

Sustain SC Launches Land and Water Action Fund
Waites Island focus of first conservation project

Columbia, SC (October 27, 2022) – Sustain SC is thrilled to announce the launch of its Land and Water Action Fund, a new conservation fund dedicated to protecting South Carolina's precious natural resources. Google contributes the first donation to the fund with a \$500,000 grant, which will go toward permanently protecting a portion of Waites Island from development. Waites Island is one of the last remaining undeveloped and unprotected barrier islands in the Southeast.

“We’re excited to contribute to the conservation efforts of Waites Island. It’s a unique, fragile environment and an important wildlife refuge,” said Ethel Bunch, Sustain SC’s Founder and CEO. “We are beyond grateful for the support launching this fund and hope it’s just the beginning of something that will truly make a difference for future generations.”

Open Space Institute (OSI), one of South Carolina’s leading land conservation organizations, is the first recipient of the fund’s monetary gift. Earlier this year, OSI purchased 260 acres of the island which is just north of North Myrtle Beach. OSI is holding the property until it can be transferred to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) to be managed as a Heritage Preserve - the highest level of protection provided for property in South Carolina.

“The Sustain SC Fund is a long-awaited and ground-breaking initiative, and Waites is a remarkable first project,” said Nate Berry, Senior Vice President of Open Space Institute. “We are honored to partner with Sustain SC and grateful for the generous contribution that will help OSI protect this stunning South Carolina barrier island in perpetuity.”

“This is a momentous announcement and Google is proud to be a part of it,” said Amber Tillman, Google’s Head of Data Center Economic and Community Development. “We fully support Sustain SC’s mission with this fund and hope Google’s grant encourages others to take part in impactful conservation efforts for South Carolina.”

Google’s commitment has already inspired others. The Waccamaw Community Foundation matched Google’s gift with a \$500,000 contribution.

“As soon as we learned about this funding initiative and Google’s support behind it, our fund holders were immediately inspired to act,” said Mike Mancuso, Executive Director and Principal of Waccamaw Community Foundation. “It’s a testament to Sustain SC’s ability to bring people together from all sectors and support meaningful projects that benefit our state in more ways than one.”

“We have an incredible responsibility to preserve South Carolina’s natural beauty and to foster sustainable growth as people from around the world are discovering all that our state has to offer and moving here,” said Gov. Henry McMaster. “Sustain SC’s Land and Water Action Fund is going to help us do that, and Waites Island is as deserving of a conservation project as we have in the state. I’m grateful for Google’s investment in this project because it will inspire further investment and collaboration across our state in the future.”

The Land and Water Action Fund, established by Sustain SC, is the first of its kind in South Carolina and will bring in new private sector dollars toward conservation leveraging county, state and federal dollars to accelerate the protection of South Carolina’s most critical natural resources.

“We are excited to see Sustain SC coordinating industry support for conservation and delighted Waites Island will be the first project to benefit from the Land and Water Action Fund,” said SCDNR Director Robert H. Boyles Jr. “191 bird species have been documented on Waites Island, which is nearly half of all the bird species that occur in our state. Conservation of Waites Island will provide an oasis in a sea of development for migratory birds, sea turtles and shorebirds, as well as the potential for restoration of the federally threatened seabeach amaranth.”

Governor Henry McMaster delivers today’s announcement at the first-ever Sustainability Symposium hosted by Sustain SC. The Symposium is taking place at Central Energy in Columbia and brings together sustainability leaders from companies across the country, as well as state and local leaders.

About Sustain SC:

[Sustain SC](#) is an economic development-driven organization that connects the sustainability goals of business in South Carolina with local solutions for the benefit of our economy, environment, and people.

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