2023 Impact Report
Conservation Voters of South Carolina Education Fund

In 2023, CVSC Education Fund celebrated 20 years of protecting the South Carolina we love–but we didn't do it alone. Our tireless advocates, trusted partners, and generous donors have been crucial to our success.

Over the last two decades, we've educated countless South Carolinians about threats to our environment and communities, while increasing awareness of opportunities to improve health, safety, and economic development. These efforts have led to tangible change in funding for conservation, water quality, a just transition to a cleaner energy landscape, and expanding environmental regulations.

This progress is just the beginning of what we can accomplish together.

CVSCEF has bold goals to protect an additional 3 million acres of land and water, make South Carolina carbon-free by 2050, and ensure every community in our state has clean water to drink. With the help of donors like you, we get closer to reaching these goals each year. In this impact report, we are thrilled to share the remarkable achievements and impactful initiatives that CVSCEF undertook in 2023–all made possible with your support.

Holding Utilities Accountable

South Carolina's utilities are regulated by the Public Service Commission (PSC), a quasi-judicial body selected by the General Assembly. Holding the PSC accountable to protect ratepayers and work towards a clean energy future requires institutional knowledge and strategic communications due to the PSC's strict rules of engagement.

Over the past several years, CVSCEF has distinguished itself as a trusted expert and leader in this work. In 2023, we successfully facilitated public engagement in PSC decisions for more clean, affordable, and reliable energy in South Carolina.

Last year, utilities submitted long-term energy generation plans to the PSC for approval that included an extended reliance on fossil fuels and not nearly enough plans for renewable energy, battery storage, or improved energy efficiency.

To push back against these dangerous plans, we helped drive numerous public comments requesting public hearings, resulting in the first public hearings on these long-term plans in at least a decade. We helped over 50 individuals prepare to testify at these hearings, resulting in over 40 passionate advocates highlighting environmental and economic issues with fossil fuels and asking for a plan with more clean energy.

Also, in 2023, utilities continued to request increases in customer bills to cover the rising costs of fossil fuels. Again, we pushed back by amplifying the public voice at the PSC. We worked with partners and advocates to submit numerous comments asking for a public hearing before Dominion Energy raised customer bills. This effort succeeded, leading to growing frustration among Commissioners regarding utilities' continued requests for rate increases.

Rethinking Land Protection

CVSCEF is committed to doubling the number of protected lands in South Carolina, which will require innovative land protection mechanisms that reach beyond the traditional model of land trusts and conservation easements. This means engaging historically underserved communities to ensure that protected lands provide quality of life, outdoor access, and cultural preservation. Creating a Rosenwald School State Park Network presents a unique opportunity to do all of this at once.

Rosenwald Schools were built for African American students in the South before desegregation. Over 5,000 schools were built across the South–with nearly 500 located in South Carolina–and played an integral role in African American education, fellowship, and the Civil Rights Movement. Most schools were built on 3-4 acres of land in rural areas across the state, which are now at risk due to overdevelopment, sprawl, and neglect. Estimates are that only 40 of the nearly 500 South Carolina Rosenwald Schools remain.

Expanding Our Staff & Impact

In 2023, we expanded our team to meet the challenges that await us in 2024. It's the second half of the legislative session and an election year for the whole General Assembly, so we focused a lot of energy on building a team that's prepared to accomplish our bold goals and embark on even more ambitious projects moving forward.

Since the beginning of last year, CVSCEF, the WeGOJA Foundation, and other local partners have been instrumental in kicking off and supporting a newly funded Rosenwald State Park Network Feasibility Study. We are a member of the steering committee and have worked with WeGOJA to assemble a team of community leaders and experts to envision the future of Rosenwald School protection in South Carolina.

CVSCEF has worked to engage and educate communities across the state as we build support for a statewide Rosenwald School network that links these sites together across the state. We also continue to manage the Rosenwald Working Group to broaden the reach of this work and create a space for community advocates to coordinate and share their work with South Carolinians and state leaders alike.

Meet Evan Renshaw

He's building relationships with partners across South Carolina to establish a more coordinated conservation movement.

Partnerships & Engagement Manager

Meet Tori Oluseyi

They are both working to inspire and empower conservation leadership in South Carolina. While Tori focuses primarily on running the SC Palmetto Leadership Academy, Heidi is working to expand training opportunities specific to electric cooperative members across rural South Carolina.

Meet Heidi Johnson-Young

Community Leadership Project Managers

Building a Conservation Movement

Environmental issues are increasingly widespread and deeply intertwined with economic development and the health and well-being of communities. To take on these complex issues, we've built coalitions to ensure we work with our partners, not against them. Each coalition has a unique group of partners involved who contribute diverse perspectives and strategies to drive positive change for our air, land, and water.

