

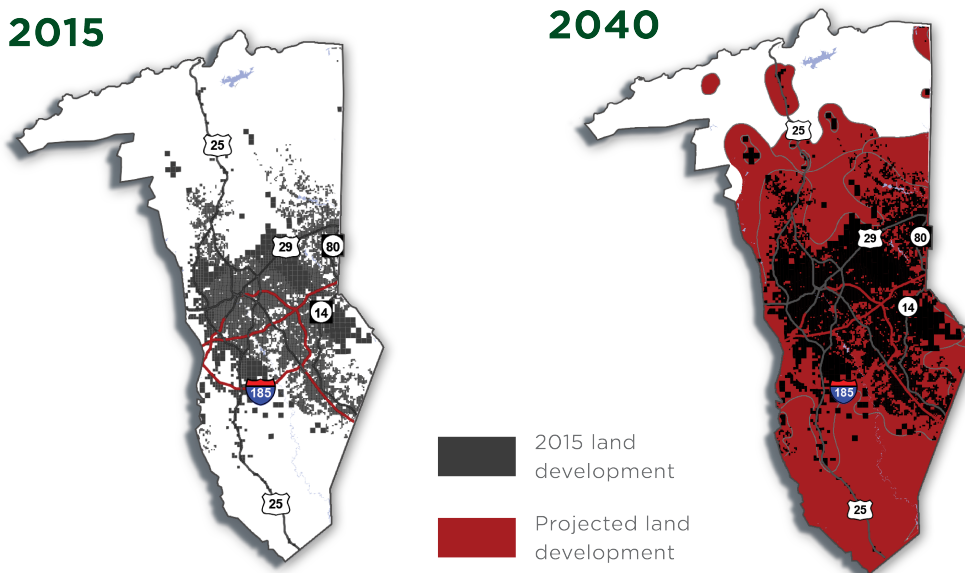
# Greenville County Historic and Natural Resources Trust

## Goal

To pass an ordinance establishing the Greenville County Historic and Natural Resources Trust.

## The Need

Of the more than 300,000 new residents forecast for the Upstate by 2040, more than half will likely make Greenville County their new home. Already, Greenville County's population is nearly that of Mecklenburg County (Charlotte) just 25 years ago. More troubling, however, is the sprawling way we are accommodating that growth, consuming a tremendous amount of land that was once primarily farms, forests and other open space.



**In the next 25 years, we are expected to double the land we have already consumed to date. If we do not take immediate action to protect green space and water quality, we could lose the special character of the Upstate resulting in a diminished quality of life for residents and decrease in the region's ability to attract and retain workforce talent.**

While voluntary conservation easements are an important tool to permanently protect land, securing one can be costly for a property owner. A Conservation Bank or Trust is a way to fund the purchase of conservation easements and fee simple acquisitions when the land is shown to have particular significance.

Other rapidly growing areas of the state have been successful leveraging local dollars to conserve local rural and forested lands and water resources. For instance, Beaufort County's Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Program has acquired approximately 23,000 acres of land for conservation since 1999. Additionally, the Charleston County Greenbelt program, launched in 2006, has preserved over 21,000 acres of high priority lands.

The Greenville County Historic and Natural Resources Trust would offer added incentive for even more Greenville landowners to voluntarily protect their land forever, and would ensure that our local dollars are used to fund conservation initiatives close to home.

# Benefits of a Greenville County Historic and Natural Resources Trust

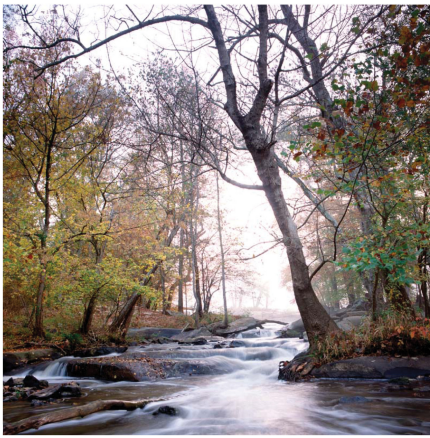


## Reduce Sprawl and Tax Burden

Sprawl ultimately cannot pay for itself because its inefficient footprint requires much more infrastructure than the tax base can support. Permanent land protection incentivizes growth in more suitable areas in the County and lowers the cost-to-serve for local governments.

