



**SOUTH CAROLINA
ENVIRONMENTAL
LAW PROJECT**

Lawyers for the Wild Side

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SOUTH CAROLINA ENVIRONMENTAL LAW PROJECT

Lawyers for the Wild Side

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Offices in Georgetown, Mount Pleasant, Columbia and Greenville

We use our legal expertise to protect land, water and communities across South Carolina.

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Welcome, Polly!

Polly Bell joined SCELPA as our new legal assistant in December. She was born in Brazil and raised in Louisiana and South Carolina. She graduated with honors from the College of Charleston and majored in classics. Polly brings experience handling complex civil litigation. Her favorite South Carolina spots are the Angel Oak and Cypress Gardens. In her free time, she enjoys reading, crochet, hiking and traveling – and is the proud owner of a rescue pitbull named Zummy.

This spring, SCELPA's entire Board of Directors gathered for a two-day retreat to do something we don't often have the luxury of doing: proactively planning for the future. Together with staff, we asked ourselves how to best focus our time, energy and resources amid the sheer number of competing demands and threats facing South Carolina's land, water and communities – many of which you'll read about in the pages of this newsletter.

I left that retreat with a clearer sense of where SCELPA is strongest, and where we need to be even bolder. Our small team continues to do extraordinary work, and it is a privilege to help guide that work as Board Chair. Thank you for being part of it.



Tom Kester
BOARD CHAIR



Director's Note

South Carolina is at an inflection point with development pressures threatening rural landscapes, unabated pollution of our waterbodies and the erosion of public accountability mechanisms that a healthy environment and democracy depend on.

That last piece may be the least visible threat we face, but it is just as consequential. When local governments don't respond to open records requests, when communities learn about decisions affecting their land and water only after the fact, when transparency becomes optional – the public loses its seat at the table. And developers, polluters and bad actors pull up theirs.

We did not choose this moment. But we were built for it. Our team meets these challenges head-on – in courtrooms, county council chambers and the unglamorous, behind-the-scenes work of holding agencies accountable. You'll read about those efforts in the following pages, including our fight to protect isolated freshwater wetlands through local ordinances; a hard-won settlement requiring a comprehensive review of the impacts of plutonium pit production at the Savannah River Site that is giving South Carolinians a rare opportunity to weigh in; a landmark ruling setting a precedent for owner removal of houses stranded on our public trust beaches; and, of course, the burgeoning fight over data centers where the stakes extend beyond property lines to the communities and ecosystems that surround them.

You'll also get to know Filippo Ravalico, our Director of Operations, who is marking 10 years with SCELP. Filippo arrived in South Carolina by serendipity, stayed by conviction and has spent a decade building the infrastructure that allows our small but mighty team to punch far above its weight.

If you've been thinking about deepening your support, this is the moment. The threats are multiplying, but I have never been more certain of this team or more grateful for the community of people who keep us in the fight. South Carolina needs defenders who will not flinch. We are moving fast, working hard and, as you'll read in the pages that follow, prevailing.

Thank you for being here.



Amy E. Armstrong
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NEW CASE

Digging Into Jasper

Hiers Mine Rezoning | Grays, Jasper County



In March, SCELPL filed suit in Circuit Court on behalf of the Coastal Conservation League, challenging Jasper County Council's decision to rezone approximately 265 acres – over 60 acres of which are wetlands – from “Rural Preservation” to “Resource Extraction.” This rezoning would allow for industrial mining in the Grays community, despite inconsistencies with the County's Comprehensive Plan and zoning laws, and despite the Planning Commission's denial recommendation.

The stakes extend well beyond this single parcel. Jasper – the fastest-growing county in the nation – also ranks first in the state for wetlands vulnerability following the U.S. Supreme Court's *Sackett v. EPA* decision which exposed an estimated 35,137 to 113,009 acres to destruction, according to NRDC mapping. The developer of the proposed mine also owns an additional 400 acres directly across the street, raising serious questions about whether this rezoning is merely the first step in a much larger pattern of industrial land use in a county already under extraordinary pressure.

