OPEN LAND TRUST

Protecting Our Lowcountry Since 1971

2026 Summer Newsletter & Annual Report

"The work we are doing at the Open Land Trust is bigger than any one of us individually."

— Charley Webb

WE PROTECT AND CONSERVE LOWCOUNTRY LAND FOREVER.

How about a walk in the woods?

It has been my privilege and pleasure to serve as Board President this year. We have enjoyed a year of many victories as our board and staff move forward to "Keep the Lowcountry the Lowcountry." I would like to extend a very gracious thank you for your support as we have placed perpetual conservation easements on over 3,000 acres of open spaces this year with many more in process. I always refer to the Open Land Trust as "Our" Land Trust as we work together to save and share special places in the Lowcountry.

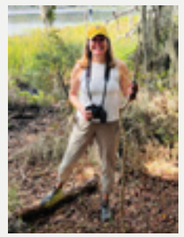
This photo is my three-year-old grandson and me taken on a bright morning on a property that is protected forever by a conservation easement. There is magic to a youngster when they visit Mother Nature's classroom. Butterflies on the wildflowers, swimming in a pond, a wild turkey gobbling, tall trees swaying in the breeze and many good questions from a curious grandson riding on my shoulders. Three generations separate us as we enjoy our walk and learn to appreciate what has been saved for us. My heartfelt excitement is to know that one day he may take this same walk with his grandson because the Open Land Trust saved it.

The work we are doing at the Open Land Trust is bigger than any one of us individually, and its impact will be felt for generations to come. Thank you again for all you do to make this work possible.

With gratitude,

Charley Webb, President

Liz O'Brien named OLT Executive Director



We are pleased to welcome Liz O'Brien as our new Executive Director. Liz steps into the role after serving as the Land Trust's Director of Development, where she led fundraising, built relationships with a range of people in the community, and helped connect people with the Land Trust's work.

As a Beaufort native, Liz has a special connection to the Lowcountry, and she brings a genuine passion for conservation. This is home to her, and she understands the people, places, and landscapes we have worked for more than 50 years to protect.

"For me, conservation is about people as much as it is about land," Liz says. "It's about making sure we have clean water, places where people can get outside and experience the Lowcountry, and landscapes that help us understand and retain our varied history. I want more people to see how conservation touches their lives and to feel that they have a place in this work and in shaping the future of the Lowcountry."

*See page 23 for a special message from Kristin Williams

Conservation Takes Many Forms

Creating space for communities to shape their own future

Sometimes conservation looks like marshes, forests, and working farms. Sometimes it looks like protecting a place where a community can continue to recognize itself for generations to come.

This spring, the Open Land Trust helped secure just under 10 acres at the intersection of Sea Island Parkway and Polowana Road on St. Helena Island. While this property is not destined for permanent conservation in the traditional sense, it represents something just as important: creating the opportunity for a community to shape its own future.

The property is the last large undeveloped tract within the Corners Community, an area identified for community-serving commercial growth. When the land was poised to be sold to a national retailer, St. Helena residents, community organizations, and nonprofit partners came together with a different vision. With funding from the South Carolina Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department (SCPRT) and the Coastal Community Foundation (CCF), the Open Land Trust was able to purchase the property and serve as its temporary bridge holder while a community-led planning process unfolds.

The long-term vision is to explore the creation of a Gullah Geechee Cultural Center and Entrepreneurial Market that celebrates the island's rich cultural heritage while encouraging culturally rooted economic development. Through a community-driven feasibility study funded by the Coastal Community Foundation, residents will help shape the potential of this project.

This vision aligns with Beaufort County's 2040 Comprehensive Plan, which recognizes that protecting St. Helena's unique culture and character can go hand in hand in creating locally rooted economic opportunity.

Following a tradition of bold conservation

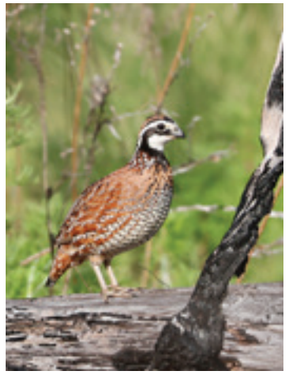
This project reminds us that conservation has always required creativity.

> ***This project reminds us that conservation has always required creativity.***

More than 55 years ago, three community members borrowed $10,000 to protect Beaufort's Bay Street Bluff because they believed some places were worth taking a chance on. That bold decision became the foundation of the Open Land Trust.

