



South Carolina Conservation Bank

www.palmettolandwater.com

FACT SHEET

Overview

Created in 2002, the South Carolina Conservation Bank invests in the natural areas that fuel the state's natural resource-based economy, safeguarding drinking water and ensuring a high quality of life, now and hopefully for generations to come. It's the only statewide source of public funding available for willing landowners and their land trust partners to voluntarily conserve important SC lands. It will shut down on June 30, 2018 unless the South Carolina General Assembly reauthorizes it before then.

Need

The state's high quality of life and abundant natural resources have been mentioned by companies such as Michelin, BMW, Boeing and others as a big part of what attracted them to the state. A recent Public Opinion Poll indicated that 95% of South Carolinians felt that land and water conservation funding was very important to their quality of life, and agree or strongly agree that conserving the places we hunt, fish, and enjoy outdoor traditions helps make South Carolina a special place to live.

South Carolina's population is getting larger and its economy is getting stronger. That's all very positive. But at the same time, it makes no sense to grow in a way that destroys or damages the farms, forests, natural areas and historic places that make SC special. The Conservation Bank is critically important because it helps us achieve a balance between development and conservation.

How It Works

Funding comes from a share of the state's deed recording fee revenues. Of every \$1.35 collected, \$0.25 is credited to the Conservation Bank Trust Fund, to be used to ensure that lands with great conservation or historic significance are not developed. It is a sensible way to fund conservation since the fees are collected when land is sold, and the sales are often to developers.

The Conservation Bank makes funding grants to nonprofit partners on a competitive basis, with grants evenly distributed among the Upstate, Midlands, Pee Dee and Lowcountry. The conditions of the grants always involve matching funds, frequently 50% or more. The state's various conservation groups use the funds to protect high-priority sites, either by purchasing them or by placing them under a conservation easement, which protects them from extensive subdivision and development by paying a negotiated amount to the owners, while still allowing the owners to use and enjoy the property.

To date, the SC Conservation Bank has protected over 280,000 acres of natural areas, forests, farms, historic sites, and waterways across South Carolina. Many purchases

funded by the Bank go to create new public parks and recreation areas. Public hunting lands across the state have been greatly expanded through funding from the Bank.

If a landowner is interested in conveying a conservation easement on his/her property it must be to a qualified entity who will hold the easement agreement and be responsible for the terms of the easement.

Eligible Entities

The Conservation Bank Act empowers the SC Conservation Bank to award grants to eligible trust fund recipients for the purchase of interests in land so long as the grants meet the purposes of the Act and other proper criteria as contained in the Act. An "eligible trust fund" recipient is defined as:

- The SC Department of Natural Resources; The SC Forestry Commission; and The SC Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism.
- A municipality of SC and any agency, commission, or Instrumentality of such a municipality.
- A not-for-profit charitable corporation or land trust authorized to do business in SC whose principal activity is the acquisition and management of interests in land for conservation or historic preservation purposes and which has tax-exempt status as a public charity under the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

Examples Of Conservation Bank Projects From Across The State

Iconic places like Stumphouse Mountain in Oconee County, Jones Gap State Park in Greenville County, and Rocky Point in Georgetown County have been opened and expanded for public recreation by the use of Bank funds. Other examples include:

- More than 53,000 acres plus hundreds of miles of river and creek frontage lands in the Congaree, Wateree, and Santee river basins, with public boat-in campsites
- More than 25,000 acres of land in the scenic Highway 11 corridor in the mountains of the Upstate; land that is rich in natural resources and important to tourism and outdoor recreation
- Lake Conestee Nature Park in Greenville County
- Rocky River Fork in Anderson County
- Isaqueena Falls in Oconee County
- Additions to Jones Gap and Paris Mountain State Parks in Greenville County

Benefits From The Conservation Bank

Whether someone is a "conservationist" or not, the South Carolina Conservation Bank benefits ALL South Carolinians. Even if one does not like to hike, hunt, fish, bird watch or just enjoy the natural beauty of our state, they benefit from clean drinking water, a stronger state economy and in various other ways.