Residents living near the proposed site documented their concerns about traffic, noise, air quality, water contamination and questioned what zoning is worth if it can be overridden for private gain. “Balancing growth with conservation isn't just an environmental issue – it's about safeguarding communities and respecting the special character of this place that draws so many people here,” said Senior Attorney Jessie White. Our attorneys are hard at work, requesting and reviewing the documents and evidence related to this rezoning approval and building our case for trial, which has not yet been scheduled. 🌱

CASE SETTLEMENT

A Facility With a Record, and Now a Reckoning

Williamsburg Recycling | Andrews, Williamsburg County

SCELPL reached a settlement on behalf of the Coastal Conservation League (CCL), resolving our challenge to a state composting permit issued to Williamsburg Recycling, LLC – a facility with a documented history of regulatory noncompliance.

The settlement delivers something the permit alone did not: real accountability to the people who live closest to this facility. Under the agreement, Williamsburg Recycling must fund annual water quality monitoring of drinking water wells within one mile of the facility for at least three years, with neighboring property owners notified of their right to participate. The company must also increase its financial assurance to guarantee proper

closure of the facility if needed, monitor hydrogen sulfide levels, better manage odors, reduce noise and improve maintenance of stormwater infrastructure.

Critically, the settlement grants neighbors direct enforcement rights – a meaningful expansion of accountability that ensures compliance is no longer solely at DES' discretion. For three years, Williamsburg Recycling must also meet annually with CCL and neighboring property owners to discuss ongoing concerns and present mitigation measures. For a community that has long lived with the consequences of this facility, a seat at the table is long overdue. 🌱

A Ruling That Will Shape South Carolina's Coastline



Uninhabited homes along the coast of Harbor Island. Photo by Lauren Petracca for The Post and Courier.

As coastal erosion shifts South Carolina's shorelines, a critical legal question has grown increasingly urgent: what happens when a structure becomes situated on land held in trust for the public? Because elected officials are unwilling to tackle this challenging question, SCELPA was ready, willing and able to do so.

In South Carolina, the answer is now clear. On February 11, the Beaufort County Court of Common Pleas granted summary judgment in favor of our client, the Harbor Island Owners Association (HIOA), and ordered the removal of the final remaining house now standing in the waters of the State.

This was a long-winded case, started in 2018 on the heels of another SCELPA victory against plastic seawalls hastily installed to protect one house threatened by erosion. Over time, several oceanfront homes on Harbor Island had ended up seaward of the high-water mark, placing them on lands held in trust by the State for the benefit of the public. By December 2024, only one house

remained from the original group at issue in the case. SCELPA filed a Motion for Summary Judgment on behalf of the HIOA under the state's Public Waters Nuisance Abatement Act, and on January 16, Senior Attorney Ben Cunningham argued the motion in Circuit Court.

The Court concluded that there was no dispute that the house is located in public waters and thus ruled that the structure constitutes an unlawful nuisance. The Order requires the homeowner to remove that structure. For the first time, a South Carolina court has clearly affirmed that houses that become stranded in public waters may be ordered removed under this state law.

The implications extend well beyond Harbor Island. From Capers Island to Daufuskie to Wild Dunes, the same dynamic is playing out up and down the coast – houses inching seaward as shorelines retreat. This precedent matters for the communities facing this challenge today, and for every coastal community that will face it tomorrow. 🌊



Wetlands are essential to the health and wellbeing of the planet. They act as the earth's kidneys, absorbing stormwater, mitigating flooding, filtering pollutants, storing carbon and providing vital habitat for ecosystems we rely upon. They are, in the truest sense, living infrastructure – and once they're filled and paved over, they don't come back. Despite these critical functions and values, federal and state government oversight has been woefully inadequate to protect them.

The federal Clean Water Act has always had limitations, and for decades, the U.S. Supreme Court has been narrowing them further. Beginning with *SWANCC v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers* in 2001 and continuing through *Rapanos v. United States* in 2006 and years of battles over the Waters of the United States rule, federal protections for wetlands have been slowly, methodically chipped away. Then, in 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court's 5-4 decision in *Sackett v. EPA* stripped protections from millions of acres of wetlands across the country overnight – the most sweeping rollback yet. In South Carolina alone, the NRDC estimates that up to 1.77 million acres – roughly three-quarters of previously regulated wetlands – are now at risk.

