,876 acres of public lands.

Katrina Feisal Saluda, N.C. Secretary

The Conservation Bank is an essential tool in achieving our mission. Through its competitive grant review process, the Bank awarded \$300,000 in 2023 to complement private support from International Paper that allowed The Nature Conservancy to protect 1,213 acres in Hampton County. These forests contribute to water quality in the Savannah River basin, a drinking water source for half a million South Carolina and Georgia residents. This is one recent example of the leverage and impact of Conservation Bank funding. The Post & Courier covered the public benefits of such a project on January 3 in the attached article

**Marty Boone** Okatie, S.C.

("Conservation effort in Hampton County will make difference to those turning on

Cayce, S.C. Quinetha "Que" Frasier Charleston, S.C.

Thomas "Tom" Effinger

Catherine Edwards Greenville, S.C.

Zelma Jackson-Maine Kennewick W A

James "Jim" Houser Okatie, S.C.

Michael "Mikee" Johnson Columbia, S.C.

> **David McIntyre** Dewees Island, S.C.

**Dean Moss** 

Port Royal, S.C.

Arnold "Arnie" Nemirow Mt. Pleasant, S.C

> John Pazdan Greenville, S.C.

Elizabeth Rhue Hartsville, S.C.

Christopher Richardson Charleston, S.C.

Terry Richardson, Jr. Barnwell, S.C.

> Dr. Jim Rothnie Sheldon, S.C.

> **Hallie Seibels** Charleston, S.C.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** 

Dale Threatt-Taylor Mount Pleasant, S.C.

I welcome the opportunity to be a resource to you and encourage you to please reach out to me if I can be of assistance as you take on the tough task of legislating and developing a State Budget this year. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

April Donnelly

Director of Government Relations

faucets downstream" by Tony Kukulich).

The Nature Conservancy South Carolina Chapter

# The Post and Courier

FOUNDED 1803 . WINNER OF THE 2015 PULITZER PRIZE FOR PUBLIC SERVICE Wednesday, January 3, 2024

POSTANDCOURIER.COM

## Burgess takes baton as leader of N. Charleston



North Charleston Mayor Reggie Burgess stands with his family as he delivers a speech after being sworn in during a cere at the North Charleston Convention Center on Tuesday night.

Former police chief sworn in as first new mayor of city in nearly 30 years

kcos@postandcourier.com

NORTH CHARLESTON — For
the first time in nearly 30 years,
the city has a new mayor.

Reggie Burgess was sworn into
office on lan. 2 before a standing-room-only audience that
ballroom at the Charleston Area
Convention Center. Alongsade
his wife, two grown children
convention Center. Alongsade
his wife, two grown children
and mother. Burgess put his
hand on the Bible and gave an
and mother. Burges put his
hand on the Bible and gave up
and credits for making him the
person he is today.
"Intrutylblessed." said Burgess,
who sit he city's first Black mayor.
"North Charleston, to me,
means everything. I'm a North
Charleston kid. How mycity and
I'm gouna represent my city all
the time."

Please see BURGESS, Page A6



 $Burgess\,kneels\,after\,being\,sworn\,in\,at\,the\,North\,Charleston\,Convention\,Center\,on\,Tuesday.$ 

#### CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

### **Putting** free press to the test

Self-styled citizen journalists assess limits of First Amendment rights

BY NICK REYNOLDS

meynolds@postandcourier.com

COLUMBIA—The three men were turning heads before they'd even walked through the front door.
They were hard to miss. Armed with hundreds of dollars' worth of video recording equipment—body cameras and top-of-the-line smart phones—the trio stood out like sore thumbs among the scrubs-clad workers and patients typically seen roaming the hallways of William Jennings Bryan Dorn Veterans Affairs Medical Center, a bustling VA hospital in Columbia.
But it was their behavior that made them stand out the most.
They film everything: the flags in the lobby, portraits of administrators, pamphlets and magazines in racks outside of the walting areas.
They filmed the policy suries.

areas. They filmed the police cruiser parked outside of the ambulance bay, the view into the courtyard, the sign above the gift shop door. One of the men filming, Skip Dorrell, took a moment to speak directly to his audience about the figure tailing him through the halls.

"This gentleman is a reporter," he said as the camera rolled "He's observing us."

he said as the camera rolled "He's observing us."
Dorrell and the two men follow-inghim — fellow South Carolinians T.G. Greene and Anthony Brigman — are known as "First Amend and auditors," self-styled clitten journal-sits whose purpose is to test their constitutional right to free speech by filming in as many public spations, or even deerally funded medical space like Columbia's VA. Many of them post their exploits on platforms like YouTube, where they can amass tens of thousands.

of views.
While Dorrell runs a pair of relatively small channels, Greene claims thousands of subscribers between all of his channels since he began doing audits in 2018.

audits in 2018.
"I got with a friend one day who
was doing it and ever since then, I've
been in it," he said. "Soft wasn't anything personal for me I just believe
in standing up for our rights."

