



South Carolina Conservation Bank

Conservation Priority Mapping

July 1, 2023

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Introduction

The South Carolina Conservation Bank (SCCB) has been tasked with developing statewide conservation priority maps that will be submitted to the South Carolina General Assembly as identified in South Carolina House Bill 4727 Section 48-59-50, B(5):

“(5) develop conservation criteria to be used, in addition to the criteria set forth in Section 48-59-70(D), that advance and support federal, state, and local conservation goals, plans, objectives, and initiatives. In order to assist in the development of conservation criteria, the bank must coordinate with the appropriate groups to integrate the goals, plans, objectives, and initiatives, as well as land use patterns, into a statewide conservation map. The map must be created by July 1, 2019, and the criteria and map must be reviewed no less than every ten years thereafter. The criteria list and map must be submitted to the General Assembly annually.”

In June of 2019, the first statewide conservation priority maps were produced by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources for the South Carolina Conservation Bank. They consisted of five sub-maps (public access, ecological conservation priorities, cultural resources, private working lands, and water resources), and a final conservation priority model. Each of these sub-maps included one or more data layer(s) representative of the conservation category. The priority maps were updated again in May of 2022 to consist of six sub-maps (conservation corridors, ecological conservation priorities, sustainable forestry and agriculture, water resources, proximity to urban interface, and public benefit), and a final conservation priority model map. From May of 2022, the South Carolina Conservation Bank plans to update the maps annually.

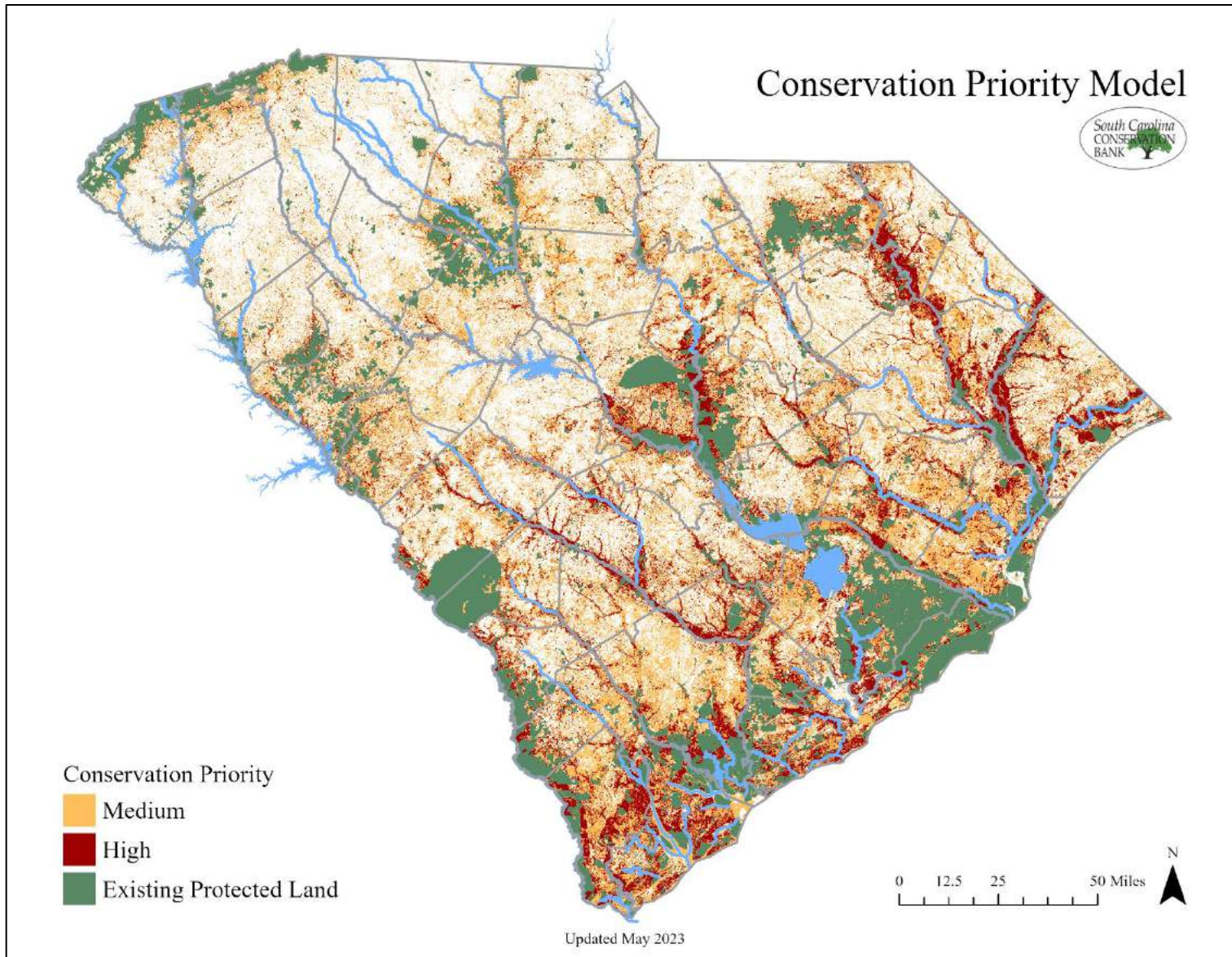
This document outlines the development of the July 2023 statewide conservation priority map. Included in this document are maps and statistics for current conservation conditions in South Carolina, the final statewide conservation priority map, and each of the 6 sub-maps. Finally, each data layer used is documented with how it was ranked for the sub-map.

Statewide Conservation Priority Model

South Carolina's land area is about 20 million acres. Currently, approximately 3 million acres of South Carolina's land area is under some form of protection (over 22,000 more acres than recorded in the August 2022 report). Approximately 2.5 million acres are developed. Both of these numbers increase annually.

This project has identified 8.6 million acres of South Carolina's landscape as medium priority (6.1 million acres) and high priority (2.5 million acres) for conservation (Map 1, Statewide Conservation Priority Model), which will help guide the South Carolina Conservation Bank's conservation funding activities. (The 2022 project had previously identified 7.9 million acres as medium and high priority.) A county-by-county breakdown of conservation priority acreage is found in Appendix A.

Map 1. Statewide Conservation Priority Model.



Current Conservation Conditions

The current status of conservation and land protection in the state provides context for conservation priority mapping and a baseline against which future conservation efforts can be measured.

There are approximately 20 million acres of land in South Carolina. Approximately 3 million acres are under some form of protection, representing more than 14% of the total land area.

Land Protection Over Time

Land protection has increased in the last three decades (Figure 1 and Map 2), with the largest increase in private land protection. Significant increases are also seen in state protected land. The South Carolina Conservation Bank was established in 2002 and began grants for conservation in 2004, bolstering the upward trend of increased conservation acreage.

