



South Carolina
Forestry Commission



BUDGET REQUEST

FY2025-26

ABOUT US

SCFC ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Our history, mission, vision and values

The SC Forestry Commission’s general duties are defined in State Code 48-23-90. In summary, the code requires the agency to make an annual report to the General Assembly on “forest conditions ... including recommendations to the public as to reforestation. ... to prevent, control and extinguish fires, including the enforcement of ... laws pertaining to the protection of the forests and woodlands give such advice, assistance and cooperation to private owners of land and promote ... appreciation by the public of the advantages of forestry and the benefits ... cooperate with the federal government in the distribution of funds allotted to the State for forestry ...”

Mission: Our mission is to protect, promote and enhance South Carolina’s forests for the benefit of all.

Vision: Healthy forests, resilient communities, impeccable service

Values: Safety | Integrity | Community | Service | Commitment

Key officials

Walt McPhail

Chair, SC Forestry Commission

Eric Smith

Vice Chair, SC Forestry Commission

Scott Phillips

State Forester

Tom Patton

Deputy State Forester

Cathy Nordeen

Director of Administration

David Jones

General Counsel / Legislative Liaison

Major program areas

Forest Protection

- Wildland Fire Suppression
- Dispatch operations
- Law Enforcement

Forest Management

- Landowner Assistance
- State Forests
- Urban & Community Forestry
- Forest Health (insects & disease)

Forest Development

- Industry recruitment
- Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA)
- Water quality protection (BMPs)
- Nursery & Tree Improvement

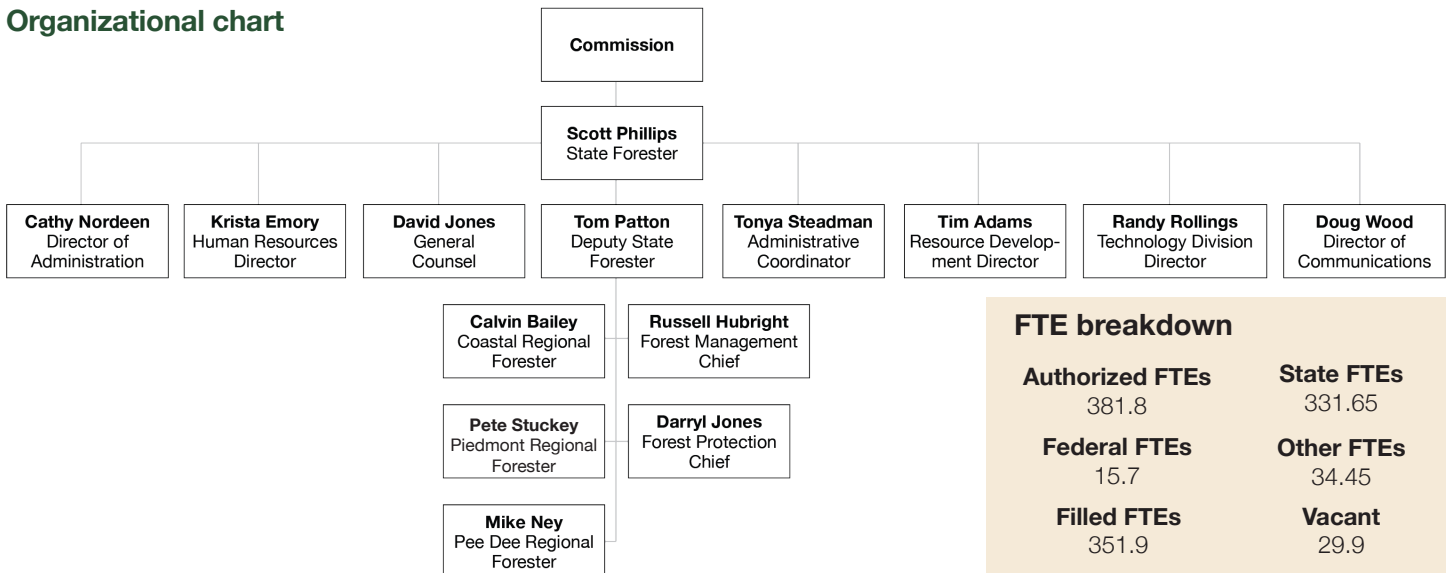
Communications

- Public information
- Environmental education
- Media relations
- Creative services