Please see RIGHTS, Page A13

#### ENVIRONMENT

#### Conservation effort in Hampton County will make difference to those turning on faucets downstream

BY TONY KUKULICH tkukulich@postandcourie

ESTILL. – Those who study water issues often say. "We all live downstream." It's a truism warning that actions upstream can have negative consequences downstream, and people exist simultaneously on both sides of that equation. Instead of negative consequences, a conservation project in Hampion County is expected to deliver downstream benefits for many, including residents

"This is an efficient way

Stretching for more than 300 miles, the Savannah River marks the border between Georgin and South Carolina as it twavels from the mountains to the ocean. Beyond its role delineating the Palmetto State from the Peach State, the river is a source of drinking water for about 500,000 residents on both its about 500,000 residents on both its about 500,000 residents on both its award in Beaufort and Jasper countes, and protecting the quality of water and protecting the quality of water

Please see CONSERVATION, Page A7



The Nature Conservancy of South Carolina coordinated the acquisition of a conservation easement that protects more than 1,200 acres near Estill in perpetuity.

#### Inside

Nikki Haley's response to a New Hampshire voter's question about the cause of the Civil War was an embarrassment. But it's not a reason not to vote for her in the Republican presidential primary



Tracking USC's portal additions, subtractions. B8

President Biden to visit Charleston on Monday. A7

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Talandalas	1000







## President Biden to visit Charleston on Monday

Speaking at Emanuel AME Church

BY CAITLIN BYRD cbyrd@postandcourie

President Joe Biden plans cossuem (De Biden Plans to deliver a maior speech main the Charleston's Einanuel AME to the Church next week as part of down to stress the high stakes of the upcoming 2024 presidential election.

souron Bible souron to the special state of the special state of the s

came the site of a late-fueled massacre that stunned and devastated the nation in the summer of 2015.

The campaign described the church as a setting that combodies the states of our nation it is moment, adding that Biden will focus his remarks on two weighty topics they say are under threat democracy and freedom.

Because whether its White supremacists descending out the historic American city of Charlottesylle, the assult on our nation's capitol on land, our a white supremacist murdering church poers al Moher Emanuel nearly nine years ago, America is worried about the rise in political violence and determined to stand results of the landers and the struggling Continent and o, Americals worried about e rise in political violence ad determined to stand against it," Quentin Fulks, Biden's top deputy campaign manager, said Jan. 2

Charleston's Emanuel
AME, commonly referred
to as Mother Emanuel, is
considered sacred ground by
many, It is where nine black
parishioners were gunned
down by white supremacist
Dylann Rood during Bible
study on the night of June 17,
2015.

The weighty themes, cou-pled with locations heavy with symbolism, will high-light what has become a fa-miliar refrain for Biden.



President Joe Biden will speak Monday at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston.

He made the perils facing American democracy a central theme of his 2020 cambraing and an again putting. Instead of the previous leading the Democratic Parity configuration of the Company of the matter of the Superior of the Democratic Parity of Continuance, former personal and primaries, and the democratic Parity of the Superior of the Democratic Parity of Continuance, former personal request, where he utged the party to string what we preach." Superior of the previous lead emphasis went on South Carolina, it will be his GOP frontrunner, former personal request, where he utged the party to string what we preach."

When Biden returns to South Carolina, it will be his claim emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his claim emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his claim emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his claim emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his claim emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his claim emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his claim emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his care present its emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his care present its emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his care present its emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his care present its emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his care present its emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his care present its emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his care present its emphasis want on South Carolina, it will be his care present its emphasis want on South Carolin

## VP Harris, Jeffries coming to SC for 'King Day at Dome'

BY NICK REYNOLDS

COLUMBIA — Vice President Ka-mala Harris and U.S. House Minor-ity Leader Hakeem Jeffries will be spending Martin Luther King Jr. Day in the Palmetto State, the South Carolina chapter of the NAACP has

Day in the Palmetto State, the South Carolina chapter of the NAACP has announced. According to a Jan. 2 news release, both Harris and Jeffrics will be keynote speakers at the organization's annual "King Day at the Dome" event in Columbia on Jan. 15. It will be Harris' accond visit to the state in any weeks, coming after a planned Jan. 6 appearance at a church in Myrile Beach. The annual church service and demonstration at the South Carolina State Captole commencerate the civil rights leader's life and legacy. U.S. Rep., Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., a close ally of Democratic President De Biden, will also be in attendance. "It's an event for all people," Brenda Murphy, president of the

Vice President Kamala Harris answers a question during her "Fight for Our Freedoms" College Tour at the Sottile Theatre on the College of Charleston campus on Oct. 11. Harris will be retur-ing to the Palmetto State for Martin Luther King Day on Jan. 15.

