

# SOUTH CAROLINA LOWCOUNTRY SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

South Carolina | est. 2023



The South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape supports immense biodiversity, encompassing more than 2.2 million acres of longleaf pine forest, ranchlands, salt marsh, forested wetlands, and unbroken wildlife corridors in the southeastern corner of South Carolina.

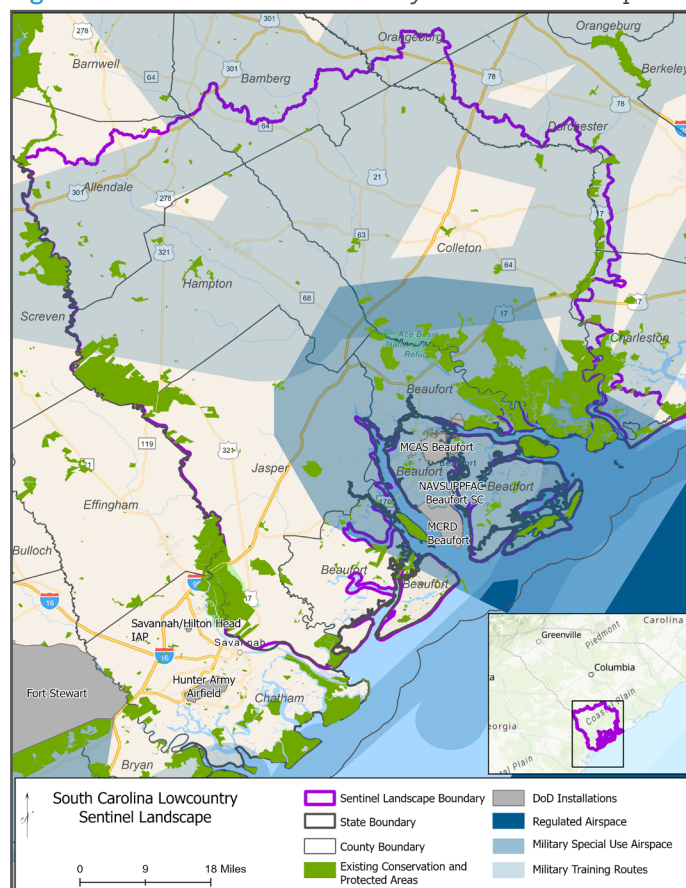
The landscape supports training activities for Marine Corps Air Station Camp Beaufort, Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, and Naval Support Facility Beaufort, contributing \$2.2 billion to the regional economy and providing nearly 20,000 jobs. The installation missions include recruiting and training U.S. Marines, supporting operations for the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, and providing critical medical services for active-duty Navy and Marine personnel.

Partners established the South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape in 2023 to work on protecting ecologically significant areas, drinking water supplies, and working farmlands, all with the goal of maintaining long-term military readiness and climate resilience across the landscape.

## IMPROVING RESILIENCE THROUGH MARSH CONSERVATION

The South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape is defined by its sprawling salt marshes, which provide critical nursery habitat for economically important fish and support carbon sequestration. However, marsh edges are eroding at an alarming rate due to sea level rise and new development in the region that blocks natural marsh migration routes. These pressures reduce the resilience of coastal ecosystems and jeopardize working farmlands. This habitat loss also severely threatens the ability of coastal installations like Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island to continue their mission critical activities and exposes transportation routes and installation infrastructure to erosion and flooding.

**Figure 1:** South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape



**Table 1:** South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape Footprint Details (from year established through fiscal year 2021)

Total Protected Acres <sup>1</sup>	0
Total Enrolled Acres <sup>2</sup>	0
Active Base Area	13,597
<b>Total Sentinel Landscape Area</b>	<b>2,241,474</b>

<sup>1</sup> Protected acres are recognized as land acquisitions—fee simple or easement—that have completed the due diligence and closing actions necessary to obtain a real estate interest.

<sup>2</sup> Land is considered enrolled if the property owner voluntarily participates in a federal or state land-management program that provides financial or technical assistance to promote sustainable agricultural practices, restore imperiled species and their habitat, or preserve critical natural resources; or if a landowner or an organization receives a federal or state grant to conduct a conservation project on said property.

