



OPEN
LAND
TRUST

Protecting Our Lowcountry Since 1971

2025 FALL NEWSLETTER



CONSERVING THE LOWCOUNTRY WITH YOU SINCE 1971

From viewsheds to watersheds

Expanding our impact, because of our roots

This year we are finalizing a new three-year strategic plan for the Open Land Trust. One of the parts I have loved most is revisiting our core values and talking about who we are today, fifty-four years after our inception. Words that rose to the top were *community, connection, integrity, gratitude, intention, and respect*.

These words don't just describe the Open Land Trust. They describe you. They describe this place and this community. They have guided us for more than fifty years and they continue to guide us through a time of extraordinary change.

In 1971, the greatest threat was losing our iconic views. The community rose to meet that moment, and as a result we have places like the Bay Street Bluff, Blocker Field on St. Helena, Lemon Island, and Bellamy Curve on Carteret Street. As the challenges grew, so did our work.

What once meant saving viewsheds now includes protecting entire watersheds.

The protection of Gregorie Neck, more than four thousand acres at the headwaters of Port Royal Sound, reflects the scale of the growth pressures and necessary solutions we face today. It is very different from protecting 1 acre on the Bluff, yet it is also exactly the same.

It is a community choosing to protect what matters.

Although the work continues to evolve, one thing has never changed. We are a community-led organization rooted in a deep commitment to people and place.

I look forward to sharing more about our goals for the next three years. It is a critical time but I know we will rise to the challenge as we always have, together, and create a future we can all be proud of.

With thanks,



Kristin Williams, Executive Director



Decades apart, from the Bluff in 1971 to Gregorie Neck in 2024, our spirit remains the same.



Signs along the way

Gentle reminders of gratitude, community, and intention

There are places in Beaufort County that stop you in your tracks. All you have to do is drive by to be reminded of how lucky we are to live here. Former Nature Conservancy director John Sawhill once said, "Our society will be defined not only by what it creates, but by what it refuses to destroy." That truth lives all around us.

For more than fifty years, the Open Land Trust has worked to protect the landscapes that define the character of this place. One of the most visible reminders of that shared work are the gray signs that appear beside sweeping Lowcountry views.

Those gray signs tell a simple story.

These vistas did not happen on accident. They happened with intention, supported by people who cared enough to act.

Lemon Island has been protected for more than twenty years, but motorists traveling between Bluffton and Beaufort will now see new gray signs marking what could have been hundreds of rooftops and driveways. Instead, Highway 170 offers one of the most stunning views in the Lowcountry, a daily reminder of what thoughtful decisions made decades ago can mean for all of us today.

Whether you are driving across Lemon Island, along St. Helena, down Bay Street, or around Bellamy Curve, let these signs spark gratitude for those who came before us and protected these special places. But let them also serve as a reminder and as inspiration.

It is our time. It is our turn to protect what we have inherited and to refuse to destroy the landscapes that define us. And because of your support, we will.





A legacy of conservation built by voters

Local conservation funding makes progress possible

Since 2002, Beaufort County voters have voted to tax themselves to protect land. First was the Rural and Critical Land Preservation Program; this property tax collection was the first local tax collected for land protection and served as an early model for others in the state. Seven other counties in SC have followed Beaufort’s lead and implemented a local land protection fund! In 2022, Beaufort continued to lead and created the Green Space Program, which is active today.

Local funds are authorized by local voters to fund projects approved by Beaufort County Council and are the finest tool we have for land protection. Able to be tailored to specific community needs, these funds have protected viewsheds, family farms, forested land, military airspace, low-lying areas that would be incompatible with development, champion oak trees, boat landings, passive parks and our shared water quality and quality of life.

The Rural and Critical Land Preservation Program (2002-2025)

The Open Land Trust led the Rural and Critical Land Preservation Program (RCLP) since 2011 as the non-profit partner, able to meet with interested landowners, secure partnership dollars, and bring more land protection opportunities to Beaufort. We are so proud of the community for supporting this program five times at the ballot box, with overwhelming majorities, often over 70% of the vote. Together, with partners like the SC Conservation Bank, USDA and U.S. Marine Corps, this program helped protect over 29,000 acres from 2002-2025.

