



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet South Carolina 2025



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2024 Final
Community Forests and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$586,485
Forest Legacy	\$0
Forest Stewardship	\$473,271
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$15,000
State Fire Assistance	\$1,515,191
Urban and Community Forestry	\$569,492
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$264,540
Total	\$3,423,979

NOTE: This funding is for all entities within the state, not just the State Forester's office.

Program Goals

- The cooperative programs are administered and implemented through a partnership among the State of South Carolina, the USDA Forest Service and many other private and government entities. These programs protect and promote the health and productivity of forestlands and rural economies, giving particular emphasis to timber and other forest products, wildlife, water resources, rural economies, and conservation practices.
- The overarching goal is to maintain and improve the health of urban and rural forests and related economies as well as to protect the forests and citizens of the state. These programs maximize cost effectiveness through the use of partnerships in program delivery, increase timber volume, increase forestland value, and improve sustainability, and they do so in a voluntary and non-regulatory manner. The programs are a significant aid to retaining working forests.

Key Issues

- The State continues to focus on two key initiatives: protecting South Carolina forest resources and further developing the awareness of the contributions these resources make to the economy and quality of life for SC citizens.
- Other key issues include invasive species, natural resource sustainability, population growth and urbanization, changing landowner goals, endangered and threatened species, physical/social/mental health benefits, urban canopy cover, forest parcelization/fragmentation, and scenic resources/outdoor recreation.
- In 2013, a major initiative was launched to increase the safety of frontline wildland firefighters in the agency. The agency has made significant progress in replacing open cab tractors with environmental cab tractors that provide additional protection from exposure to heat, smoke, and hazardous conditions. Ninety-three percent of firefighting tractors have been replaced and funding has been identified to ensure that all frontline firefighters have environmental cab tractors by 2026.
- In 2023, the South Carolina Forest Recovery Task Force was formed under the South Carolina Forestry Commission and Forestry Association of South Carolina's leadership. The goal of the Task Force is to address recent paper mill closures by strengthening existing industry and developing new markets for forest products. The Task Force holds focused monthly meetings with key stakeholders, and an action plan will be forthcoming in 2025.
- Hurricane Helene dealt a heavy blow to the forestland of South Carolina in late September 2024. Timber damage was estimated at \$83 million with an additional \$51 million impact to forest industry and \$60 million in urban tree losses for a total damage estimate of \$194 million. In areas with significant damage, the increased fuel loads, access issues, and forest health impacts will be a factor

in wildfire suppression, prescribed burning, and forest health for several years.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2024 Accomplishments	Value
Population	5,118,425	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	2,114
Acres of Forest Land	12,849,178	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	24,833
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	8,560,409	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	14,719
Number of NIPF Landowners	83,939	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	300
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	926,000	State Fire Communities Assisted	260
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	12,730,912	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	5,200
Number of Rural Fire Departments	475	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	271	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	95
Forest Based Employment	48,255	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	3,401,481
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	5,214
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	47,470,190		

Program Highlights

Cooperative Fire Protection

State Fire Assistance (SFA) provides funding to support wildland firefighting operations throughout the state. Preparedness funds are used to supply Personal Protective Equipment, water handling equipment and supplies, training (wildland and leadership), air operations support, and upgraded communications equipment. The SC Forestry Commission's (SCFC) Computer Aided Dispatch System is also maintained with these funds.

SFA mitigation and cross-boundary funds in the amount of \$243,994 were used by the SCFC to provide assistance to 209 communities at risk (CARs) in the wildland-urban interface. As part of these accomplishments, grant funds were utilized to fund the following fuel mitigation projects: 20 prescribed burns for a total of 1598 acres, 6 firebreak installations, 5 mechanical treatments for a total of 129 acres, and 1 chemical treatment for 81 acres. There were 30 additional sub-grants awarded to Firewise USA communities to assist them with wildfire mitigation efforts. In addition to these efforts, the WUI Team worked with 12 new communities that are in different stages of becoming recognized as Firewise USA communities, created 17 CWPPs, attended 32 community events, and conducted 86 wildfire community risk assessments.

The Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) program helps rural fire departments support their fire prevention and suppression efforts by building capacity to respond, especially in the wildland urban interface. VFA funds in the amount of \$299,319 were allocated to 78 fire departments. There are 796 Communities at Risk that VFA grants have helped protect.

