



NATURAL ASSETS AND NATURAL CONSTRAINT TO GROWTH

Southern Beaufort County's natural environment is an integral part of the region's cultural environment and economy. Natural amenities such as coastal waters, salt marshes, beaches, trees and local wildlife are what have made this region unique and immensely popular to outsiders and newcomers. They have essentially driven the economic engine of growth. In the face of rapid growth, a delicate balance must be struck between accommodating new development and preserving the very things that make this region unique.

This chapter identifies and provides an inventory of southern Beaufort County's natural assets. It looks at challenges and threats to the preservation of these assets and how they are being protected at the federal, state, and local level, and what gaps exist in their protection. Finally, it calls for regional approaches to planning management to further protect southern Beaufort County's natural assets in the face of rapid growth.

Identification and Inventory of Natural Assets

The following environmental features are the most regionally significant types of natural assets in southern Beaufort County and are worthy of multi-jurisdictional protection.

- Salt Marshes, Coastal Waters, Marine Resources, and Marsh Islands;
- Open Space;

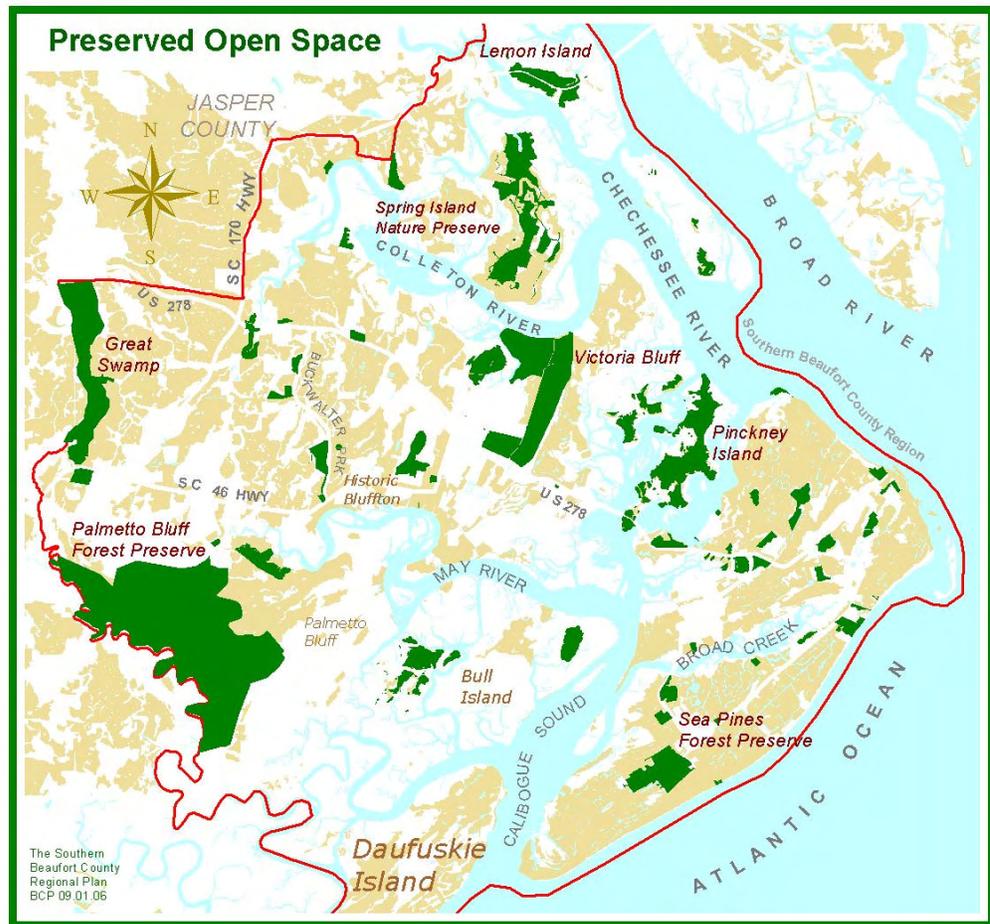
led to the creation of the Clean Water Task Force, which initiated the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) for Beaufort County. The SAMP process led to many local programs, policies and ordinances that address water quality, which are discussed later in this chapter.



