Conservation Easements Get State Tax Break

"A huge milestone," said Charles Lane, chairman of the ACE Basin Task Force, referring to recent state legislation that provides a tax credit of 25 percent of the value of conservation easements conveyed after June 1, 2001.

"I think it is the most important thing the South Carolina Legislature did this year," Lane said. "The state now recognizes the value of conservation to the point it is going help. This is something we have done right." The federal government also offers a tax break to landowners who donate conservation easements.

Rep. Chip Campsen, R-Charleston, who drafted and sponsored the legislation, said the act will preserve thousands of acres of critical habitat in a new way.

"Instead of regulating land use, this act provides an incentive for voluntary conservation," Campsen said. The legislation respects property rights but also tackles the problem of habitat loss in an economic manner, he said.

"The Campsen bill complements the Department of Natural Resources' priority of habitat protection for the 21st century," said John Frampton, DNR Assistant Director and ACE Basin Task Force member.

Property owners can protect their property forever with a conservation easement that spells out exactly how the land can be used, often for forestry, farming, wildlife management and recreation such as hunting and fishing.

Owners often specify that significant trees may not be cut and buffers along rivers, roads or marshes many not be altered or developed. An easement, which remains with the property when it changes hands, is usually conveyed to a non-profit conservation organization.

The member organizations of the ACE Basin Task Force worked with Campsen on the bill as did other conservation groups from around the state.

The Farm Bureau, the Realtors Association and a
bipartisan group of legislators also supported the legislation. Ed McMullen of the S. C. Policy Council said Campsen accomplished what few can.

"He brought conservationists, developers and business people together to support a historic effort to preserve our breathtaking landscape."

S. C. Nature Conservancy executive director Mark Robinson sees clear public benefits from the new law.

"Private landowners will be able to maintain wildlife habitats and provide compatible land uses that protect our state’s wetlands, rivers and waters. It’s a win-win situation for South Carolina.”

Lane added, “People realize the need for land protection and recognize that a good way to do it is conservation easements.” The act could encourage more people to donate easements, he said.

(Adapted from an article in the Charleston Post-Courier by Lynne Langley)

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**Restoration of Shellfish in the ACE Basin NERR**

Restoring oyster populations in the lower ACE Basin is the goal of a grass roots project in Two Sisters Creek, not far from the Bennett’s Point headquarters of the National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The eastern oyster, a keystone estuarine animal because of its ability to filter nutrients from the water, has declined throughout its range along the eastern seaboard. Disease, loss of habitat, overharvesting, changes in salinity and pollution have combined to reduce oyster populations.

Since juvenile oysters, called spat, require a hard substrate on which to attach and grow to maturity, replanting of oyster shell insures that future generation of oysters have a place to live in the otherwise soft, muddy bottoms.

Unfortunately, most oyster shell, left from oyster roasts (now the prime market for local oysters) goes into the garbage, or is used for fill in driveways, rather than returned to the marsh. However, healthy oyster beds, founded on discarded shell, provide habitat for other important species including juvenile fish of many species, as well as shrimp and blue crabs.

The current project, designed to reduce erosion from boat wakes and to stabilize shorelines, will evaluate five different experimental methods that enhance the natural habitat by providing shell or live oysters along the banks of Two Sisters Creek.

The S. C. Department of Natural Resources has planted more than 600 bushels of local oyster shell, 650 bushels of seed oysters transplanted from polluted waters, 530 bushels of shell from oysters imported from the Gulf of Mexico, 1,000 bushels of whelk shell and large seed clams along the creek banks.

The area is closed to shellfish harvesting for three years and during that time the growth of oysters will be closely monitored with assistance from the Beaufort Marine Institute and local residents of Bennett’s Point.

A repository for used shell has been established at the Bennett’s Point NERR Field Station to provide for additional shell as needed.

The project receives its funding from the office of Habitat Conservation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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*Students from the Beaufort Marine Institute assist DNR Biologist, Charlie Zemp, in monitoring the growth of oysters in restored shellfish beds in the ACE Basin NERR.*
In an ongoing study in Tennessee, champion bird dogs can find only 10 percent of quail coveys in the study area. Have quail gotten smarter, or have bird dogs gotten dumber, or both?

That was just one of the interesting points raised at a recent bobwhite quail workshop held in the ACE Basin at Cheeha-Combahee Plantation.

About 45 people gathered to hear a discussion of quail management conducted by Billy Dukes, Small Game Project Supervisor for the S. C. Department of Natural Resources, and by Dr. Lee Stribling, Associate Professor of Wildlife Biology at Auburn University.

Dukes listed the many factors involved in quail decline in the Southeast. These include larger and fewer farms, more efficient "clean" farming, more intensive management of woodlands, conversion of longleaf pine forests to loblolly and slash pine, and shorter pine rotations.