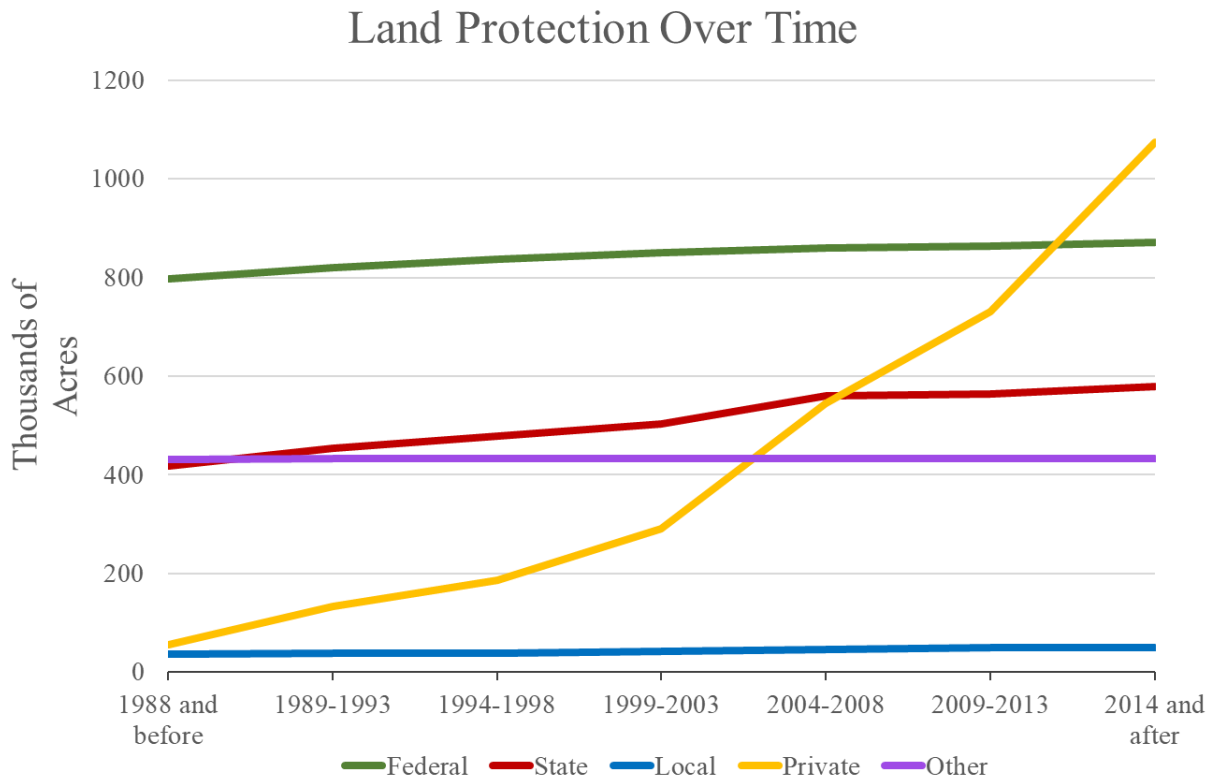
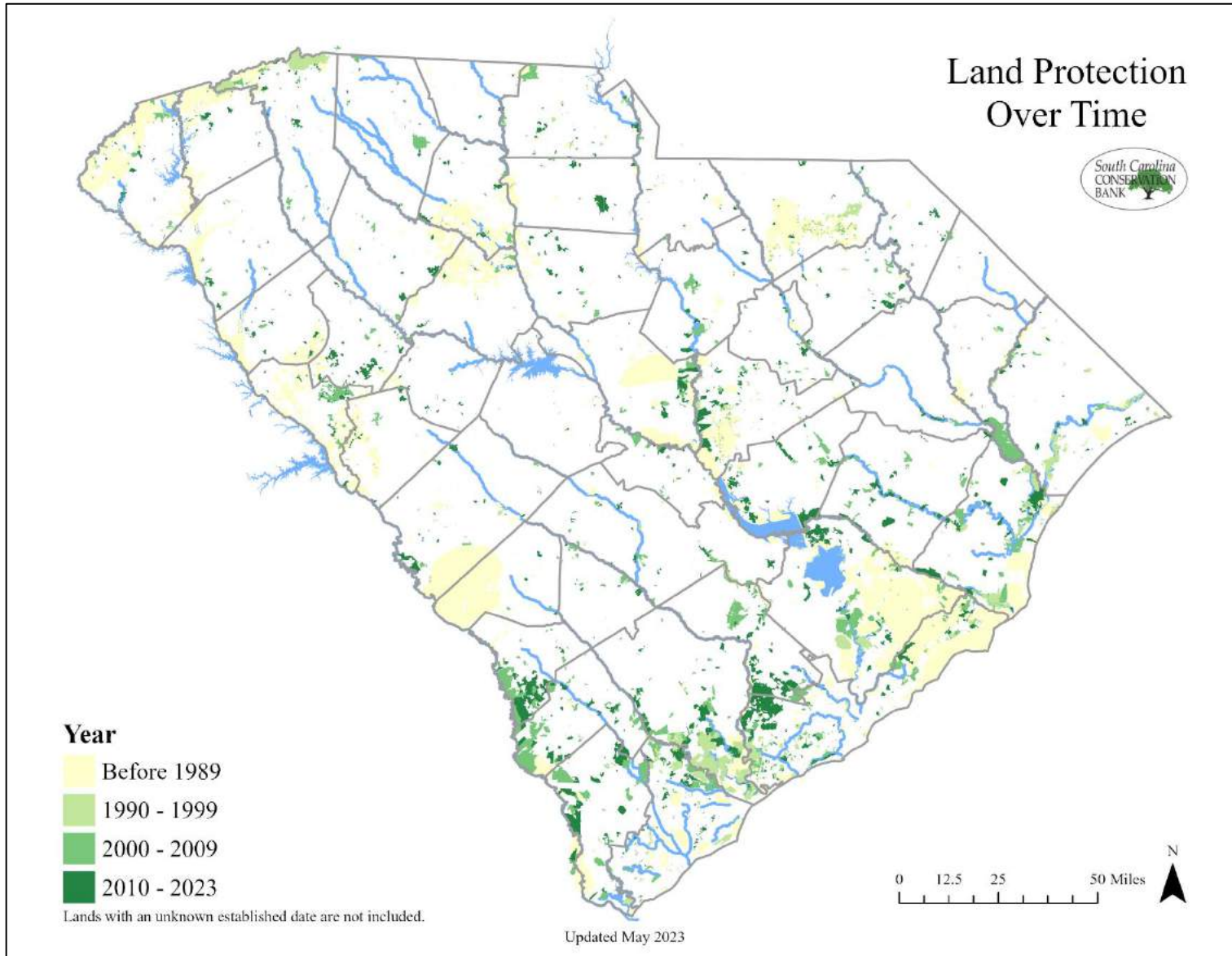


Figure 1. Land Protection Over Time*.^[1]

*The data are from the January 2023 release of The Nature Conservancy’s Protected Lands dataset (exported May 31, 2023). ‘Other’ protected lands include those owned by the US Department of Energy and US Department of Defense, as well as some lands owned by Clemson University, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and Santee Cooper.

Map 2. Land Protection Over Time.



Current Land Protection by Entity

Protected lands in South Carolina are managed by different entities. Private and state protected lands together contribute to more than half of total protection (Figure 2, Table 1, and Map 3).

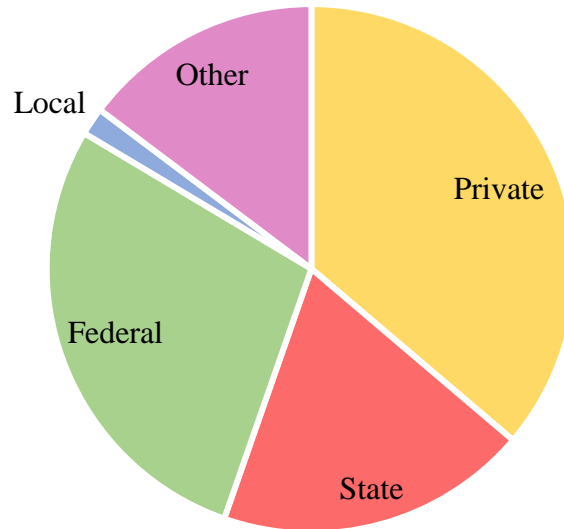


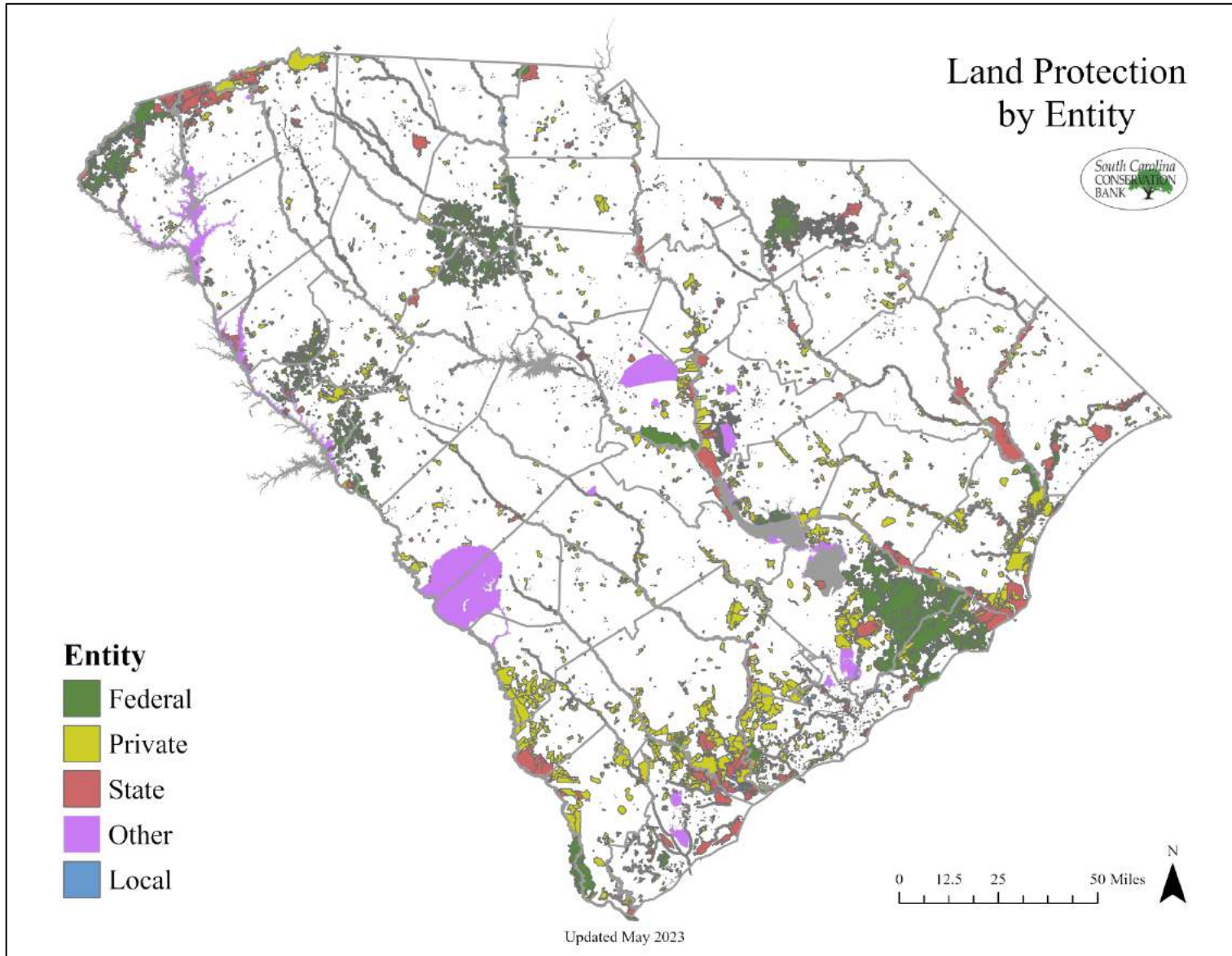
Figure 2. Land Protection by Entity.^[1]

