



Southeast Wetlands Initiative 2022 Annual Report

DU's Southeast Wetlands Initiative encompasses a dynamic geographical region steeped in time-honored traditions and boasting a strong outdoor heritage. From the Chesapeake Bay and North Carolina sounds to the Lowcountry, Everglades, Mobile Bay, and Tennessee River, some of the nation's most famous and threatened wetland systems are found here. Development pressures and related water quality impairments are among the most significant challenges to the area's coastal wetlands, riverside forests, freshwater marshes, bays, and estuaries. Fortunately, due to a rich outdoor heritage, there are many supporters and partnership efforts at the ready to conserve remaining wetlands and restore those that have been altered.



Conservation work under the Southeast Wetlands Initiative focuses on restoring and enhancing public lands containing critical wintering waterfowl habitat, including managed coastal wetlands, bottomland hardwood forests, and freshwater marshes, with state and federal partners. Permanent protection of habitat on private lands through donated conservation easements and targeted acquisitions is also important. DU's wetland conservation work provides economic, ecological, and societal benefits far beyond waterfowl. In addition to providing community resilience while supporting navigation, tourism, and seafood industries, wetlands provide people with improved quality of life associated with nature.

FY22 CONSERVATION SUMMARY

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service awarded a \$1 million National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) for wetland restoration on the Lower Middleton complex at Samworth Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Georgetown County. DU and SCDNR have a longstanding partnership in South Carolina, together conserving more than 53,000 acres of upland and wetland habitat through fee acquisitions and wetlands restoration and enhancement projects that benefit wildlife and the public. Improvements included substantial levee and canal repair and installation of four tidal rice trunks, which have been used to manage water levels along the South Carolina coast for more than 300 years. Historically, these were used by rice planters as a way to flood and drain rice fields. Today, the trunks are used by wetland managers as a conservation tool to enhance habitat. Supported by the Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation, this project will improve habitat for game and non-game species, including wading birds, shorebirds, reptiles and amphibians. Georgetown County's residents are also direct beneficiaries of this project as their access to outdoor spaces, local water quality, flood protection, and climate adaptation will be immediately impacted through this conservation project.



DU partnered with several entities in Florida's Panhandle, including the Sam Shine Foundation and the St. Marks Refuge Association, to leverage conservation investments in the area and acquire land that will expand St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). DU closed on the JLT tract in Wakulla County, in November 2021. This tract will later be added to the 80,000-acre NWR boundary in the coming years and will be open to public access once transferred to St. Marks NWR. The 1,306-acre tract contains 317 acres of wetlands and 1.2 miles of frontage along the St. Marks River; a complex of cypress and hardwood forested wetlands and emergent marsh providing important habitat for a variety of resident and migratory waterfowl, neotropical migratory songbirds, and wading birds. The 989 acres of uplands are predominantly longleaf and loblolly pine, providing valuable habitat to a variety of declining plant and animal species such as red-cockaded woodpecker (federally endangered), frosted flatwoods salamander (federally threatened), eastern diamondback rattlesnake, and eastern indigo snake. The JLT acquisition protects habitat fronting the St. Marks River, which drains into the Apalachee Bay, providing water quality protection for the Bay's large complex of coastal marshes and important seafood resources.



**SOUTHERN
REGION**

DUKE ENERGY FOUNDATION- BROAD SUPPORT OF THE SOUTHEAST WETLANDS INITIATIVE

The Duke Energy Foundation (Duke) helps meet the needs of communities where Duke Energy customers live and work by supporting vibrant economies, climate resilience, and justice, equity and inclusion. As part of its mission to create powerful communities, Duke recognizes the importance of wetlands for their role in providing climate resilience and enhancing well-being

In Florida, Duke supported the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Expansion Project, which will add more than 1,300 acres of undeveloped land adjacent to the St. Marks NWR into the public trust. This area provides essential habitat for waterfowl, migratory songbirds, wading birds and other wildlife and protects water quality within the Apalachee Bay and St. Marks River.

Duke also supported the enhancement of 48 acres of impounded wetlands on Beaverdam Creek Wildlife Management Area near Clemson, South Carolina. DU is implementing management infrastructure improvements to help the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources provide quality habitat to waterfowl and other wetland-dependent wildlife in the Upper Savannah River Focus Area.

Duke's most recent investment is in restoration work in coastal North Carolina, where failing infrastructure on Goose Creek Game Land jeopardizes the habitat and coastal resilience values of 180 acres. Because of the overlapping economic and ecological benefits of wetlands, partnering with Ducks Unlimited to protect and restore wetlands across their service area is a perfect fit for the Duke Energy Foundation.



Help secure the future of wetlands and waterfowl.

Band together with us today.

Your gift to Ducks Unlimited is invaluable. DU invests at least 80 cents of every dollar received in our conservation mission. Your contribution will help secure the future of wetlands and waterfowl. To learn more, visit www.ducks.org or

contact Ducks Unlimited at
843-745-9110



**SOUTHERN
REGION**

INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE:

Initiative States:

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia

FY22 By the Numbers:

Public Revenue: \$16.4 million  **Philanthropic Revenue: \$2.1**

Acres Conserved*: 51,590  **Acres Impacted**: 39,273**

**Conserved acres are the "conservation footprint" of Ducks Unlimited's conservation activities that protect, restore or enhance wetlands and associated habitats. Because DU performs more than one activity on the same piece of land over time, only new acres that have not been previously touched are added every year to the existing acreage footprint.*

***Impacted acres is the sum of all Ducks Unlimited conservation activities in a given year and include conserved acres as well as those acres that are "retouched" over time or any conservation efforts that DU is involved with that may enhance habitats even over a short time frame.*