Other factors include higher tree stocking rates, more intensive site preparation before planting tree seedlings, changes in pasture management from native grasses and legumes to nonnative species, changes in weather patterns, and loss of habitat to development.

Other theories more difficult to document include an increase in predators and the use of pesticides, the impact of fire ants, competition for food from deer, predation by turkeys, and the switch to repeating shotguns.

Stribling has lead an intensive study of quail ecology near Albany, Georgia, and has developed some controversial approaches to quail management. He explained his ideas on proper timber management, as well as providing adequate nesting habitat, quality brood rearing habitat, adequate forage including supplemental feeding, and control of nest predators.

After the presentations, participants enjoyed a tour of the plantation with manager Lew Crouch and had the opportunity to quiz the experts on details of quail management.

A barbecue chicken lunch was provided by Ray and Becky Bass, along with Peachie Washington from Nemours Plantation. Dr. Ernie Wiggers and Eddie Mills with the Nemours Wildlife Foundation organized the event.

The ACE Basin Task Force sponsors two workshops per year. The fall workshop focuses on wetland and waterfowl management, and the spring workshop deals with upland wildlife and habitat management.

To be put on the mailing list for these workshops, contact Nemours Wildlifefoundation at (843) 846-2539 (FAX-843-846-4948) or via email at wiggers@islc.net. The fall workshop will be held October 20.
Coy Johnston recently was honored for his more than 25 years of service as a citizen advisor to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

Johnston was first appointed to the agency’s Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Board in 1973 by then governor John C. West. He served six consecutive terms through 1992. In 1993 he was appointed to the DNR’s Law Enforcement Advisory Committee where he continues to serve.

Johnston meanwhile worked full time as Ducks Unlimited’s ACE Basin Project director from 1987 until his retirement in 1997. Previously, he had been DU’s Regional Development Director, taking on that position in 1979.

Johnston also served six years on the state’s Migratory Waterfowl Committee and eight years on the Board of Directors of the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund.

Perhaps Coy’s greatest legacy is his many accomplishments in the ACE Basin. He played a key role in the expansion of Bear Island Wildlife Management Area and the establishment of Donnelly Wildlife Management Area. He also worked to secure support for the ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge and, farther north, the Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge.

Over the years, Johnston used his considerable people skills to develop more than 25 conservation easements that now protect more than 50,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat in the state.

“The hallmark of Coy Johnston’s conservation ethic is his commitment to stewardship for the land,” said Dean Harrigal, DNR’s ACE Basin Project Biologist. “Coy believes in land conservation while maintaining traditional uses such as hunting, farming and forestry. His legacy is for future generations to enjoy the way of life he so treasures.”

Following a successful 1999 promotional campaign that raised $10,000 for ACE Basin project, Anheuser-Busch, Inc. and the ACE Basin Task Force continued the “Keep It Natural Carolinas,” which ran from this year from May through September. (photo courtesy of Blankney Photo)
The ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve recently received continued annual funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for operations, management, research, monitoring, education and facilities development.

The funding will be used in part to develop a new research facility at the reserve's Bennett's Point field station. Now in its final design phase, the new facility will provide an expanded base of operations for Reserve staff and visiting researchers conducting studies in the ACE Basin.

A conference room/classroom has been incorporated into the building's design for workshops, training sessions and special community-based functions.

Environmental monitoring will also continue to provide benchmark information to researchers and coastal managers. Information gathered will help detect, quantify and predict both short-term and long-term changes in the health and viability of estuarine systems.

The grant also supports several education initiatives that provide crucial linkage between research and coastal management. Workshops for decision-makers will be held in several areas along the coast to ensure that the latest scientific research findings are translated to key individuals.

The Reserve will also continue to provide educational cruises aboard the DNR's research vessel Anita, and will focus on stewardship and land protection issues. Expansion of the Reserve's educational activities at Edisto Beach State Park is planned under the renewed funding.

The Protected Areas Geographic Information System project is also funded again and brings the most efficient and useful ways to store and retrieve information to the Reserve. When complete, this national data storage and retrieval system will benefit the ACE Basin and give NOAA the means to compile national resource management data and to detect environmental trends.

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Public Lands in the ACE Basin

**Bear Island WMA**
- Hunting - Archery and gun hunts for deer; waterfowl hunting by drawing; dove and small game hunts also scheduled.*
- Fishing - Fish and blue crabs can be harvested from impoundments from April 1 to Sept. 30.
- Camping - Primitive facilities available for deer hunters and conservation groups by appointment.
- General Public Use - Designated areas open for bird watching, photography and wildlife observation from Jan. 21 through Oct. 31. Mon.-Sat.