Entity	Acres	% of Protected Acres	% of State Land Area
Federal	828,852	28.2	4.2
Private	1,063,479	36.2	5.3
State	561,825	19.2	2.8
Other	432,793	14.8	2.2
Local	46,764	1.6	0.2
Total	2,933,713	100	14.7

SC Total Land Area 19,971,591 acres

Table 1. Land Protection by Entity, with percentages of protected acres and total state land area.^[1] Total protected acreage increased by 22,169 acres since the August 2022 report, a 1.1% increase of total state land area.

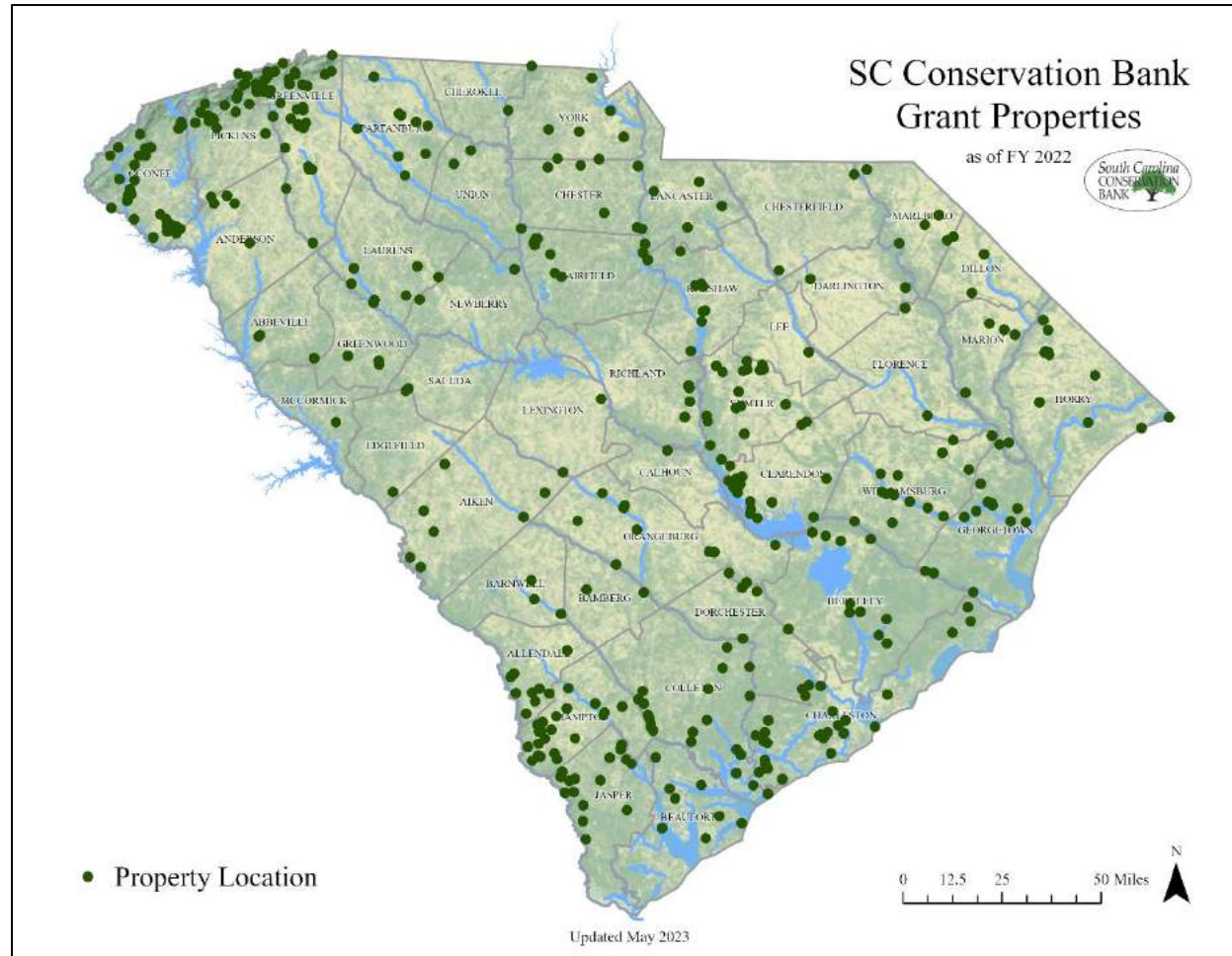
Map 3. Land Protection by Entity.



South Carolina Conservation Bank Projects

As of fiscal year 2022, the South Carolina Conservation Bank has helped conserve 354,016 acres in the State (15,314 additional acres since fiscal year 2021).

Map 4. Current South Carolina Conservation Bank Grant Properties.