Between these drastic federal rollbacks and the lack of any state-level direct permitting authority over freshwater wetlands, communities are left vulnerable – unless local governments act. The consequences aren't hypothetical. South Carolina has already lost an estimated 27% of its historic wetlands – more than 2.3 million acres gone, filled in and built upon for new development as growth pressures continue to skyrocket. In their place: more flooding, more polluted

water and communities left footing the bill. Flood insurance claims in South Carolina have increased tenfold in thirty years, from \$45 million between 1995 and 2005 to nearly \$600 million between 2015 and 2025. That is not a coincidence. When wetlands disappear, floodwaters have nowhere to go.

A SOLUTION BUILT BEFORE THE CRISIS HIT

After decades of watching federal protections erode, and years of the state refusing to step up, SCELPA reached a conclusion: the real opportunity rests with communities who most directly see and feel the impact of wetlands loss, and the local officials that represent them. In 2022 – a full year before the Sackett decision – our team developed a model wetlands ordinance designed specifically for South Carolina counties and municipalities. The idea was straightforward: if federal and state protections were going to fall short, local governments needed a practical, legally-sound tool to fill the gap.

That's exactly what we built. Something that can meet the needs of any jurisdiction while working alongside existing state and federal requirements.

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS BY LOCAL LEADERS

The Town of Bluffton became the first municipality in South Carolina to pass a wetlands ordinance, requiring a 50-foot undisturbed buffer around on-site wetlands. Bluffton is now strengthening that ordinance with a comprehensive wetlands mapping tool, and drawing national attention in the process. SCELPA has stood by the Town's side and supported their efforts.



The Town of Awendaw has passed its own standalone wetlands ordinance based on SCELPA's model.

And in a major milestone, Georgetown County – one of the state's most wetland-rich coastal counties – has become the first county in South Carolina to adopt a comprehensive local wetlands ordinance using SCELPA's model. This was no small feat – SCELPA's lawyers worked alongside County officials and diverse stakeholders to hear and understand concerns and provide guidance and feedback throughout a years-long process.

These aren't small victories. They are proof that local governments, when given the right tools and support, can protect the wetlands their communities depend on – regardless of what's happening in Washington or Columbia. 🌿

Access Our Model Ordinance



Learn more about our work to protect wetlands across the state at the local level. Scan the QR code to visit scelp.org/local-wetlands-ordinance.





Growth Without Consent: Data Centers & the Public's Right to Know

They arrive under ambiguous names. Project Spero. Project Altair. Project Moc-1. By the time a community learns what is being proposed, the levers that allow meaningful public input are often already slipping away.

Driven by the explosive growth of artificial intelligence, data centers are arriving in communities across the state with energy demands, water needs and landscape footprints that eclipse most industrial facilities. A single campus can consume hundreds of megawatts of power – enough to reshape the entire energy grid around it, threaten increased utility costs for ratepayers and drive new gas plants and infrastructure projects. Many rely on water-intensive cooling systems that draw hundreds of millions of gallons annually from surface and ground sources. The equipment runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, causing constant noise, vibration and air pollution for neighbors. And after construction wraps, these facilities typically create few permanent jobs.

Large-scale development of any kind can strain local resources and reshape landscapes in ways that are difficult – if not impossible – to reverse. What distinguishes data centers is not their size alone but the lack of transparency and accountability that has come to define their approvals. These projects deserve full public review; instead, the norm has become fast-tracked approvals and closed-door decisions.

In Spartanburg County, a proposed \$3 billion data center campus known as Project Spero was discussed for months under a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) between the developer and the county's economic development arm. Key project details, including its 200-megawatt energy demand and its expected water use, remained private

as officials moved toward approving a fee-in-lieu-of-tax (FILOT) agreement that would have cut the company's property tax rate from 10.5% to 4% for 40 years.

County Council closed the public hearing after just 30 minutes, even though dozens of residents who signed up to speak remained unheard. So many people had shown up that they spilled into the hallway and every available corner of the building. Community questions went unanswered, and residents had to fight for information that should have been available from the start. But they fought – and they won. Residents organized, petitions circulated and SCELPA Staff Attorney Emily Poole attended and spoke in opposition. Two hours before a final vote, the developer withdrew its application.

Months later, in Newberry County, a similar story unfolded. A data center agreement sailed through first and second readings of County Council until a packed room of engaged residents showed up for the third. Council rejected the agreement and went further by enacting a 12-month moratorium on all data center development in the county. "What happened in Newberry proves communities have real power when they show up and speak out," said Poole. "Residents made it clear this is not what they want for their community, and, thankfully, the Council listened."

