



**Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service, Southern Region
4931 Broad River Road Columbia, SC 29212**

Contact: Peggy Nadler (803) 561-4000

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Francis Marion National Forest Adds 253 Acres Thanks to Multiple Funding Sources

The Francis Marion National Forest recently acquired two tracts of land vital to further consolidating its holdings, protecting the integrity of the forest and augmenting critical habitat. The Walleye Tract, a 57-acre tract in Berkeley County located near Big Ocean Bay in the interior of the forest, was 75% surrounded by existing national forest lands. The Bulls Bay Tract in Charleston County contains 196 acres that were completely surrounded by national forest and is located along the Highway 17 corridor near Awendaw.

“These lands are vital to the Francis Marion National Forest,” said Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests Forest Supervisor Jerome Thomas. “Consolidating the forest is a priority for us and these two tracts are fundamental in helping us better manage the land, create critical habitat for wildlife and provide better public safety.”

Multiple funding sources were leveraged to make these acquisitions possible. The Berkeley County tract, representing a \$232,000 acquisition, used federal Land and Water Conservation Funds, private donations and a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Charleston County tract, valued at \$1,746,000, was donated to the forest by The Nature Conservancy and was partially funded by a \$623,700 Charleston County Rural Greenbelt Program grant as well by other public and private funding sources.

“I know of no other example of a county government providing funds for federal land acquisition,” said Thomas. “Charleston County is leading the way to protect greenspace for its residents and visitors.”

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The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

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The forest successfully applied directly to the USFWS for a \$75,000 grant funded through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) for the Berkeley County tract. The NAWCA grant and its award is the first of its kind for the national forests in South Carolina. Such grants are awarded on a nationally competitive basis to projects demonstrating significant benefits to wetland and migratory bird resources. The agency hopes to use this funding source for future land acquisitions as it provides an excellent opportunity to leverage federal dollars to meet land management and protection goals.

The Nature Conservancy was an integral part of both land acquisitions.

“The Nature Conservancy has been an invaluable partner to the U.S. Forest Service’s land acquisition program for a number of years,” said Thomas. “Their conservation efforts have greatly enhanced the forest’s ability to manage these resources for future generations.”

For images associated with the Walleye Tract or more information on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, visit: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms>.

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Photo By: Mark Danaher

Carolina Pygmy Rattlesnake on Forest Service land adjacent to Walleye Tract.



Photo By: Mark Danaher

Upland mixed pine/hardwood stand next to depressional wetland on Walleye Tract.

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