Land Cover Conditions

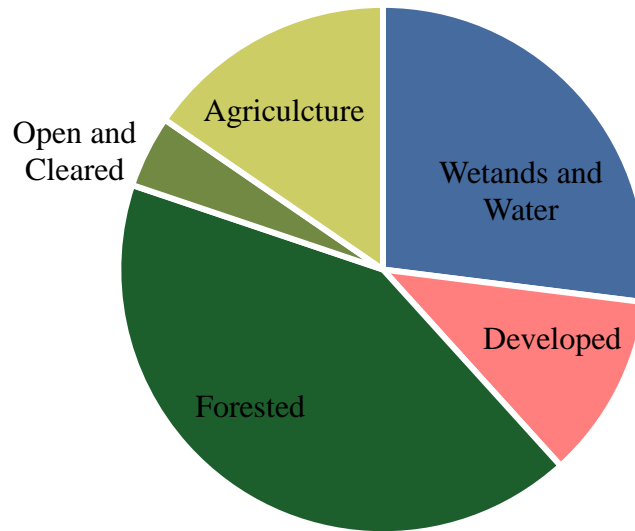


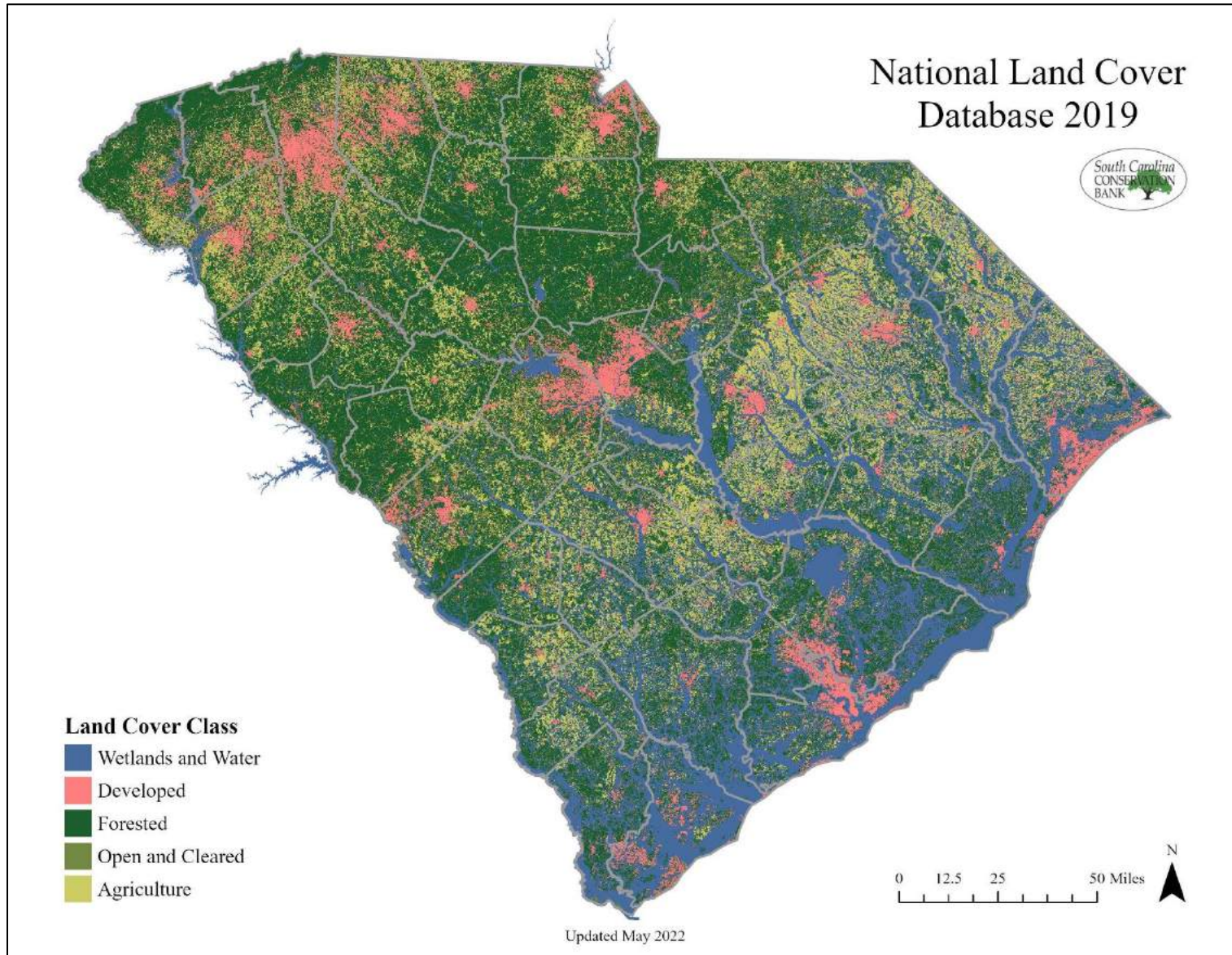
Figure 3: South Carolina Land Cover, grouped into four basic categories*. ^[2]

In reviewing the land cover changes between 2016 and 2019, there are three key trends:

- 1) **Developed land has increased by 26,000 acres.** The percentage of developed land increased from 11.18% to 11.31% of the state's total land area.
- 2) **Forested land has increased 48,000 acres.** The percentage of forested land (of any forest class) has increased from 41.64% to 41.88% of the state's total land area. The forested land increase is seen in deciduous forest and shrub/scrub land, whereas evergreen and mixed forest have decreased.
- 3) **Protected lands increased by 94,000 acres in the same period,** based on the protected lands dataset.

*The data are from the 2019 release of the National Land Cover Database (NLCD), the latest available data (released June 2021). This data release can be compared to the prior release (2016), and a land cover change index dataset can be reviewed to see where land cover change has occurred over multiple NLCD datasets.

Map 5. National Land Cover Database.



Current Conservation Conditions References

1. The Nature Conservancy SC Protected Lands. Accessed May 2023.
2. Multi-Resolution Land Characteristics Consortium - National Land Cover Database 2019. Accessed May 2023.

Priority Mapping Data and Methodology

General Methodology

The statewide conservation priority map was developed using an occurrence modeling method. Best-available datasets representing each sub-map's category were obtained. With guidance from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), it was determined how the attributes of each dataset would be ranked. These ranks are outlined in this section of this document. The datasets were processed into raster datasets with values according to their attribute ranking. To generate each sub-map model, the data layers were 'stacked', or summed on a per-pixel basis. The resulting sub-map raster was divided into low, medium, and high priority categories based on Jenks Natural Breaks classification and feedback from the Technical Advisory Committee.

The final summed priority model is a combination of all six sub-maps. Each sub-map model was given a normalized value for their low, medium, and high-ranking pixels. A normalized value was used so that each sub-map model had equal weight in the summed priority model. The normalized sub-map models were summed on a per-pixel basis to produce the summed priority model.

All data were re-projected to NAD83 UTM Zone 17, clipped to the extent of South Carolina, rasterized to 30 meters spatial resolution, snapped to the cell alignment of and masked by the National Land Cover Dataset. The areas that were already under protection were merged with each dataset and assigned a value of 99. Finally, all areas that had no data or were not determined to be priority were assigned a value of 0.

Sub-Map 1: Conservation Corridors

Habitat fragmentation is a major threat to biodiversity. Connectivity facilitates animal movement, seed dispersal, and other ecological processes. Creating corridors of protected land is critical to conservation.

Data Layers

Adjacency to Protected Lands

- High: parcels touching existing protected land, and parcels adjacent to parcels that touch existing protected land that are equal to or greater than 500 acres
- Medium: parcels adjacent to parcels that touch existing protected land that are less than 500 acres, and parcels within two miles of existing protected land that are equal to or greater than 500 acres
- Low: parcels within two miles of existing protected land that are less than 500 acres

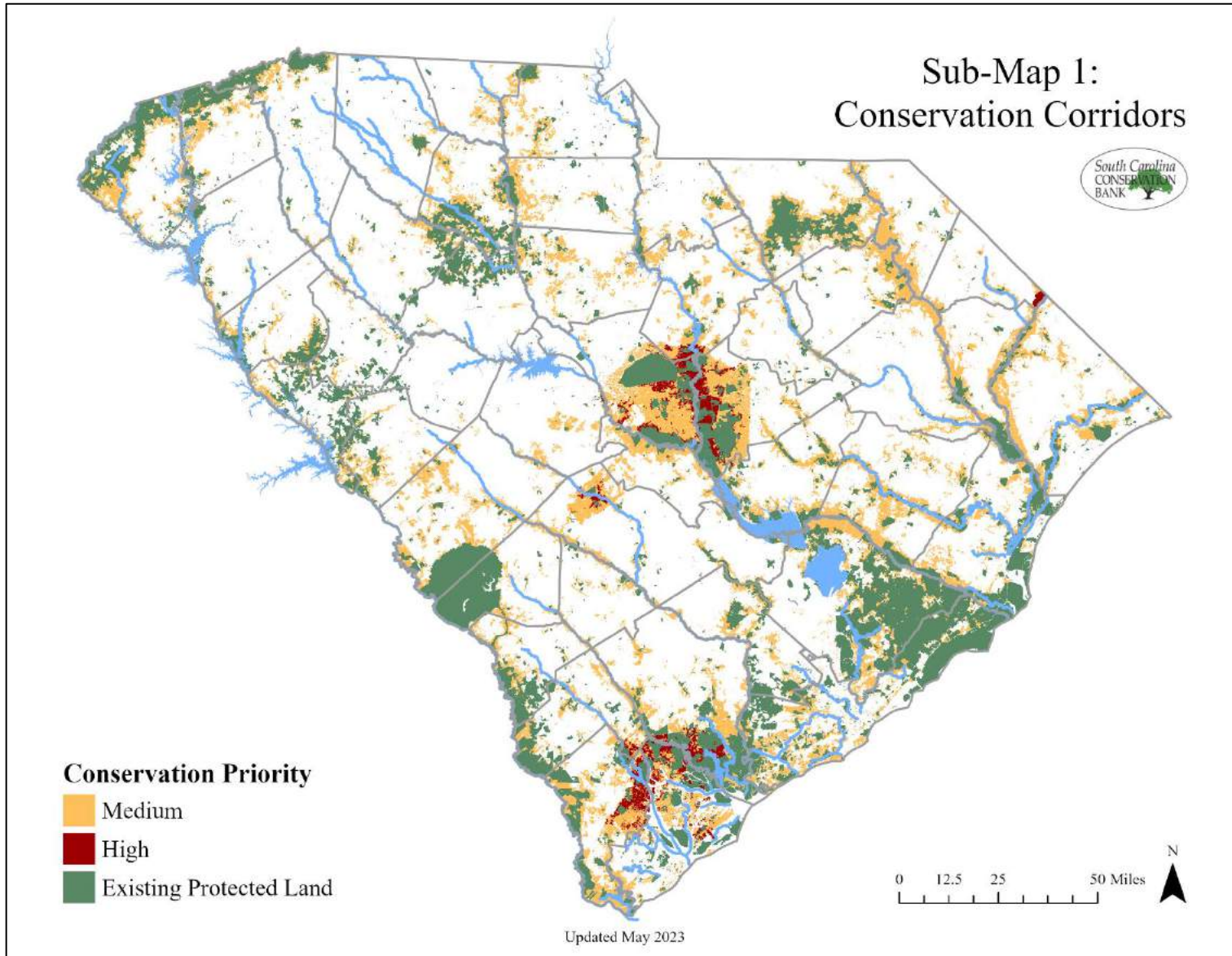
Important Lands for the Military

- High: parcels within REPI Partnership Opportunity Areas
- Medium: n/a
- Low: n/a