South Carolinians have a right to the places that sustain them – the beaches, rivers and wild public lands – and the right to transparent, accountable government decisions. When that right is obscured by NDAs, trade-secret claims, redacted filings and projects that quietly grow from 50 to 450 megawatts, the law is evaded, and public trust is broken.

Public hearings and comment periods are not formalities – they are the mechanisms by which communities exercise real power, and they only work if the public has the information it needs to act in time. In many instances, SCEL P’s ability to intervene depends on early involvement before approvals are granted. Developers operating behind NDAs and assumed project names understand this well. Secrecy is not incidental to how these projects move forward – for many, it is the strategy.

Spartanburg and Newberry are not isolated cases. SCEL P is actively monitoring proposed and approved data center developments across the state, from a proposed 850-acre campus in the ACE Basin in Colleton County – one of the largest intact estuarine ecosystems on

the Atlantic Coast – to projects and proposals in Union, Aiken and Marion Counties. In each case, the same questions apply: What are the energy and water demands? Who bears the environmental and public health costs? What is the public return on any tax incentives being offered? And was the community given opportunities to weigh in?

South Carolina does not have to choose between innovation and stewardship. But it must be able to choose how it grows and who gets a say. Many residents across the state haven’t been handed transparency – they’ve fought for it, and some have won. That outcome is possible for any community willing to demand it. 🌱

CASE UPDATE & CALL TO ACTION

A Collective Victory

Savannah River Site | Aiken County

For years, the federal government moved forward with plans to produce plutonium bomb cores at the Savannah River Site (SRS) without fully accounting for the environmental and public health consequences – and without meaningful public input. SCEL P fought to change that.

In a landmark ruling, the federal district court agreed that a full, program-wide environmental review was required under the National Environmental Policy Act. The result: a court-approved settlement requiring the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration to conduct a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) and to pause certain activities at SRS while that review proceeds.

This spring, SCEL P Attorney Ben Cunningham joined plaintiffs and scientists for a rare inspection of the facility. What they found was striking: a massive building being gutted and converted into a bomb core factory now estimated to cost up to \$30 billion – potentially the most expensive building ever constructed in the United States. Beyond the staggering cost, the facility would generate radioactive waste, some of which would be disposed of in unlined trenches.

The draft PEIS is open for public comment. This is exactly the opportunity we fought for, and we encourage you to use it. The stakes begin along



Aerial photo of the Savannah River Site by High Flyer.



Submit comments by July 16.

Scan the QR code to visit pitpeis.com for resources, talking points and instructions on how to submit comments.

the Savannah River, where workers, neighboring communities and one of the Southeast’s most vital watersheds face the most immediate consequences. But they don’t end there. Plutonium will be regularly transported across the country on our highways, and we have no permanent disposal site for the most toxic nuclear waste on earth.

SRS has never produced plutonium pits before, and the public deserves a say in whether it ever does. 🌱



CASE UPDATE

A Ruling Against the ACE Basin and a Fight That's Far From Over

Bay Light Bridge | Meggett, Charleston County

On April 30, Administrative Law Court Judge Ralph King Anderson, III ruled in favor of a developer seeking to build a private vehicular bridge to an island in the ACE Basin near Meggett, despite its failure to comply with legal requirements. The ruling sent the permit decision back to DES to process the application without the heightened protective standards that apply to areas of special resource value, specifically the ACE Basin Taskforce Boundary Area.

Despite unchallenged, long-standing GIS data retained by DES and direct testimony supporting the location of the ACE Basin Taskforce Boundary Area – which has remained unchanged since 2004 – the ruling concluded that the precise boundaries were not documented clearly enough for the court to determine whether the property falls within it. While the ruling does not invalidate the Boundary Area regulation and is limited to the specific facts of this case, it creates a pathway for the developer to seek a bridge permit under a more lenient permitting process and could set a dangerous precedent – precisely the outcome these regulations were designed to prevent.