The Federal Excess Personal Property Program (FEPP) and Firefighter Property Program (FFP) are other ways the SCFC works with rural fire departments to increase their firefighting capacity by providing equipment and vehicles from the USDA Forest Service. There are 488 pieces of equipment on loan to approximately 60 departments throughout the state, valued at \$16.1 million.

Economic Action

The impact of forest industry on South Carolina's economy has grown from \$17.4 billion in 2006 to \$23.2 billion in 2020. There are 81 primary and 913 secondary forest product mills in the state that support a total of 100,133 jobs. While most forest industry sectors remained strong, the closure of 2 pulp mills in June 2023 resulted in the loss of over 3 million tons of market for small diameter trees. By Fall 2024, a

total of 10 mills had announced closures or cutbacks in production, resulting in a projected loss of 8.2 million tons of wood markets. The SC Forest Recovery Task Force was formed to develop a plan to develop new markets to utilize the available pulpwood supply.

The Forestry Commission administers a marketing program in support of our forest industry by offering market research, education and promotion. In 2023, international sales of SC forest products amounted to \$986 million with pulp and paper accounting for \$810 million. China, Canada, and Mexico top a list of 110 countries that import SC forest products. South Carolina has an abundant forest resource with more standing wood inventory than ever recorded. The wood supply is balanced between hardwood and softwood forests as well as between natural pine and planted pine stands. However, SC's forests are maturing with projections of large-diameter pine inventory continuing to increase creating an opportunity for economic growth.

The SCFC owns a forest tree seedling nursery and a tree improvement facility in support of forest landowners and tree planting. The Tree Improvement Program, headquartered at Niederhof Forestry Center, includes 1.5 generation longleaf pine and 3rd generation loblolly pine seed orchards. Fourth cycle loblolly orchards are being established. ArborGen operated Taylor Nursery as part of a 10-year contract until Spring 2024. Under a modified contract, ArborGen will continue to provide seedlings to South Carolina landowners at preferred pricing up to a 3 million seedling cap.

Forest Health Protection

Southern pine beetle (SPB) trapping was conducted in 32 counties. Results indicated potential for outbreaks in Berkeley, Charleston, McCormick, Edgefield, Oconee, and Pickens Counties. Only Pickens and Oconee saw increased pine beetle activity during the growing season of 2024. During FY24, 282 acres of forests susceptible to SPB were thinned pre-commercially and 1,417 acres of pines were planted at reduced densities to decrease susceptibility to SPB under the Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program.

Oak wilt continues to be a problem in water oaks in Aiken, Barnwell and Lexington Counties. Conversations with landowners strongly suggest that the outbreak of oak wilt started after the 2014 ice storm as broken limbs allowed insect vectors carrying the fungal pathogen into the vascular tissue of the tree. This appears to have been exacerbated by wind events in the Barnwell area in the spring of 2021.

There are seven active cogongrass infestations (down from 10 in FY23) in five counties (Anderson, Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, and Hampton) that are in the process of treatment and eradication.

Emerald ash borer continues to be found in the Upstate (Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg, Oconee, Cherokee, York, Chester, Lancaster, and Laurens Counties) and we have advised several landowners, including the city of Greenville and the Conestee Nature Preserve, on best practices to mitigate infestation by emerald ash borer.

Asian longhorned beetle continues to infest Charleston County, but eradication efforts are underway and the prognosis for eradication is good. Asian longhorned beetle has been successfully eradicated from Illinois, New Jersey, Canada, and large parts of New York, Ohio and Massachusetts. However, we can expect the eradication process to be of long duration, involving at least a decade of monitoring.

Forest Legacy

South Carolina was one of the first states to participate in the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) and has an impressive record for funding and acres protected. The FLP is unique in South Carolina in that it resides within the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), specifically in the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division. A Certified Wildlife Biologist is the coordinator of the program. The South Carolina Forestry Commission is a partner in this program.

To date, the South Carolina Forest Legacy Program has completed 17 fee-simple acquisition tracts (13 projects; 70,910 acres) and 2 conservation easements (2 projects; 12,080 acres). In total, 82,990 acres of working forest land and valuable wildlife habitat have been protected across the state. Currently 6 more tracts (from 4 projects) have been approved for funding, but have not yet closed. Once completed, an additional 3,409 acres will be protected fee-simple. and 61,340 acres from a single new conservation easement will be added to the total protected lands.

