



## Case Study 2

# Conservation Development in South Carolina

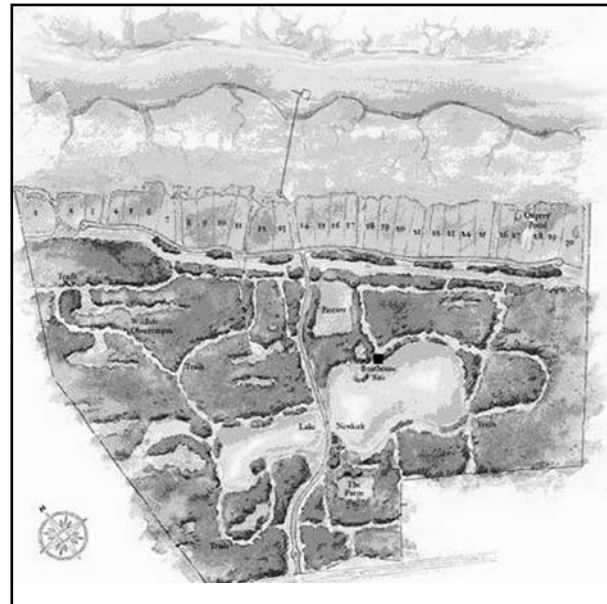
South Carolina's coastline is a maze of tidal flats, marshes, islands, and uplands. Most of the highland areas have been planted in corn, cotton, potatoes, or pine at some point during the last two centuries. Overgrown hardwood hammocks, the lack of road access, and the barrage of sporadic hurricanes make development and resource management challenging. Areas that people have managed to develop, however, are rapidly expanding. New subdivisions and golf course communities are cropping up near Hilton Head Island and Charleston.

Advertisements draw people from across the nation to come take advantage of the 'last homesites now being sold' because 'people need refuge too.' Typical developments provide large homes on mid-sized lots and community designs that isolate residents from nature and require them to drive to enjoy recreational activities.

Some developers are beginning to offer alternatives to typical development, creating designs that aim to create balance between people's desire to live in beautiful, natural places and the protection of those natural places. One such project is the Sewee Preserve, which is about 25 minutes from downtown Charleston.

Once completed, Sewee will include 30 houses on a 90-acre parcel with more than 400 acres left undeveloped. All of the homes will be built along the bay, conserving the remaining land for wildlife observation and seven miles of trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. The development also includes a 45-acre stocked lake for fishing and boating. There is also an on-site working farm, managed by a local farmer, providing property owners with access to freshly-grown vegetables like squash,

sweet corn, potatoes, tomatoes, and beans through their farmer's market.



Conservation subdivisions generally cluster home lots in one area and leave a portion of natural area undeveloped.

In this example, wealth acquires access to nature and simultaneously aims to protect it; lots in the preserve start at \$625,000. The Wetlands America Trust retains a land preservation agreement for the 400-plus acres of undeveloped land. This easement provides a key link in the Santee Corridor, which runs from Mount Pleasant to the Santee River delta, connecting the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and Francis Marion National Forest. The preserve has also established guidelines for environmentally-sensitive homebuilding and lighting technologies and encourages homeowners to use native plants for landscaping.

The preserve provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species, including many birds. The preserve developed the Sewee Partnership for

Birds of Prey in cooperation with the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey. This partnership works to enhance habitat in the area for species such as hawks, osprey, owls, and eagles. Sewee property owners are offered honorary memberships to the center, which rehabilitates and releases hundreds of birds every year.



Photo courtesy of Sewee Preserve

The Sewee Preserve offers beautiful scenery and recreational opportunities to its residents.

The Sewee Preserve is one model for alternative residential development. While the cost to live there makes it an inaccessible option for most people, it fills a niche that might otherwise be comprised of pavement and golf courses. It sets an example and provides ideas for future development that might meet the needs of middle and lower-middle class home buyers.

Developments like Sewee also provide opportunities for natural resource professionals to perform outreach activities and, in some cases, provide management for commonly-owned natural areas.

## Source

Sewee Preserve website,  
[www.seweepreserve.com](http://www.seweepreserve.com) (accessed October 5, 2005).