Improves the overall economy

A 2009 study found that South Carolina's natural resources provide \$29 billion in annual economic benefits to our state. Additionally:

- Agriculture provides 460,000 jobs in South Carolina
- Forestry provides 50,000 jobs in South Carolina

- Outdoor recreation drives the South Carolina economy to the tune of \$18B in direct consumer spending, \$1B in direct tax revenue, and 201,000 jobs
- Jobs in forestry and agriculture jobs revitalize rural communities by
- Protected lands reduced the cost to treat waste water and storm water
- Property value is enhanced with parks, open space, trails and other amenities that are shown to increase the value of surrounding neighborhoods

Supports the critically important tourism industry

Tourists pour into South Carolina every year to see and enjoy our extraordinary natural and historic resources, making tourism our State's number one industry.

- Tourism supports one in ten South Carolina jobs
- Over 30 million people visit South Carolina each year
- South Carolina ranks 11th nationally in trip destinations
- Tourists spend \$1.9 billion annually in our state
- Hunters, fishermen, and wildlife enthusiasts spend \$1.7 billion a year in South Carolina

Allows greater public access to conservation lands

- 81.7% of the properties funded by the Bank have some public access
- 49.4% have unlimited general access
- 32.3% have regulated public access, which means you simply have to contact the landowner to arrange access

Without the Conservation Bank, many of these properties would be privately developed and forever lost to **any kind** of public access.

Balances growth and conservation

Quality of life ranks high among the reasons people move to South Carolina, yet the land on which this quality of life depends is a limited commodity. South Carolina is among the nation's 10 fastest growing states. The urban areas of Myrtle Beach, Charleston and Beaufort/Hilton Head all rank in the top 20 fastest growing areas in the country.

Our population will grow by another 25% in another 15 years. To support that growth we will need 525,000 new houses; 40 million feet of new office space; 13,000 hotel rooms; 50% more paved roads. Accommodating this population growth has caused, and will continue to cause, rapid development across the State. This puts great pressure on our drinking water supplies, wildlife habitats, and outdoor recreational areas.

The Conservation Bank helps us “have it both ways”—to continue to grow but at the same time to protect many of the forests, farmlands, green spaces and historic sites that make South Carolina so special and unique.

Preserves the family farm

The Conservation Bank is the only source of public funds available in the state for agricultural or farmland easements. The USDA sets aside substantial funds for this type of protection but match is almost always required.

When family farms are protected with funding from the Conservation Bank, this helps the local economy and often makes continued operation of the farms financially feasible. Often, the funds are spent locally on machinery, fuel, surveys, labor, seeds, animals and construction. So, at the end of the day the family farm is preserved in perpetuity producing food and fiber; the recurring jobs associated with the farm will still be there; and the farmer has funds that can provide for retirement.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do landowners have to participate in the Conservation Bank program?

Answer: NO. Landowner participation is completely voluntary.

2. Does a conservation easement have to do with government rights-of-way?

Answer: NO. A conservation easement or conservation agreement is a voluntary conservation option. It sets up a legal arrangement between a landowner and a government agency or land trust that ensures the land remains essentially in its current state and its conservation values are protected. The land remains the private property of the landowner, who is responsible for its upkeep, paying taxes, etc. at no cost to state taxpayers.

3. When you sign a conservation easement, do you give up all your property rights?

Answer: NO. Your conservation easement is tailored specifically to your needs—in fact, you help design it. Its main purpose is to protect the conservation values of your property, so you continue to own and control your land and all financial and other values you derive from it. Typically, a conservation easement allows farming, forestry, hunting and fishing to continue on the land, as well as limited building rights defined in the conservation easement.

4. Will a conservation agreement give the government the ability to take over my property and management decisions?

Answer: NO. You continue to own and manage the land in accordance with the terms of the conservation easement.

5. Do I have a choice in land trust partners?

Answer: YES. Your potential land trust partners know that choice is important to you, so nothing will be forced on you when entering a conservation agreement. There are many qualified land trusts working across South Carolina.

6. Do conservation agreements reduce the value of your property and make it difficult for your children or grandchildren to profit from it?

Answer: A conservation agreement can reduce the fair market value because they ensure that the property will be protected rather than developed. But this loss in value can be significantly reduced by a grant from the Conservation Bank and also by tax deductions and credits. The most important value is the owner knows that his or her special place will be protected forever.