Banner photo credit: Working farmland on St Helena Island under conservation easement increases resilience of sea islands surrounding Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island (Open Land Trust, Miles Sanders)



*A cattle farm, protected with a conservation and restrictive easement through the active REPI program, safeguards farmland west of Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. (Open Land Trust)*

Partners in the South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape are committed to restoring and enhancing vital salt marshes to protect critical infrastructure and habitats. The partners have developed a strategy to install living shorelines and nature-based solutions that reduce erosion, protect upland marsh migration corridors, and conserve natural marsh vegetation. Through research, new project identification, and other collaborative efforts, the South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape is poised to become a leader in coastal resilience.

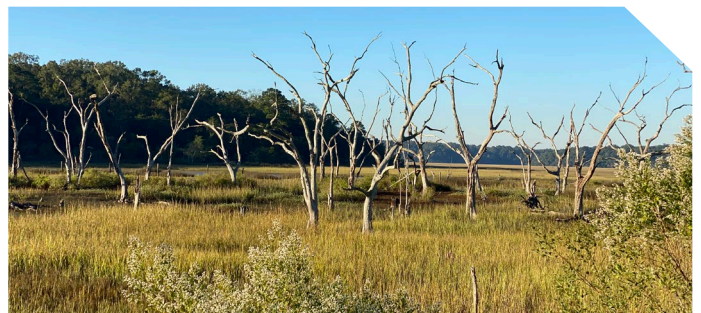
## SAFEGUARDING WORKING FARMLANDS

Partners in the South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape also protect working lands, enabling landowners to remain on their land and maintain it in a use that is compatible with military mission. A successful REPI Program partnership has been in place in Beaufort County since 2006, protecting over 10,000 acres around Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. However, landowners in rural South Carolina often belong to historically under-served groups and may not be aware of or have access to government programs that can assist them in protecting their working lands.

The landscape's diverse partners will use Department of Defense funds to leverage existing grants from local, state, and federal sources for acquiring working lands easements that protect strategic properties from development that could impact military testing and training needs. Additionally, the partners plan to enroll landowners in under-served communities in financial assistance programs focused on promoting sustainable agriculture and forestry practices. This will improve landscape resilience by supporting landowners in maintaining habitat connectivity, pursuing beneficial prescribed fire activities, and improving water quality through landscape-scale conservation.

## Key Partners

- ★ Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto (ACE) River Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve
- ★ ACE Basin Task Force
- ★ ACE-South Carolina Lowcountry (SOLO) Longleaf Partnership
- ★ Beaufort County Rural and Critical Lands Program
- ★ Center for Heirs Property Preservation
- ★ Ducks Unlimited
- ★ Georgia Sentinel Landscape
- ★ Local governments – counties and municipalities
- ★ Lowcountry Open Land Trust
- ★ Nemours Wildlife Foundation
- ★ Open Land Trust
- ★ Open Space Institute
- ★ Port Royal Sound Foundation
- ★ Savannah River Clean Water Fund
- ★ SC Conservation Bank
- ★ SC Department of Natural Resources
- ★ SC Forestry Commission
- ★ SC Office of Resilience
- ★ SC State Parks
- ★ Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- ★ SOLO Task Force
- ★ South Atlantic Saltmarsh Initiative
- ★ Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy
- ★ The Longleaf Alliance
- ★ The Nature Conservancy
- ★ U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service
- ★ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- ★ U.S. Forest Service
- ★ U.S. Marine Corps
- ★ U.S. National Park Service
- ★ U.S. Navy



*Ghost trees, like those seen along Huspah Creek, showcase the impact of sea level rise and salinity changes in the marsh migration process throughout the landscape. (Lowcountry Council of Governments)*

The partnership is also advancing market-based approaches that help generate revenue for farmers by identifying market needs (e.g., sawmills, agricultural co-ops, food hubs) and other missing financing links, such as tax incentives, that will improve the profitability of working lands and ensure landowners receive conservation funding benefits. Land protection will also support the habitat and future viability of the significant populations of threatened and endangered species in the landscape, including the red cockaded woodpecker, gopher frog, gopher tortoise, and flatwood salamander.