Priority Corridors

- High: areas categorized as sea level rise area, priority coastal marsh migration space, vulnerable tidal complex, resilient tidal complex, resilient diffuse flow (climate informed), resilient recognized biodiversity, resilient concentrated flow (climate informed)/recognized biodiversity, resilient diffuse flow (climate informed)/recognized biodiversity value, resilient concentrated flow (climate informed), resilient diffuse flow/recognized biodiversity, resilient diffuse flow, and most resilient/far above average terrestrial resilience in TNC's Resilient Coastal Sites and Resilient and Connected Landscapes models that overlap with areas categorized as hubs and corridors in the Southeast Conservation Blueprint
- Medium: areas categorized as sea level rise area, priority coastal marsh migration space, vulnerable tidal complex, resilient tidal complex, resilient diffuse flow (climate informed), resilient recognized biodiversity, resilient concentrated flow (climate informed)/recognized biodiversity, resilient diffuse flow (climate informed)/recognized biodiversity value, resilient concentrated flow (climate informed), resilient diffuse flow/recognized biodiversity, resilient diffuse flow, most resilient/far above average terrestrial resilience, mostly resilient/concentrated flow/recognized biodiversity, mostly resilient/concentrated flow, slightly more resilient/slightly above average terrestrial resilience, and more resilient/above average terrestrial resilience in TNC's Resilient Coastal Sites and Resilient and Connected Landscapes models that overlap with areas categorized as blueprint priority in the Southeast Conservation Blueprint
- Low: n/a

Map 6. Sub-Map 1: Conservation Corridors Priority Model.



Sub-Map 2: Ecological Conservation Priorities

South Carolina faces various ecological challenges. Many species are being driven out from their natural habitat due to invasive species, deforestation, or urbanization. By identifying lands that can support wildlife populations, South Carolina can conserve these lands for natural wildlife. Areas that have existing endangered species also have priority for conservation.

Data Layers

Ecological Resiliency

- High: areas categorized as sea level rise area, priority coastal marsh migration space, vulnerable tidal complex, resilient tidal complex, resilient diffuse flow (climate informed), resilient recognized biodiversity, resilient concentrated flow (climate informed)/recognized biodiversity, resilient diffuse flow (climate informed)/recognized biodiversity value, resilient concentrated flow (climate informed), resilient diffuse flow/recognized biodiversity, resilient diffuse flow, and most resilient/far above average terrestrial resilience in TNC's Resilient Coastal Sites and Resilient and Connected Landscapes models
- Medium: areas categorized as mostly resilient/concentrated flow/recognized biodiversity, mostly resilient/concentrated flow, slightly more resilient/slightly above average terrestrial resilience, and more resilient/above average terrestrial resilience in TNC's Resilient Coastal Sites and Resilient and Connected Landscapes models
- Low: areas categorized as medium, high, and highest in the SECAS Conservation model that do not overlap with TNC's models

State Species of Concern*

- High: green infrastructure cores that have a core score between 2.8 and 5.0 and contain federal at-risk species, federal/state threatened and endangered species, G1-G3 species, and/or S1-S3 species, and green infrastructure cores that have a core score between 1.9 and 2.7 and contain federal/state threatened and endangered species, G1-G2 species, and/or S1-S2 species
- Medium: green infrastructure cores that have a core score between 2.8 and 5.0 and do not contain federal at-risk species, federal/state threatened and endangered species, G1-G3 species, and/or S1-S3 species, green infrastructure cores that have a core score between 1.9 and 2.7 and contain federal at-risk species, G3 species, and/or S3 species, and green infrastructure cores that have a core score between 1.1 and 1.8 and contain federal/state threatened and endangered species, G1-G2 species and/or S1-S2 species
- Low: green infrastructure cores that have a core score between 1.1 and 2.7 and do not contain federal at-risk species, federal/state threatened and endangered species, G1-G3 species, and/or S1-S3 species, and green infrastructure cores that have a core score between 1.1 and 1.8 and contain federal at-risk species, G3 species, and/or S3 species

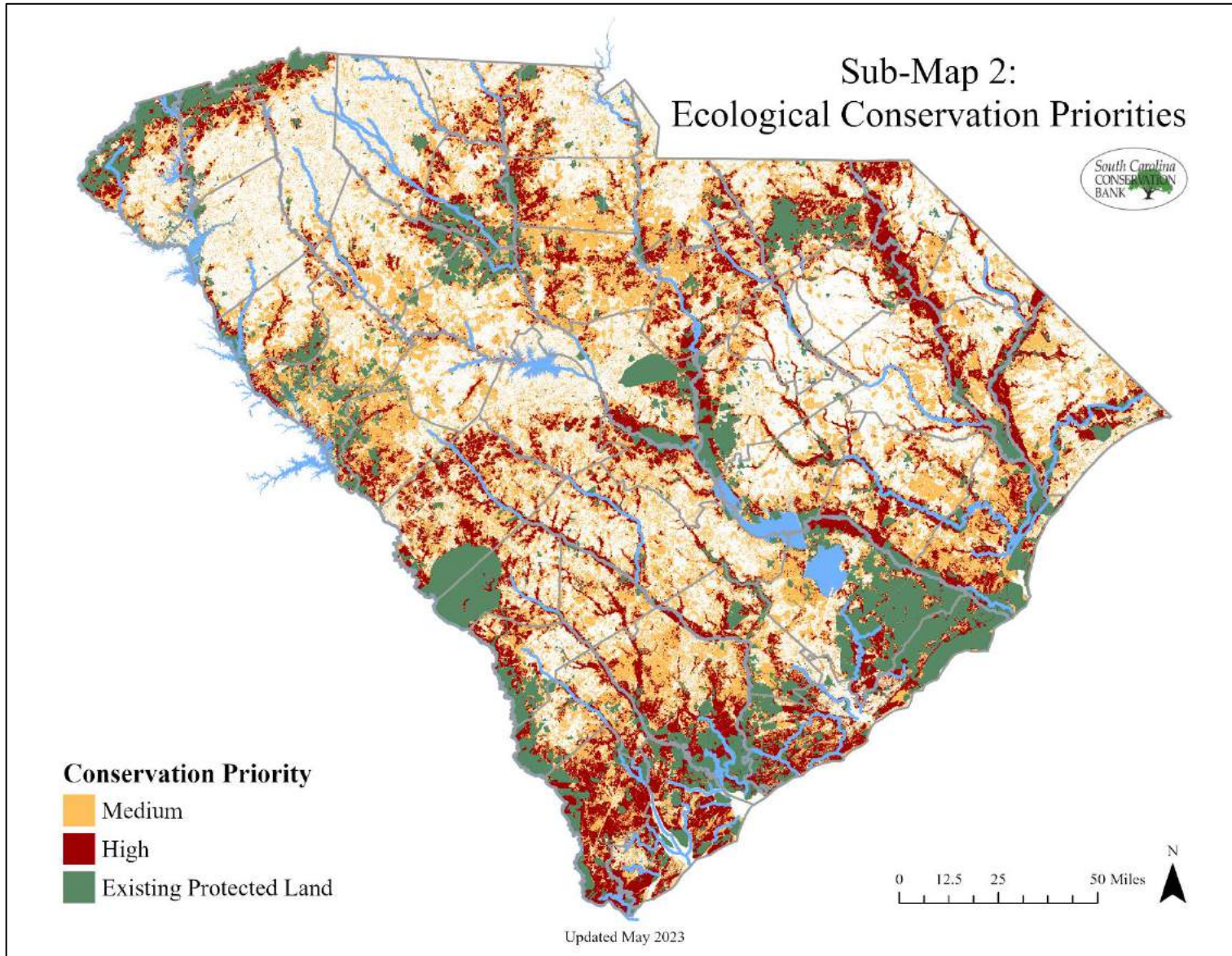
*G1-G3 ranks refer to Global Conservation Status Ranks assigned by NatureServe. S1-S3 ranks refer to State Conservation Status Ranks assigned by state wildlife biologists. Historic and extirpated records were removed from analysis

Species of Interest Suitable Habitat*

- High: areas where ‘seven’ priority species share suitable habitat
- Medium: areas where ‘three to six’ priority species share suitable habitat
- Low: areas where ‘one to two’ priority species share suitable habitat

*Five summary rasters were created to document species distribution for Black-throated Blue Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Carolina Gopher Frog, Chuck-will’s-widow, Common Ground Dove, Dickcissel, Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnake, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Field Sparrow, Golden-winged Warbler, Gopher Tortoise, Grasshopper Sparrow, Gray Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Painted Bunting, Piedmont Prairie Species, Pine Barrens Treefrog, Pinesnake (Northern and Florida), Prairie Warbler, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Southern Hog-nosed Snake, Spotted Turtle, Venus Flytrap, and Webster's Salamander. The five were a random forest classification model, a logistic regression model using the maximum entropy approach, a logistic generalized additive model using seven splines, a gradient boosted classifier model, and a generalized linear model. Black-throated Green Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Golden-winged Warbler, and Pine Barrens Treefrog were ultimately removed from the final combination model because their Cohen’s kappa coefficients were below the 0.4 threshold which generally indicates a poor level of agreement. Developed areas (NLCD 2019) were also removed to mitigate sampling bias towards urban areas for some bird species where public observations were used as input data into the models. Suitable habitat is defined as areas where four or five summary rasters agree. For more information on project site-specific priority species, please visit the South Carolina Natural Heritage Program’s website.