## Clean Rivers, Drinking Water

Protecting Greenville's watershed lands will boost the health of our rivers and lower cost to treat drinking water. Cleaner water is also beneficial to industries including tourism and recreation.



## Protect Iconic Places

There is the opportunity now to preserve more iconic places, such as the Blue Wall Preserve (including Caesar's Head State Park and Gap Creek), Scenic Highway 11, and Lake Conestee Nature Preserve. We also must add much needed acreage and trail and parking capacity to Jones Gap and Paris Mountain State Parks before it's too late.

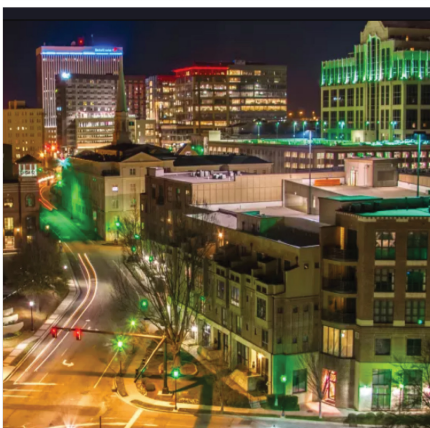
## Preserve Quality of Life

People are attracted to areas where there is an emphasis on green space protection and easy access to trails and nature. Greenville's high quality of life is largely dependent on its special natural character — our abundant green space, outdoor recreation areas, local farms, and mountain views. Without strategic permanent protection, those assets could be lost to sprawling development. With projected rapid population growth, we must also increase residents' areas for and access to recreation as our area parks are already often overburdened.



## Attract Businesses and Jobs

Not only does the Upstate's outdoor character improve our quality of life and boost tourism, it helps attract and retain businesses and talent necessary for a thriving economy. High quality of life means high quality of workforce and better job opportunities.

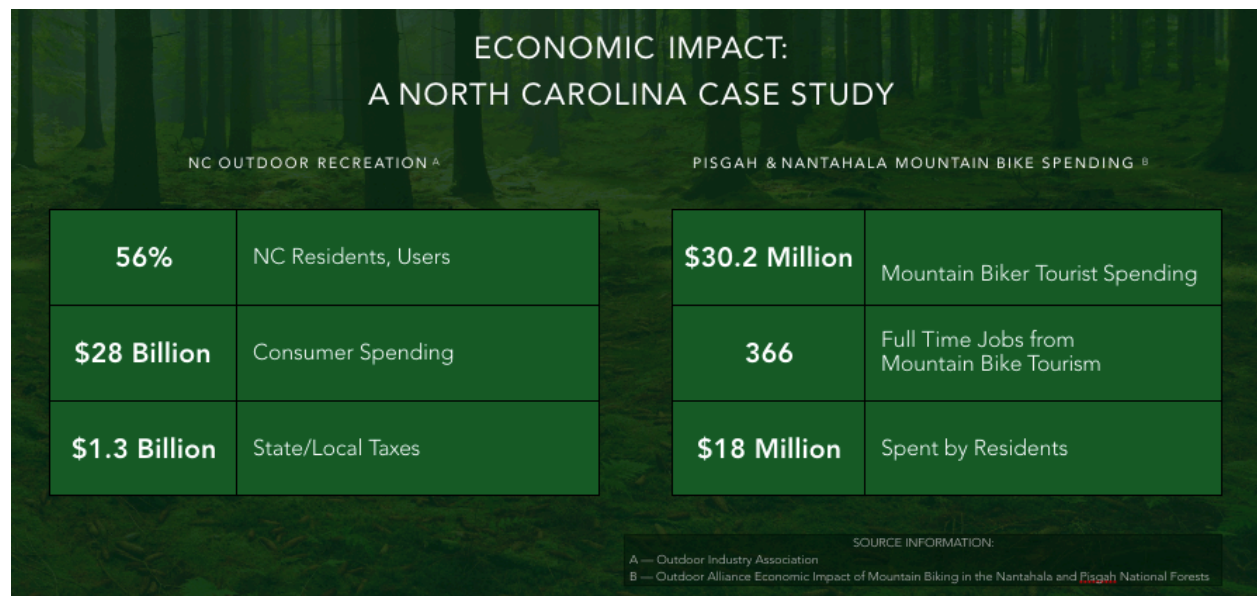


## Keep Conservation Close to Home

The SC State Conservation Bank is a great tool, but limited funds are distributed throughout the state. The Greenville County Historic and Natural Resources Trust would ensure that all funds are spent right here in Greenville County, providing local results from local dollars.

