

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO.

2026-24

WHEREAS, South Carolina possesses great natural beauty, from the mountains in the Upstate to the marshes in the Lowcountry, with rivers, fields and forests in between and wildlife abounding as waters turn from fresh to brackish and then to the sea; and

WHEREAS, this natural beauty has long been recognized as part of what makes South Carolina a remarkable place in which to live, work, and raise a family, to wit, as early as 1739, a report to King George II on colonial South Carolina called it “the fairest & most fruitful Province belonging to Great Britain”; and

WHEREAS, “The health, welfare, and safety of the lives and property of the people of this State and the conservation of its natural resources are matters of public concern.” S.C. Const. art. XII, § 1; and

WHEREAS, as used in this Order, the terms “conservation” and “preservation” extend to resources of all kinds, including natural resources such as land, air, water, flora and fauna; historic sites and events; legacies of historical figures; and the cultural heritage of all peoples living and having lived here; and

WHEREAS, proponents of healthy living, including physicians and nature lovers of all kinds, advocate the benefits of working, vacationing and simply relaxing in and among the peaceful treasures of nature, particularly as the pressures of population growth and development increase; and

WHEREAS, South Carolina’s natural and human resources are key to sustaining the State’s economy, health and quality of life through endeavors ranging from manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and tourism to the academic fields of natural history, ecology, the life sciences, law and medicine; and

WHEREAS, a thriving population and economy are necessary for our State’s future prosperity, which cannot be fully achieved and sustained without a clean, healthy natural environment; and

WHEREAS, our growth must be thoughtfully considered so that it enhances—rather than diminishes—the treasured natural and cultural resources and traditions that are central to South Carolina’s identity; and this intentional approach represents an important responsibility of South Carolinians both now and in the future; and

WHEREAS, the haphazard development that often accompanies population growth can be lessened or avoided by placing voluntary conservation easements, or where appropriate, agricultural easements, on fields, forests, farms and other lands in urban and rural areas, and by the creation of parks, trails and historical or cultural sites for learning, preservation or recreation; and

WHEREAS, South Carolina’s marshes, forests and wetlands provide critical natural infrastructure and defense against floods and other natural hazards, thereby increasing the resilience of the State’s communities, economies and ecosystems, including wildlife of all kinds; and

WHEREAS, “[i]t is the policy of this State to recognize the conservation of natural resources as an important state interest and to encourage resource agencies, consistent with their statutory authority and missions, to support conservation through planning, grant program administration, land management, voluntary landowner partnerships, and activities that contribute to the establishment of protected land.” S.C. Code Ann. § 48-61-110; and

WHEREAS, approximately 3.4 million acres are currently preserved in some form, with approximately 400,000 of them having been added since 2017 through increasingly coordinated efforts; and

WHEREAS, the undersigned has called for ten million acres—approximately half of South Carolina’s acreage—to be preserved for this and future generations; and, reflecting this aspiration, the General Assembly, as part of the South Carolina Protected Lands and Conservation Coordination Act, 2026 S.C. Acts No. 190, has set a “long-range goal of the State to increase protected land to seven million acres by the year 2050.” S.C. Code Ann. § 48-61-120(B); and

WHEREAS, achieving the State’s conservation goals will require efforts of both government and the private sector, as well as voluntary coordination and partnerships with private landowners all seeking a happy answer to the question, “What will South Carolina look like in one hundred years?”; and

WHEREAS, in addition to the State’s natural resources, South Carolina also boasts many remarkable sites that tell the story of the State’s history and culture in shaping South Carolinians as a people; and

WHEREAS, pursuing the State’s conservation policy will require consistent efforts—both large and small—which will span not only gubernatorial administrations but also generations of South Carolinians.