The ACE Basin is one of the largest undeveloped estuaries on the Atlantic Coast, providing enormous public benefits for water quality, wildlife habitat, recreation and quality of life. The protections at stake here were established specifically because places like this deserve a higher standard of care, not a procedural workaround. SCEL P, on behalf of the Coastal Conservation League, has filed a motion to reconsider the ruling and will continue to evaluate all options to protect the integrity of what's at risk here. 🌊

CASE UPDATE

When No Doesn't Mean No

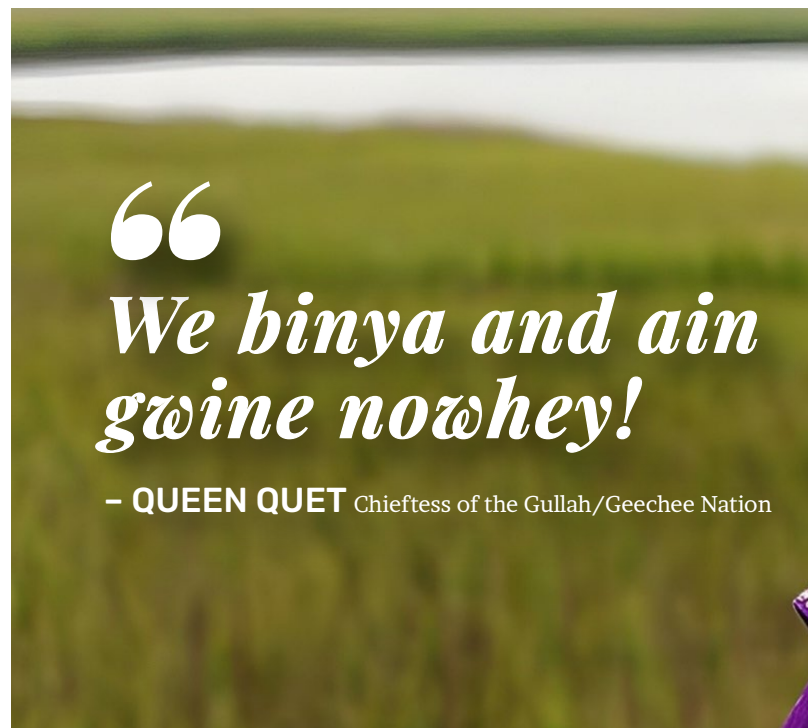
Edgefield RV Park | Trenton, Edgefield County

Since our last newsletter, SCEL P has taken on a new fight in Edgefield County, one that cuts to the heart of what land-use protections are worth when officials ignore them.

The case centers on a proposed 70-site RV park on environmentally sensitive forestland containing Horse Creek springheads. The Planning Commission unanimously agreed the site was unsuitable and denied the application in July 2025. Three months later, without new information, without legal authority to reconsider and without explanation from the commissioners who reversed course, the same unchanged application was approved 3-2. SCEL P appealed on behalf of Horse Creek Nature Preserve and the Savannah Riverkeeper, arguing the reversal was procedurally improper and that the development fails to meet Edgefield County's own requirements for RV park permitting.

On May 12, Staff Attorney Emily Poole argued the case in Circuit Court. The ruling did not go our way, but we are evaluating our options and next steps.

Land use regulations exist for a reason. When they can be reversed without explanation, the communities and ecosystems they protect pay the price. This fight is not finished. 🌿



CASE UPDATE

The Fight for St. Helena: A Victory, Then a New Front

Pine Island | Beaufort County

Since our last newsletter, the Pine Island cases have delivered both a victory and a stark reminder that developers with deep pockets rarely give up easily. In December 2025, the developers voluntarily dismissed their state court challenge after years of legal maneuvering. Then, on February 20, 2026, a federal court dismissed the developers' remaining lawsuit in its entirety, finding the case moot. It was a significant step towards settling the validity of Beaufort County's Cultural Protection Overlay (CPO).

Yet not only did the developers appeal the dismissal to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, they also filed a new federal lawsuit directly challenging the CPO as unconstitutional, characterizing the community-driven protection in place since 1999 as a "race-conscious zoning scheme." SCELPA filed a motion to intervene on behalf of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition on June 8.

