



HEIRS'
PROPERTY

MATTERS

Join us on Saturday, Dec. 9th
Unique Lowcountry Outing and
Feast at McLeod Plantation
Special Guest Speaker - Jack Bass

Center Advocates Call to Action!

*Share what you know...
in your own words.*

"Preserving and working the land is the closest connection that we have to God and our ancestors." Alverta Bowens, Woodland Community Advocate

[See page 3 for full story]

WHAT IS HEIRS' PROPERTY?

Most heirs' property in the Lowcountry is land that was either purchased by or deeded to African Americans after emancipation. Much of this land has been passed down through

This unstable form of ownership puts heirs' property at high risk for loss because any heir can sell his/her percentage of ownership to another who can force a sale of the entire property.

the generations without the benefit of a will so that the land is owned in common by all of the heirs - whether they live on the land; help pay the taxes, or have never set foot on the land.



A Note From Jennie *Are We There Yet?*

Are we there yet? Did you ever say that as a child? It's human nature to want to "arrive" at your destination, but journeys have a way of taking their own time.

And - so it has been with the Center. In 2002, it began as the "Heirs' Project" at Coastal Community Foundation.

In 2005, it became a non-profit organization, with the mission of helping low-income heirs' property owners protect their family land.

In 2013, the Center launched the Forestry Program to help families benefit economically from their land through forest management, with the mission of protecting heirs' property and promoting the sustainable use of land to provide increased economic benefit to historically underserved landowners.

Are we there yet? No, but our journey is making a difference to the people we are helping along the way. They say it is the difference between being knowledgeable and unaware, confident and unsure, active and passive, powerful and powerless and, finally - hopeful and hopeless about their economic future. Perhaps the journey is our destination and we arrive every day.

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WCA — Call to Action! Share what you know...



WCA graduates, Alverta Bowen and Laura Manigault, with keynote speaker - Amadou Diop, Outreach Liaison, USDA Forest Service, Cooperative Forestry

At the Graduation and Retreat of the 2017 "Woodland Community Advocates" [WCAs], the call to action was simple, as keynote speaker, Amadou Diop said - "Realize that you are a leader who increases confidence in others by giving information that they can act on when you are no longer there."

There are many reasons why forestry participants decide to be the eyes, ears and voices of the Center in their communities. "The Center reconnected me to my childhood through my family land," said Laura Manigault. I grew up in a rural area with hogs, cows and chickens. We were the "smell" of the neighborhood," she laughed. "I was proud of our homestead."

Reconnection is one. Laura is a Job Coach at Baptist Hill Middle High

and St. Johns High School. With the knowledge she gained from the Center, she worked with colleague, Joanna Leonhardt, to create a garden at Baptist Hill - planting collards, purple kale and squash. "A field of greens is a work of art," she said, remembering one early morning as a child - sitting in the middle of a field of mustard greens, eating them fresh from the ground. "It made me feel so secure and safe."

Laura's rural students, who knew little about planting, harvested what they grew... prepared and shared a meal together. In her own way, she had connected them to the land.

"Before you are a leader, it's about growing yourself," Diop said at the WCA graduation. "When you become a leader, it's about growing others."

Newly graduated WCA Alverta Bowens took us all to church. "Preserving and working the land is the closest connection that we have to God and our ancestors."

Because of what she has learned at the Center, Alverta has decided to manage her family land for a better future — to create a "living" plan for it.

There is no single voice among our WCAs. Each one is distinct and powerful. "Buy in," said WCA Joe Hamilton. "We have to have buy-in, if we're going to call ourselves evangelists."

"Buy in" begins with WCAs re-connecting with the stories of their family land, of their ancestors, of their legacy, of what they have learned, of what they hope to do and are doing with their land. "We are left in charge," said Laura. "I feel responsible."

Alverta is finding her own way to evangelize. "Every third Sunday, we have a family dinner. I'm not just into eating. I need to share the information I've been blessed to receive."

"Knowledge is an acquisition which, when given to someone, doesn't decrease," said Amadou.

To that we all say —

"A-men!"

Protecting Family Land...Building Generational Wealth...Growing "Working" Landscapes

The Evolution of a Non-Profit...from legal service provider to economic development organization

In a few short years, the Center has expanded its staff from 5 to 15 and its service area from 7 to 15 counties. It has also expanded its mission and impact. This evolution is the result of need and increased funding to respond to that need.

