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*Beaufort County Comprehensive
Plan*
Natural Resources



- Pesticides from agriculture and residential and commercial landscaping;
- Nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, resulting from fertilizer applications on farms, lawns and landscaping; and
- Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and heavy metals derived from car exhaust and tire wear on roads and parking lots.

Changes in Salinity Levels: Large amounts of stormwater runoff into the upper sections of tidal creeks can cause rapid drops in salinity, which kills some species of small marine worms and crustaceans. These small marine animals are important food for shrimp and larval crabs. A decrease in the abundance of these animals could therefore have a negative impact on larger animals farther up the food chain.

EXISTING EFFORTS TO PRESERVE WATER QUALITY

There are two general approaches to protecting salt marshes and coastal waters through the regulatory process. They consist of limiting development in and around salt marshes and coastal waters, and controlling the quantity and quality of upland stormwater runoff.

Limiting development in and around salt marshes and coastal waters: The Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) provides protection to most of southern Beaufort County's salt marshes and coastal waters through its ownership of these areas (fee simple title) on behalf of the state. In those rare cases of King's grant or state grant lands where property owners hold title to salt marshes, development activity is strictly regulated and limited to water dependent structures, such as docks, marinas, and boat ramps. The OCRM sets a demarcation between upland and state controlled marshland or "critical areas" called the critical line.



Preserving land from development around saltmarshes is one method of protecting water quality.

- **Critical Line Buffers:** Beaufort County and its municipalities limit development adjacent to salt marshes and coastal waters by requiring development to be set back and buffered from the critical line. The purpose of this requirement is ultimately to improve water quality by capturing sediments and pollution from stormwater runoff. Requirements for critical line buffers vary between Beaufort County and its municipalities. Providing "baseline" standards for critical line buffers was a common recommendation in both the Northern and Southern Beaufort County Regional Plans.
- **Purchasing Development Rights:** Another effective water quality measure practiced in Beaufort County is limiting development in sensitive headwater areas through voluntary conservation easements (as with properties within the ACE Basin), purchase of development rights, and fee simple land purchases.
- **Limiting Development on Small Coastal Islands:** Beaufort County has hundreds of small islands with no bridge access. Almost all of these islands are surrounded by expanses of salt marsh and



Open Space

Protecting open space is a common thread among Beaufort County's natural resource goals and recommendations. Conservation easements and fee-simple purchases of land to limit or prevent future development is a powerful tool in protecting valuable habitat types, limiting development in environmentally sensitive areas, providing public access to natural amenities, and facilitating regional stormwater management.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Currently 30,572 acres of land in Beaufort County are preserved through conservation easements and government and/or non-profit ownership. This makes up approximately 17% of the total land area. Map 5-10 shows the locations of these preserved lands. 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 Beaufort County.



The Alan Ulmer property, a conservation easement purchased through the Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Program.

LOCAL EFFORTS TO PRESERVE OPEN SPACE

There are essentially three methods used to preserve open space. The first is the fee simple purchase of a property by a governmental, non-profit or private entity for the purpose of preservation. The second method is through a conservation easement or purchase of development rights which allows the property owner to continue to own their property but limits future development through covenants. The third method is requiring by ordinance the set aside of a certain percentage of open space when land is developed. The most effective (and most expensive) way for local governments to control the use of land is to own it. Both Beaufort County and the Town of Hilton Head Island have programs that target purchasing properties to protect natural areas and to take land out of active development.

Beaufort County's Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Program: This program, established by ordinance in 1999, is aimed at preserving open space either by fee simple land purchases or the purchase of conservation easements on private property. Two successful bond referendums (2000 and 2006) have provided the

becomes scarcer and more expensive to acquire, it may become necessary to look more creatively at several different open space acquisition methods to achieve multiple objectives.