Since then, we have permanently protected more than 40,000 acres across seven counties. But our work has never been measured by acres alone. It has always been about protecting the places, traditions, and communities that make this region unlike anywhere else.

Whether conserving thousands of acres of marsh and forest or creating space for community conversation before an opportunity disappears, our mission remains the same: protecting the Lowcountry's land, culture, and sense of place for generations to come.



The Clarks are restoring longleaf pine on their property to help bring back the population of Northern Bobwhite quail, while also creating critical habitat for wildlife and migrating birds all year.

Keeping the Lowcountry, the Lowcountry

Families safeguarding the places that shaped them

H&H Farm is a 534-acre family property just five miles west of Walterboro in Colleton County, where the Hiott and Clark families have long enjoyed the woods and waters of the ACE Basin.

For Wendy Hiott Clark, this land is personal. She has childhood memories of time here with her parents and more recent memories of her own children exploring the outdoors with the kind of freedom kids do not get much anymore. Today, Wendy and her husband, Joe, own the property. In December 2025, they took an important step to protect it forever.

With funding support from the South Carolina Conservation Bank, the Clarks worked with the Open Land Trust to place a conservation easement on H&H Farm. Conservation easements are voluntary, permanent agreements that limit certain types of development so working lands, wildlife habitat, and rural character can endure for generations.

Importantly, the Clark family still owns the land. They will continue to pay property taxes and can sell it, gift it, or pass it down, but the easement will remain in place no matter who owns the property in the future.

Wendy and Joe shared, “We are pleased to preserve and protect this family property for posterity and are honored to help sustain the rural character of Colleton County and the Lowcountry.”

Their timing could not be more important. Development pressure is increasing across Colleton County, including threats of a proposed data center near H&H Farm. In moments like this, proactive conservation matters. It is how we keep the places that define the Lowcountry intact, even as the landscape around them changes.

And the Clarks are not stopping there. They are restoring longleaf pine to help bring back Northern Bobwhite quail, a bird that has become harder to find as longleaf forests have disappeared and the landscape has fragmented over time. Their stewardship also supports critical habitat for wildlife and migrating birds throughout the year.

As development pressure continues, decisions like the Clarks’ benefit all of us by protecting water, wildlife habitat, and the rural character that makes this region home.

Chelsea: Crossing the Finish Line

Every conservation success has a team behind it

Last year, we shared the story of Chelsea's second chance at conservation. This year, we're celebrating its successful conclusion.

What began in 2019 when the 2,700-acre Chelsea property in Jasper County was sold and proposed for large-scale development has come full circle. A determined community refused to give up. Neighbors and local residents rallied through *Keep Chelsea Rural*, while conservation organizations, military partners, local governments, state agencies, and funders worked together to create a path toward permanent protection.

The path reached it's final milestone on August 31, 2026.

The Open Land Trust officially placed a permanent conservation easement on Chelsea, ensuring the land can never be developed. The property has also been transferred from The Nature Conservancy to the South Carolina Forestry Commission, where it will become the region's newest public state forest. It is now owned and managed by the SC Forestry Commission and protected forever through an easement co-held by the Open Land Trust and the Department of the Navy.

This outcome didn't happen overnight. It took years of persistence, partnership, and trust. The Nature Conservancy's bold purchase of the property in 2025 created the opportunity, but it was only possible because the community had spent years advocating for this landscape and partners at every level stepped up to make permanent protection a reality.

Chelsea is proof that conservation is a team effort. When communities speak up, partners work together, and supporters like you invest in the future, remarkable things happen.

Thanks to that shared commitment, 2,700 acres of forests, marshes, and wildlife habitat are now protected forever and will soon be open for future generations to experience as South Carolina's newest state forest.

Thank you to Kate Parks Schaefer for continuing to see this project through while balancing a new role at Lowcountry Land Trust.

A Legacy Carried Forward

On Hilton Head Island, the Simmons name is woven into the history of the Spanish Wells community. Long before a bridge connected the island to the mainland, Charlie Simmons Sr., known as "Mr. Transportation," operated boats and trucks that carried residents, farm goods, schoolchildren, workers, and supplies between Hilton Head, Daufuskie, and Savannah. His work helped sustain the community and created an important connection to the world beyond the island.

That spirit of connection remains rooted in the Simmons family today.

Along Spanish Wells Road, Palmer Simmons and his sister, Charlesetta Aiken, have protected 8.64 acres of family land through a conservation easement with the Open Land Trust funded by the Town of Hilton Head and the Beaufort County Green Space Program. Stretching from the roadway to the marshes of Old House Creek, the property holds mature live oaks, open land, and a family cemetery.