Technology

- I.T. services
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- Telecommunications

Organizational chart



FTE breakdown

Authorized FTEs	381.8	State FTEs	331.65
Federal FTEs	15.7	Other FTEs	34.45
Filled FTEs	351.9	Vacant	29.9



SCFC BUDGET REQUEST

FY2025-26, PRIORITIZED SUMMARY

Priority 1: Retaining Wildfire Prevention Staff

\$345,000 recurring

- The prevention of wildfires and the mitigation of the potential effects of wildfires are critical components of the Forestry Commission's mission. Federal funding for program staff that coordinate the agency's wildfire prevention efforts with communities and local governments is being discontinued. Unless state funding is secured the agency risks losing these important positions which will reduce its ability to implement successful prevention campaigns and assist communities with wildfire mitigation projects which could result in more wildfires and increased damage to homes and properties.
- Fully funding this request will shift three FTEs to more stable state funding ensuring the future of the agency's wildfire prevention program and its ability to mitigate wildfire risks to communities throughout the state.

Priority 2: Recruitment and Retention

\$280,000 recurring / \$63,000 non-recurring ¹

- Agency mechanics perform critical repairs to firefighting equipment in both field and shop settings and conduct general maintenance to ensure readiness. Current salary levels are below comparable positions and have resulted in challenges in recruitment and retention for mechanics with the specialized skills required to meet agency needs.
- Fully funding this request will provide salary increases to bring agency mechanic salaries in line with the current market rates and strengthen the agencies recruitment and retention of these critical positions. It will also add a new FTE, equipment and operating funds to increase employee oversight and safety for shop operations in the Piedmont Region.

Priority 3: Investing in Information Technology

\$550,000 recurring

- The current provider of the agency's Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) software is discontinuing operations by the end of 2024, leaving us without system support. CAD plays a mission-critical role in our firefighting operations and without support, system errors may be unresolvable increasing wildfire response time and thereby wildfire risks to lives and property. The agency has leveraged carry-forward funding for the initial procurement of FireResponse, the next generation CAD solution for wildland fire agencies. However, funding is needed to support the recurring costs of a new CAD solution and to support ongoing maintenance of agency information technology infrastructure.
- Fully funding this request will provide recurring funding critical to support a new CAD solution and the maintenance for agency GIS and Microsoft platforms.

Priority 4: Expanding Forest Health Capacity

\$337,000 recurring / \$52,000 non-recurring ²

- Increasing expenses for salaries and operating costs combined with stable to declining federal funds for base level forest health programs have resulted in fewer surveys for forest pests and reduced access to forest health expertise. To increase program impact, state funding is necessary to offset salaries which will allow the federal funds to be utilized for more value-added projects.
- Fully funding this request will shift three FTEs to state funding allowing federal funds to be utilized for strategic projects that better protect South Carolina's forests and provide one-time funding needed to purchase a vehicle and supplies for the program.

1 Non-recurring component corresponds to the B2 form designated as priority #8.

2 Non-recurring component corresponds to the B2 form designated as priority #9.

Priority 5: Strengthening Forestland Conservation \$354,000 recurring / \$5.05 million non-recurring ³

- South Carolina is one of the fastest growing states in the nation and as our population increases so does the risk of deforestation. A primary goal of the Forestry Commission is the conservation of working forests and recently the agency has stepped up efforts to conserve working forests in our state through fee-simple acquisitions of forestland to be added to our State Forests system or through the acquisition of conservation easements of working forests. These conservation easements leverage federal funding that requires a state agency hold title to the easements and currently the Forestry Commission is the only agency that fills this niche. Currently the agency does not have dedicated staff for this work and the projects we are working on are outstripping agency capacity. Dedicated funding and staff are necessary to increase the agency’s capacity to capitalize on conservation opportunities to help attain agency and state conservation goals.
- Fully funding this request will provide one new FTE, shift one FTE from other funds to state, and increase agency capacity to identify and capitalize on conservation opportunities for forestlands in our state.