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor of the State of South Carolina and pursuant to the Constitution and Laws of this State and the powers conferred upon me therein, I hereby establish the Governor's Conservation Commission, which shall function as set forth below:

Section 1. Establishing the Governor's Conservation Commission

A. There is created the Governor's Conservation Commission.

B. Membership of the Commission:

The following public officials shall serve on the Commission ex officio:

1. The Governor or his designee
2. The Director of the Department of Natural Resources
3. The Director of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism
4. The Director of the South Carolina Conservation Bank
5. The Chief Resilience Officer
6. The State Forester

The Governor shall appoint no more than twenty-six members from the private or academic sectors who have knowledge of matters concerning conservation, preservation, history, or culture through experience, education, training, or interest.

The Governor shall invite the following officers to participate as members ex officio:

1. The Commissioner of Agriculture or his designee
2. The Chairman of the House Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee or his designee
3. The Chairman of the Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee or his designee

C. The Governor shall appoint a member of the Commission to serve as Chairman.

D. Ex officio members shall serve with all privileges, including voting.

E. Private- and academic-sector members shall serve two-year terms and may be reappointed. These members may be removed by the Governor at any time at his discretion.

F. Members shall serve without compensation.

G. Any costs related to the Commission shall be paid by the Office of the Governor.

H. The Commission's responsibilities include:

1. Advising the Governor and the Executive Branch regarding strategies and opportunities to conserve and preserve South Carolina's natural resources, its historic sites, historical records and cultural sites and heritage; and
2. Promoting collaboration among state agencies to develop policies, practices and long-term strategic plans to promote the State's conservation and preservation goals; and
3. Providing assistance to local governments in developing their own policies and goals for conservation and preservation; and
4. Promoting public awareness of the importance of conservation and preservation, as well as knowledge of South Carolina's history and culture; and
5. Providing assistance to the General Assembly in promoting the State's natural resilience, conservation policies and the preservation of its historical sites and cultural heritage; and
6. Communicating, collaborating and cooperating with public, private and nonprofit entities of all kinds—including commercial and academic—and encouraging them to do so among themselves, to maximize the strength and effectiveness of conservation and preservation efforts in South Carolina; and
7. Identifying and collaborating with potential public and private sources of funding for promoting conservation and preservation; and
8. Promoting conservation and preservation of the State's natural resources through voluntary private action and state acquisition of such resources for parks, recreation, scientific research and wildlife preservation.

- I. The Commission is advisory only and shall not exercise any part of the sovereign power of South Carolina.

Section 2. General Provisions

A. This Order is not intended to create, and does not create, any individual right, privilege, or benefit, whether substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any party against the State of South Carolina, its agencies, departments, political subdivisions, or other entities, or any officers, employees, or agents thereof, or any other person.

B. If any section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, sentence, clause, phrase, or word of this Order is for any reason held to be unconstitutional or invalid, such holding shall not affect the constitutionality or validity of the remaining portions of this Order, as the undersigned would have issued this Order, and each and every section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, sentence, clause, phrase, and word thereof, irrespective of the fact that any one or more other sections, subsections, paragraphs, subparagraphs, sentences, clauses, phrases, or words hereof may be declared to be unconstitutional, invalid, or otherwise ineffective.

C. This Order shall be implemented consistent with and to the maximum extent provided by applicable law and shall be subject to the availability of appropriations. This Order shall not be interpreted, applied, implemented, or construed in a manner so as to impair, impede, or otherwise affect the authority granted by law to an executive agency or department, or the officials or head thereof, including the undersigned.

October 22, 2026

D. I hereby expressly authorize the Office of the Governor to provide or issue any necessary and appropriate additional or supplemental guidance, rules, regulations, or restrictions regarding the application of this Order or to otherwise provide clarification regarding the same, through appropriate means, without the need for further Orders.

E. This Order is effective immediately and shall remain in effect unless otherwise expressly stated herein or modified, amended, extended, or rescinded by subsequent Order.

**GIVEN UNDER MY HAND AND THE
GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF
SOUTH CAROLINA, THIS 22nd DAY
OF OCTOBER, 2026.**

HENRY DARGAN MCMASTER
Governor

ATTEST:

MARK HAMMOND
Secretary of State