In a place where undeveloped land has disappeared at a record rate, this protection keeps more than a scenic view intact. It preserves a tangible connection between Hilton Head's natural landscape, its Gullah history, and a family whose service helped shape the island.

This is what conservation makes possible: land remaining with family, history remaining visible, and a legacy carried forward for generations.

> *"We know now that it will be here forever. The property will maintain its graciousness through the years to be enjoyed by family and friends."*
>
> – Palmer Simmons

6 Quick Facts
About Conservation Easements

Each conservation easement is unique and tailored to conserve the special features of the property and reflect the values of the landowner.

1. **Voluntary.** The Open Land Trust works with families to conserve their land on a voluntary basis.
2. **Supports working land uses.** Recreational enjoyment, forestry and agriculture are all supported land uses.
3. **Permanent.** The property can be sold, transferred, bequeathed, or given away and the conservation easement stays with the land.
4. **Doesn't prohibit all development.** Many landowners can build family homes, barns and similar structures.
5. **Remains privately owned.** The land stays in private ownership, can be sold or inherited, and generally remains on the local tax rolls.
6. **Income tax benefits.** A landowner may qualify for state and federal income tax benefits.

Is Conservation right for you...
...or someone you know?

People choose to conserve land for many reasons. Some find peace of mind knowing that a place they love will be cared for long into the future. Others want to help keep land in the family, make it easier for the next generation to inherit, help new and beginning farmers gain access to farmland, create habitat for wildlife, or ensure that children and families have beautiful places to enjoy for generations to come.

Many people are surprised to learn that conservation can be a good fit for a wide variety of properties and family goals. Every property is different, and every family's goals are unique.

There are many ways to conserve land. Some people choose to protect their property with a voluntary conservation agreement (conservation easement) during their lifetime, while others include a conservation agreement or a gift of land or other real estate in their will. Some people donate land or real estate during their lifetime. Depending on your circumstances, conserving land during your lifetime may also provide federal income tax or estate tax benefits. Every situation is different.

The first step is simply a conversation. We'd be happy to answer your questions, explain the options available, and help you determine whether conservation is a good fit for your goals. There is no obligation, and no cost.

For more information or to arrange a confidential conversation, please contact Director of Conservation Caylor Romines at 843-521-2715 or caylor@openlandtrust.org.

You may also know a family member, friend, or neighbor who has begun thinking about the future of their land. If so, please feel free to share this publication with them.

Caring for Blocker Field
Protecting the legacy of a Lowcountry landmark

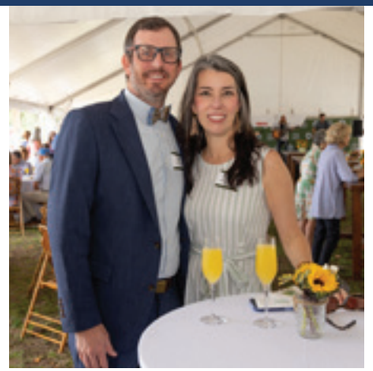
This spring we celebrated Earth Day with a community cleanup of the Blocker Field shoreline, bringing together volunteers of all ages to clean up years of tires and trash from the tidal marsh behind the store. By engaging in stewardship opportunities such as this, the community takes ownership over the health and beauty of the land we call home.

Longtime locals remember the Blocker Store that served as the unofficial welcome center of St. Helena Island for many years.

In 1997, the opportunity arose for the Open Land Trust to purchase Blocker Field and Blocker Store—an incredible chance to conserve land at a time when concerns about commercial blight were growing. With the support of Beaufort County, as well as generous private donations from our members and local residents, OLT successfully purchased Blocker Field and Blocker Store in the summer of 1998.

In keeping with the country store theme, Lowcountry Cider Company now operates a market and coffee shop and continues to welcome locals and visitors to enjoy a delicious coffee or piece of pie and appreciate the beautiful view that is protected, forever.

There is more work to do to to reverse the buildup of debris in the marsh and along the shoreline. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Bryce Donaghue, Land Stewardship Manager, at bryce@openlandtrust.org or 843-521-2175.



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Celebrating the legacy of protecting our future

This special spring event takes place on the very first piece of land that the Open Land Trust protected — the Bay Street Bluff. Every year, this party does double duty: it celebrates our accomplishments, and it helps protect more land, since funds raised go straight to conservation.

This year we welcomed a record crowd of over 350 attendees and enjoyed crab cakes, live music, and the iconic view as we marked another year of success and helped fund the next piece of land we will protect.

