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Contact:
Michelle Sinkler (OSI) – (843) 412-8583
Kevin Yokim (Florence County) – (843) 665-3035
Lyles Cooper (Pee Dee Land Trust) – (843) 667-3229

Florence County, Open Space Institute, and Pee Dee Land Trust Announce Creation of New County Park Along State Scenic Lynches River

Project will create new public access for the Pee Dee Region

LAKE CITY, SC (April 12, 2023)—Florence County, the Open Space Institute (OSI), and Pee Dee Land Trust today announced creation of a new county park along the State Scenic Lynches River. The 498-acre park will create a vibrant community resource while establishing additional public access for a celebrated, multi-county paddling trail.

Adjacent to the popular paddling take-out point at Bennie Landing, the "Independence Farm" property includes 1.3 miles of riverfront as well as inland forests and freshwater forested wetlands. The new county park will become an important access point, along with the upstream Lynches River County Park, for the South Carolina Revolutionary Rivers Trail, a National Park Service-designated National Water Trail. In addition to paddling, overnight camping platforms, hiking, and other uses will be evaluated for the park.

"The Open Space Institute is proud to add a county park for the residents of Lake City and for the greater Pee Dee region," said Maria Whitehead, OSI Vice President and Director of Land for the Southeast. "This park is both an important next step in protecting the Lynches River, and a huge win for public access and the region's burgeoning outdoor recreation economy. We thank Florence County and Pee Dee Land Trust for their dedication to enhancing the Lynches River visitor experience, and we appreciate the support of the South Carolina Conservation Bank and the Lynches River Conservation Fund."

"We are excited at the possibilities this property holds as we strive to conserve our natural resources and provide public access to one of our county's most beautiful assets, Lynches River," said Florence County Councilman Jason Springs. "We thank the Open Space Institute and the Pee Dee Land Trust for their assistance in securing this property and dedication to this project."

After acquiring the land in May 2022, OSI will transfer the property this month to Florence County for creation of the park. Pee Dee Land Trust will hold a conservation easement on the property, forever protecting its natural resources. The South Carolina Conservation Bank and the Lynches River Conservation Fund at Central Carolina Community Foundation provided funding for the project.

"Pee Dee Land Trust is proud to partner with Florence County as the conservation easement steward in perpetuity," said Lyles Cooper, Pee Dee Land Trust Executive Director. "Our work primarily focuses on working with private landowners, however we were excited to partner with Florence County and Open Space Institute to help with the addition of a low impact park for public enjoyment."

"This project will showcase the Lynches River as one of South Carolina's most scenic and ecologically important waterways. I hope that our partners can build on this success and protect more land along the broader corridor in the coming years," said Raleigh West, Executive Director of the South Carolina Conservation Bank.

"Since its inception, the Lynches River Conservation Fund has permanently protected over 3,700 acres of land within the Lynches River watershed," said Erin Johnson, Vice President, Community Investment at Central Carolina Community Foundation. "This new county park will allow for almost 500 more acres to be conserved while also providing residents of Florence County access to the river."

"With the growing popularity of the Revolutionary Rivers National Water Trail, this park site will be a preferred stopping spot for paddlers," said Holly Beaumier, Executive Director of the Florence Convention and Visitors Bureau. "The Florence Convention and Visitors Bureau looks forward to promoting this new County treasure."

The state-designated scenic portion of Lynches River stretches 111 miles and is home to Blueback Herring, American Shad, and Hickory Shad, all of which are designated with the highest priority for conservation under the State Wildlife Action Plan. The park also contains habitat for the federally at-risk Spotted Turtle, while significant fish species include American Eel, Sawcheek Darter, and Ironcolor Shiner.

The South Carolina Revolutionary Rivers Trail is a National Recreation Trail that highlights the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution, following the Lynches Scenic River from Lynches River County Park to the confluence. The 66-mile-long trail offers paddlers the unique experience of floating through lands once utilized by Patriots as they fought British Loyalists.

About Pee Dee Land Trust

Founded in 1999, Pee Dee Land Trust (PDLT) has partnered with private landowners across the Pee Dee Watershed to permanently protect their land. The **mission** of Pee Dee Land Trust is to conserve, and to promote an appreciation of, the significant natural, agricultural, and historical resources of the Pee Dee Watershed of SC. But it takes the **people** to preserve
the **places**. PDLT has permanently protected over 39,659 acres in the Pee Dee Watershed. While remaining in private ownership, the 95 properties protected through conservation easements held by PDLT ensure that special places will be available for farming, forestry, and recreation for future generations.

Our land conservation efforts are focused on the Pee Dee Watershed, which includes Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Marion, Marlboro and Williamsburg Counties, and we follow a strategic plan to preserve:

- clean water in wild and scenic rivers for both drinking water supplies and a strong draw for outdoor recreational tourism
- productive farmland run by family farmers who support the food systems we all depend on
- working forest land supporting jobs and supplying mills as our number one sector of the agricultural economy in South Carolina
- rich natural areas where we can all enjoy the incredible diversity of native wildlife and vegetation that is our inheritance
- cherished historic sites as foundations for heritage tourism

To learn more about PDLT, conservation easements and how you can get involved in our conservation community, please visit our website: www.peedeelandtrust.org

CELEBRATING 23 YEARS
Pee Dee Land Trust

About Open Space Institute

Founded in 1974, the Open Space Institute (OSI) has been a partner in the protection of more than 2.3 million acres along the eastern seaboard from Quebec to Florida. OSI's Southeast office, established in Charleston in 2014, has been a partner in the protection of more than 50,000 acres in South Carolina, the vast majority of which will be open to the public. Visit OSI online at www.openspaceinstitute.org/states/south-carolina