## Economic benefits of protecting land

There is high demand in the area for outdoor recreation — and that demand currently overwhelms supply. Popular parks like Jones Gap and Table Rock often have long lines to enter on weekends. Greenville could **capture substantial tourism and recreation dollars** by protecting land to expand outdoor recreation access (see NC case study below).



Additionally, we spend millions of dollars to artificially clean and treat our drinking water each year, and those costs are rising. Protecting forested watershed land leads to **significant savings in water treatment costs** — a solid investment for Greenville residents.

- The Trust for Public Land found that a 1% increase in forest cover decreases water treatment costs by 2%.
- Conversely, for every 1% we decrease forested lands, we add ½ percent to our treatment costs.
- According to the EPA, every dollar spent on land protection saves \$27 on water treatment.

Finally, farmland protection helps **promote agritourism and boost the local food economy**. If every South Carolina resident purchased \$5 worth of food each week directly from a farmer in the state, the potential impact would be about \$1.2 billion.



## Making Greenville County's goals a reality

Plan Greenville County, the Comprehensive Plan adopted unanimously in 2019, states that “Greenville County’s natural resources are essential to its prosperity, quality of life, and character. (p.136)” The Greenville County Historic and Natural Resources Trust would create a practical funding tool to support numerous goals and objectives laid out in the Plan, including but not limited to calls to:

- Increase opportunities for recreation and active transportation, including expansion of the county multi-use trail network (*Objective A-3: Strategy 4, p.122*)
- Ensure the conservation of abundant natural areas and open spaces as an integral component of workplace development strategies + recognize the importance of these features in attracting new and retaining existing businesses (*Objective B-3, Strategy 8, p. 127*)
- Protect prime farmland and important forestland (*Objectives C-1, p.132; C-2, p.133*)
- Identify and protect critical open space, scenic byways, and important rural vistas (*Objective D-1: Strategy 1, p. 138*)
- Protect and improve water resources and wildlife habitat (*Objective D-2, p. 138*)
- Protect our cultural and historic resources for current and future generations. (*Goal E, p. 143*)
- Expand and connect sidewalks, bikeways, and trails (*Objective F-3: Strategy 2, p. 149*)

## Funding Priorities

**Protect Greenville County’s most iconic natural places, especially those that expand outdoor recreation opportunities for the public.** Potential projects:

- Grow and buffer our region’s state parks, such as Paris Mountain, Caesars Head, and Jones Gap
- Expand the Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail by filling the gap to southern Greenville County (the Golden Strip) and Marietta or Highway 11 and create a trailside parkland site
- Increase the size of Lake Conestee Nature Preserve
- Protect land for additional urban and rural trails
- Protect land that offers increased access to waterways for fishing, paddling & other recreation

**Safeguard and improve water quality by protecting the most critical watershed lands.** Potential projects:

- Protect the Reedy River and its water quality through land protection
- Improve drinking water quality by preserving more riverside land in the Greenville watershed

**Preserve prime farmland to maintain rural character, promote agritourism, and ensure continued ready access to local food.** Potential projects:

- Leverage federal funding to save vanishing farmland in Southern Greenville County
- Retain cultural and natural heritage by permanently protecting historic family farms

## Leveraging public dollars for a bigger impact

Conservation Banks and similar programs can provide an excellent return on investment and are an efficient way to steward taxpayer dollars. In 2019, the South Carolina Conservation Bank protected 24,701 acres through 20 grants. The Bank’s contribution of \$10.5 million was leveraged to attract **more than \$61 million** in additional private, local, and federal funds.

Funding from The Greenville County Historic and Natural Resources Trust could be leveraged with state, federal and private funding sources to create tremendous impact and achieve the goals set forth in the Comprehensive Plan in a cost-effective way. We estimate the Trust could **generate an additional 30% in matching funds** from these sources — an efficient and effective use of taxpayer dollars to protect land and enhance quality of life for residents.