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]
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 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.

**WHAT IS HEIRS’ PROPERTY?**

The 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.

**A Note From Jennie**

Are We There Yet?

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At the Graduation and Retreat of the 1011 “Woodland Community Advocate” (WCA), 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 Mannigut. “I grew up in rural areas with logs, cows, and chickens. We were the ‘small’ 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, Joanne Loomis, 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 an 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 know 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 Alberta Bowen took it 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, Alberta 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 WCA’s. Each one is distinct and powerful. “Bayin,” said WCA Joe Hamilton. “We have to have buy-in, if we’re going to call ourselves evangelists.”

“Buy-in” begins with WCA’s 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.”

Alberta is finding her way to evangelize. “Every third Sunday, we have a family dinner. I’m not just eating. I need to share the information. I’ve been blessed to receive.”

“Knowledge is an acquisition which...”

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 3 to 17 and its service area from 7 to 17 counties. It has also expanded its mission and impact. This evolution is the result of needed and increased funding to respond to that need.

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 $11 billion industry in SC 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 150 landowners, who collectively owned land with a tax-assessed value of $1.8M;
- 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.
- 45 USDA/NRCS financial assistance contracts were awarded to landowners totaling $244,760 (2016). Since 2014, more than 100 landowner contracts were awarded a total of $8M.

Growing up the next generation of land stewards! (Board Chair Alex Singleton is 7th from left and Beth Richardson - Clemson Extension Area Agent in Forestry, far right)

There has been a 157% 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.
Left: Partners, Funders & Friends - Cassandra Gaithers, 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 Voorhees College in June.

Above: Wells Fargo Friends - Lon 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