



FRIENDS

OF COASTAL SOUTH CAROLINA

SUPPORTING OUR NATIONAL FOREST AND WILDLIFE REFUGES

Fall 2015

INSIDE:

- The Value of Wetlands
- Shaping Attitudes and Providing Opportunity
- A Stellar Year on the Francis Marion National Forest



Dedicated to preserving the ecosystems and wildlife of the South Carolina coast for future generations; we support our national forest and wildlife refuges through our education programs, advocacy work and by engaging citizens in stewardship of these critical resources.

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Cover photo courtesy of Andy Day.

Roseate spoonbills in adult plumage. Spoonbills are one of many signs of a changing environment. Once only rarely seen in South Carolina, they are now frequent visitors. Their breeding range has also expanded north to Georgia.

Our thanks to AccuPrint of Mount Pleasant for their support with production of this newsletter.



From the Director

Dear Friends,

This has been a remarkable year for Friends of Coastal South Carolina, which began with celebrating the 10th anniversary of Music and Oysters for Wildlife in January. This was one of our most successful years with the auction alone setting a new record raising \$11,000. At the same time our new name and logo became a reality. We are delighted with the enthusiasm you have shown for our new "brand" and website. We hope you will continue to follow the new site sccoastalfriends.org and keep up with us on Facebook at [Facebook.com/sccoastalfriends](https://facebook.com/sccoastalfriends).

We participated in our first Lowcountry Giving Day on May 5th and your generosity not only helped us earn a \$10,000 matching gift from the Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation, you helped us raise a total of \$26,679 (see page nine). You will find many more highlights of the work you have made possible this year in the following pages.

As monumental as 2015 was for our organization we are already looking forward to celebrating our 20th Anniversary in 2016. Since our founding in 1996 much in our world has changed. There was no Federal budget sequester taking its toll on our public lands. Research on climate change was just beginning to gain widespread credibility, and lead had just been phased out of gasoline. The World Wide Web had been publicly accessible for only five years, and the Nokia 9000 was the most popular cell phone. It had an antenna, cost \$800, and weighed almost one pound.

Through all the years and change our commitment to our coastal natural resources and Waccamaw, Cape Romain, E.F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuges and the Francis Marion National Forest have remained unwavering. Although we have grown to partner with our refuges and forest on a variety of projects; it is with good reason that our commitment to environmental education has remained strong. Studies have shown that twenty years ago kids were spending twice as much time outside as they do today. Many factors have contributed to this change, including the loss of many wild places and the 50 plus hours a week many kids now spend using electronic devices for entertainment. The bottom line remains that, with your support, our programs continue to provide the only opportunity many of our kids will have to experience and learn about the natural world (see page three for a full discussion).

None of our work (sea turtle conservation, shorebird conservation, advocacy, citizen engagement, the events we support with our partners and environmental education) would be possible without your support. Please enjoy reading about all you have joined us in accomplishing!

Gratefully,

Grace

Grace Lynch Gasper

Executive Director



Merrill Irvin



The Value of Our Wetlands

As we go to press South Carolina is still recovering from October's storm event. Rainfall totals in South Carolina ranged from eight inches in the Upstate to 27 inches in the Lowcountry. A Texas newspaper described our storm as "how to dodge a hurricane and still get hammered". Hammered we were. All in all it is estimated that 5.8 trillion gallons of water fell on South Carolina. Our thoughts are with all those impacted by the floods, especially our students and teachers and their families, in Georgetown County.