During the last round of IRA funding, South Carolina made Forest Legacy Program and state conservation history. Both projects submitted for funding were approved with the Pee Dee Basin RMS Initiative Project being the largest land conservation project a state agency in South Carolina has ever undertaken. At \$50 million, it is also the largest Forest Legacy Program request ever submitted and awarded. SC has 15% of its land base in conservation. This single (RMS) project moves the needle two whole percentage points to 17%! By comparison, the national average is 13%, so SC is doing its part to achieve the state and national "30 by 30 Initiative".

Forest Stewardship

A goal of the SC Forestry Commission is to conserve and manage working forest landscapes in our state to achieve multiple objectives. The SCFC continues to emphasize Forest Stewardship Plan development and landowner recognition programs, focusing efforts on priority areas identified in the SC Forest Action Plan. Private forestry consultants have historically played a very active role in producing Stewardship plans for private landowners across the state, but decreased federal funding for the program, beginning in FY14, eliminated our ability to partner with the private sector for consultant-written plans. Thus, the number of new and revised plans completed by consulting foresters decreased significantly. However, recent additional state funding for Forest Stewardship employee salaries has begun to reverse this trend by freeing up funds for consultant-written plans. The SCFC began providing these funds again in FY21 after the development of the SC Forest Stewardship Priority Parcel Viewer, which provides quick assessments of priority parcels that are eligible for consultant-written plan funds. At 109 plans for 25,669 acres, FY24 saw the largest number of plans written since FY14. With 54 plans for 16,958 acres, consultants are largely responsible for this increase with approximately half the plans and two thirds of the acreage.

Currently 148,596 acres are enrolled in the Forest Stewardship Program in SC with 70,358 of these acres in Federal Investment Areas. The 5-year trend for implementation monitoring indicates that approximately 85% of South Carolina's current Forest Stewardship Plans are being implemented. SCFC included additional evaluation of specific management outcomes that have resulted from the implementation of Forest Stewardship plans. Results indicate that Forest Stewardship plans are having a positive impact on these practices, resulting in more retention of working forests and increased timber production which generates more forestry jobs.

Landowner Assistance

The South Carolina Forestry Commission assisted 1,756 forest landowners during FY24 and agency foresters served as subject matter experts at 15 forestry workshops that were attended by 547 landowners.

Landscape Scale Restoration

Funds from the Landscape Scale Restoration grant titled "Increasing Prescribed Fire Capacity Through Education and Experiential Learning" were used to support Learn to Burn workshops and to provide tools for new prescribed burn associations.

NRCS Cooperative Agreement

The South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) entered into a Cooperative Agreement with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) effective October 1, 2023. During federal fiscal year 2023-2024, agency foresters wrote 153 practice plans covering 11,327 acres for landowners participating in NRCS programs. SCFC personnel also performed 38 practice certifications on 2,546 acres, ensuring that this work met NRCS standards.

Urban and Community Forestry

SCFC continues to partner with Trees SC to deliver SC Arborist Workshops (SCAW) and an Annual Conference. The purpose of SCAW is to bring expert speakers to share information about insect and disease diagnosis and management, tree care techniques, and climbing techniques. The Trees SC Annual Conference serves to provide quality and timely arboricultural information to SC arborists, urban foresters, planners, tree company service providers, and municipal and county staff responsible for tree management.

SCFC and the Green Infrastructure Center collaborated with government partners to create a strategic green infrastructure network and plan for SC. The resulting GI Strategic Plan provides new tools and planning strategies for use by state agencies and regional and local governments. The model is available at <https://www.scfc.gov/management/urban-forestry/sc-green-infrastructure-plan-2023/>.

The Forestry Commission partnered with GIC to provide technical assistance to over 40 communities during the past several years. The technical support program offers urban canopy mapping, modeling the benefits that trees provide, setting goals to expand urban canopy, tree codes audit, and budgeting tools. Also, the SCFC UCF program has provided direct assistance to SC municipalities and counties for urban forest management planning documents such as: urban forest management plans, tree inventories, tree risk assessments, and tree planting plans.

SCFC has awarded funds to the Charleston Parks Conservancy (CPC) to establish the program's first food forest which will improve food access and affordability in areas that historically struggled with food insecurity.

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