Map 7. Sub-Map 2: Ecological Conservation Priorities Priority Model.



Sub-Map 3: Sustainable Forestry

With the population of South Carolina growing, the demand for forest products also continues to grow. The conservation of forest resources needs to be identified to meet future demands.

Data Layers

Distance to Mills

- High: areas that have a value 100 score of 68 or greater
- Medium: areas that have a value 100 score between 52 and 67
- Low: areas that have a value 100 score between 32 and 51

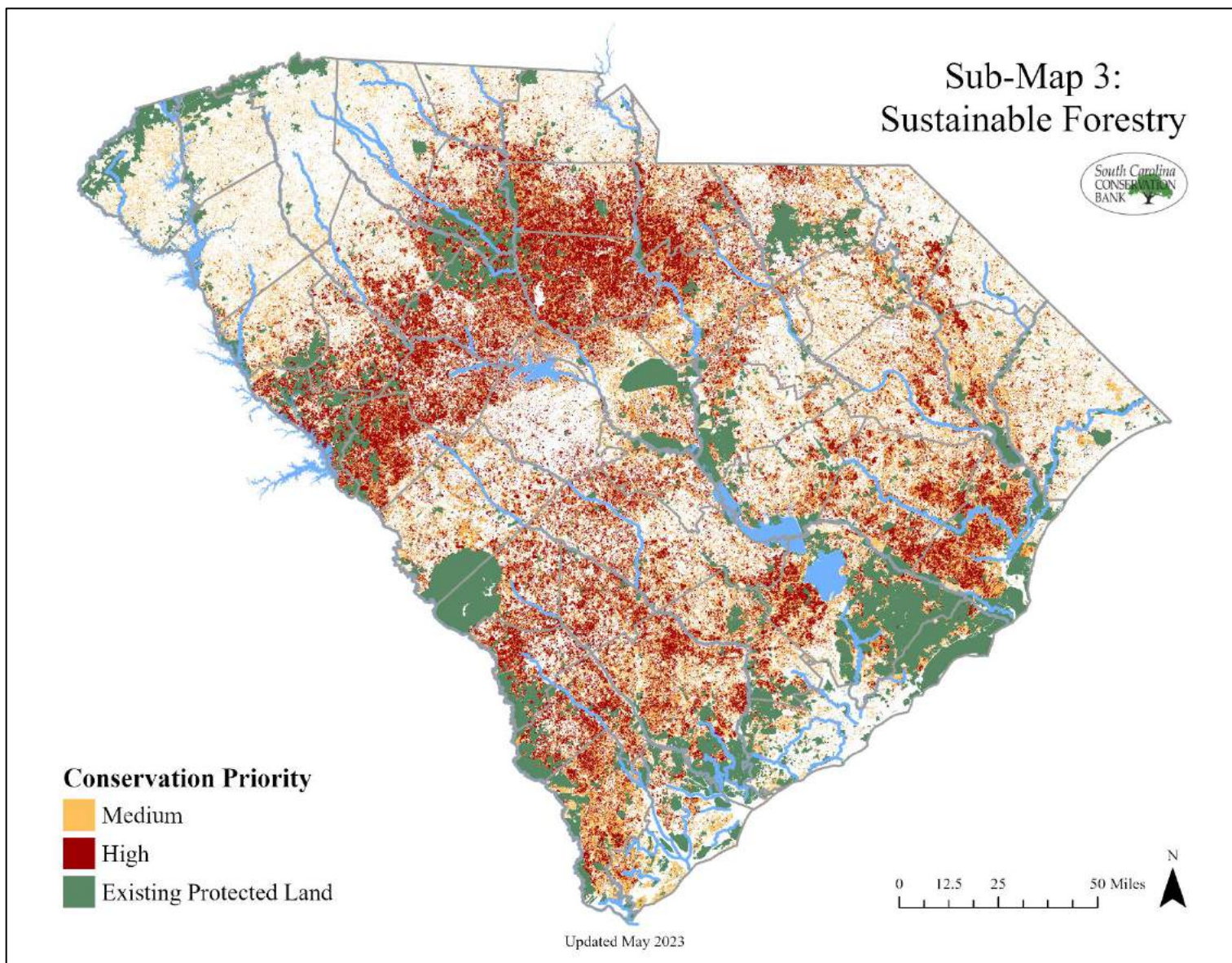
Managed Timber

- High: all areas categorized as evergreen plantation or managed pine, harvest forest – grass/forb regeneration, and/or harvest forest – shrub regeneration
- Medium: NA
- Low: NA

Carbon Estimates

- High: areas that have greater than 126 metric tons of carbon sequestration predicted for 2050
- Medium: areas that have between 110 and 126 metric tons of carbon sequestration predicted for 2050
- Low: areas that have between 93 and 110 metric tons of carbon sequestration predicted for 2050

Map 8. Sub-Map 3: Sustainable Forestry Model.



Sub-Map 4: Sustainable Agriculture

With the population of South Carolina growing, the demand for food also continues to grow. The conservation of agricultural resources needs to be identified to meet future demands.

Data Layers

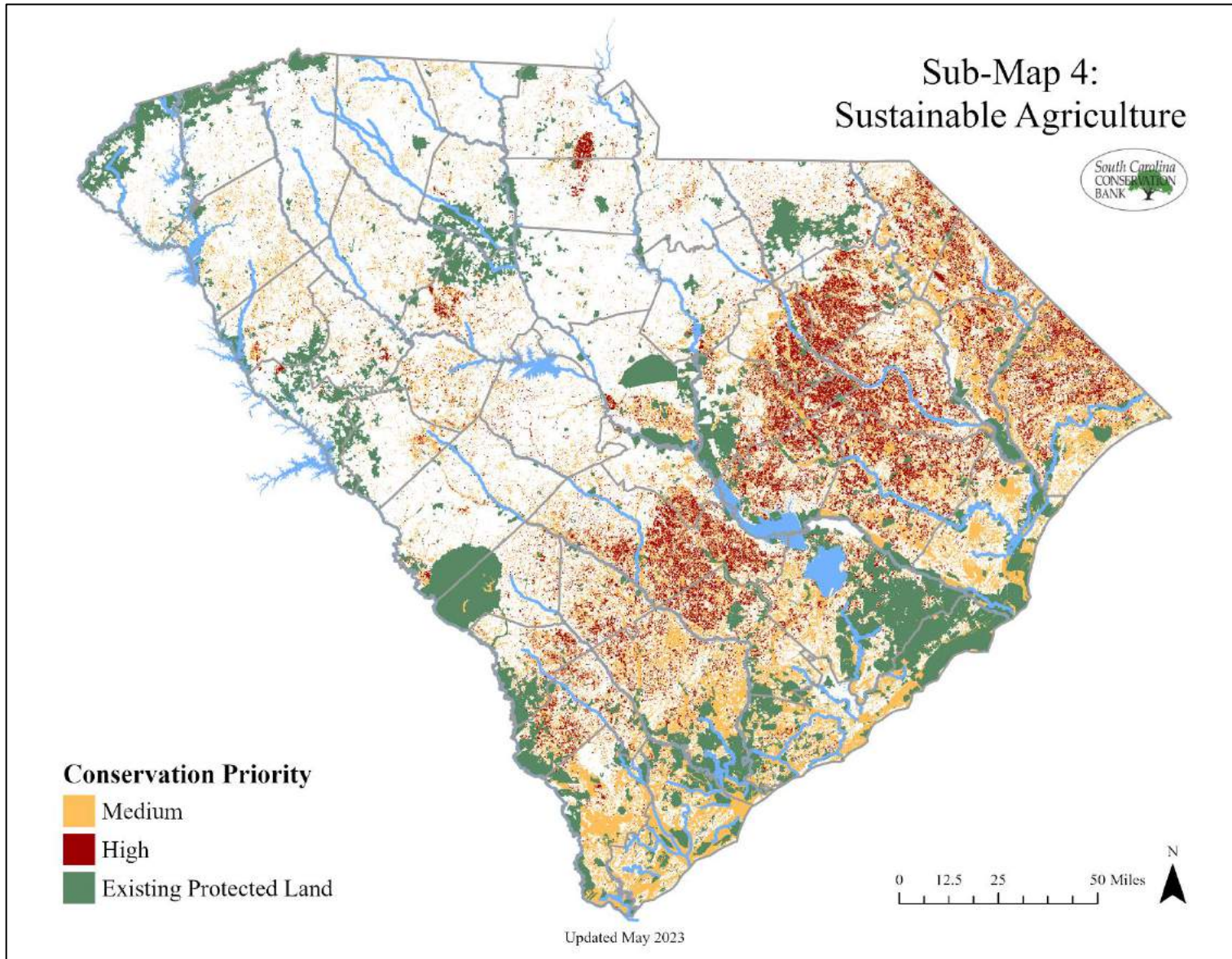
Soil Drainage

- High: areas that have a DI value between 79 to 99
- Medium: areas that have a DI value between 60 to 78
- Low: areas that have a DI value between 45 to 59

