

2025 Legislative Session

# TNC in South Carolina



## Executive Summary

The South Carolina (SC) Government Relations team remains committed to the premise that the ties between people and nature are strong in the Palmetto State. As an organization that values collaboration, partnership and the pursuit of durable conservation policy, The Nature Conservancy is beautifully positioned to succeed in making key funding and legislative gains with the SC General Assembly in the 2025-2026 legislative session.

In 2025 we will conduct both strategic lobbying as well as foundational outreach to gauge the potential and lay groundwork for future work this year and next. As this work requires nimble consideration of shifting dynamics at the SC statehouse and federally with the incoming Executive Administration and 119th Congress, we anticipate pursuing the following with the understanding there are always challenges and opportunities to be encountered along the way. We will tuck accordingly and remain in diligent alignment with our Chapter, Southern Division and North American conservation goals.

# Legislative Priorities

## **Cultivating a Conservation Ethic in the SC General Assembly**

With the November election resulting in 13 new state Senators and over 28% of the body having turned over in the last 4 years, along with 19 new House members, we will look to 2025 as a season of General Assembly outreach to sow an appreciation of the long-standing impact and importance of conservation policy and legislation in South Carolina. In 2025 we will:

- Work alongside Sustain SC to conduct statewide conservation issue polling with the intent to bring results and opportunities to SC House and Senate leadership and members for consideration
- Promote protection projects and the science that underpins them through direct legislative engagement to provide examples of conservation as compatible with land use, development, resilience, and prospering communities

## **Investing in Resource Conservation & Partnerships across South Carolina**

The Nature Conservancy has long served South Carolina alongside state agency partners, working in strong alignment on conservation goals and priorities. We endeavor to remain allied with robust requests for State Agency funding for land protection, forest management, habitat restoration and coastal stabilization among other priorities. In 2025 we will:

- Support full funding for the SC Conservation Bank, telling project stories and creating a shared appreciation for the leveraged funding it achieves on behalf of South Carolinians
- Elevate the role of the SC Land Trust Network in reaching the General Assembly in Columbia and at home to reveal local project impact and the importance of consistent state funding for land protection
- Advocate for continued and enhanced investments in natural resource protection and management through the SC Department of Natural Resources, the SC Office of Resilience,

the SC Forestry Commission, and the SC Department of Environmental Services

## **Enhancing Current Conservation Finance Mechanisms**

South Carolina is best suited to advance conservation resources through policies that incentivize voluntary transaction and encourage landowners to realize value through protecting their land. In 2025 we will:

- Partner with the SC Land Trust Network, and work in concert with the SC Department of Natural Resources, to build consensus around improving the *SC Scenic Rivers Tax Credit* to better serve both the state's interest in securing the health and vitality of key river corridors and enhancing the opportunity for landowners to realize a benefit in protecting river frontage lands
- Work in tandem with the SC Farm Bureau and the SC Land Trust Network to advance legislation aimed at improving the *SC Conservation Easement Tax Credit*. Adjusting the tax credit to track more closely in pace with inflation and current property values will incentivize and encourage private land protection statewide

## **Encouraging Natural and Nature Based Approaches to Natural Resource Challenges**

The South Carolina Chapter is known for our freshwater science and expertise and has served on statewide surface water management initiatives for 10+ years. We are further supportive of growing an understanding, acceptance, and deployment of natural and nature-based approaches to alleviate flooding, erosion, sedimentation, and other natural hazards facing the state from the coast to the mountains. In 2025 we will:

- Serve as a member WaterSC with the goal of positively influencing state water planning and to ensure conservation outcomes are among key elements of consideration in developing consensus on planning and policy decisions. WaterSC is a water resources working group created by Executive Order 2024-22 and led by the SC Department of Environmental Services (DES). This work will be fulfilled in coordination with Science and Stewardship Director Eric Krueger who will serve, along with Dale Threatt-Taylor, as the SC Chapter representative to WaterSC.

- Work in partnership with DES to provide information and assistance to state legislators serving in a decision-making role related to water planning, including Senate Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee members and Surface Water Study Committee members (as designated per Budget Proviso 117.184), and others as determined.
- Gather information to assess the potential for a successful attempt to secure greater protection for state wetlands including isolated wetlands and Carolina Bays. Work in collaboration with the Southern Environmental Law Center, Sustain SC and other partners to better understand present obstacles and concerns from the agriculture, business and economic development communities in particular, moving at the speed of trust and mutual understanding around what is or is not feasible with regard to creating state protections to support flood defense and water quality in particular.

### **Balancing Renewable Energy Deployment with Natural and Working Land Use**

In partnership with Sustain SC, The Nature Conservancy has unique opportunities to align with the business and industrial sectors in the coming year in pursuit of a constructive conversation around clean energy infrastructure in South Carolina. In 2025 we will:

- Invest in a series of member roundtable events to grow a collective understanding of energy generation and transmission, developing technologies and challenges. This effort will be geared to advance conservation science and practices that best inform energy infrastructure siting and development in balance with natural and working land needs. These events are not meant to drive immediate advocacy but rather to strengthen cross-sector relationships and identify mutual interests in the shadow of the current and expected ongoing legislative energy debate.

### **Our work in 2025 will remain rooted in the following TNC approach to public policy:**

- We will promote more efficient resource management,
- We will craft initiatives that are ambitious but practical, with long-term benefits,
- We will pursue policies that take advantage of the power and value of nature
- We will seek conservation while respecting human needs at the same time
- We will consider the use of market mechanisms to achieve resource management goals
- We will emphasize cooperation across agency, political and organizational boundaries,
- We will recognize public sector fiscal constraints

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