Priority 6: Expanding Prescribed Fire Capacity \$170,000 recurring / \$3.8 million non-recurring ⁴

- Prescribed fire can significantly reduce wildfire risks while also improving habitat for native species. However, the Forestry Commission does not have adequate capacity to meet demand for prescribed fire on the lands it manages or on the private lands we provide assistance on, averaging just 58% contract completion over the last 4 years. In South Carolina, it is estimated that only half of acres that should be prescribed burned each year are actually completed. The agency seeks to add a permanent position to coordinate prescribed fire efforts at the state level and funding for contract resources to increase the pace and scale of prescribed burning on agency and private lands.
- Fully funding this request will provide one new FTE to coordinate the statewide prescribed fire program and increase the creation of prescribed fire associations around the state, empowering private landowners to complete more burns on private lands. It will also provide one-time funding to allow the Commission to use contract resources to increase the pace and scale of prescribed fire on private and state-owned lands.

Priority 7: Strengthening Forest Business Recruitment \$150,000 recurring

- Recent mill closures have rocked the forestry supply chain in SC. By 2023, the economic stresses related to the COVID pandemic and global competition, resulted in two large paper mills closing, resulting in 3.2 million tons of lost fiber market in South Carolina. This began a ripple effect within the industry, resulting in the closure of 4 chip mills across the state. Just in 2024, both Interfor and Georgia Pacific have announced the closure of sawmills in Summerville and Prosperity, respectively. The most recent announcement has been the announced closure of International Paper’s mill in Georgetown which alone generated \$874 million in economic activity in Georgetown County. All told, these closures and reductions in production have resulted in the loss of over 8 million tons of wood consumption in SC. A dedicated position is needed to “mine” forest industry economic development projects in SC that could stabilize markets and restart growth in this critical sector.
- Fully funding this request will provide one new FTE, and operating funds, that will be dedicated to the recruitment of both primary and secondary forest industry to the state and will be charged with “mining” projects by actively reaching and recruiting companies that are complementary to SC’s natural resource base and forestry supply chain.

3 Non-recurring components correspond to the B2 designated as priority #10 (\$52,000 for vehicle) and the capital request designated as priority #12 (\$5 million).

4 Non-recurring component corresponds to the B2 designated as priority #11 (\$52,000 for vehicle and \$3,750,000 for the prescribed burn crews).