We would like to extend a very special thank you to our sponsors. This event, and the conservation it funds, would not be possible without your support.

SAVE THE DATE FOR 2027: SATURDAY, APRIL 24
Tickets will be available starting in January

If you are interested in a sponsorship, please contact Liz O'Brien at 843-521-2175 or liz@openlandtrust.org

Ready and Resilient

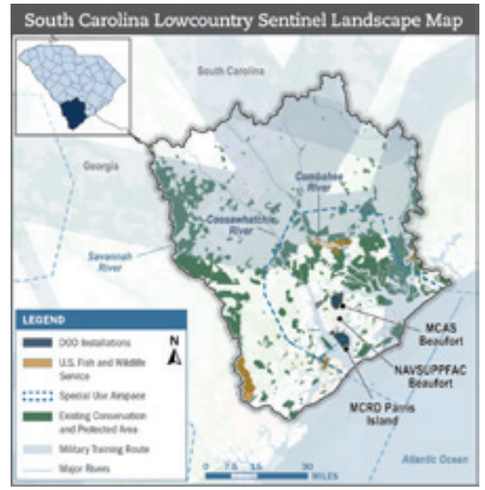
Achieving more conservation together

Rapid growth is increasing pressure on the farms, forests, wetlands, and waterways that define the South Carolina Lowcountry. Because these lands support wildlife, drinking water, resilience, and military readiness, the federal government designated the region a Sentinel Landscape in 2023. Open Land Trust hosts the coordinator, Dana Bauer, and the program brings partners together to advance conservation projects of interest to the military. Since designation, partners have protected more than 32,000 acres, enrolled 136,000 acres in technical assistance, and leveraged over $93 million for conservation, stewardship, resilience, and landscape-scale work.

Two recent properties protected by Open Land Trust, Essex Farms and Chelsea, show this partnership in action. Essex Farms in Dale protects nearly 900 acres of farmland and forest beneath nearby Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort's flight paths. Along the Broad River Corridor in Jasper County, Chelsea protects nearly 2,700 acres that will become the first state forest in the southern Lowcountry and safeguards part of the Beaufort-Jasper Water & Sewer Authority canal which supplies drinking water to residents and our military bases. Both projects leveraged the Department of War's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, which funds conservation supporting military readiness and natural resources.

The Sentinel Landscape is expanding opportunities beyond land protection. This spring, partners hosted the inaugural Lowcountry Landowner Resource Exchange, connecting landowners with conservation programs, technical assistance, and stewardship resources. A project led by Marshall University and MCRD Parris Island is researching eastern diamondback rattlesnake habitat, supporting future conservation while reducing potential conflicts with military training.

Looking ahead, partners plan to expand private land stewardship opportunities and advance new initiatives, including habitat modeling for the federally endangered northern long-eared bat. Together, these efforts demonstrate that the Lowcountry's future depends on conservation that is collaborative, science-based, and rooted in healthy working lands.



Protecting land under and adjacent to flight paths is a high priority for our military partners.

SIGN UP

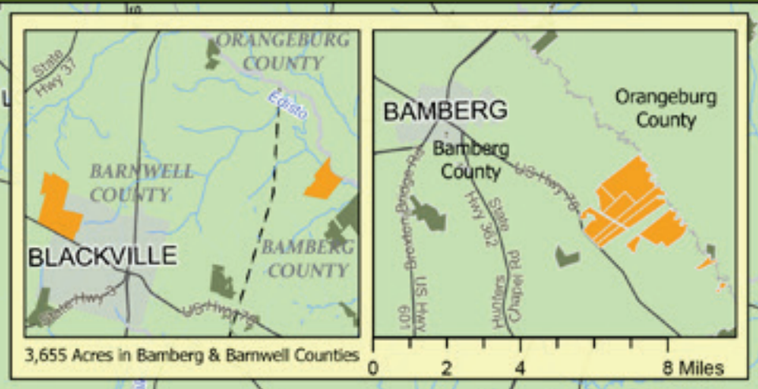
Interested in learning more? Sign up for the Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape monthly e-news