Such intense storms are poignant reminders of the important job our wetlands and marshes do here in the Lowcountry, and our role in protecting them. When intense flooding occurs wetlands can slow the speed of water into rivers and buffer against ocean storm surge. It is estimated that a one acre wetland can store one million gallons of flood water. It only emphasizes the importance of our forest and wildlife refuges to our communities to know that Waccamaw, Cape Romain and ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuges along with Francis Marion National Forest protect 380,000 acres that include some of the most critical wetlands in our coastal watersheds. We continue to emphasize an understanding of watersheds and wetlands in our education programs not only because these places are such critical habitat to wildlife, but because they are so important to our communities and our economy. In fact, our 2015 teacher workshop was a two day program entirely focused on South Carolina watersheds (see page five). In 2016 our students will participate in a project to restore native vegetation around a wetland site at the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center. We hope this project will inspire others to take on similar projects. There are additional restoration efforts taking place on our public lands, including restoration of an area of marsh that was long ago converted to timber production on the Francis Marion.

One of the most important things we ask you to do, as our conservation minded members, is to help us spread the word in our community about the importance of this issue. Below are some facts about wetlands we hope you will share.

- One reason floods have become more costly is that over half of the wetlands in the United States have been drained or filled.
- Wetlands filter and store critical drinking water supplies. The 22,000 acre Congaree bottomland hardwood swamp, in central South Carolina, has been shown to remove a quantity of pollutants from the watershed equivalent to that which would be removed by a five million dollar treatment plant. Although the exact financial contribution to water quality made by the wetlands of Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge has not been quantified, the protected area is similar to that of Congaree at 22,579 acres.
- According to one assessment of natural ecosystems, the dollar value of wetlands worldwide was estimated to be \$14.9 trillion.
- Rivaling the likes of tropical rainforests and coral reefs, wetlands are among the most fertile, productive ecosystems in the world.
- Two thirds of all fish consumed worldwide are dependent on coastal wetlands at some stage in their lifecycle.
- Annual fish and seafood production in swamps and marshes worldwide has been estimated at an average of nine tons per square kilometer.
- As many as one half of all North American bird species nest or feed in wetlands.
- Five to seven million migratory waterfowl depend on wetlands as resting and feeding areas. 50,000 depend on the ACE Basin annually.
- Although wetlands cover only about 5 percent of the land surface in the lower 48 states, they are home to 31 percent of plant species.
- An easy way to support wetland conservation is through buying federal duck stamps. Fees from these migratory bird hunting stamps support wetland protection and restoration. You don't have to be a hunter to buy one. Stamps cost \$25 and are available at Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge (or online through US Fish and Wildlife Service).

Shaping Attitudes and Providing Opportunity

Nothing illustrates our society's changing relationship with nature, and the potential consequences, better than the changing relationship between our children and nature. Without a next generation that has a real connection to nature there is little hope of a next generation that will be good stewards of our irreplaceable natural resources. We know this is something you believe as strongly as we do. It also means a generation missing out on the simple joy of exploring wild places and missing out on the respite from the stresses of everyday life these places can bring. Many of us grew up exploring nature as a routine part of our childhood and still carry with us those precious memories; memories that shaped our attitudes about the natural world and bring us together today as conservation minded adults.



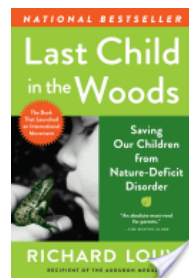
Besides the lure of electronic devices what is the reason for so little time outside? In a 2011 survey of American youth done by The Nature Conservancy, the top obstacles to overcome in getting kids to spend more time in nature are a lack of access, a lack of interest, and feelings of discomfort (heat, bugs). Safety issues related to crime were also on the list. Our experiences with kids along the South Carolina coast definitely confirms lack of interest as a reason for not spending time outside but we would also add fear brought about by a lack of understanding of nature to the list.

This same study showed that kids who have had just one positive personal experience in nature were "almost twice as likely (as kids who had not had that experience) to say they prefer spending time outdoors and more than twice as likely to strongly agree that protecting the environment is cool". In addition, of the kids who did have a nature experience the top four words used to describe their feelings while in nature

were peaceful, free, calm and happy.