Total SCFC FY2025-26 budget request: \$11.155 million



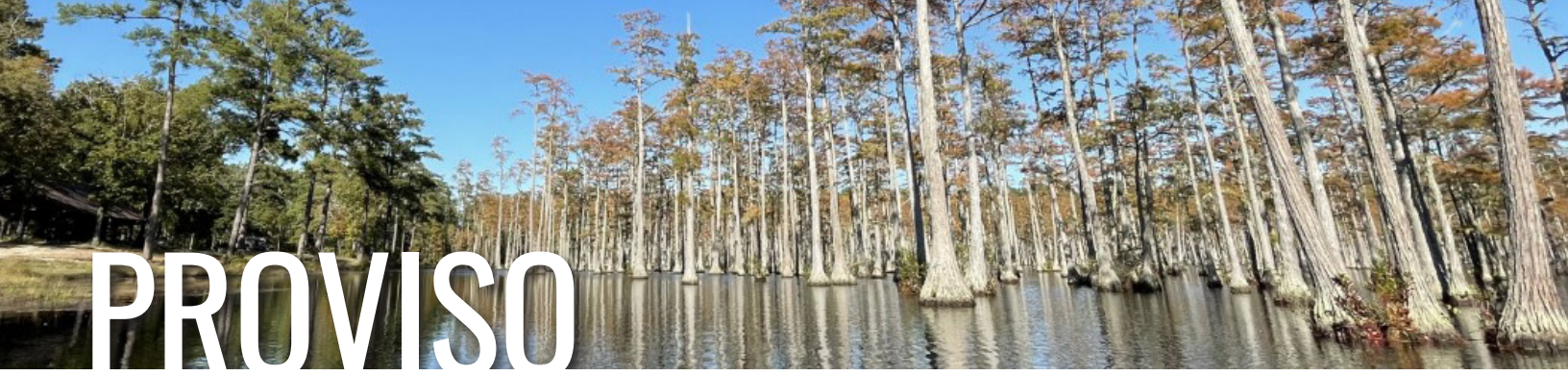
FINANCIAL UPDATE

BUDGET EXECUTION, FY2023-24/FY2024-25

Major Budget Categories	Fiscal Year	General Funds Appropriations	General Funds Expenditures	Federal Funds Appropriations	Federal Funds Expenditures	Other Funds Appropriations	Other Funds Expenditures
Personal Services	2023-24	\$16,407,920.00	\$14,682,474.00	\$1,028,518.00	\$896,102.00	\$1,390,000.00	\$1,125,453.00
	2024-25	\$18,054,119.00	\$7,450,882.00	\$1,028,518.00	\$417,272.00	\$1,390,000.00	\$537,357.00
Other Operating	2023-24	\$5,428,655.00	\$10,313,898.00	\$3,899,567.00	\$1,983,538.00	\$7,878,713.00	\$3,766,279.00
	2024-25	\$5,458,655.00	\$1,899,996.00	\$5,149,567.00	\$703,977.00	\$7,878,713.00	\$1,812,839.00
Special Items (Forest Renewal and Projects)	2023-24	\$200,000.00	\$200,000.00			\$5,300,000.00	\$1,443,534.00
	2024-25	\$200,000.00	\$184,219.00			\$4,639,992.00	\$83,401.00
Distributions to Subdivisions	2023-24	\$125,000.00	\$121,235.00	\$800,475.00	* \$1,663,714.00	\$1,100,000.00	\$807,830.00
	2024-25	\$125,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$2,050,475.00	\$489,924.00	\$1,100,000.00	
Fringe Benefits	2023-24	\$9,010,311.00	\$7,902,920.00	\$435,000.00	\$419,414.00	\$510,000.00	\$559,341.00
	2024-25	\$9,838,157.00	\$3,964,607.00	\$435,000.00	\$201,519.00	\$510,000.00	\$275,313.00
Non-Recurring	2023-24	\$5,100,000.00	\$1,584,458.00				
	2024-25	\$14,700.00					
Carry-forward	2023-24	\$2,697,980.00					
	2024-25	\$2,881,207.00					
TOTALS	2023-24	\$38,969,866.00	\$34,804,985.00	\$6,163,560.00	\$4,962,768.00	\$16,178,713.00	\$7,702,437.00
	2024-25	\$36,571,838.00	\$13,514,704.00	\$8,663,560.00	\$1,812,692.00	\$15,518,705.00	\$2,708,910.00

* Additional federal authority was a one-time increase for IIJA funds. Permanent additional federal authority was requested and approved for FY 2025.





PROVISO REQUESTS

43.1 - Grant funds carry-forward

Proviso Text: The Forestry Commission is authorized to use unexpended federal grant funds in the current year to pay for expenditures incurred in the prior year.

Year introduced: 1996 / Years in budget: 29

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.2 - Retention of emergency funds

Proviso Text: The Forestry Commission is authorized to retain all funds received as reimbursement of expenditures from other state or federal agencies when personnel and equipment are mobilized due to an emergency.

Year introduced: 2000 / Years in budget: 25

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.3 - Commissioned officers' physicals

Proviso Text: The Forestry Commission is authorized to pay the cost of physical examinations for agency personnel who are required to receive such physical examinations prior to receiving a law enforcement commission.