SC chapter of the NAACP told The
Post and Courier. "And so we just
encourage then to attend."
The Post and Courier has reached.
The event has become a regular

stop for Democratic presidential candidates on the campaign circuit and hallmark event for Democratic politicians seeking to appeal to the state's Black voting population ahead of the South Carolina primaries. Party leaders have already expressed overwhelming support for the Biden-Harris ticket in the state. Other Democrats on the ballot are author and spiritualist Marianne Williamson and Minnesota congressman Dean Phillips.

MLK Day at the Dome bears aspecial significance this year. South Carolina's presidential preference primary is Feb. 3 — the first union the Democratic presidential nominating calendar.

But it is also taking place at a time the state has ever appeared first on the Democratic presidential nominating calendar.

But it is also taking place at a time the state has ever appeared first on the macronic president. Jeffries, D.-N.Y., is the the state has ever appeared first on the day to the state has ever appeared first on the dimensional pundits and strategists havenoticed at rend of apalty proving within Democras's traditional colition of unban over a consequence of the province of the

#### Hampton County conservation effort will make difference to those turning on faucets downstream

CONSERVATION, from A1

CONSERVATION, from A1

flowing into the source in the text and the Lowcountry requires efforts that extend well upstream.

To that end, multiple agencies including the The Nature Conservancy, International Paper, the Savannah River Clean Water Fund and the South Carolina Conservation Bank cooperated to obtain a conservation easement that will protect water quality in 1,218 acres of the Savannah River watershed in perpetuity. "We were able to do this deal for about more-tenth of the cost to buy it. This is an efficient way to protect the land-scape without having to spend as much money," said David Bishop, coastal and Midlands conservation director with The Nature Conservancy, of the case-next deal.

The property in Estil, known as Low-

ment deal.

The property in Estill, known as Low-lands, is now part of a network of nearly 130,000 protected acres in the Savannah River watership.

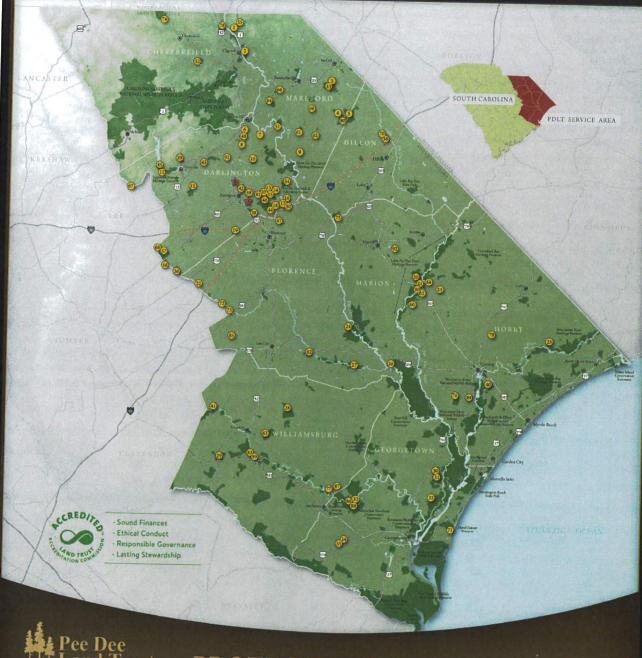
Lowlands is a shining example of how South Carolina does conservation so well, said Dale Threat-Taylor, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in South Carolina in a press release regardine the project. ing the project.

#### Why preserve the Lowlands property?

Other factors make the Lowlands an important property. For several decades, on conservation work in the southern Low-country has followed the model established in the ACE Basin where there are currently about 425.00p protected agrees. That model attempts to connect protected properties to create large constitution of the connectivity in the large constitution of the connectivity in the large constitution of the connectivity of the large constitution of the large constitut Linke the terms of the easement. Low-lands will be managed for timber re-reation and wildnife. The easement also satablishes a buffer of hardwood trees along a miles of Long Branch Creek. Commercial timber harvesting will be probabiled in the buffer, which will help preserve the quality of the water draining into the Savannah River. That water eventually ends up in 1 tags in places like Bufffon, Hilton Head, Beautort. Hardeeville and Port Royal. "Forests are nature's water filters," Bishop said.

"An easement is a really valuable tool that allows us to save what's important on the property, but also gives the land-







# PROTECTED LANDS - 41,434 ACRES

- Old Long Marsh Farms 180 acres

**PRESERVES**