The last RCLP project — ending where it all began

One of the first RCLP projects created the 160-acre passive park at Widgeon Point in 2006.

In October of this year, North Widgeon, a nine-acre drumstick-shaped property at the base of the Broad River Bridge, became the final project funded by the Rural and Critical Land Program — a true full-circle moment. Partner funding was earned from the new Green Space Program and the SC Conservation Bank.

Once platted for seven lots, North Widgeon will instead expand Widgeon Point Preserve, securing the view from the bird blind, the high marsh, and a key link in the Lemon Island corridor. Winter is a perfect time to spot white pelicans — get out and enjoy!

The next chapter – Green Space funding

Similar in purpose but different in approach, the Green Space Program is up and running. After voter approval in 2022, The Green Space Program levied a sales tax that collected over \$100m from local residents and visitors.

To date, the Green Space Program helped protect:

- 4,409 acres at Gregorie Neck*
- 26 acres for public access at Mitchelville on Hilton Head
- 898 acres in Dale*
- 55 acres on Lady’s Island*
- 9 acres at North Widgeon*
- 1,742 acres for Pocotaligo Station, a new state forest*
- 2,681 acres at Chelsea*
- 1.88 acres on Beach City Road on Hilton Head
- 6.55 acres Jonesville Tract on Hilton Head

(*OLT PARTNER PROJECTS)

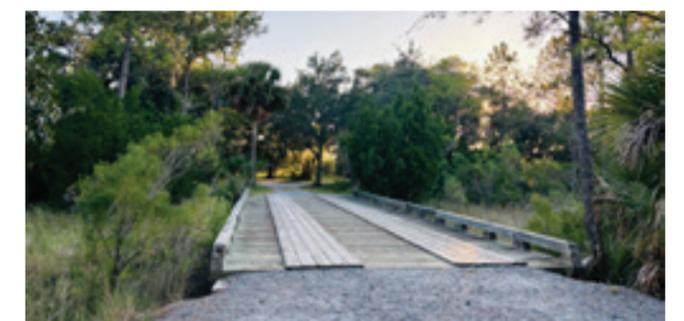
These properties would not be protected if not for Green Space funding and your support. This program is unique in its ability to spend money on land protection in neighboring counties. From the headwaters of the Port Royal Sound to the mouth, the momentum for meaningful, strategic land protection that benefits Beaufort County is strong.

Rural and Critical Land Preservation Program

BY THE NUMBERS

<p>29,258 acres Permanently Protected</p> <p>This includes family farms, forests, public parks, historic and cultural sites and neighborhood open space. This land was protected over the course of 5 voter approved funding referendums and with \$46 million in partner funding.</p>	
	<p>16 public parks Spanning 14,234 acres and growing</p> <p>The Beaufort County Passive Parks department provides outdoor recreational opportunities for all citizens to “take it outside” and enjoy the natural and cultural beauty and unique places in Beaufort County.</p>
<p>5,973+ acres of forests</p> <p>Forests for wildlife and people</p> <p>This includes oak groves, evergreen pine forests, and mixed forests (pictured) that are home to wildlife including song birds, deer, bobcat, owls and others. Forest cover adds to community resilience from flooding and storms.</p>	
	<p>2,523 acres of farmland Protecting family farms</p> <p>Family farms abound in Beaufort County and funding protects our local food supply and helps keep farmers on their land. Protected farms include blueberry farms (pictured), sod farms, and horse pastures, among others.</p>
<p>102 miles Of salt marsh and river shoreline</p> <p>Over half the salt marsh on the east coast is in South Carolina and half of that salt marsh is right here in the ACE Basin and Port Royal Sound. Protecting shoreline protects water quality, provides for marsh migration, supports local fisheries and provides recreation opportunities.</p>	

www.ruralandcritical.org



From the ACE Basin to the Savannah River

How protecting the Port Royal Sound completes a lowcountry conservation puzzle

One of the driving forces of success of the ACE Basin initiative – a thriving landscape of protected land totaling over 320,000 acres between the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto (ACE) Rivers – is that it started with just a few landowners and grew with passion, persistence and partnership. Neighbor to neighbor, landowner to landowner, state to federal agency, public park to non profit land trust for 36 years and counting.