Year introduced: 2006 / Years in budget: 19

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.4 - Compensatory payments

Proviso Text: In the event a State of Emergency is declared by the Governor, exempt employees of the Forestry Commission may be paid for actual hours worked in lieu of accruing compensatory time, at the discretion of the agency director, and providing funds are available.

Year introduced: 2012 / Years in budget: 13

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.5 - Sale of promotional items

The Forestry Commission may sell promotional items that advocate for forestry and forest culture, including items featuring the South Carolina Forestry Commission Forest Life brand and logo, for the purpose of generating funds for agency operations. Unexpended funds may be carried forward from the prior fiscal year into the current.

Year introduced: 2022 / Years in budget: 3

Requested Action: Retain/Codify

43.6 - Firefighting equipment & response carry-forward

Proviso Text: The Forestry Commission is authorized to carry forward any unspent funds appropriated for firefighting equipment into the current fiscal year to be expended for the same purpose.

Year introduced: 2023 / Years in budget: 2

Requested Action: Retain/Codify



PERFORMANCE UPDATE

SUMMARY OF FY2023-24 ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

Accomplishments

As documented in the agency's FY2023-24 Accountability Report, the Forestry Commission's accomplishments are numerous and varied, with notable progress being made toward each of the five goals around which our newly revised strategic plan is based. Organized by the five principal areas, or goals, of our agency's multifaceted mission – Enhance Public Benefits From Trees And Forests, Protect Forests From Harm, Conserve Working Forests, Raise Awareness About Our Forests, and Strengthen The Commission For The Future – the plan lays out explicit strategies supporting each goal, and the achievement of each of the strategies is gauged by a combination of individual and composite key performance indicators (KPIs).

Goal 1: Enhance Public Benefits From Trees And Forests

- SCFC, in partnership with the Forestry Association of South Carolina, formed the Forest Recovery Task Force to catalyze market-based conservation efforts to bolster SC's forestry supply chain and sustain the state's forests so they can continue to provide economic, environmental and social benefits.
- Nearly \$105 million in capital investment projects were announced in FY24. These announced projects are expected to create 340 new jobs. There were 5 forest products-based announcements this fiscal year.
- The agency's Forest Markets Development Index, which quantifies the agency's efforts to retain and grow markets for forest products, was 7.9. This is 26% above the annual target. SCFC staff provided 239 business assists, engaged on 15 economic development projects, and participated in three trade events.
- The SCFC Forest Ecosystem Benefits Index was 7.21, which is 9% above the annual target. The agency's Environmental Management Program provided 19.75 hours of instruction across 16 training programs, reaching 556 loggers, landowners, and forestry professionals. Best Management Practices (BMP) Foresters completed 238 BMP courtesy exams to help ensure compliance, completed 571 site visits and responded to 18 complaints.
- The agency's Community Forestry index was 7.65, which is more than 7% above baseline and 53% above the annual target. The Urban and Community Forestry Program's outreach served an estimated 3.54 million citizens and provided nearly 1,200 training hours to communities and tree care professionals.

Goal 2: Protect Forests From Harm

- SCFC awarded a 5-year contract for Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs), which provide increased capacity to respond to wildland fires during initial attack. These resources will be available for service in fall of 2024 and a huge step forward for wildfire response in SC.
- The agency purchased 11 safer enclosed-cab dozers, toward the 160 target, in FY24. The agency needs to procure 11-12 dozer units each year based on the 15-year safe service life for this firefighting equipment
- SCFC responded to 1,221 wildfires that burned 7,722 acres. Fifty-five percent of these fires were caused by debris burning, the number 1 cause of wildfires in SC.
- Wildfire prevention efforts continued across the state, including wildfire presentations that reached over 300 people, 12 cooperator meetings for Community Wildfire Protection Plan developments and 17 community outreach events with more than 4,650 people in attendance. Other prevention efforts have resulted in 104 community wildfire risk assessments in association with both Firewise USA communities and fuel mitigation grants, which funded 1,234 acres of fuel mitigation projects using approximately \$140,000 in federal grant funds.
- The agency's Forest Health Index was 5.42, which is 16% below FY23. The primary drivers of this drop are increasing costs to deliver forest health programs and stable/declining federal funds to support this work. In FY24 1,393 acres received southern pine beetle treatments versus 2,421 acres in FY23.

