

Your support made the difference in 2020.

Needless to say, last year wasn't what any of us expected.

In February, we held a record-breaking ForeverGreen Awards Luncheon honoring the legacy of Upstate Forever's founder, Brad Wyche. Nearly 500 people showed up, and the energy and enthusiasm were palpable.

Less than a month later, COVID-19 brought the country to a screeching halt. Over the summer, deep-seated racial injustice engendered anger, unrest, and sadness — but also a charge to strive for better.

It was a turbulent and uncertain time, and we had to adapt quickly. We closed our offices to the public, and staff began working remotely. Meetings and presentations became virtual. The Land Conservation team even started using satellite monitoring to steward protected properties. We redoubled our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts to more intentionally engage, support, and learn from the diverse community we serve.

Our mission to protect the Upstate's critical land and water resources has never been more relevant or urgent. Crowded parks and packed trails during COVID-19 shutdowns have brought the need for immediate, accelerated land protection to the forefront, as this overcrowding is representative of what we can expect as our population swells. We need more public places for outdoor recreation and relaxation, and we need them now. Time is not on our side as the region grows.

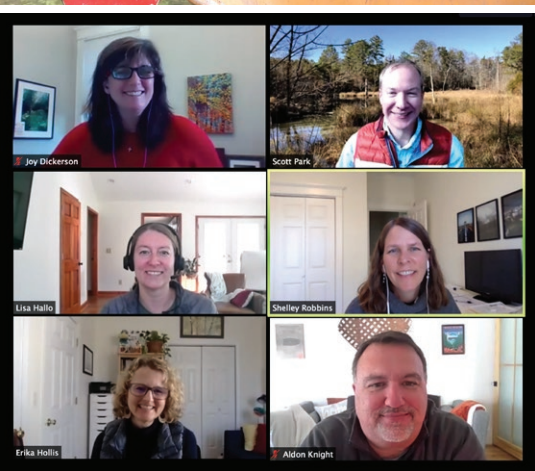
And, yet, despite the challenges, Upstate Forever had a tremendously successful year. I am extremely proud of our dedicated staff, who achieved so much under adverse circumstances.

However, we could not do any of this crucial work without your support, and we thank you. If you're receiving this report, you understand the importance of proactively, thoughtfully, and equitably addressing the growth that's coming our way. You realize that conservation boosts the economy, protects drinking water, and enhances quality of life. You understand that access to nature is necessary for human health and happiness.

I hope you will take a few moments to read about just a few of the success stories you made possible in 2020. If you're interested in learning more about any of these items, send us an email at info@upstateforever.org and we'll connect you to the right staff member.

For the latest updates on UF throughout the year, follow us on social media and visit upstateforever.org/email to make sure you're subscribed to our email lists. Again, thank you for your support, and here's to 2021!

Andrea Cooper | Executive Director, Upstate Forever



Top to bottom: **1)** Raleigh West, Director of the SC Conservation Bank, at the ForeverGreen Awards Luncheon in February. **2)** Honoree Brad Wyche (left) speaks with Bryant Harrison at the Luncheon. **3)** Volunteers at our Lake Conestee Nature Preserve Work Day in September. **4)** UF staff humor the communications director and smile for a screenshot during a Zoom meeting. **5)** Andrea Cooper displays two of the 1,000 masks that UF and partners donated last May to keep transit riders safe.



**2000+ ACRES
PROTECTED**



**1,024 DONORS
GAVE MORE THAN
\$550,000**

Highlights & success stories from 2020

Thousands of acres protected forever

In 2020, the Land Conservation team permanently protected 2,000+ new acres of land (including more than 1,000 acres in Union County and an expansion of the spectacular Grant Meadow property at the base of Table Rock) for an all-time total of 133 conservation easement properties across nearly 25,800 acres. In addition, partner projects, where UF was integral to the effort's success, added another 713 acres.

National Accreditation renewed

Following a rigorous application process, UF's land trust renewed its accreditation through the national Land Trust Alliance. This process includes a comprehensive review to ensure UF upholds strong standards and demonstrates sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship. Fewer than 1/3 of land trusts attain this distinction.

Safeguarding one of the world's rarest plants

Alongside residents and partners like SELC and the Native Plant Society, UF opposed developments that would have threatened populations of the ultra-rare Bunched Arrowhead plant in northern Greenville County. Travelers Rest is under significant development pressure right now, so it's critical to protect the sensitive habitats that support this plant and impact water quality for residents who live downstream.

Addressing sediment pollution in Pickens

UF joined Naturaland Trust and South Carolina Trout Unlimited to take legal action against the owners and operators of Arabella Farms, a Pickens County event venue, over violations of the Clean Water Act. Since 2017, numerous unlawful discharges of sediment-laden stormwater have blanketed and choked important water resources in this sensitive natural area, including waterways on a nearby conservation easement. SCELPA is representing us in this matter.

