



BIRD IN HAND: Land Conservation in SC

Camilla Cerea

A TALE of TWO PROPERTIES

BEIDLER FOREST:

Audubon South Carolina's 18,000-acre bird and wildlife sanctuary near Harleyville is the world's largest virgin cypress-tupelo swamp forest. Beidler hosts 11,000 visitors per year on guided walks and canoe or kayak trips, including thousands of school children.

Cost of Project: \$2.75 million from the Conservation Bank

Value of Project: Nearly \$35 million based on before-and-after appraisals

Use of Bank Funds: Starting with \$2.75 million from the Conservation Bank, Audubon and its partners protected 9,300 acres of ecologically critical land, including nearly nine miles of river corridor and floodplain. The Conservation Bank paid just *eight cents on the dollar* for a project valued at nearly \$35 million. More than \$18 million was donated by private landowners, who accepted payments for easements that were lower than their actual value. We also raised millions of dollars in federal funds, including a \$1 million NAWCA grant (North America Wetlands Conservation Act). Thanks to the leveraging made possible by the Conservation Bank grants, our application received a top score in the national NAWCA competition.

Purposes Served: This project benefits both wildlife and human communities. In and around Beidler Forest we've helped protect a total of 43,000 acres, including 30 miles of a 34-mile floodplain along the Edisto River. The benefits flow downstream. Protecting this land filters out industrial discharge, agricultural runoff, and other contaminants, keeping the water clean. A clean Edisto River helps keep the ACE Basin biologically vital, and also supplies clean drinking water to homes and businesses in the Charleston area. Meanwhile, the wetlands we're restoring at Beidler absorb excess water during storms, which prevents flooding downstream.

At Beidler Forest, the Bank
paid eight cents on the dollar
for the land protected.



BIRD IN HAND: Land Conservation in SC

Camilla Cerea

Leveraging Typical: The eight percent figure at Beidler Forest is particularly impressive. Still, groups that receive Bank grants often leverage the funds. For example, between 2002 and 2017, the Lowcountry Land Trust used less than \$11 million in Bank grants to purchase more than \$40 million in easements, protecting nearly 38,000 acres of land.

SILVER BLUFF:

Audubon South Carolina's 3,400-acre property overlooking the Savannah River near Aiken was once a plantation owned by South Carolina Governor James Henry Hammond. It's now a demonstration site for sustainable forestry. It's also used by six hunt clubs and 2,000 school children each year, who come to Silver Bluff to learn science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Silver Bluff is open to the public year-round for free.

Cost of Easement: \$820,000 from the Conservation Bank

Value of Easement: \$5.2 million based on appraisals, with \$4.38 million donated by Audubon South Carolina

Use of Bank Funds: At Silver Bluff, \$820,000 in Bank funds will purchase an easement valued at \$5.2 million. In other words, the Bank will pay just *16 cents on the dollar*. Bank funds will be used as an endowment to enhance/expand public use of the site. Silver Bluff was a Native American trading post; a British fort in the Revolutionary War; the original site of one of the oldest African-American churches in America; and more. It also has 20 miles of horse trails, 2.75 miles of walking trails, and more than 200 bird species, including Bald Eagles (threatened in South Carolina) and Wood Storks (threatened throughout the U.S.). Thanks to the Bank grant, we look forward to expanding public access to Silver Bluff and enhancing the visitor experience.

Leverage Opportunity: The Bank's \$820,000 grant, plus Audubon's donation of \$4.38 million of the value of the easement, makes Silver Bluff competitive for a \$1 million federal NAWCA grant. The federal grant could be used to protect additional land nearby. If we get the NAWCA grant and purchase valuable easements on surrounding lands at no cost to ourselves, the Bank will have paid less than 16 cents on the dollar for the total project.

At Silver Bluff, the Bank has paid
16 cents on the dollar so far. That
number may decrease.