Then, on June 16, the federal court granted the County's motion to stay, putting the new lawsuit on hold until the Fourth Circuit appeal is resolved. The court found that because the two cases involved nearly identical issues, the stay will avoid the risk of inconsistent rulings, confusion and inefficiencies for the court and the parties. SCELPA's

motion to intervene, along with the County's motion to dismiss, were temporarily dismissed, with the right to refile once the stay is lifted. We will now focus our efforts on the Fourth Circuit appeal. 📌

CASE UPDATE

Public Beach Pays the Price

Isle of Palms Seawall | Charleston County

In January, all parties filed appeals in the Isle of Palms seawall case, sending it to the S.C. Court of Appeals. Since then, we have had a disappointing development. On March 11, Administrative Law Court Judge Ralph King Anderson, III granted Rom Reddy's motion to stay the removal order, meaning the illegal seawall will remain standing while the appeals process plays out. In granting the stay, the judge acknowledged he was "remorseful that the public beach may suffer in the interim."

The wall – built without permits – continues to adversely affect the surrounding shoreline and block public beach access while litigation proceeds. SCELPA's appeal remains focused on ensuring the full strength of South Carolina's coastal protection laws is preserved on review. 📌

CASE UPDATE

The Spit is Still There. So Are We.

Captain Sams Spit | Kiawah Island, Charleston County

After nearly two decades of litigation – including two trials, five arguments before the South Carolina Supreme Court and countless legal challenges – permanent protection for Captain Sams Spit is closer than it has ever been.

A conditional settlement has been reached that would permanently protect the Spit from any development, as well as protect public use of and access to Beachwalker Park. Under the agreement, the developer would place a conservation easement on the Spit, transfer the highlands to DNR to become a Heritage Preserve, transfer the beachfront to the State, and transfer Beachwalker Park to the Town of Kiawah Island which will also have a conservation easement. Both easements would be held by our client, the Conservancy of the Sea Islands. What hangs in the balance is the South Carolina legislature's inclusion of \$32 million in the state budget. The House budget approved it in full, and the Senate committee put in \$1 – a common opening position in budget negotiations. As of this printing, the outcome remains uncertain. 📌





Ten Years Under the Hood:

A conversation with Filippo Ravalico, Director of Operations

Filippo Ravalico did not plan to end up in South Carolina. A business lawyer by training, he had made his way from Italy to Boston before his wife's career brought them both to Charleston in 2014. He arrived without a job lined up, knowing only that he was drawn to environmental work and that an organization called the Coastal Conservation League was pretty good at it. Serendipity, he'll tell you, did the rest.

In that first year, when his parents visited from Italy, he took them to Kiawah Island and pointed out the stretch of land known as Captain Sams Spit. A developer was threatening to build fifty homes, and the absurdity of it struck him. Then, almost by accident, he found SCELPL.

The organization had recently created the program manager position, and there was an opening. He applied.

The interview was held at a kitchen table in the Chandler family house on Highmarket Street in Georgetown. Around the table sat board and staff members, a consultant and Executive Director Amy Armstrong. It felt less like a job interview and more like joining a conversation with friends.

Soon after being hired, he discovered that SCELPL was representing the Coastal Conservation League in the Captain Sams Spit case he'd talked about with his parents months before. "I was surprised by how important and widespread SCELPL's work was," he says. "I thought it was just Georgetown."

That kitchen table office is gone, since the Georgetown office relocated in 2020. But the culture it represented – scrappy, informal, serious about the work if not about appearances – is something Filippo has spent a decade helping to protect and build upon, even as SCELPL has grown from five staff members in a single office to a team of seventeen across five locations.

"From the get-go, Amy and I were very much on the same page," Filippo recalls. "That felt not only good – it made the work so much easier. We hit the ground running."

His role turned out to be something harder to define than the title suggested. For years, he spent much of his time on communications and fundraising. Only in recent years has he mostly settled into the operational work the title has always implied.

There are moments from his early years that he returns to with particular fondness. One was a giving day – one that an organization like ours relies on – with a \$60,000 goal. The clock was ticking. At 11:50 p.m., with ten minutes to spare, they hit it. He remembers bursting into an impromptu happy dance, with a colleague cheering along. It's the kind of moment that happens when the whole organization fits around a kitchen table.

SOUTH CAROLINA, TESTED

Twelve years ago, when Filippo arrived, South Carolina's coast looked markedly different from Florida's. He worries that gap is narrowing – not because of any failure on the part of conservationists, but because of something more fundamental.

"Population growth is one of the key drivers of the problem," he says, with the careful precision of someone who has thought about this long enough to know how easily the observation is misunderstood. "It's not about trying to control the population. But the simple fact is: more people means more resource consumption, more waste and more pressure on the land. South Carolina has a strong conservation track record, but it was relatively easy when there were fewer of us. Now, we're being tested."