**Donnelley WMA**
- Hunting - Archery and gun hunts (drawing only) for deer; waterfowl and turkey hunts by drawing; dove and small game hunts scheduled.*
- General Public Use - Designated trails; Mon.-Sat. 8 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., closed on Sunday and during special hunts.
- For more information on Bear Island WMA and Donnelley WMA call (843) 844-8957.

**ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve**
- Research - Support and facilities are provided for qualified scientists to study estuaries and coastal ecosystems.
- Education - Education cruises, marsh classroom adventures, workshops and training sessions provided to organized groups.
- General Public Use - Accessible by boat; primitive camping in specified areas; some restrictions.
- For more information call (843) 762-5400.

**ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge**
- Hunting - Archery, primitive weapons hunts for deer. Waterfowl hunts in designated areas.
- General Public Use - Open for public use except during scheduled hunts.
- For more information call (843) 889-3084.
  - Office hours - 7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
  - (* See SCDNR current Hunting and Fishing Rules and Regulations)
About 200 Colleton County elementary students recently met snakes, alligators and crabs, and learned how to look for signs of wildlife in the woods as participants in the DNR’s annual Student Environmental Education Day (SEED) held at Donnelley WMA near Green Pond.

Students from Ivenia Brown, Colleton Prep and Northside Elementary divided into groups and went from station to station to listen to education specialists and get hands-on experience with many wild creatures.

“We designed the activities to provide youngsters with a hands-on learning experience in an outdoor setting,” said Dean Harrigal of the SCDNR. “Even though Colleton is a rural county, many school children today don’t get the same outdoor experience their parents did. Children come home from school, get on the internet, or watch television and rarely experience the real world all around them.”

“These kids really aren’t exposed to things around them,” said Ivenia Brown teacher, Patricia Salley. “I liked this program because it gave students a hands-on experience. They got to touch snakes, alligators, and all types of sea animals in a natural setting. They wouldn’t get to do that in a classroom.”

Education Specialist BeBe Harrison of the SCDNR coordinated the event for the second year and is already preparing for next year’s event.

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The SCDNR Research Vessel ACE was present at the raising of the Hunley. The boat was donated to the DNR and will be stationed at Bennett’s Point for work in the ACE Basin NERR.
The first annual Edisto Nature Expo on June 17th drew more than 300 people. The Edisto Chamber of Commerce developed the concept to highlight the natural resources of the area. In the true spirit of the ACE Basin, the Expo was a cooperative of the Chamber, the ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve, and Edisto Beach State Park.

Clemson Grad Students Study Fire Ants in ACE Basin

The impact of fire ants on quail, and on reptiles and amphibians is the combined focus of studies by two Clemson graduate students.

Working in the ACE Basin, the students are pursuing Master of Science degrees in Clemson’s Department of Aquaculture, Fish and Wildlife at Clemson under the guidance of Dr. Craig Allen.

The red imported fire ant, a South American species accidentally introduced into this country at Mobile, Alabama, in the 1930’s has now spread to nine southern states. Fire ants can reach densities of 100 million per acre in suitable habitat.

Biologists and landowners have long suspected that fire ants prey directly on ground nesting birds, such as quail, and on toads, snakes and other amphibians and reptiles. Many of these species have declined, in some cases, dramatically in areas infested with fire ants, although many other factors may be involved.

The two students, Evan Myers and Jason Slater, will study six areas consisting of adjacent plots of 200 to 500 acres on both public and private lands. In the ACE Basin their research areas are on Ashepoo Plantation and Nemours Plantation.

In May one of the plots in each study area was treated with pesticide to reduce fire ants, and treatment will continue to control fire ant populations. The other plot in each study area was left untreated.

Myers and Slater will monitor populations of quail, reptiles and amphibians for the next two years and expect to see an increase in the populations of those species in the plots where fire ants were controlled.

The study provides an excellent example of state and federal agencies working with private conservation organizations as well as private landowners. Organizations cooperating and contributing to this study include:

- Nemours Wildlife Foundation
- S.C. Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit
- Clemson University
- American Cyanamid
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- S. C. Department of Natural Resources
- Quail Unlimited
- U. S. Department of Agriculture
- Agricultural Research Service

The students are especially grateful to the private landowners for allowing access to their properties.
Public Sites

Bear Island Wildlife Management Area (est. 1953)
Donnelley Wildlife Management Area (1992)
ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge
  auldbrass Tract (1995)
ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve
Edisto Beach State Park (est. 1936)
Hunting Island State Park (est. 1938)

Sub-total

Private Sites

Conservation Easements (41)

Deed Restrictions

Hannah Tract (1993)

Organization Ownership


Management Agreements

Westvaco (1991)

Other

Botany Bay Plantation, Slann Island (1996)

Sub-total

TOTAL

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John E. Frampton, ACE Basin Task Force

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