Productivity, Versatility, and Resiliency of Agricultural Lands

- High: productivity, versatility, and resiliency of agricultural land areas that overlap with prime farmland soil areas and are categorized as greater than 0.6
- Medium: productivity, versatility, and resiliency of agricultural land areas that overlap with prime farmland soil areas and are categorized as greater than 0.3
- Low: all other productivity, versatility, and resiliency of agricultural land areas and prime farmland soil areas

Map 9. Sub-Map 4: Sustainable Agriculture Priority Model.



Sub-Map 5: Water Resources

As the population of South Carolina continues to grow, the state needs to plan for future water needs. Water is a critical resource, both for the ecosystem and the developed landscape. By identifying areas of the state that have water resources impact, South Carolina conservation efforts can contribute to protection of and smart use of water resources.

Data Layers

Forests to Faucets

- High: areas that have IMP_R values between 83 and 100, and/or APCW_R values between 80 and 100
- Medium: areas that have IMP_R values between 66 and 82, and/or APCW_R values between 58 and 79
- Low: areas that have IMP_R values between 40 and 65, and/or APCW_R values between 48 and 57

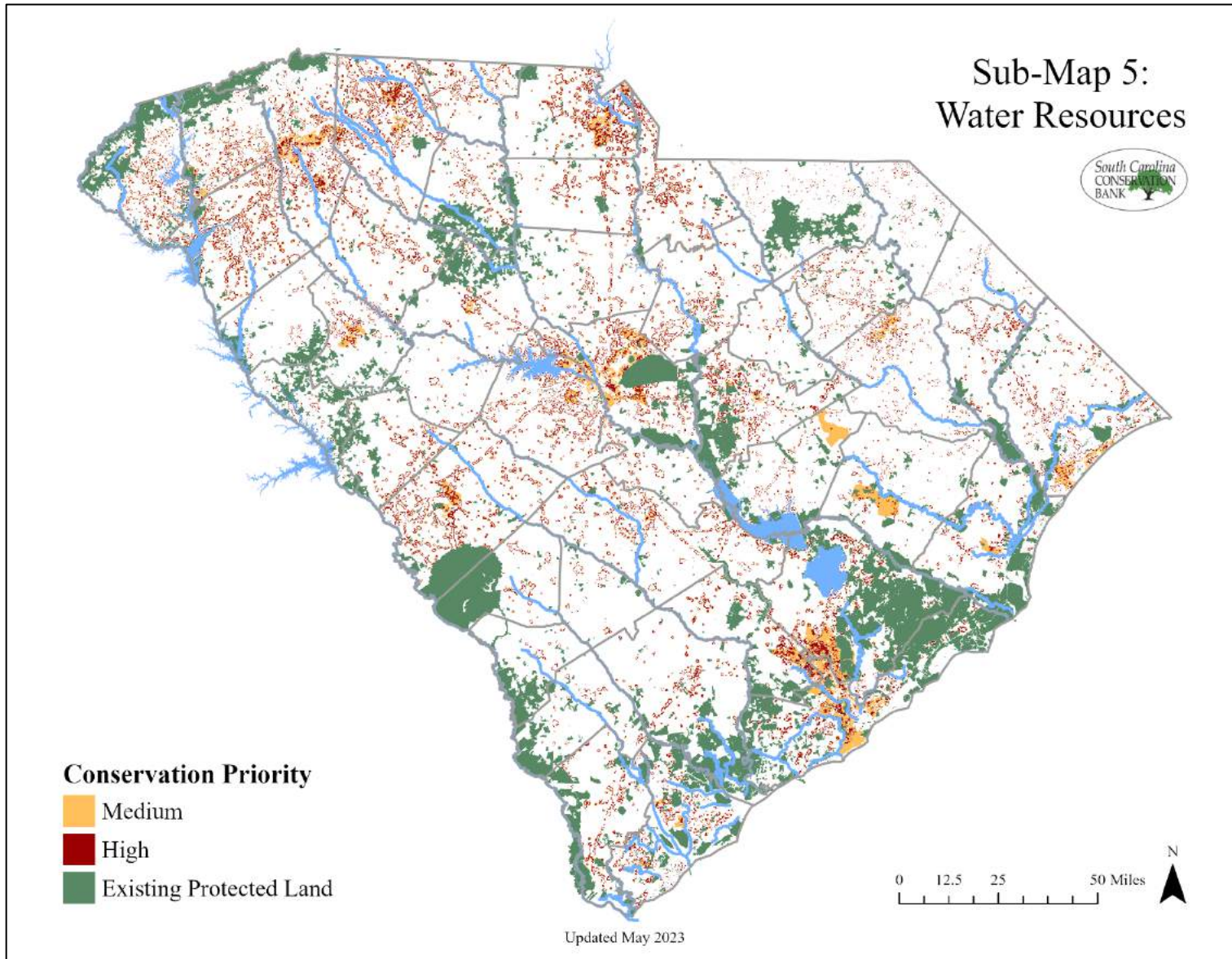
Flood-focused Priority Conservation Model

- High: all flood focused priority conservation areas
- Medium: n/a
- Low: n/a

Water Quality Protection

- High: two or three of the following are true for a 30x30 raster cell area- has higher than one standard deviation above the mean recharge (greater than 10.158), is within a parcel that intersects with a source water protection area and/or a groundwater protection zone, and/or is within a parcel that intersects with an outstanding resource water
- Medium: one of the following is true for a 30x30 raster cell area- has higher than one standard deviation above the mean recharge (greater than 10.158), is within a parcel that intersects with a source water protection area and/or a groundwater protection zone, or is within a parcel that intersects with an outstanding resource water

Map 10. Sub-Map 5: Water Resources Priority Model.



Sub-Map 6: Public Trails and Vistas

The public can benefit from conservation through public access opportunities. Likewise, areas within the viewshed of main roads, waterways, and public trails provide scenic viewing opportunities.

Data Layers

Scenic Vistas – Roads and Trails

- High: areas within the viewshed of scenic byways and public trails
- Medium: n/a
- Low: n/a