A similar movement took root along the Savannah River: landowners motivated by protecting working forests and water quality for all who depend on Savannah River drinking water (ahem...all of us) have protected over 200,000 acres.

The ACE and Savannah River Basins are beautiful productive landscapes with successful conservation stories to tell. But there is a gap in the middle. That gap is more perfectly described as the Port Royal Sound and is home to the productive salt marsh, farms, and forests right in our backyard.

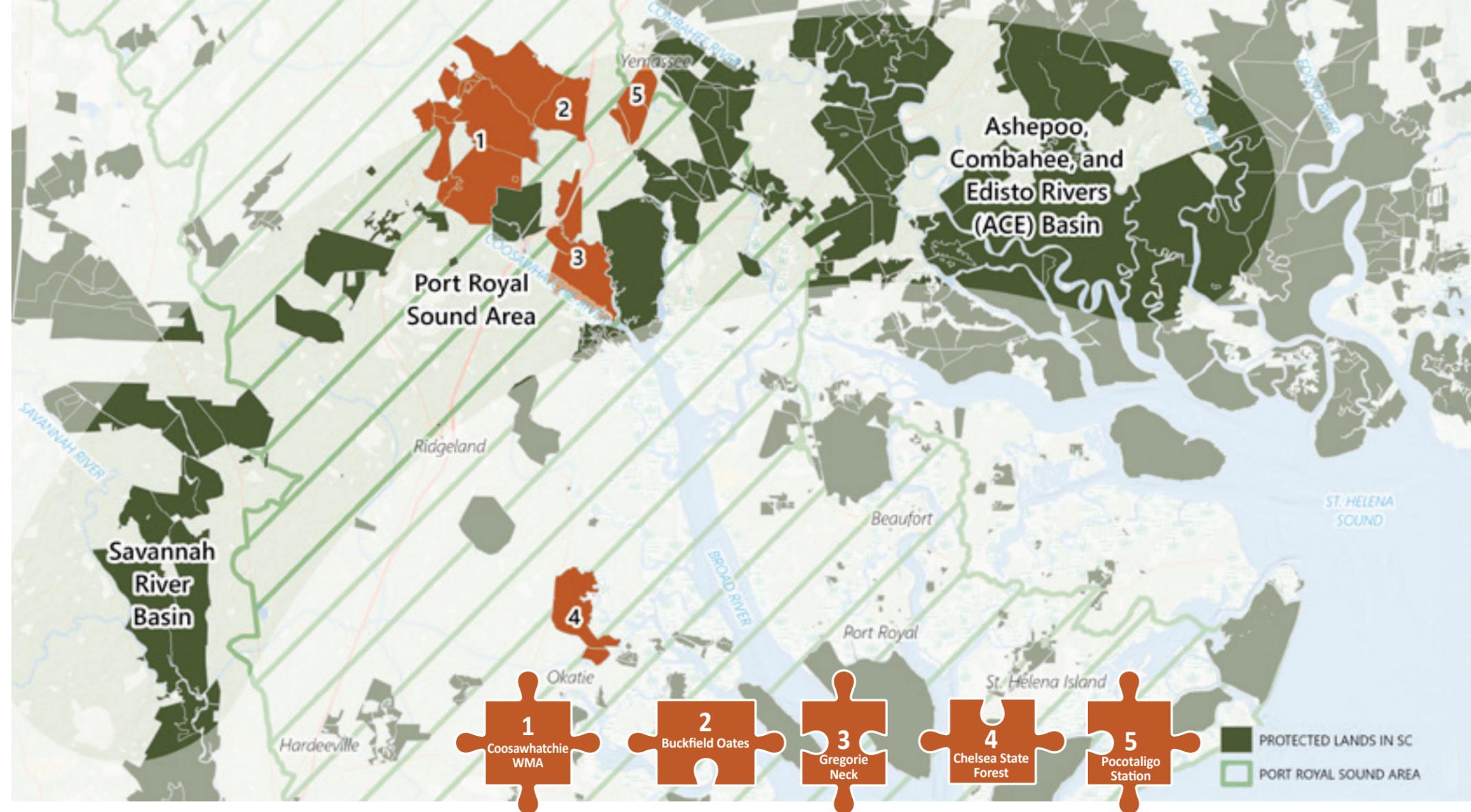
Imagine this landscape like a family puzzle spread out over the holiday dinner table. One by one, pieces come into view, attached to and connected to others that spread out to reveal an entire image.

