



HENRY McMASTER
GOVERNOR

May 1, 2024

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I am writing to express my support for the South Carolina Forestry Commission's (SCFC) application for the Forest Legacy Large Landscape program. The "Pee Dee Basin RMS Initiative" presents a unique and impactful opportunity to permanently conserve over 50,000 acres of working forestland in the tri-county area of Marion, Williamsburg, and Georgetown Counties.

South Carolina is blessed with an incomparable environmental landscape from mountains to coastlines, reflecting a rich cultural and environmental legacy that distinguishes us as a state. We recognize the importance of preserving this heritage and environment. Our approach strongly emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between economic prosperity and environmental stewardship, underlining that they are not mutually exclusive but rather interdependent goals.

We recognize the importance of having a solid ecological portfolio comprising representative terrestrial and aquatic habitats across our state. These investments will continue to provide water quality protection, biodiversity, working forests important to our economy and culture, and recreation and tourism opportunities for our citizens and visitors.

The Pee Dee Basin RMS Initiative will deliver a multitude of benefits. This project will permanently protect more than 50,000 acres of working forestland, ensuring a sustainable timber industry and jobs in the Pee Dee region. It will also improve water quality by safeguarding critical riparian buffers and increase public access, stimulating the rural economies of nearby towns, all of which are considered underserved and many of which fall within the culturally important Gullah-Geechee Heritage Corridor. Furthermore, the initiative will enhance habitat for diverse wildlife populations, contributing to South Carolina's rich biodiversity. The project will increase recreational opportunities for residents and tourists, strengthening our tourism industry.

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The project builds on previous investments by state agencies, such as the Department of Natural Resources, the Forestry Commission, Office of Resilience, and the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, towards creating corridors in priority areas such as river corridors and unique upland habitats. Land trusts and private landowners have also contributed considerably to conservation goals discussed in our State Wildlife Action Plan, Forest Action Plan, and Resilience Plan, as well as countless other guidance documents.

This single, transformative project will achieve a remarkable 2% increase in South Carolina's permanently protected conservation lands. I applaud Resource Management Services' (RMS) decision to significantly expand South Carolina's conservation footprint through their partnership on this project. Funding for the Pee Dee Basin RMS Initiative represents a strategic investment in South Carolina's future. It will ensure a thriving forest economy, safeguard our natural heritage, and enhance quality of life for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions regarding this matter, do not hesitate to call on me.

Yours very truly,



Henry McMaster

HDM/jm

cc: Mr. Scott Stewart, Forest Legacy National Program Manager, U.S. Forest Service