Open Space

Preserving open space is important to protect valuable habitat types, limit development in environmentally sensitive areas, provide public access to natural amenities and to relieve congestion in intensely developed areas. There are essentially two general methods used to preserve open space. One is the fee simple purchase of a property by a governmental, non-profit or private entity for the purpose of preservation. The other

Map 1: Preserved Open Space



mechanism is the purchase of development rights or voluntary conservation easements which allow the property owner to continue to own their property but limit future development through restrictive covenants. In southern Beaufort County, currently 14,727 upland acres of land are preserved through these means. This makes up approximately 15% of the total land area. As undeveloped land becomes scarcer, the cost of acquiring land for open space increases. This fact has made the acquisition of open space for the purpose of preservation a top priority in southern Beaufort County.

Beaches and Dunes

Southern Beaufort County's beaches and dunes are an important public resource. They provide the basis of much of the region's successful tourism industry and are a factor in the region's attractiveness as a place in which to relocate. A healthy beach and dune system also provides a natural storm barrier protecting life and property for those living along the coast. Southern Beaufort County has approximately 15½ linear miles of beaches. Barrier islands, such as Hilton Head and Daufuskie, are very dynamic environments continually being modified by waves, currents and winds. Balancing this dynamic natural environment with the fixed environment of man-made structures is the primary challenge in protecting this important public resource.



Trees, Forests and Wildlife

Southern Beaufort County's magnolias, palmettos and sprawling live oaks help define the region's scenic quality and character. In developed areas, trees soften the built landscape, shade buildings and streets and reduce the demand for air conditioning during the region's long hot summers. In undeveloped areas, forest communities provide valuable habitat for local wildlife. The threats to southern Beaufort County's trees and forest communities are related primarily to the rapid pace of development. Approximately 58% of southern Beaufort County's natural forests are anticipated to be impacted when all currently approved development is built out.



Objective 8.2: Coordination of Public and Private Open Space. Participating Local Governments will work cooperatively to ensure that additions to the public and private open space systems are complementary and coordinated to the greatest extent possible.

Implementation Action: Build on the Greenprint process to advance regional open space goals by developing a regional inventory of lands to target for open space preservation.

Description: Inventory would help to:

- Ensure that additions to the open space system are consistent with the open space network already being established;
- Provide a basis for determining when to dedicate open space and when to provide fees in-lieu of open space;
- Plan for corridors that connect open space areas,
- Coordinate public and private open space protection efforts; and
- Facilitate the protection of areas that serve multiple purposes (stormwater management, recreation, etc.).

Responsibility: Natural Assets Working Group

Objective 8.3: Regional Open Space Funding. Participating Local Governments will establish one or more reliable and permanent sources of new funding for regional open space preservation to support existing local government and non-profit programs, such as the Beaufort County Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Program. The Participating Local Governments will lobby the state legislature to extend the ability to levy a real estate transfer fee to the entire southern Beaufort County region (whereas now the fee may be levied only by Hilton Head Island).

Implementation Action: Establish a reliable, permanent source of funding for regional open space preservation.

Description:

- In the short term, the recommended option is to replenish funding for the existing Rural and Critical Lands Program by taking a new proposal for renewed funding for the program to the voters.
- Seek matching funding from state organizations, such as the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, or from similar federal programs and agencies to leverage local funds.
- In the long term, pursue the real estate transfer fee as a dedicated funding source (would require change in State enabling legislation).

Responsibility: Participating Local Governments

Objective 8.4: Regional Open Space Goals. Future regional open space protection will focus on establishing a network of open space areas that fulfill multiple objectives and that cross jurisdictional lines.

See implementation action under Objective 8.2