Many of us had an experience that shaped our attitude later in life. For executive director Grace Gasper it was moving to Northern California in her late twenties. Author and board member Bob Raynor shared the following memories: *"I grew up in a New Jersey town about seven miles from the ocean. I spent many an afternoon playing in the woods a block from my house. In my mind it was a huge forested world. In the other direction, I could get on my bike and ride a couple of miles to the Navesink River. I had no idea of the impact these experiences would have on my life. These formative years spent in the outdoors elevated the later discovery of the mountains and Outer Banks of North Carolina as a revelation. My parents were responsible for encouraging my outdoor play, and getting me out on the river - I am grateful for their efforts".* Regardless of when it occurred we each had an opportunity to make a lifelong connection.

It is no secret that today's generation is growing up in a very different atmosphere. Studies show, on average, today's kids spend half as much time outside as compared to kids of just 20 years ago, and that they spend over 53 hours a week using electronic devices for entertainment. In fact, one study indicated that in a typical week only six percent of children ages 9-13 play outside on their own. Those are staggering statistics aren't they? Lack of connection to the natural world goes beyond shaping our kids' conservation ethic, or lack thereof. Much research has shown that time in "wild places" shapes cognitive and emotional development. Richard Louv's "Last Child in the Woods" has been out for some time but this book is still a great discussion of the impacts of nature on children's development.



Overcoming the obstacles: each year the programs our donors so generously support give thousands of kids the opportunity to explore wild places. For many of our kids in rural areas, who have great access to natural places in their own back yards, it's simply overcoming fear of the unknown and sparking interest. Once we get our kids outside however, the experience is equal parts science education and just plain discovery. We never forget through all the science learning that just allowing kids to find that one thing that makes them want to discover and explore more is equally important. The attitudes of parents and teachers play a strong role too. We continue to provide numerous opportunities for teachers to gain skills in working with their students outside (see pages four and five). This year we are also implementing take-home exercises as part of our Earth Stewards program to encourage families not only to discuss critical environmental issues but also to encourage simply spending time outside exploring.

Along with a unique science learning experience, our programs provide the only opportunity that many of our kids will have for that one "attitude-shaping" experience that may actually lead to putting down their electronic devices for just a little while.

Your support is making it possible for us to give thousands of kids (and many parents and teachers) each year a chance to have that "attitude-shaping" experience in nature. In addition you help us teach about the importance of the magnificent 370,000 acres of protected lands that are the forest and refuges for which we advocate.

Shaping Attitudes continued...

We believe the discussion about our society's changing attitudes about the natural world is a discussion that is critically important to engage in as a community. Although your support of our programs is crucial, we also need your help in keeping this important discussion going in the community. We hope you will share with us your strategy for getting the kids in your life outside. We would also love to hear your favorite outdoors childhood memories, and your thoughts about "Last Child in the Woods" and the crisis of "inside kids".

Share with us on Facebook at [Facebook.com/sccoastalfriends](https://www.facebook.com/sccoastalfriends) and Twitter @FrndsofCoastlSC

or email us at info@sccoastalfriends.org with "inside kids" in the subject line. Or even mail us a letter!



Intern Cindy Sender with students from Plantersville Elementary School.

Internship Opportunities

We continue to offer a variety of internship and volunteer opportunities throughout the year. Nonprofit organizations would be lost without the contribution of interns and volunteers and we are no exception. Our interns and volunteers make an irreplaceable contribution to our ability to deliver our programs. In turn we do our best to offer a diverse and rewarding experience. Our interns have completed research projects that have made a significant contribution to our programs and earned course credit for their work. For more information on internships please contact Emily Scott at educator@sccoastalfriends.org

Below, our 2015 Summer intern, Cindy Sender shares her thoughts about her experience with us. We thank Cindy for her hard work and significant contribution.

"Having grown up around animals and working at a horse farm most of my life, I've always had a passion for wildlife and the environment. After graduating from Cleveland State University in May with a degree in Biology, I started to research internships in wildlife conservation. When I learned about Friends of Coastal South Carolina I knew it was an opportunity I couldn't pass up! Throughout the summer I taught a variety of environmental education courses and even had the chance to work at the sea turtle nesting sites at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. My summer has been a rewarding experience and I'm thankful to have had the opportunity. Not only have I learned so much during my summer here, but I've also experienced joy in being a part of an organization helping to make a difference."

