

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATEMENT FROM FAITH RIVERS JAMES

Former Executive Director, South Carolina Coastal Conservation League

After nearly four years of service, I am pleased to share that I am stepping into a new chapter and transitioning from my role as Executive Director of the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League. It has been an honor to serve as the first Lowcountry native to lead this organization, and I depart with an abiding sense of pride in what we have accomplished together and excitement about the path ahead.

I came to CCL not as an outsider, but as someone who grew up in rural East Cooper and watched firsthand the pressures of unbridled growth reshape the landscape I called home. I met the League first as a funder, more than twenty-five years ago, supporting their work examining the impacts of land use policies on heirs' property owners in the Lowcountry. Inspired by my acquaintance with noted conservation leader Charles Jordan, the first African American chair of The Conservation Fund and a staunch advocate for urban parks, I went on to become a law professor at Vermont Law School, the nation's top environmental law school. With reverence for Lowcountry leaders like George Payton, Emory Campbell, and Tom Barnwell, I dedicated my legal scholarship to exploring law and policy solutions to the heirs' property conundrum, and advocating for a more expansive body of environmental work that includes the perspectives of both conservationists and preservationists who share a common goal of protecting the natural environment and the communities that bind the coastal plain together. When the Board asked me to lead CCL, I brought that lived experience and scholarly perspective with me.

Working together, our board, staff, advocates, and partners achieved meaningful and lasting victories for the South Carolina coast. CCL joined with the Preservation Society and Historic Charleston Foundation to challenge the proposed big box development at Union Pier, creating space for a plan that honors Charleston's history and ensures all residents can enjoy our waterfront. We stood with our community partners in supporting the County's compromise that recognized and protected the cultural history of the Phillips Community and the legacy of the Rutledge family, one of our nation's founding fathers.

As a team, we've dedicated late nights and weekends in community meetings from Sol Legree to Ten Mile, and out on the State Ports Authority Terminal. We've been essential partners in four successful campaigns across the Lowcountry to provide critical greenbelt funding, not only for rural conservation acquisitions, but also for greenspace preservation in urban areas and settlement communities. We've been "boots on the ground" supporting friends and neighbors as they stand up and speak out for their vision of nature and community in balance.

I am honored to have worked with Mayor Tecklenburg's team, led by the late Dale Morris, and to have served on Mayor Cogswell's Flood Resilience Team alongside dedicated City staff and our Charleston Waterkeeper. I have faith that these bright minds will devise a way for Charleston's legacy to endure in the face of flooding and resilience challenges, for as goes Charleston, so goes coastal city centers across the world.

Heeding Teddy Roosevelt's charge that "wildlife and its habitat cannot speak, so we must and we will," for thirty-six years, CCL has deployed the core federal environmental statutes as a sword and shield – protecting endangered species, preserving wetlands and wildlife habitat, safeguarding clean water, and defending the public's right to safe and open access to our beaches. I'm proud that we've defeated critical legal challenges against St. Helena's Cultural Protection Overlay. Against all odds, our team won the battle to protect precious Red Knots who feed on ancient horseshoe crabs eggs the Carolina shores. Through expert private and nonprofit counsel, and a bounty of environmental organization partners, CCL continues to make the case for South Carolina's coast through strategic litigation.

Thanks to the generosity of exceptional donors, CCL closed out a capital campaign and secured a \$1.2 million New Market Tax Credit to establish a new GrowFood warehouse as an anchor in the critical Charleston Neck Opportunity Zone. Our recent audit and tax returns confirm that CCL stands on solid footing. Year over year, CCL continues to invest in conservation programs that deliver results for the coast.

I am proud to leave behind a reinvigorated team with deeper experience, enhanced professionalism, and a strong work ethic that honors integrity, values honesty, and embraces the duty of advancing CCL's mission with fierce persistence and grace. That is the challenge of environmental leadership in this new era. I have every confidence in the CCL team's capacity to meet key moments ahead.

Conservation in the Lowcountry has always been personal to me. Charleston is not just a place I visited or chose; it is where I was formed. My commitment to this coast runs seven generations deep. During my tenure at CCL, I worked hard to ensure that we amplified the voices of the mosaic of communities who revere this special place. Indeed, all should be welcomed to the table as we engage in this mission to protect our coast. Invited to the table, assuredly, all should benefit from strategies that guard our natural resources, provide access to nature, and deliver essential resilience strategies to help families navigate the uncertainties of climate impacts ahead. There is enough pie, and enough work, for all of us to join together, share our views, and fight each battle – not with ourselves, but for our coast.

As a legal scholar and policy advocate at heart, I look forward to returning to the power of the pen to continue my exploration of ethical environmental leadership and civic engagement in this "existential era of environmentalism." And I remain committed to the ongoing work of widening the conservation tent to welcome all Lowcountry voices into the movement that protects our shared home.

To CCL supporters, partners, and fellow advocates who have stood with us at podiums and council chambers up and down this coast; thank you. The conservation challenges ahead will require all hands on deck. The League needs the community's involvement and support now more than ever. I encourage everyone who loves this special place to stay engaged and work with the CCL team to look for creative solutions to the conservation and preservation needs ahead.

As someone once reminded me: it is a privilege to do work worthy of attack. I wear that as a badge of honor well worth the sacrifice. I have every confidence that the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League will remain true to its core mission: protecting the natural resources of this coast for generations to come. Our children and grandchildren are counting on us.

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