The pressure, he adds, isn't limited to the shoreline. The question he keeps circling is whether South Carolina's once much stronger commitment to environmental protection will hold as growth accelerates – and whether organizations like SCEL P can help ensure that it does.

PEOPLE AS MUCH AS PLACE

If one shift in SCEL P's work stands out to him personally over the past decade, it's the organization's deepening involvement with Gullah/Geechee communities, joining a profoundly unequal fight to protect their land and culture.

"Our work in Ten Mile and on Pine Island got started at about the same time, making both the origin and the implications of these battles at the local level all the more glaring," he says. "It's gentrification and despoliation of natural wealth. It's deep-pocketed and well-connected developers trying to scoop up what's left, often cutting corners – and always clearcutting lots to do so. You do this work for environmental reasons because that's the mission. But it becomes something so much more than that."

UNDER THE HOOD

Ask Filippo what a Director of Operations actually does, and he reaches for a metaphor he has used for years: "I'm under the hood. I make sure the engine is running well, that the cables are all connected and that the filters are clean. I don't decide where we're going. I make sure we can get there."

The honest answer, he admits, is that "operations" at a small nonprofit means doing a lot of things that larger organizations parcel out among many specialized roles. More recently, he's proud of the operational wins – a performance evaluation system and a financial house that cleanly passes every audit. He's equally proud of the relationships he's built along the way, including a long-cultivated partnership with the SC Bar Foundation that has become a lead supporter of our environmental justice work.

The growth that matters most to him, though, is geographic. When SCEL P expanded from its original Georgetown base to add offices around the state – a transition that crystallized around the disruption of COVID – he felt the organization turn a corner. "We had always been statewide," he says. "But there's a big difference between providing services statewide from one office and growing your presence and being rooted in the places you're fighting for."

WHAT KEEPS SCEL P SPECIAL

There is a phrase that used to be a SCEL P motto – no case is too small – that the organization has had to renegotiate as the landscape has changed and the demands on the team have grown. Filippo doesn't see this as a problem; he sees it as the organization growing up. "How do we keep SCEL P being SCEL P as we move from five people around a kitchen table to a team of 18-20 around the state?" he asks. "The answer isn't to do everything the same way. But the nature of a crusading public interest law organization – that doesn't change."

He offers an image that has stuck with him – a story Amy shared: SCEL P founder Jimmy Chandler walking into court in boat shoes and walking out victorious. "It's all about the substance," Filippo says. "We take it easy with ourselves, but we are very serious about the work."

As for the next ten years, he hopes the trajectory continues. But what he hopes for most is something he acknowledges SCEL P has never had to plan for before: the next generation of leadership.

"In ten years, I would like there to be five or six leaders who, with unabated passion and commitment, can team up to plan and see through the next twenty years of SCEL P." 🌱



Filippo and his parents at Boneyard Beach on Bull's Bay in 2018.



Champions for the Wild Side: **Ginny & Michael Prevost Transition from Rooting for Jimmy Chandler to Legacy Donors at SCEL**

Theirs was a match made – not so much in heaven – as on the earth they wanted to protect. Ginny and Michael Prevost came to environmental advocacy work from different angles, but ultimately with a shared purpose.

As an undergraduate, Ginny participated in an ecological study of the habitat that a proposed cross-Florida barge canal would impact. In the end, the environmental concerns this study raised put an end to the project and the site became home to the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway. Not surprisingly, Ginny subsequently leaned into environmental education to make a difference. Over the course of her career as an educator, she created lesson plans that got students – young and old – out in nature to learn math, write poetry, you name it. Even now, having retired from a teaching career, she remains committed to education through community engagement as absolutely essential to securing and strengthening environmental protections. Serving on McClellanville's Planning Commission, she's witnessed firsthand how putting legislation in front of people before they fully understand and are onboard with what's being proposed ends unhappily. "If you don't initiate [community outreach] or accept community input, your effort to do something materially is diminished."