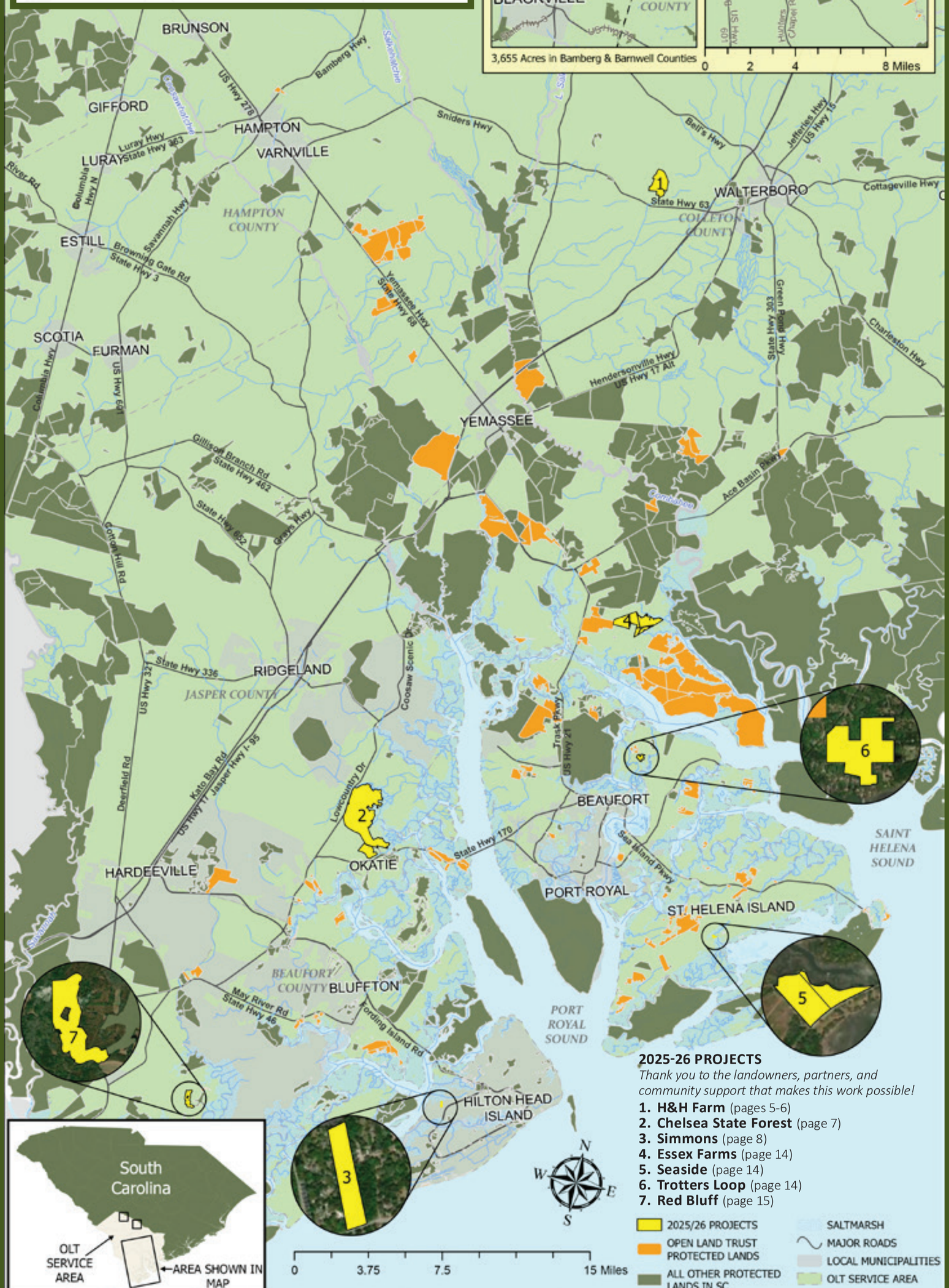
The Open Land Trust and Other Protected Lands

Land protection is a team sport. This map showcases the recent projects (in yellow & numbered) and land protected forever by the Open Land Trust (in orange). Together with our partners, all other properties (in green) add to this incredible landscape of local, private, state and federal permanent land conservation.

SCAN HERE FOR AN INTERACTIVE VERSION OF OLT PROTECTED LANDS

This map is created to the best of our ability using the most current data available.





2025-26 PROJECTS

Thank you to the landowners, partners, and community support that makes this work possible!