Opportunities for Teachers to Learn About

Teachers and administrators from Andrews Elementary (below) joined us at Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge in August for a daylong, hands-on workshop. They experienced the unique ecosystems available for their students to explore and participated in many of the lessons we offer for their students. See page five for additional 2015 teacher workshop highlights.



Former Earth Stewards Student Becomes an Environmental Educator



Laura Evan's first experience with Friends of Coastal South Carolina was as a fifth grade Earth Stewards student at Pinckney Elementary School. Laura went on to receive her B.S. in Environmental Studies from Brevard College. She continued to work with us as an intern and volunteer during her college breaks. This year Laura accepted a position as the Education Coordinator at RiverLink, a non-profit in Asheville, North Carolina, through AmeriCorp's Project Conserve. She is teaching water-based environmental education focusing on the French Broad River watershed to elementary and high school students. Although Laura's contribution to our programs will be missed we are delighted she will be continuing to help kids make a lasting connection to the natural world.

A Stellar Year on the Francis Marion National Forest

Getting kids outside depends on getting teachers outside. Providing our teachers with great learning experiences, and relevant tools to use in their classrooms, is as important to us as educating our students. This year we were delighted to be able to offer a two part workshop on coastal watersheds and human impacts to these resources. After an overview of our South Carolina watersheds, and the critical issues impacting our watersheds, we learned about the history of the rice culture from ACE Basin refuge manager Mark Purcell and former Forest Service biologist Mark Danaher. They described the many alterations to coastal watersheds during that period, including the many alterations to hydrology of the Francis Marion National Forest resulting from rice culture and also logging. Then, true to our form, we took our classroom lessons outdoors to the Francis Marion National Forest and explored the Wambaw Creek Wilderness (below) and discovered the beauty of pitcher plants in a Carolina Bay (right) on the forest (one of our most unique wetlands). Our sincere thanks to Nature Adventures Outfitters for outfitting our Wambaw Creek trip.



Teachers from Charleston, Georgetown and Berkeley Counties joined us to explore the Wambaw Creek Wilderness (left) and a Carolina Bay (above) on the Francis Marion National Forest as part of a two day workshop on coastal watersheds.

Battling Invasive Species

As part of their Earth Stewards program, Sullivan's Island Elementary students became citizen scientists. In collaboration with Clemson's Department of Plant Industry, students became junior invasive species investigators, and conducted a survey for invasive insects affecting trees on the Francis Marion National Forest. Students learned that without the pests and predators of their natural environment, invasive animals and plants are able to rapidly invade new areas and out-compete native species for resources. Invasive species are a growing problem in South Carolina and the United States. Invasive species reduce biodiversity and severely threaten the balance of ecosystems. Estimates indicate that 42% of the nation's endangered and threatened species have declined as a result of encroaching invasive species. It is estimated invasive species cost our economy \$138 billion per year.

We are looking forward to incorporating this service project into our Forest Ecology program next year, and plan to expand the lesson to include invasive plants. Along with learning about the impacts of invasive species, students learn about the role people play in introducing invasive species, and what an important contribution citizens can make to conservation efforts.



Forest Service Unveils a Bold Plan for the Future Management of the Francis Marion National Forest

A lengthy process has come to fruition with the release of the draft management plan for the Francis Marion National Forest this fall. As we told you in 2013 the Forest Service has a formidable task managing for a variety of uses, including watershed protection and improvement, habitat for wildlife (including threatened and endangered species), wilderness areas, timber production, education and recreation. It is not an easy task to find a balance between all these uses but the Forest Service has done an exceptional job. Restoring natural hydrology, longleaf pine restoration, increased prescribed burning, and strengthening relationships with surrounding communities are all high priorities in the draft plan.