We are both creating and solving this puzzle together.

The puzzle starts to take shape

The first pieces started to come together in 2019. Buckfield a 20,000+ acre timber property was subdivided and listed for sale. The Open Space Institute was quick to negotiate a purchase of several thousand acres, and soon in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, purchased adjacent land home to longleaf pine and the gopher tortoise. These properties, assembled over the course of several transactions, are known today as the 12,000-acre Coosawhatchie Wildlife Management Area owned and operated by South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

Soon after, families nearby chose to protect their land — including our 2023 conservation easement with the Oates family to protect an adjacent 2,000 acres. In early 2024, when Gregorie Neck hit the real estate market, The Nature Conservancy outcompeted two developers and purchased the property; OLT protected it with a conservation easement later that year. And the “one that got away” Chelsea is the latest: purchased by The Nature Conservancy in May 2025, OLT is working on a conservation easement to be completed by 2026. Chelsea will become a new state forest, open to the public to enjoy soon thereafter.



Over 32,000 acres have been protected in the Port Royal Sound watershed in the past five years.

Working together with our land trust partners, over 32,000 acres have been protected in the Port Royal Sound watershed over the past five years!

Completing this land protection puzzle takes us all and requires creativity, an ability to take risks and a desire to take the long-view. Like the ACE Basin and Savannah River landscapes, the Port Royal Sound will be protected over time.

And like the final puzzle piece in one big image, it will tie everything together for the wildlife and people in our growing communities.





Oysters, oaks and the work we share

Celebrating what we protect together

Each year, our Annual Meeting is a time to pause and celebrate what we've accomplished together. At the Open Land Trust, we do it the Lowcountry way with fresh oysters on the water, under majestic oaks, on protected land.

This year's gathering on St. Helena Island felt especially meaningful. Children ran barefoot in the grass and climbed sprawling oaks while laughter and the smell of oysters filled the air. It was a day to share the year's success with those who make this work possible and to remember that by protecting this place today, we ensure that children decades from now will still climb these trees, taste fresh oysters, and experience the same simple joys.



Thank you
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Dr. and Mrs. Michael Harris
Nurnberg Photography
Orange Grove
Stone Floral Design



Volunteer spotlight

Building paths that last



When Drew Stone first walked into our office in 2018, he was ready to get his hands dirty. Having volunteered with a land trust back in Connecticut, he asked the simple question every land trust loves to hear: "How can I help?"

Trail building was what Drew really wanted to do, but at the time we didn't have the capacity to make it happen. So he jumped in wherever he was needed. One year he helped monitor more than 40 properties across Beaufort County, filling out paperwork, taking photos, and covering miles of back roads.

Then in 2024, when we were finally ready to build a trail, Drew was the first call we made. He led the charge, hiking, flagging, and organizing volunteers to clear the path.

Today, thanks to Drew and all the volunteers who pitched in, more than 400 visitors have already explored our ¾-mile trail across from the Old Sheldon Church Ruins.