1. **H&H Farm** (pages 5-6)
2. **Chelsea State Forest** (page 7)
3. **Simmons** (page 8)
4. **Essex Farms** (page 14)
5. **Seaside** (page 14)
6. **Trotters Loop** (page 14)
7. **Red Bluff** (page 15)

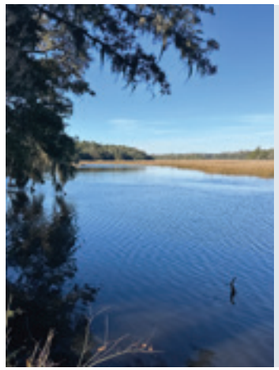
N W E S

0 3.75 7.5 15 Miles

2025/26 PROJECTS
OPEN LAND TRUST PROTECTED LANDS
ALL OTHER PROTECTED LANDS IN SC
SALTMARSH
MAJOR ROADS
LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES
OLT SERVICE AREA

2025 Conservation Highlights

2025 was defined by advancements in land conservation, with four major projects completed and several more underway and anticipated to close in 2026-27. Landowners continue to ask for our support in protecting their land instead of allowing for development. We are thankful for the ongoing opportunity to support their intentions as we shape the future landscape of our region. Thank you for your support of our work, we could not do it without you.



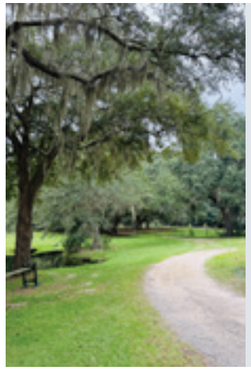
Essex Farm – Dale

In March 2025, the Open Land Trust partnered with the Rhodes family to permanently protect 900 acres in the heart of the ACE Basin in northern Beaufort County. Essex Farms includes 2.3 miles of river frontage, productive farmland, and forests that help support flight training operations at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. For fifth-generation landowner Molly Rhodes, protecting this land is both a family legacy and a personal promise. A voluntary conservation easement keeps the land natural and open while the Rhodes family retains full ownership. Key funding partners included the U.S. Navy, the Beaufort County Green Space Program, and the SC Conservation Bank.

Seaside – St. Helena Island

For nearly a century, Luke Inabinett's family has lived, farmed, and fished on St. Helena Island. Luke assembled 12 acres along Seaside Road where his pecan grove meets the saltwater edge of Club Bridge Creek. Watching the island change around him, he chose to permanently protect his land through a conservation easement with the Open Land Trust. Funding from Beaufort County's Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Program made it possible. "I figured if the Open Land Trust had something to do with it, then it would always be here and it wouldn't be developed," Luke said. His decision preserves a way of life for generations to come.

*See tribute to Luke Inabinett on page 20



Trotters Loop – Lady's Island

For over fifty years, the Mark family has called Trotters Loop on Lady's Island home. As development steadily crept toward their property, Michael and Dorinda Mark chose to permanently protect their 55-acre homeplace on Mark Island through a conservation easement with the Open Land Trust. The land will never become a subdivision or commercial development. It continues draining into Broomfield Creek and the Port Royal Sound, helping keep Beaufort's waters clean and landscapes open. Supported by the Beaufort County Green Space Program, this project complements more than 200 nearby protected acres. As Michael put it, "I can promise that this land will stay this way for all those who come after us."

Red Bluff – Jasper County

Located in Jasper County's Lower Savannah River Basin, Red Bluff protects more than 145 acres of freshwater wetlands, bottomland hardwood forest, open water, and forested depression wetlands that support the health of the Savannah River watershed. The property helps safeguard water quality and strengthens the region's resilience to storms and flooding. It provides important habitats for migratory birds, wading birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, and other wildlife that depend on intact wetland systems. Protecting Red Bluff also expands a connected network of conserved lands between the Savannah River and ACE Basin preserving wildlife corridors, rural character, and the scenic natural landscape of the area.

Open Land Legacy Fund

An investment to keep every promise we've ever made

As South Carolina's oldest land trust, we've spent decades saying yes to landowners who wanted their property protected forever. Today, that means holding conservation easements across the Lowcountry — each one has a permanent and legal commitment to monitor, defend, and steward that land for as long as it exists.

That's a remarkable legacy. It's also a responsibility that grows every year, while most of our funding has always been raised one year at a time. This year, we took a step to close that gap: we launched the Open Land Legacy Fund. Thanks to gifts from a group of founding donors, the fund opened with $100,000 with a goal to grow to $500,000 over the next several years. That money will never be spent, only invested, so that its earnings can help fund easement monitoring, legal defense, and stewardship in perpetuity.

$100,000 is a beginning, not an ending. But it marks something we have never had before in our nearly 55-year history: a fund built to ensure that "forever" does not run out of money before the land runs out of need. As we look toward the next fifty years of protecting South Carolina's land, we are deeply grateful to donors who understand that the most important gift is not always the one that funds this year's work — it is the one that outlives us.