A Georgetown native, Mike grew up duck hunting and eventually got interested in what the ducks were feeding on, which piqued his curiosity about plants, inspiring him to manage waterfowl habitat. That led him to study habitat ecology and to ask the bigger question: "How are we going to protect this land?" After working in conservation for federal and state agencies, Mike joined the staff of The Nature Conservancy [TNC] and began working on the ACE Basin Project, which entailed protecting not just an

ecosystem, but what the organization called whole "landscapes." The goal for protecting landscapes was not to protect a siloed natural resource use, animal or plant species or particular habitat, but to safeguard the larger ecosystems that help ensure all plant and animal life—including people—enjoy clean air, soil and water. As he humbly recalls, "We were just a bunch of guys runnin' and gunnin' without a lot of sophisticated science or philosophy." But what they intuitively understood was the education piece and the cultural shift that was going to need to happen if they were going to succeed in protecting an area as big as the ACE Basin. As he explains it, "We came up with the idea of seeking endorsements and had this dinky form that we got people from the highest officials at DNR to the head of Ducks Unlimited to the Edisto Island Shell Collecting Club members to sign onto. And our mantra was that we were going to preserve the ACE Basin to maintain and promote traditional uses like hunting, fishing, forestry, farming and wildlife observation."



Michael & Ginny Prevost

So how did Ginny and Mike come to be among the first people to join SCEL P's Chandler Legacy Society? As Ginny explains it, "Our relationship with SCEL P goes back beyond when SCEL P was founded because Jimmy was already a friend. He and Mike grew up together in Georgetown. So when he started SCEL P, we jumped on it! It was a natural transition from us loving Jimmy and rooting for him. He was fighting a power plant and a petroleum refinery in Georgetown and all sorts of stuff."

Mike adds, "We've enjoyed so much success because groups [like SCEL P] have learned to be effective and to work together. That's why Ginny and I have chosen to support land trusts, environmental law groups, and advocacy groups [in our estate plan]. Because it takes an effective, collaborative effort to succeed. Without one of those components you're not going to succeed at scale, and I believe scale is critical." 🌱



Georgetown waterfront along the Sampit River.

Fighting for This State's Natural Beauty Matters

by Jim Thompson

At first it didn't seem like a good idea to take this opportunity to comment for SCEL P's summer newsletter. "It's not about me...etc., etc." But then I realized that I have experienced something that not many of us left can describe.

I'm 82 years old, a native South Carolinian from Upstate and have clear memories of visiting the South Carolina Lowcountry in 1946 and 1949. I remember finding it stunning. Awesome. Beautiful. It was so different from the red hills of Oconee and Pickens Counties that those of us from the Upstate easily became jealous of people living in the Lowcountry. (Note: Lowcountry folks who traveled up to our hills and mountains may have had a similar experience, finding themselves full of wonder at it being SO DIFFERENT!)

Even as a child I was captivated by the tunnels of live oaks over the narrow roads, draped in Spanish moss, and the wide marshland and the expanse of sandy beaches and...(what are the words?) ... the near holiness of it all. Sullivans Island, Isle of Palms and Folly Beach where we went weren't

like the city of Charleston, which was still a mess. (Kudos to the Preservation Society of Charleston, Historic Charleston Foundation and former Mayor Joe Riley (1975-2016) for all they did to change this.)

Try to find that Lowcountry elegance I experienced as a child these days. River Road on Johns Island, Mathis Ferry Road. Maybe a half mile of Rifle Range Road. Probably Wadmalaw Island, but I haven't been there. And isn't that the problem? It's the exception, not the norm.

So here we are today. There are still some guardians at the gates...the Coastal Conservation League, Lowcountry Land Trust, and Edisto Island Open Land Trust. But none stand stronger and taller and more prepared to fight for what's left of our State's beauty from the ocean to the mountains than the South Carolina Environmental Law Project.

I love this State. I love having moved back to South Carolina when God's plan allowed it. I love knowing what it once looked like. I love that some are still trying to protect what is left of what we had.

Special thanks to you, SCEL P. You keep fighting. I'll keep giving. 🌱



P.O. Box 1380 Pawleys Island, SC 29585



SCELP's 17th annual Wild Side returns to Georgetown on Saturday, October 24. Join us under the majestic oaks of Kaminski House for a meal, cocktails, live music from Prettier Than Matt and waterfront views of the Sampit River.

This year's featured speaker is Bob Inglis, former congressman and recipient of the 2015 John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award. He will share insight into political courage and his own metamorphosis on climate change.



Scan the QR code or visit
scelp.org/wildside to
buy your tickets.

