



## WHAT IS THE RURAL AND CRITICAL LANDS PROGRAM?

The Rural and Critical Lands program began in 1999 and levies your property taxes to protect land. **This bond referendum would cost the average homeowner \$12/year.**

Land conservation is a complementary tool for planning and zoning decisions. Protecting land encourages rural land uses like farming and supports open space along rivers and marshes. Land conservation in strategic areas also reduces future traffic challenges by reducing development potential. This is especially helpful outside of our urban areas where land protection can pre-empt traffic disasters along Highway 170 or 17.

## WHAT IS A CONSERVATION EASEMENT?

Easements involve working with a willing landowner, who retains ownership of the land but is compensated for reducing or eliminating the development rights on the property. **The Beaufort County Open Land Trust holds many easements.** Conservation easements are often cheaper than buying the land and keep the land on the county tax rolls. We believe the **program should continue to prioritize easements over outright acquisition in the rural areas.**

## LAND CONSERVATION ACROSS SC: BEAUFORT IS A LEADER

Since 1985, more than 1.2 million acres have been protected on the South Carolina coast. The healthy coastal greenbelt contains and enhances our growing community and provides recreational opportunities, clean water and an unparalleled quality of life.

## VOTE YES ON NOVEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup> TO SUPPORT \$25M FOR LAND CONSERVATION

Since 1999, Beaufort County voters have supported the Rural and Critical Lands Program to protect land. Today, over 24,000 acres are protected. Benefits of protected land to Beaufort County taxpayers include:

- **Increased property values.** Parks, trails and open spaces raise home values. Beaufort County collects more than \$1 million in additional annual property tax revenue due to the proximity of conserved land.
- **Cost savings.** Protected lands provide natural absorption of storm and rainwater, saving Beaufort County taxpayers **\$27.4 million annually in stormwater fees.**
- **More revenue from tourism.** Nearly 10 percent of all Beaufort County visitors travel here to visit our parks and open spaces—and they spend their money here, more than \$115 million each year, representing \$3.46 million in local tax revenue.
- **Healthier people.** We all enjoy health and recreation benefits from being outdoors. Our ability to be outside, walk, run and enjoy the outdoors saves county residents an estimated **\$7.91 million medical cost savings.**
- **More farms and better food.** One hundred thirty-seven farms in Beaufort County generate \$28.3 million in agriculture product value. These farms, either protected themselves or supported by a rural landscape of protected properties, provide fresh food for our community and South Carolina.
- **Jobs, jobs, jobs.** Land conservation supports the local economy and provides jobs. Our local military bases are buffered by acres of protected land, **supporting safe and long-term operations and 14,900 defense jobs.**

## WHY PROTECT LAND?

Our region is defined by the Port Royal Sound Watershed, saltwater rivers, healthy fisheries, rural farmland and thriving small towns.

- Over 50% of Beaufort County is salt marsh
- Our state's fisheries and ocean-based tourism and recreation support nearly 79,000 jobs and generate over \$4.4 billion in GDP each year in South Carolina.

Our region is also defined by fast-paced growth and development, popular beaches and tourist attractions.

- In 2015, 2.6million visitors came to Beaufort County, and tourism generates \$1.3 billion in economic impact.
- Beaufort County is the 7th fastest growing county in SC, with a population growth of 4.6% between 2014 and 2016.
- Over the past decade, Beaufort County has grown by 24.3 percent.
- The Beaufort-Bluffton-Hilton Head metro area was the 12th fastest growing community in the nation in 2015.
- Hardeeville was the 2nd fastest growing city in 2015.

To maintain balance between our natural resources, economic growth and quality of life, we must continue to invest in land protection throughout the region. **VOTE YES!**