Every footstep on the trail is proof that volunteers truly make a difference!

“Working with my fellow volunteers to build trails is a great way to raise the value of our OLT properties by increasing access and usage. Not to mention it's fun and gets us out onto these beautiful pieces of land.” – Drew Stone

Many hands, many ways to help

Are you looking to make a difference and have fun with friends and family? Volunteering is a great way to do that and there are a lot of ways you can jump right in.

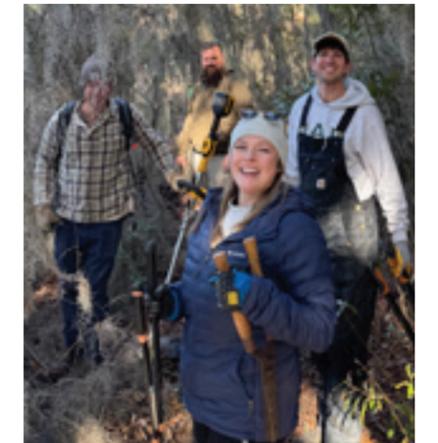
Photographs We are always looking for photos for social media, our website, newsletters and mailings. Let us know if you are willing to share your photos of wildlife, lowcountry landscapes, people enjoying nature, farms, and our beautiful rivers, creeks, marshes.

Trails You can volunteer on our new Old Sheldon Woods Trail with ongoing trail maintenance, signage creation, litter clean ups, etc.

Mailings Join us for good conversation and comradery as we gather around the conference table several times a year to stuff, fold, seal envelopes for large mailings.

If you'd like to volunteer there's a place for you. Depending on your interests and availability you can spend all day or a couple hours with us. From helping out in the office, providing support at events, working on our properties, helping with trails and outreach, there are many ways you can get involved.

Contact Sherry Akers via email at sherry@openlandtrust.org, call our office at 843-521-2175, or scan the QR code to explore what feels right for you.



In Memory. In Honor. In Gratitude.

We are honored to recognize the loved ones, friends, and community members you have chosen to honor or remember. These meaningful tributes celebrate stories, relationships, and legacies that continue to inspire and guide us.

Thank you for celebrating those who matter most through your generosity and thoughtfulness.

IN HONOR OF

David & Kitty Beecken
 William & Sharon Baird
 Anthony & Lucy Ditommaso
 Candy & John Hickey
 Jean Wolff
 Mark Young
 John Bukofser
 Ms. Barbara Kingsbury
 Kathy Clark
 Mr. & Mrs. Kin Purvis
 Henry Coleman
 Michael Coleman
 Dwain Cox
 Leonard Yankosky
 Paula Crowley
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 Emmett Freeman
 Mr. & Mrs. Robert L. Freeman

Betty Heilig
 Brandy Renn
 Brenda Litchfield
 Sea Island Garden Club
 Oban Francis Moremen
 Mrs. Dot Gnann
 Dr. Al Segars
 Fripp Island Audubon Club
 Susan Sullivan
 Sea Island Garden Club
 Corey Vernon
 Sea Island Garden Club
 J. Wyman Wall III
 Mr. & Mrs. David L. Huguenin
 Jake & Julianna Zadik
 Fripp Island Audubon Club

IN MEMORY OF

Mary Ann Berger
 Mary Beth Staben
 Linda Brown
 Mrs. Dot Gnann
 Suzanne Chapman
 Elise Chapman
 Richard Harding Davis
 Libby Anderson & Paul Nurnberg
 Raymond Dominick
 Caroline & Bud Brooks
 Jan & Keith Harter
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 Mary Anne & Spencer Mitchem
 Scopas S. Poggo
 Sun City Environmental Club
 Edwin Williams
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 Tim & Kristy Wood
 Robert Carl Hoover
 Tracey Hoover Brown
 Stephanie Huguenin
 Mr. & Mrs. David L. Huguenin
 Taby Keener
 Mr. & Mrs. Wade St. John
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 Whitney & Aaron Eller
 Mr. & Mrs. Owen K. Hand
 Dr. & Mrs. Michael R. Harris
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 Beaufort Area Hospitality Association
 Mr. & Mrs. Larry Laughlin
 Sea Island Garden Club
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 Harriette Russell
 Mr. Mark W. Russell
 Shirley Sienkiewicz
 Mrs. Dot Gnann
 Beek Webb
 Mr. & Mrs. Robert Bundy
 Ms. Mary Emerson
 Amanda Griffith