This is an opportune time for revisiting that great quote from Margaret Mead; *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has"* because the Forest Service plan is now in the hands of citizens for comment. The Forest Service needs your support for many of the ambitious goals they have set for prescribed burns, longleaf restoration and hydrologic restoration. With the forest facing ever-increasing development pressures this is a critical opportunity to voice support for preserving and enhancing this treasured landscape. Although the slides below stop at 2008 they illustrate the staggering rate of urbanization in our region.

With another 9,000 acres approved for development on the Cainhoy Peninsula, pressure on the ecologically critical southwest edge of the forest will not be easing any time soon.



Merrill Irvin

Biodiversity aside, the Forest Service also needs to hear from all of us about how important the forest is as a place for recreation and respite from our increasingly urban environment.

Citizen comments can be made at: <http://bit.do/FMPlanComments>

By mail to: Francis Marion Plan Revision Comments
4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29212

Comment period closes November 11, 2015

See our full 2013 article on the planning process at: <http://www.sccoastalfriends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2013-newsletter-new-final-draft-3.pdf>

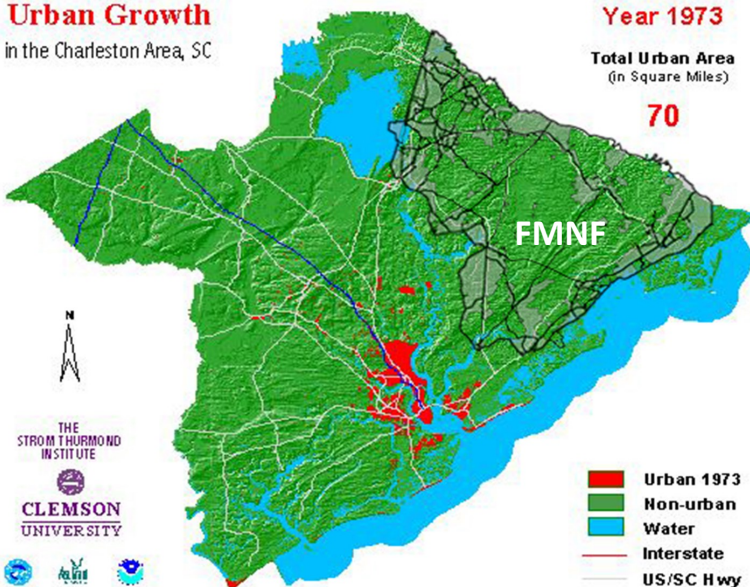
Urban Growth

in the Charleston Area, SC

Year 1973

Total Urban Area
(in Square Miles)

70



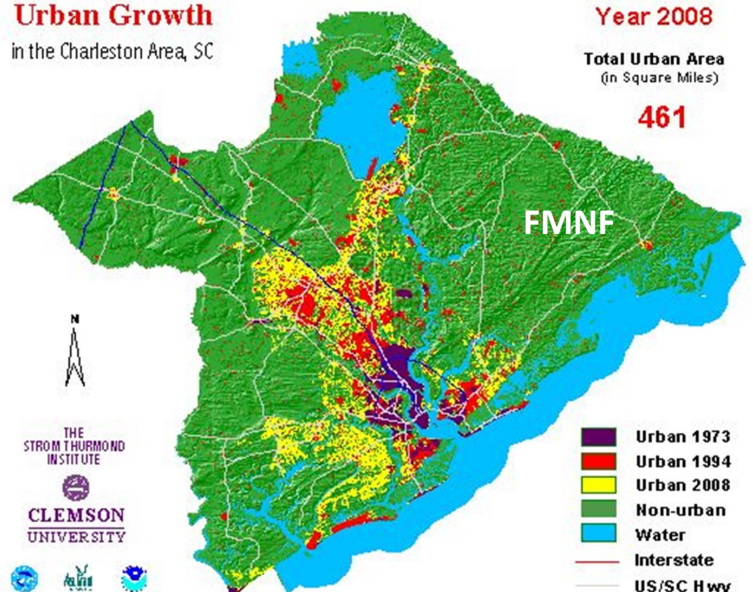
Urban Growth

in the Charleston Area, SC

Year 2008

Total Urban Area
(in Square Miles)

461



The Power of Partnerships



Board member Alys Campaigne with National Wildlife Refuge Association's Desiree Sorenson-Groves, Vice-President of Government Affairs, in Washington, DC. We have partnered with the National Wildlife Refuge Association to advocate for our refuges on many important issues, including funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.