At the Heart of Land Loss

The loss of land is more than the loss of the cultural heritage and legacy of family land. It is also the loss of economic opportunity for people whose primary asset is land.

Twelve of the 15 counties we serve are designated as areas of "persistent poverty" which is defined by the U.S. Census as counties in which 20+% of the population has been living at or below the poverty level for the past 30 years.

What prevents many of these families from realizing the true economic value of landownership is: 1] owning heirs' property; 2] not knowing about the programs, information meetings and financial assistance available to them, and 3] not feeling

Growing up the next generation of land stewards! [Board Chair Alex Singleton - 5th from left and Beth Richardson - Clemson Extension Area Agent in Forestry - far right]

welcome where that information is shared.

At the Heart of Our Work

Protecting Family Land - *You can't act on what you don't know.*

The Center builds trust, provides education on heirs' property [HP] ownership and direct legal services to resolve HP issues; probates estates and facilitates estate and succession planning.

Building Generational Wealth - *Unlocking economic opportunity with knowledge and tools.*

Building generational wealth is the key to moving people out of poverty. Timber is a \$21 billion industry in S.C. and growing. Individual families own 87% of the forestland in SC.

The Center helps families realize the value of their land, by providing forestland land management education, tools and services, and by connecting them with expert partners and financial assistance programs to propel their economic success.

Growing "Working" Landscapes - *Equipping families to succeed.*

The Center equips these families

with what they need to make informed decisions about their land and take control of their economic future...while preserving our rural landscape and natural resources.

2016 IMPACT: The Center's legal and forestry work is helping families develop the "economic engine" of landownership.

LEGAL:

- The Center provided free, one-hour "Advice and Counsel" about heirs' property and its resolution to 250 landowners, who collectively owned land with a tax-assessed value of \$28M;
- The Center drafted 160 simple wills to prevent the growth of heirs' property, and
- The Center resolved 24 titles on land with a cumulative tax-assessed value of \$1.2M.

FORESTRY:

- 400 families, owning more than 20,000 acres, have received forest management education and/or direct services to manage their land for timber.
- 43 USDA/NRCS financial assistance contracts were awarded to landowners totaling \$234K [2016]. *Since 2014, more than 100 landowner contracts were awarded a total of \$1M.*



There has been a 155% increase in the number of financial assistance contracts awarded to minority landowners in SC by USDA/NRCS since the Center launched the Forestry Program in 2013.

DO WE SAY "THANK YOU" ENOUGH? THANK YOU x Infinity!

For giving so generously so that we can provide legal and forestry education and services across 15 counties in SC to help protect family land...build generational wealth, and grow working landscapes. The following donors made gifts to the Center between September 1, 2016 — August 31, 2017. If we have left anyone out, please let us know and accept our sincere apologies.

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2016 UNIQUE LOWCOUNTRY OUTING & FEAST
The 2nd annual "Unique Lowcountry Feast" on Dec. 3, 2016 was held at the beautiful McLeod Plantation with historic tours, down home BBQ by Richard Habersham & Friends, live music and Center program. All made possible by our generous sponsors.
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2018 "Commitment to Justice" Center Champion

Judge Bernard Fielding

On Thursday, March 8, 2018, the Center will honor Judge Bernard Fielding with its "Commitment to Justice" Award at a reception at the Francis Marion Hotel • [387 King St.] from 5:30-8:00PM.

Judge Fielding was the first African American elected to the Charleston Probate Court and as Probate Judge, and he has served as CEO of his family's Fielding Home for Funerals since 1984 but to us, at the Center, Judge Fielding is one of the earliest and most ardent supporters of our work. He is our "Center Champion" and we are proud to honor him with our 8th "Commitment to Justice" award.

Please join us to honor Judge Fielding and support the Center!

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Left: Partners, Funders & Friends - Cassandra Gaither, Prof. Drew Landham [Clemson University], Jennie and Nate Barber [South State Bank] join nearly 100 attendees at the 2017 "SC Rural and Limited Landowner Symposium at Furber College in June.



Above: Wells Fargo Friends - Len Hutchison, Wells Fargo Charleston Area President and Susan Bankson, Wells Fargo SC Community Affairs Officer, present Jennie with a generous \$5,000 check to support the work of the Center.



All hands on deck for 2017 WCA Retreat and Graduation