“It’s impossible to imagine a more worthy cause or organization to include in our estate planning. It’s very gratifying to know our contribution will support creating and maintaining precious “forever” places.”

– Pam Powell, Bluff Legacy Circle



The Bluff Legacy Circle

A gift that protects the land you love, forever

The Open Land Trust is deeply honored to be included in the personal legacies of our supporters. When you leave a gift in your will, you’re doing more than giving — you’re making a promise to future generations. It’s one of the most meaningful ways to protect the places that hold your memories and will help spark new ones for generations to come.

Why “The Bluff”

The Bluff Legacy Circle is named for the Bay Street Bluff — Beaufort’s beloved view and the very first property protected by the Open Land Trust. For over 50 years, it has reminded us of what’s worth protecting. Legacy gifts ensure that this kind of vision and impact continues long into the future.

Planned gifts help us do two things: protect land today and care for it forever. It’s a legacy that keeps working, long after we’re gone.

Leaving a gift in your will is simple and your privacy is always respected.

To learn more or notify us of your gift, contact Kristin Williams, Executive Director at kristin@openlandtrust.org or (843)521-2175. Or follow the simple steps by scanning the QR code.



The Bluff Legacy Circle

The Open Land Trust is honored to be included in the personal legacies of its supporters.

Anonymous (5)
 Colden R. Battey, Jr.
 Dan Boone
 Mrs. Elizabeth G. Caldwell*
 Kelly M. Campbell
 Dawson & Molly Cherry
 Paula & Jack Crowley
 Bradford L. Fleming
 Frederic J. & Mitzi Rhame Golod
 Ms. Kathleen Grewenig
 Mr. William Kelly
 Andrew Mason Living Trust
 Mr. & Mrs. Alan A. Moses*
 Dean & Peggy Jo Nadler

*deceased

Mr. Paul Nurnberg & Mrs. Libby Anderson
 Pamela & Scott Powell
 Mrs. Wyatt B. Pringle, Sr.*
 Mr. Gerald H. Schulze
 Jane Shaffer
 Pamela Thomas Dyer
 Chris and Mary Thomsen
 Mrs. Constance Thompson
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Fox Squirrel

JAKE ZADIK



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Save-the-Date BRUNCH ON THE BLUFF SATURDAY April 25 | 2026



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FOR ENEWS



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address. Send to:
info@openlandtrust.org

Front Cover Photo Credit:
Jake Zadik, Red fox, Brays Island



GIFT A YEAR OF
CONSERVATION

Give a gift that makes an impact

Did you know you can gift an annual membership to the Open Land Trust?

It's a meaningful way to honor a birthday, anniversary, or the holiday season while helping protect wildlife, safeguard our rivers, creeks, and marshes and conserve the landscapes that define our unique sense of place in the Lowcountry.

We will prepare a personalized package for your recipient, who will stay up to date on what their gift makes possible throughout the year and be in the know about upcoming events and field trips. You can even add OLT merchandise to make it extra special!

There are many ways to give

YEAR-END GIFT | MONTHLY GIFT | GIFT OF STOCK | BEQUEST

You can make a big difference for the people and places of the Lowcountry. Donating to OLT helps protect habitat for animals, farmlands that provide fresh food and keeps natural spaces open and accessible to locals and visitors alike. Visit openlandtrust.org to donate or call Liz O'Brien, Director of Development at (843) 521-2175 to discuss a gift that is meaningful to you.