To learn more, please contact Liz O'Brien, Executive Director, at 843-521-2175 or liz@openlandtrust.org.

"Our gift to the Open Land Legacy Fund isn't just about protecting land today – it's about making a lasting promise to all the generations who will follow us."

– Bill and Laura Kelly

Thank you to all who make conservation possible in the Lowcountry.

Fiscal year 2025 (January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025)

If there is an error or omission, please contact us.

Grants

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Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
The Land Trust Alliance

$20,000 +

Garcia Family Charitable Fund
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Thank to our sponsors and those who provide in-kind services. Conservation is made possible with the community support and local businesses are at the heart of that effort. If you know someone interested in exploring sponsorship or in-kind gifts, please have them contact Liz O'Brien – liz@openlandtrust.org

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Thank you to this incredible group of monthly givers. This steady support is one of the most powerful ways to protect the Lowcountry. Want to join them? Scan the QR code below or visit our website — it's simple.

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Thank you to all who make conservation possible in the Lowcountry.

Fiscal year 2025 (January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025)

If there is an error or omission, please contact us.

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– Lynn & Dave Strange

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** Deceased*

2025 Financial Snapshot

Your support helps turn conservation opportunities into permanent protection. Because of your generosity, the Open Land Trust can move quickly when important lands become available, safeguarding the places that make the Lowcountry unique for generations to come.

As a nationally accredited land trust, we are committed to being responsible stewards of every dollar entrusted to us, investing your generosity where it will have the greatest and longest-lasting impact.

If you would like a more detailed financial report, please contact Liz O'Brien at (843) 521-2175 or liz@openlandtrust.org.

Thank you for investing in the future of the Lowcountry. Together, we're protecting the places that make this region special, forever.

*Financial information is based on audited financial statements.

2025 Revenue

Individual Contributions	$674,441
Grants	$238,190
Special Events	$130,804
Program Services	$194,331
Other Income (includes unrealized investment losses/gains)	$195,477
Total	**$1,433,243**

2025 Expenses

Programs Land Protection & Land Stewardship	$698,532
Community Outreach & Special Events	$229,671
Operations	$228,973
Total	**$1,157,176**

Honoring Those who Inspire and Guide Us

Tribute gifts are meaningful ways to celebrate the people, occasions, and memories you hold dear. Honorary gifts can mark special moments—birthdays, anniversaries, and other milestones—or simply recognize a loved one and the blessings they bring into your life. Memorial gifts celebrate lives well-lived by supporting conservation in the community we love.

We're honored to recognize the loved ones, friends, and community members you've chosen to celebrate or remember. Each tribute reflects a story, a relationship, a legacy—one that continues to inspire and guide us.

When you make a memorial or honorary gift, we not only send you a thank you letter, but we also reach out to their family to let them know you remembered their loved one in such a thoughtful way.

Tribute gifts become part of a lasting legacy rooted in connection, remembrance, and love of the land.

Thank you for honoring the people who matter most through your generosity and thoughtfulness.

On July 25, 2026 Luke Inabinett passed away after 91 full years of life, by all accounts working and caring for his land right up through his final days. We loved working with Mr. Luke over the last few years and are eternally grateful for his decision to protect his land. He will be missed.

PHOTO BY PAUL NURNBERG

Thank you for choosing to honor and memorialize these special people with a gift to the Open Land Trust.

In Honor of

Al Segars
Dataw Garden Conservancy
Ben Spencer
Ms. Barbara Spencer
Charles Ewing
Claiborne Yarbrough
Charley Webb
Jeanne Phillips and William Pendergraft
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Mr. & Mrs. C. Vernon Peers

This list reflects gifts received Dec. 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Planned Giving

A gift that protects the land you love, forever

One of the most meaningful ways to support land conservation is through a gift in your will. The Open Land Trust is honored to be included in the personal legacies of its supporters. The Bluff Legacy Circle honors these members and friends who preserve the mission of the Open Land Trust for generations to come through an estate gift.

Planned gifts create a lasting legacy, allowing stewardship and land protection to continue for years to come and helping preserve the Lowcountry forever. The name was chosen in honor of the Bluff, the Land Trust's first protected property, which has served as an iconic Beaufort vista for more than 55 years. It remains a daily reminder of the importance of land protection to all who pass by.

Becoming a member of the Bluff Legacy Circle is easy. If you've already taken this step, we would be grateful to hear from you — so we can thank you personally. Leaving a gift in your will is simple and your privacy is always respected.

