LONG DISPUTED WHITE TRACT WILL BE PERMANENTLY PRESERVED IN BREAKTHROUGH CONSERVATION OUTCOME FOR CAPE ROMAIN WILDLIFE REFUGE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 6, 2026
Media Contacts:
Emmi Palenbaum, Charleston Waterkeeper - emmi@charlestonwaterkeeper.org, 864-420-4419
Sandee Jackson, Coastal Conservation League - sandeej@scccl.org, 843-708-4280
Grace Gasper, Friends of Coastal South Carolina - grace@sccoastalfriends.org 843-697-7535
Shelby Cohen, South Carolina Environmental Law Project - shelby@scelp.org, 843-527-0078

AWENDAW, S.C. — After years of sustained advocacy, the White Tract adjacent to Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge will be permanently protected. The White Tract is a 229-acre property controlled by Pulte Home Company (Pulte) in the Town of Awendaw, Charleston County, that became the subject of legal challenges filed by the South Carolina Environmental Law Project (SCELP) on behalf of the Coastal Conservation League, Friends of Coastal South Carolina, and Charleston Waterkeeper (collectively, the Conservation Parties). This week, the Conservation Parties reached a collaborative agreement with Pulte that positions Open Space Institute to acquire the property and ultimately be available for future incorporation into the Refuge.

"We are grateful to SCELP for standing with us and representing us so well through the legal process, and to our partners at the Coastal Conservation League and Charleston Waterkeeper. Getting to this point was not easy, and it would not have happened without the incredible collaboration between our organizations. This is not only a huge victory for the ongoing protection of Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge; it is also a testament to the determination and perseverance of the community that has advocated for protection of this property for 20 years," said Grace Gasper, Executive Director of Friends of Coastal South Carolina.

After Open Space Institute identified a potential funding source for the conservation purchase, Pulte played an active role in extensive discussions with Open Space Institute, the Conservation Parties, and SCELP. Together, the parties developed an agreement that balances conservation goals with the region's need for thoughtfully planned growth. Under the agreement, Pulte has agreed to sell the White Tract to Open Space Institute for permanent conservation protection. As a result of the property being permanently conserved, SCELP will dismiss the pending legal challenges.

"It can feel sometimes with this work that the only position is an adversarial one, but the parties have worked together to achieve something really unique," said Leslie Lenhardt, Senior Managing Attorney at SCELP.

Cape Romain is home to Class 1 wilderness, crucial habitat for food sources fueling federally-threatened migratory birds, and the site of more sea turtle nests than anywhere else in South Carolina. Placing the White Tract under conservation management by the Open Space Institute will ensure the landscape remains intact for wildlife and water quality amidst heavy growth pressures neighboring the boundaries of the Refuge.

"The White Tract has always been about more than one property," said Lori Cary-Kothera, Interim Executive Director and Chief Conservation Officer of Coastal Conservation League. "It's about whether we can protect the places that make the Lowcountry special while the region around them grows rapidly. Cape Romain's marshes, beaches, and barrier islands support sea turtles, migratory shorebirds, and the fisheries coastal communities rely on, and dense development at its doorstep would have put all of that at risk."

"The fate of the White Tract has been in question for years. We now know this story will have a positive ending," said Andrew Wunderley, Charleston Waterkeeper Executive Director. "We are proud to see the conservation community stick together to achieve this outcome and prevent dense, septic-reliant development from polluting this pristine area."

Pulte also agreed to incorporate additional environmental enhancements into its Farms at Longleaf community in the Town of Hollywood, Charleston County, and the Rock Six community in Dorchester County. The Conservation Parties are encouraged that the agreement provides additional protections that more fully consider long-term environmental impacts to water quality, habitat, and community health.

The parties also express their appreciation for the support of state and local leaders who helped make this agreement possible, including Governor McMaster, the South Carolina Office of Resilience, the Town of Awendaw, Charleston County, and Dorchester County.

###