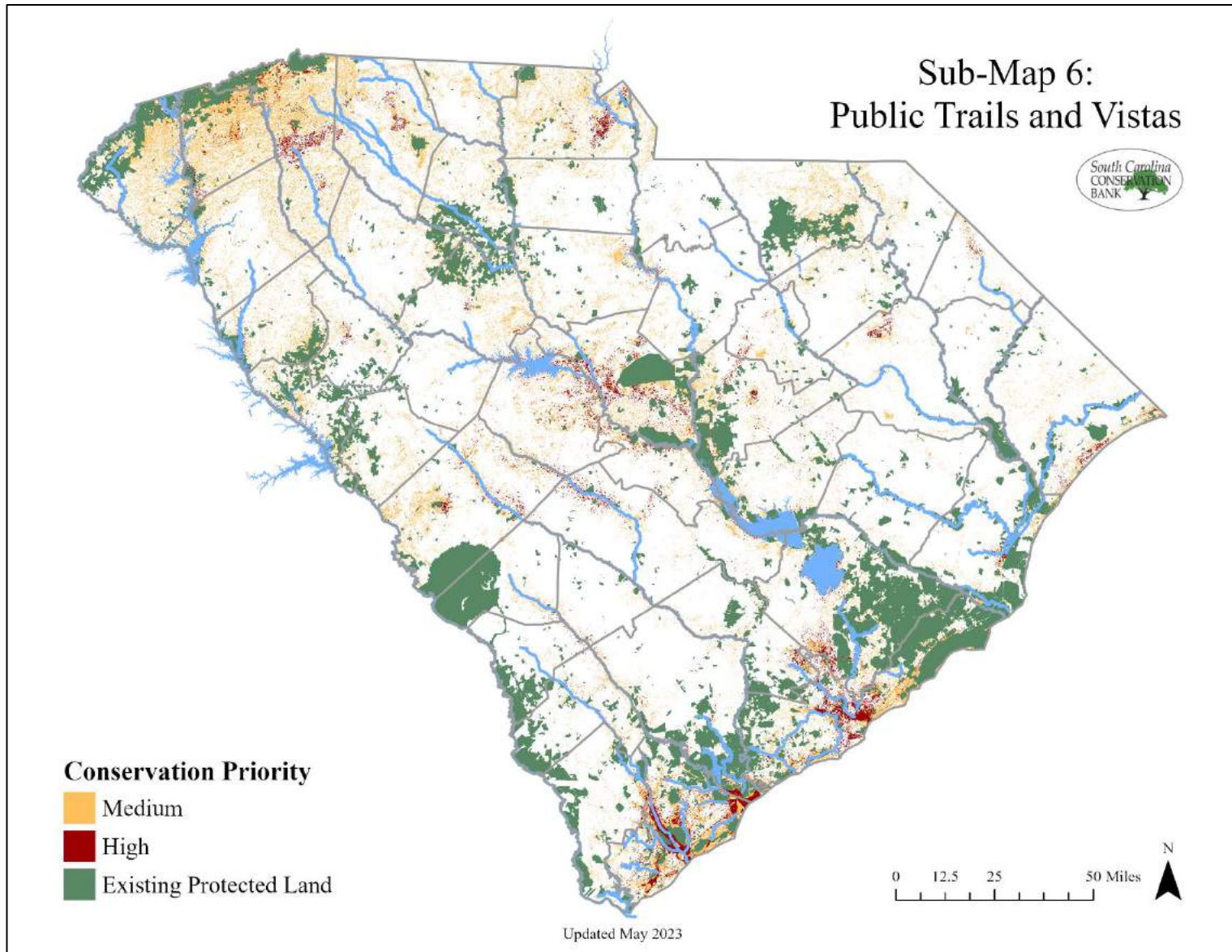
Scenic Vistas - Waterways

- High: areas within the viewshed of paddle-able rivers, including scenic rivers
- Medium: n/a
- Low: n/a

Proximity to People

- High: block groups that have a population one standard deviation above South Carolina's mean
- Medium: block groups adjacent to high block groups
- Low: block groups that are within one mile of high block groups

Map 11. Sub-Map 6: Public Trails and Vistas Priority Model.



Priority Mapping Data and Methodology References

Sub-Map 1: Conservation Corridors

Adjacency to Protected Lands

- The Nature Conservancy's SC Protected Lands
- Parcel Data - Accessed via individual county

Important Lands for the Military

- United States Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Partnership Opportunity Areas

Priority Corridors

- The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Coastal Sites
- The Nature Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Landscapes
- Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS)'s Southeast Conservation Blueprint – Blueprint Priority
- Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS)'s Southeast Conservation Blueprint – Hubs and Corridors

Sub-Map 2: Ecological Conservation Priorities

Ecological Resiliency

- The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Coastal Sites
- The Nature Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Landscapes
- Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS)'s Southeast Conservation Blueprint – Blueprint Priority

State Species of Concern

- South Carolina Natural Heritage Program's Element Occurrence Data
- Green Infrastructure Center Inc.'s Habitat Cores

Species of Interest Suitable Habitat

- South Carolina Natural Heritage Program's Species Suitability Models

Sub-Map 3: Sustainable Forestry

Distance to Mills

- South Carolina Forestry Commission's Proximity to Mills

Managed Timber

- United States Geological Surveys – GAP/LANDFIRE National Terrestrial Ecosystems' Managed Timber

Carbon Estimates

- Williams et al.'s Forest Carbon Stocks and Fluxes from the NFCMS, Conterminous USA, 1990-2010 (2021b) – accessed via The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Land Mapping Tool

Sub-Map 4: Sustainable Agriculture

Soil Drainage

- United States Department of Agriculture - Forest Service's Soil Drainage

Productivity, Versatility, and Resiliency of Agricultural Lands

- American Farmland Trust's Productivity, Versatility, and Resiliency of Agricultural Lands
- National Resources Conservation Service's Prime Farmland Soils

Sub-Map 5: Water Resources

Forests to Faucets

- United States Department of Agriculture - Forest Service's National Forests to Faucets

Flood-focused Priority Conservation Model

- South Carolina Office of Resilience's Flood-focused Priority Conservation Model

Water Quality Protection

- United States Geological Survey Soil-water Balance 1979-2016 and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's High Modeled Potential Recharge Areas
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's Source Water Protection Areas
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's Groundwater Protection Zones
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's Outstanding Resource Waters

Sub-Map 6: Public Trails and Vistas

Scenic Vistas – Roads and Trails

- South Carolina Department of Transportation's Scenic Byways
- East Coast Greenway Alliance's East Coast Greenway
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Rails to Trails
- Palmetto Conservation Foundation's Palmetto Trail
- South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism's SC Trails
- United States Geological Survey's Elevation Data

- U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service and U.S. Department of the Interior's Landscape Fire and Resource Management Planning Tools Existing Vegetation Height

Scenic Vistas – Waterways

- South Carolina Department of Natural Resource's Scenic Rivers
- Paddle SC's Waterways
- United States Geological Survey's Elevation Data
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service and U.S. Department of the Interior's Landscape Fire and Resource Management Planning Tools Existing Vegetation Height

Proximity to People

- United States Census Bureau's 2010 Census Block Boundaries

Appendix A - Table of Conservation Priority Area by County

County	County Total Acres	Medium and High Priority Conservation Acres	% County Area	Current Protected Acres	% County Area	All Developed Land Cover Acres	% County Area
Abbeville	326,960	99,132	30	56,059	17	23,307	7
Aiken	693,576	293,248	42	96,326	14	83,149	12
Allendale	263,543	109,124	41	61,263	23	12,585	5
Anderson	484,461	86,732	18	46,258	10	98,300	20
Bamberg	252,915	133,481	53	9,220	4	15,862	6
Barnwell	356,442	131,569	37	121,944	34	22,230	6
Beaufort	484,990	337,994	70	102,929	21	62,553	13
Berkeley	786,116	306,936	39	314,949	40	76,220	10
Calhoun	251,100	119,977	48	18,969	8	17,500	7
Charleston	687,396	323,723	47	280,289	41	101,590	15
Cherokee	253,853	50,902	20	4,136	2	34,523	14
Chester	374,777	146,541	39	25,641	7	24,865	7
Chesterfield	515,729	182,155	35	103,842	20	41,252	8
Clarendon	444,578	189,262	43	55,218	12	28,319	6
Colleton	695,980	389,734	56	130,572	19	34,965	5
Darlington	362,129	150,062	41	19,850	5	39,043	11
Dillon	260,205	119,737	46	4,584	2	21,336	8
Dorchester	366,470	213,313	58	63,521	17	43,872	12
Edgefield	322,732	163,427	51	40,109	12	22,484	7
Fairfield	453,960	190,557	42	23,779	5	23,590	5
Florence	514,484	263,713	51	8,873	2	62,356	12
Georgetown	558,655	324,936	58	138,417	25	44,972	8
Greenville	508,289	126,535	25	65,379	13	156,375	31
Greenwood	296,218	113,407	38	30,600	10	37,149	13
Hampton	360,238	198,600	55	73,202	20	18,955	5
Horry	733,365	409,540	56	59,046	8	127,316	17
Jasper	428,847	298,861	70	86,342	20	22,274	5
Kershaw	473,910	258,255	54	23,685	5	44,201	9
Lancaster	354,234	116,277	33	13,535	4	39,696	11
Laurens	463,067	122,809	27	34,403	7	47,218	10
Lee	263,139	107,086	41	12,834	5	16,908	6
Lexington	485,409	146,159	30	3,840	1	112,200	23
Marion	316,143	185,103	59	43,300	14	24,636	8
Marlboro	310,385	169,299	55	8,586	3	21,757	7
McCormick	251,649	95,107	38	96,509	38	15,150	6
Newberry	413,967	164,391	40	68,804	17	30,585	7
Oconee	431,378	87,383	20	131,916	31	57,567	13

Orangeburg	720,714	358,970	50	16,289	2	65,462	9
Pickens	327,406	95,343	29	59,745	18	56,471	17
Richland	493,975	219,791	44	113,166	23	113,403	23
Saluda	293,546	106,573	36	8,140	3	20,101	7
Spartanburg	524,129	90,992	17	13,384	3	132,548	25
Sumter	436,329	216,548	50	98,985	23	51,312	12
Union	330,066	117,886	36	73,367	22	21,015	6
Williamsburg	599,179	372,793	62	45,503	8	33,538	6
York	444,963	115,636	26	26,405	6	85,931	19
TOTALS*	19,971,591	8,619,599		2,933,713		2,286,639	

*These totals do not include acreage from open water, so the numbers may be slightly less than the total area given elsewhere.