SC Electric Transportation Network

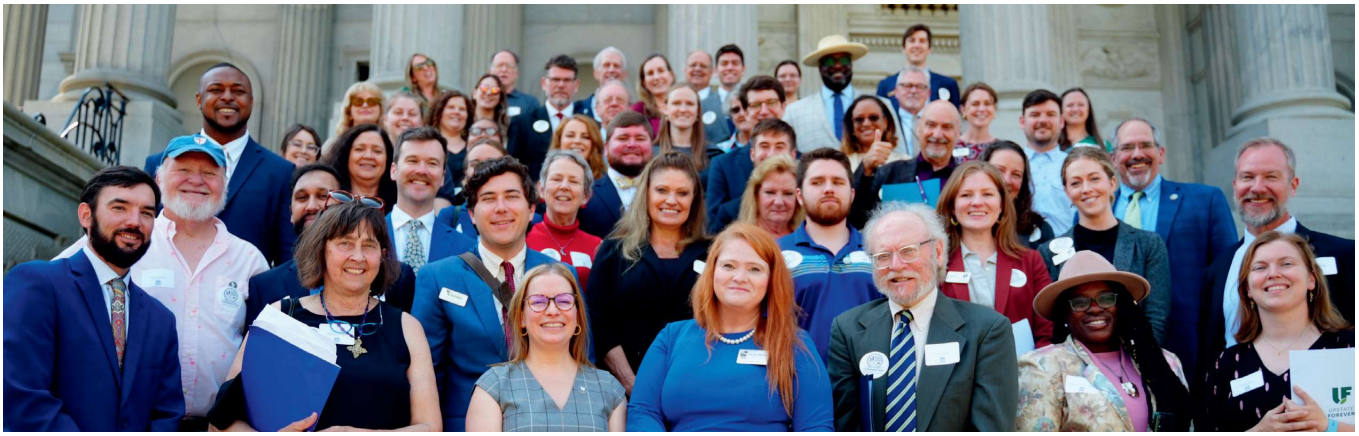
A few years ago, CVSCEF and other electric vehicle stakeholders realized South Carolina lacked a coordinated network focused on electric transportation. Now, we facilitate the SC Electric Transportation Network with over 100 organizations, agencies, and manufacturers across South Carolina to provide a space for collaborating on electric transportation advancements in the state, legislative planning, and funding initiatives. Through this network, CVSCEF was able to help partners raise public awareness about electric transportation in the state, build support among electric transportation businesses for policy change, and mobilize these partners to support legislation expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

SC Energy Justice Coalition

The Energy Justice Coalition is a dynamic, non-partisan collective of over 50 organizations across the four regions of South Carolina working to support communities experiencing high energy burdens and other inequities in the state's energy system. The coalition is guided by facilitated dialogue, grassroots supporters, and environmental justice values as they fight for a just and clean energy future for all South Carolinians. CVSCEF relies heavily on their guidance to inform our outreach and partnership efforts in the energy space. We helped form the coalition in 2021, and after a part-time facilitator was hired in 2023, we joined the coalition's steering committee, where we continue to support its important work and inform our energy efforts through the partnerships developed there.

SC Conservation Coalition

20 years ago, we established the first iteration of the Conservation Coalition. Since then, it's grown to include over 40 conservation-minded organizations across the state. The coalition has been instrumental in countless wins for our environment by ensuring the conservation community is aligned and working towards common goals. In 2023, we hired additional staff to better facilitate this invaluable work and helped increase engagement with organizations working with and in low-wealth communities and communities of color.



SC Conservation Coalition Lobby Day 2023
Where our staff, partners, and advocates met with legislators to discuss our conservation priorities.

"Vision without alignment makes it nearly impossible to achieve success or create impact. We can't thank you enough for demonstrating your commitment to conservation and a shared belief that a safer, healthier, and more prosperous South Carolina is possible. 2023 would not have been the success it was without you, our partner in philanthropy."

Kendra Mallett-Brunson, Senior Vice President of Collaboration & Impact

Looking Ahead

We're excited to announce the launch of our inaugural SC Palmetto Leadership Academy! Local boards and commissions make countless decisions across South Carolina that affect our environment and communities. This program was developed to recruit, train, and support aspiring community leaders to fill these influential roles.

The first session began this January with a group of 15 fellows who are eager to make a positive impact on South Carolina. Over the next few months, fellows will learn about running for and serving in a board or commission position, from the basics of how different levels of government function and campaign fundamentals, to parliamentary procedure and representing diverse communities. We're looking forward to hosting many more sessions in the future to educate and empower tomorrow's conservation leaders.

Bold Vision for South Carolina

We envision a South Carolina where every community has access to clean and plentiful water, our special landscapes are preserved for future generations, energy is clean, reliable, and affordable, polluters and other bad actors are held accountable for their mistakes, and communities build each other up to make our state a better place to call home.

This won't be accomplished alone, so last year we focused our energy and resources on building a more impactful and inclusive conservation movement. And thanks to the help of donors like you and our partners across the state, we've made a good of progress in seeing our vision come to life.

We look forward to accomplishing even more in 2024 with your continued support. Thank you for all that you do to protect the South Carolina you love!

Best,

John Tynan
President

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