To learn more or notify us of a planned gift contact Liz O'Brien, Executive Director at 843-521-2175 or liz@openlandtrust.org 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.

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Ms. Nancy Wishart*
Carolyn Wood
Mary Jane Zabinski*

**deceased*

"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

Now Is the Time

Over the past several years, more families across the Lowcountry have been thinking about the future of their land and the role conservation might play. Some have planned for years. Others are prompted by a change in life, an opportunity, or the desire to ensure the places they love remain protected for generations to come.

At the same time, an increasing number of people are enjoying the Open Land Trust's trails and vistas, and families who have already conserved their land continue to look to us for guidance as questions arise over time.

These are encouraging signs. They also remind us that conservation doesn't happen on a schedule. It happens when families and communities are ready.

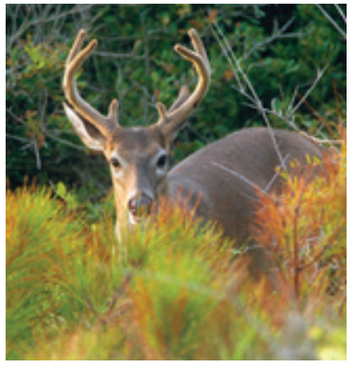
Ready When Families Are

When a family reaches out to the Open Land Trust, they need timely answers, thoughtful guidance, and someone who will be there to understand their goals. That's why the Open Land Trust is expanding our team. Thanks to growing community support we've recently hired new staff to help more families explore conservation options, provide continued support to those who have already protected their land, enhance our trails, and work alongside the volunteers who make so much of our work possible.

As many know, protecting land is the beginning of a long-term relationship, not the end. Families often have questions years after signing a conservation agreement. As land is passed to the next generation, new owners may want to better understand the agreement and what it means for the future of their property. Being available to answer those questions is part of the commitment we make to every family who conserves their land.

As a community-supported conservation organization, these investments are possible because of people like you. Your generosity means we're ready when families are ready. It means we're able to respond to new conservation opportunities, care for the lands already protected, and continue building the relationships that make lasting conservation possible.

The need is growing. And thanks to you, the Open Land Trust will be ready to meet it.



Leaving with a Full Heart

Looking back with gratitude. Looking ahead with confidence.

Before sitting down to write this final letter as Executive Director, I looked back at the previous eight annual report letters. Together, they capture moments in time that shaped both this organization and our community — from navigating a pandemic to celebrating OLT's 50th anniversary; welcoming new staff, board members, and conservation landowners into the Open Land Trust family; and saying goodbye to some of the special people who helped build it.

As I read them, I was reminded of something I have felt since my family moved to Beaufort nine years ago: this place has a way of becoming a part of you. There is a sense of community here that is rare and incredibly special.

In the 2020 newsletter, during the pandemic, I wrote, *"As times continue to change, we will change with them, and our work will continue."* Those words still ring true.

When our founders took the bold step to protect the Bay Street Bluff in 1971, they could never have imagined the growth that would transform the Lowcountry over the next 55 years. Yet through every challenge and opportunity, the OLT has remained steadfast in protecting the places, culture, and character that define who we are as a region.

Our work has always been rooted in community and that legacy continues because of you. You are the reason this land trust is stronger than ever, and the reason I know the best days are still ahead.

The Open Land Trust has never been stronger, and I have never been more confident in its future. While my role is changing, my commitment to conservation in the Lowcountry is not.

Thank you for your trust, your generosity, and your belief in this work.

I hope you'll stay in touch. You can reach me at kwilliams@nemourswildlife.org, and my phone number will remain the same: (843) 986-7291.

Kristin

Kristin Williams, Executive Director
2018-2026

PHOTO CREDIT PAUL NURNBERG

OPEN LAND TRUST
Protecting Our Lowcountry Since 1971

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Did you know?

Many shorebirds, including Least Terns and Piping Plovers, nest right on the sand, where their speckled eggs and tiny chicks can blend in so well that they are easy to miss. Giving these birds plenty of space helps parents stay close to their nests and keeps eggs and chicks safer from heat, predators, and accidental footsteps. If you notice birds calling loudly, swooping, or acting extra protective, it may be their cheerful beach-parent way of saying, "Thanks for giving us room!" You can help them have a successful nesting season by admiring from a distance, following posted signs, walking around nesting areas, and keeping dogs leashed near the beach.

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Sign up for our eNewsletter by visiting our website **www.openlandtrust.org**

Please make sure we have up to date contact information for everyone in your household – changes and updates can be sent to **info@openlandtrust.org**

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