Reducing pollution in our lakes & rivers

The Clean Water team is working on reducing bacteria, sediment, and nutrient pollution in the Tyger River, Lake Greenwood, and 3&20 Creek watersheds. We also were instrumental in securing more than \$90K in federal funding to implement a septic repair and replacement program in watersheds in the Lake Keowee area.

Lawsuit settlement from massive fuel spill

A \$1.5 million settlement from a Clean Water Act lawsuit against Kinder Morgan over a 2014 fuel pipeline spill in Belton will be used to enhance water quality for residents in Anderson County and beyond. The suit was brought by the Southern Environmental Law Center on behalf of UF and the Savannah Riverkeeper. An independent fund has been set up to house the \$1.5M.

Precedent-setting rooftop solar proposal

UF worked with many partners on a landmark deal with Duke Energy that, if approved by the SC Public Service Commission, will restructure how rooftop solar power is valued when it is combined with smart meters and smart thermostats. The proposal has attracted attention from jurisdictions across the country.

Opposing an unnecessary pipeline in TR

We joined with local residents to put pressure on Piedmont Natural Gas to halt a proposed pipeline project in northern Greenville County that would have likely had a negative impact on Bunched Arrowhead, one of the world's rarest plants, and threatened the area's water quality (read more at bit.ly/2WVBHHA).

Launched Impact Greenville with local partners

We partnered with local stakeholders to launch Impact Greenville — a diverse coalition that hosts forums and educational events, provides technical support, and convenes advocates to shape public policy at the intersection of housing, transportation, and land use. Learn more at impactgreenville.org.

Upstate Forever's programs are:



LAND CONSERVATION



CLEAN WATER



LAND PLANNING & POLICY



ENERGY



STATE POLICY

Advocacy for more progressive and equitable land use plans and policies

The Land Policy Team advocated in seven Upstate jurisdictions for land use policies that expand housing choices, mobility options, and green spaces, and reduce sprawl into forests and farmlands. We also partnered with stakeholders, residents, government staff, and community leaders to advance progressive and equitable comprehensive plans in Greenville County and the cities of Greenville, Spartanburg, and Greer. In addition, we supported efforts to strengthen tree preservation and protection for all City of Greenville residents and pushed for improved land development regulations in line with Greenville County's unanimously adopted comprehensive plan.

A new conservation trust to protect special places in Greenville County

We partnered with a broad coalition of businesses, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and residents to encourage Greenville County Council to establish a Historic and Natural Resources Trust. Council voted unanimously to establish the fund in December 2019, which is a huge step forward in efforts to protect more public recreation areas, farms, trails, and other special places that enhance quality of life for Greenville residents.

Exploring the value of water, a basic human right

Our Clean Water team debuted the Water Log, an email newsletter dedicated to water quality news and issues. We also released the "Value of Water" issue of the *Upstate Advocate* (read it at upstateforever.org/newsletter) to highlight the ways water — a basic human right — impacts every aspect of our lives, and why we must safeguard it in light of rapid development.

Educating and mobilizing residents in Greenville and Spartanburg

We mobilized community members through calls to action via social media and e-lists dedicated to land policy issues in Greenville and Spartanburg. We also engaged 60 residents in Citizens Planning Academies to build awareness of how land use shapes our community and how residents can influence community planning and land policy decisions in Greenville.

Federal partnership to protect vanishing farmland

The Land Conservation team received \$3.9 million grant from USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program to protect priority farmland in the Upstate. Local farms can strengthen our food supply chains and are an important part of combating food insecurity. UF is currently the only land trust in the state enrolled in this partnership, and we expect it to be a great tool to incentivize protection of our region's vanishing prime farmland.

Progress at the State House, despite COVID

While COVID-19 halted much in the Statehouse this year, we advocated for several great bills that were passed, including the Black Market Wildlife Trading Bill and Energy Market Reform Study Committee Bill. If you'd like to get the latest updates on the 2021 Legislative session, sign up to receive weekly Legislative Update emails at upstateforever.org/email.

PROGRESS ON FIVE-YEAR* STRATEGIC GOALS

GOAL: PROTECT 15,000 MORE ACRES OF CRITICAL LANDS

5,698 / 15,000

GOAL: 10 POLICIES THAT SUPPORT ALTERNATIVES TO SPRAWL

5 / 10

GOAL: DOUBLE UPSTATE FOREVER'S BASE OF SUPPORT

47% INCREASE

**From UF's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan*

HOW TO HELP

Support our work: Make a tax-deductible gift at upstateforever.org/donate or by mailing a check to our Greenville office.

Consider a planned gift: Find more info at upstateforever.giftlegacy.com.

Stay informed: For the latest updates and action alerts from UF, sign up for our email lists at upstateforever.org.email and follow us on social media.





Protecting Land & Water | Advocacy | Balanced Growth

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ON THE COVER

Grant Meadow, Pickens County: In 2020, Upstate Forever's Land Trust expanded protection for this beautiful property thanks to the vision of generous landowners, a grant from the SC Conservation Bank, and contributions from donors like you.

DONOR IMPACT REPORT | 2020