In August Executive Director Grace Gasper and Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge Manager Craig Sasser traveled to the US Fish and Wildlife Service's National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia to present to a joint session of the Friends Academy and Advanced Refuge Managers Training Program on successful Refuge/Friends partnerships and their journey as an organization and a refuge.

"Having the opportunity to come together with other Friends groups and Service staff, in such an inspiring setting, to share ideas and experiences is truly one of the greatest benefits of our partnership" said Executive Director Grace Gasper.

(Left to right) Grace Gasper; Craig Sasser; Sallie Gentry USFWS Visitor Services Specialist, Regional Friends, Volunteer, and CMS Coordinator; Joanna Webb, USFWS National Friends and Partnership Coordinator.



Board members Alys Campaigne and George Geer accepted a \$10,000 gift from the Employees Community Fund of Boeing South Carolina in support of our environmental education programs in September. The gift was presented by Kasie Dugan, Vice President, Boeing South Carolina Employees Community Fund (right).



Georgetown County partners joined us for "Careers" at Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge. The annual event introduces Earth Stewards students to career paths in natural resources. Presenters included Winyah Bay NERR, The Center for Heirs Property Preservation's Sustainable Forestry Program (Sam Cook above left), Clemson's Baruch Institute (Stephen Hutchinson above right), Ripley's Aquarium, and Georgetown Natural Resources Conservation Service. Students learned about the hands on work the presenters do and the education required for their positions. It was an inspiring day!



Patrick McMillan (above with wife Kris), naturalist and host of the Emmy winning PBS series Expeditions, joined us once again for a spectacular beach drop tour of Bulls Island. The event raised over \$6,000 for sea turtle conservation work on Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. 2015 was a record turtle nesting year with over 2000 nests laid on the refuge. We are grateful to Patrick for giving so generously of his time and energy, to **Coastal Expeditions** for their generous support of this trip, and to all those who attended. Keep an eye on our website for 2016 tour dates.

Thank You to Our Donors

Without You, Our Work is Not Possible

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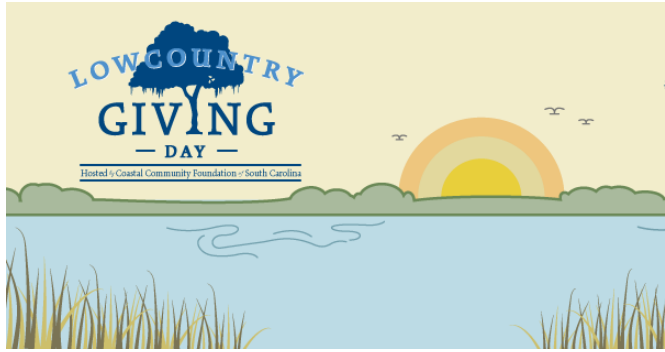
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Simply go to smile.amazon.com and on your first visit select Friends of Coastal South Carolina as your charitable organization. Then let your friends and family know about this great way to support us.



Our appreciation to Indigo Creek for their generous support of the red wolf captive breeding program at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge.



On May 5th you helped us raise a total of \$26,679.00

Thank you!

Our sincere thanks to the Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation for inviting us to participate in our first Lowcountry Giving Day and for their very generous \$10,000 matching gift.

\$10,000

Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation

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Music and Oysters for Wildlife

Our 2015 silent auction contributors helped us raise over \$11,000!
Thank you to all who donated.

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