



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet South Carolina 2024



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2023 Estimate
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$585,218
Forest Legacy	\$4,055,000
Forest Stewardship	\$156,730
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$151,811
State Fire Assistance	\$1,735,552
Urban and Community Forestry	\$643,277
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$253,052
Total	\$7,580,640

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-two 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 held focused monthly meetings with key stakeholders, and an action plan will be forthcoming in 2024.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2023 Accomplishments	Value
Population	5,118,425	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	0
Acres of Forest Land	12,849,178	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	17,034
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	8,560,409	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	8,458
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	295
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	12,730,912	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	5,100
Number of Rural Fire Departments	475	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	3,508
Cities and Towns	271	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	85
Forest Based Employment	48,255	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	3,544,604
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	3,180
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	45,695,228		

Program Highlights

BIL Funds Update

Community Wildfire Defense Grant funds were used to support travel for SC Forestry Commission Mitigation Coordinators to promote CWDG funding opportunities to communities, cooperators, and interested groups. State Fire Assistance funds were used to purchase 45 computers for frontline firefighters and software licenses to improve communications and coordination. VFA funds were awarded to 13 rural fire departments in South Carolina, and were used to purchase skid units, wildland PPE, radios, and hand tools to improve response capabilities.

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, consistently recognized as one of the best in the country, is also maintained with these funds.

SFA mitigation funds in the amount of \$112,957 were used by the SCFC to provide assistance to 36 communities in the wildland urban interface. SFA mitigation funds in the amount of \$147,312 were used for fuel mitigation on 55 tracts for a total of 1,410 acres treated while reducing risk to 55 additional communities. Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessments were completed for 58 communities. Approximately 247 Community Wildfire Protection Plans have been developed covering approximately 785 communities. Fire prevention staff attended 15 community events to help spread the wildfire prevention message.

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 \$309,682 were allocated to 81 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 614 pieces of equipment on loan to approximately 287 departments throughout the state, valued at \$21.56 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 83 primary and 988 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. 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 2021, international sales of SC forest products amounted to \$1.12 billion with pulp and paper accounting for \$920 million. China, Canada, and India top a list of 129 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. Taylor Nursery is being operated under the management of ArborGen as part of a 10-year contract that includes the production and sale of forest tree seedlings.

The Environmental Management program also falls within the Resource Development Division. Ongoing training programs, relationship development, and assistance programs have routinely resulted in 95+% compliance rates with state-approved Best Management Practices.

Forest Health Protection

Southern pine beetle trapping was conducted in 32 counties; results indicated potential for outbreaks in Berkeley, Charleston, McCormick, and Edgefield Counties. All of these counties saw increased pine beetle activity during the growing season of 2023.

During FY23, one hundred eleven acres of forest susceptible to SPB were thinned pre-commercially and 1,560 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 ten active cogongrass infestations in five counties (Anderson, Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, and Hampton) that are in the process of treatment and eradication.

Emerald ash borer (EAB) continues to be found in nine upstate counties (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 EAB infestations.

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. To date, the South Carolina Forest Legacy Program has completed 17 fee-simple acquisition projects (68,250 acres) and two conservation easements (12,080 acres). In total, over 80,000 acres of working forest land and

valuable wildlife habitat have been protected across the state. SCDNR's FY22 submission, the "Southern Coastal Biodiversity Initiative: Slater Tract" (3,827 acres in Jasper County) was funded and closed in 2023.

SCDNR's FY23 submission, the "Southern Coastal Biodiversity Initiative: Bigbee, Glover, and Duck Ponds Tracts" (1,842 acres in Jasper County), adds to the Slater Wildlife Management Area/Heritage Preserve footprint and was selected for funding. Unfortunately, the Bigbee Tract could not be obtained, but an adjacent tract known as the "Solar Option Piece" was allowed by the US Forest Service to be substituted. The total acreage of the FY23 project thus became 1,604. This project is going through the standard permissions processes by the State toward an 2024 closing date. Partners in this project include the Open Space Institute and The Nature Conservancy.

SCDNR did not submit a project for FY24 consideration in September 2023, since older projects are being completed first and no viable new projects met the readiness criteria. However, an IRA Small Grants project titled "Foothills Scenic Corridor: Cedar Mountain Tract," was submitted in December 2023 and will be ranked in February 2024. It is located in Greenville County, consists of 435 acres, and harbors rare plants due to a diversity of habitat types.

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 state's 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 over the last few years 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 has 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. Increased rates for consultant written plans have improved accomplishments, with consultants writing 23 plans for 7,294 acres during FY23.

Currently 181,506 acres are enrolled in the Forest Stewardship Program in SC with 72,822 of these acres being in Federal Investment Areas. Implementation monitoring indicates that approximately 87% of South Carolina's current Forest Stewardship Plans are being implemented. In addition to adhering to the standard implementation monitoring protocol for FY23, 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 1,626 forest landowners during FY23 and provided education through forestry workshops that were attended by 116 landowners.

Outreach to Disadvantaged Landowners

The South Carolina Forestry Commission participated in four workshops during FY23 designed to inform disadvantaged farmers and landowners of the services available to assist them in land and forest management. These workshops, facilitated by the South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development, reached 65 landowners, 24 of whom became eligible for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In addition, the agency supports efforts by the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation (CHPP) to provide assistance to disadvantaged landowners, serving as speakers at 2 workshops during FY23 and delivering technical assistance as needed. The SC Forestry Commission also hosted a field tour at Manchester State Forest on May 13, 2023 which was attended by approximately 20 landowners who were participating in CHPP programs.

Urban and Community Forestry

SCFC continues to partner with Plan Green to deliver a webinar series for planning commissioners on issues where trees and forests can help address common objectives such as energy conservation, green

infrastructure implementation, storm planning and mitigation, economic development, and air quality and stormwater management through a series of informational webinars.

SCFC and the Green Infrastructure Center (GIC) 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/>.

An urban and community forestry economic study funded by an LaSR grant showed that SC urban and community forests directly contributed \$908 million in industry output and \$478 million in value-added by supporting about 10,249 jobs.

The Forestry Commission partnered with GIC to evaluate urban forest management plans through a survey application and produced a report describing the state of management plans along with recommendations for improvement. GIC has developed best practices guidance for updating and creating effective plans to better manage the urban forest in cities and towns - https://www.scfc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/AGuidetoUrbanForestPlans_web-spreads.pdf.

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

The Forestry Commission is partnering with GIC to deliver Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding to disadvantaged communities as defined by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool to help map canopy, set goals, create planting plans, adopt new codes, educate the community, and plant and care for trees.

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