Goal 3: Conserve Working Forests

- The agency assisted 1,776 landowners during FY24, which is 11% below the annual target of 2,000. Shortfall is due to recruitment/retention issues and new/inexperienced forestry staff.
- SCFC achieved a 95% customer satisfaction level for forest management assistance for FY24 (97% in FY23).
- The agency recorded a significant increase in prescribed burning – more than 477,000 acres counting all sources. SCFC personnel carried out prescribed burning on 10,761 acres and performed standby service on 2,449 acres. In addition, the agency leveraged federal funds to create a new Prescribed Fire Coordinator position that has improved agency use of non-SCFC fire crews and encouraged the formation of prescribed fire associations, enabling more private landowners to use prescribed fire to meet their objectives. Seventy percent of all forestry prescribed burns during FY24 were supervised by personnel who had obtained CPFM certification.
- With the help of conservation partners, SCFC acquired 2,248 acres in Georgetown County at, essentially, no cost to the agency. This property was added to Wee Tee State Forest, increasing the size of the property to more than 18,000 contiguous acres, allowing for expanded public access and contributing to a growing corridor of protected land in the Santee Basin.
- With the help of conservation partners, SCFC was selected as the long-term steward for the 5,000 acres Congaree Mitigation Site in Richland County known as Millaree. Once transferred to the agency the property will become a new state forest managed for multiple uses as are SC's five other state forests.

Goal 4: Raise Awareness About Our Forests

- New federal grant funding was used to hire two FIA Foresters in temporary grant positions to bolster plot production. FIA plot production was 81% of the target for FY24, which is down 8% from last fiscal year due to difficulties recruiting and retaining FIA Foresters, especially those in temporary grant positions. However, accuracy scores remain very high (>98%).
- Efforts to grow the number of Project Learning Tree (PLT) facilitators were rewarded with significant growth in FY24. Currently 51 certified PLT facilitators are active in SC, which is a 42% increase over FY23 and the highest number of PLT facilitators ever recorded in SC.
- The addition of a full-time social media coordinator last year has significantly bolstered the SCFC's presence on all major social media platforms while simultaneously expanding its ability to gather quality metrics related to these efforts. The agency Facebook page boasts more than 40,000 followers and has an engagement rate of 8%, which is more than four times higher than the average for government agencies. For FY24 the social media analytics index was 6.23.

Goal 5: Strengthen The Commission For The Future

- Successfully recruited the Assistant Protection Chief, Staff Forester, and two pilot positions received in the FY23 budget.
- The overall turnover rate for FY24 is 8.4%, down from 11.9% in FY23. The number of qualified applicants for open forestry positions in the agency more than tripled from 4 applicants/posting in FY23 to 12.5 applicants/posting in FY24. For forester positions the agency averaged 12 qualified applicants/posting in FY24, which is more than four times the FY23 average. Twelve forester positions were hired in FY24, which is tremendous and speaks to stepped-up recruiting efforts within the agency.
- SCFC completed its third comprehensive employee engagement survey since 2018. The results of the 2024 survey show continued improvement. The full 2024 survey achieved a 66% response rate and resulted in an employee engagement index of 7.83 compared to 7.53 in 2021.
- Appropriations and the strategic use of carry-forward funds has allowed the agency to invest in technology to increase its efficiency and effectiveness. In FY24 nearly 32% of the agency's I.T. spending was leveraged to modernize and transform the agency. While implementation is currently in progress, the most significant project was the replacement of the agency's legacy Computer Aided Dispatch System (CAD). This new system will modernize our fire dispatch operations and provide field staff greater visibility into incidents from their mobile devices. Other examples include a new fleet maintenance package that provides diagnostic data to our mechanics and the purchase of three AI-enabled wildfire detection cameras that will be installed in strategic locations to monitor the horizon for evidence of wildfire.