



Thompson Farm Acquisition Project

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

The mission of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

JEDI Efforts and Impact

TNC recognizes that achieving our complex goals will require creativity, innovation and engaging with and leveraging the differences of a network of partners and philanthropic community. TNC is implementing tools and recommendations to ensure that our science-based conservation approach for the benefit of all people and nature,

including populations disproportionately impacted by a changing climate.

Final Success Successful completion of the Thompson Farm project will include long term protection of 1,875-acres and 5 river miles, enhancing water quality and quantity in the Savannah River, expanding protection of wetland habitats and expanding the network of protected and publicly accessible recreation lands in the Savannah River corridor.

Location Details

The Thompson Farm property is located within the Savannah River corridor, which is considered a high priority watershed in the Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan with the 3rd highest global significance score in the state. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR) and TNC are collaborating on the acquisition of Thompson Farm. This property is the oldest Black American owned business in Augusta—the family has owned and farmed the property for over 100 years. The property is adjacent to the State-owned Phinizy Swamp Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and has almost 5 miles of frontage on the Savannah River, along a stretch of river that includes the federally endangered Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, federal candidate species robust redhorse, and multiple high-priority freshwater mussels. This area is important for migratory waterfowl and other species that utilize the river and adjacent wetlands.

Biodiversity in Project Area

The Thompson Farm property is adjacent to the 1,541-acre Phinizy Swamp Wildlife Management Area (WMA), a 705-acre private wetland mitigation bank and the 1,286-acre Phinizy Wetlands Research Center and Nature Park, which is home to the Phinizy Center for Water Sciences. The Thompson Farm property connects this block of protected lands out to the Savannah River corridor. If successful, priority species that will benefit from the protection of Thompson Farm include: the federally endangered Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, federal candidate species robust redhorse, Carolina slabshell, tidewater mucket, and a number of high-priority freshwater mussels, including the G1S1 (globally imperiled) brother spike, and delicate spike. It is also an important roosting and foraging area for federal candidate tricolored bats and represents the furthest inland breeding area for painted buntings.

Based on The Nature Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Landscapes data, the Thompson Farm property is located in a Resilient and Connected Network exhibiting high resilience, high flow, and recognized biodiversity. With significant Savannah River frontage, the property is a critical component of the climate resilient corridor running along this waterway from the coast to the Appalachians.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

At closing, 1,575- acres of the property will be purchased by GDNR and will immediately become a state-owned WMA, open to the public for hunting, fishing, and other nature-based recreation. TNC will purchase 300-acres of the property subject to a reserved life estate in favor of Mr. Thompson, allowing him to continue to use the property under current use—including agricultural management and private recreation—for the remainder of his lifetime. Upon Mr. Thompson's passing, TNC will transfer the property to DNR for incorporation into the WMA.

The Thompson Farm property is also one of the highest priority protection parcels for the Savannah River Clean Water Fund (SRCWF). Protection of this property and maintaining its place as a forested tract on the river corridor will help maintain water quality and quantity in the Savannah, minimizing drinking water treatment costs in the Savannah River basin.

Upon a successful acquisition, some fields on the Thompson Farm tracts will continue to be planted with agricultural crops to support the local economy. However, the majority of the area will become an extension of the Phinizy Swamp WMA with an objective to create optimal conditions for game such as dove, waterfowl, rabbits, quail, wild turkeys, deer, and other wildlife. Note that at Phinizy, there are already extensive hunting opportunities as well as five ponds that offer walk-in fishing.

**Strategy & Timeline
For Final Success**

GDNR and TNC have verbal agreements to purchase the Thompson Farm and are finalizing option agreements with the seller, with closing anticipated in late 2025. The GDNR and TNC acquisitions are dependent upon one another, so TNC must acquire the 300 acres in order for GDNR to acquire the 1,575 acres, and vice versa. Upon signing the option, TNC will complete an appraisal to determine the purchase price, along with a survey, environmental site assessment and title. Per the terms of the option, the purchase price will be the average per acre value determined by two appraisals, not to exceed \$4500/acre less the value of the reserved life estate. For current budgeting purposes, TNC is estimating a purchase price of \$4,000/acre. TNC will work with the seller to cure any issues uncovered during the due diligence period prior to closing. At closing, the State will purchase 1,575-acres and manage it as part of the Phinzy WMA. Mr. Thompson wishes to retain a reserved life estate over 300 acres, so TNC will purchase the 300 acres subject to the reserved life estate, allowing him to use the property for the remainder of his lifetime. Upon his passing, TNC will transfer the property to the State for incorporation into the WMA. The State will purchase its portion of the property using a Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program grant, US Fish and Wildlife Pittman-Robertson Funds, a Knobloch Family Foundation (KFF) grant and State of Georgia Bond Funds. TNC will purchase its portion of the property using \$88,555 from the SRCWF (committed), a \$20,000 donation from International Paper (in hand), \$200,000 in Georgia Department of Transportation funds (in hand) with GDNR, and a KFF grant (proposal to be submitted this summer but KFF has verbally expressed strong support for the project). A Conservation Alliance grant would fill the final funding gap for the acquisition.

Under TNC's ownership, the reserved life estate will prevent Mr. Thompson from engaging in any activities other than those currently existing on the property, which includes agricultural use and private recreation. TNC will monitor the property to ensure that the terms of the reserved life estate are not violated.

Elevate Voices

Purchase of the Thompson Farm reflects The Nature Conservancy in Georgia's desire to consider all relevant perspectives related to our work to conserve land, water, and climate for our collective futures. The Thompson family's land holdings date back to 1870 during Reconstruction, but the 100-year designation dates to the 1918 purchase by JoAnn (John Ann) Crosby Thompson of 660 river-bottom acres of forested

Key Decision Makers

The Thompson Farm property is a long-standing protection priority for numerous stakeholders, including the SRCWF, GDNR, and the Central Savannah River Land Trust. Key partners in this project include the GDNR (acquisition partner), Georgia Department of Transportation (funding partner), KFF (funding partner) Savannah River Clean Water Fund (funding partner), and International Paper (funding partner).



Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- a. Long term protection of the 1,875-acre Thompson Farm property
- b. Expanded public recreational access to 1875 acres of high-quality recreational land
- c. Elevated understanding of Thompson family's contributions to the local economy

bottomland along the Savannah River on what was then the outskirts of Augusta, Georgia. Notable about Mrs. Crosby Thompson's impressive purchase was that it predated Black women's right to vote which was granted in 1965 through the Voting Rights Act—35 years after the 19th Amendment granted suffrage to white women in 1920. Further, JoAnn's grandsons Harold and Charles Thompson who currently manage and farm the land emphasize that she singlehandedly spearheaded daily maintenance of the farm which was an anomaly at the time.

The family's commitment to land stewardship continues today through their effort to sell to GDNR so it can remain in its natural state for as long as possible. GDNR is preparing interpretative signage to place on the property that will share the property's rich history with visitors.

TCA Funding Plan

TCA support will fill the final, anticipated funding gap needed to complete the project and allow TNC to move to closing on the property. In addition, a TCA grant will greatly enhance TNC's proposal to KFF for funding as KFF appreciates seeing their gift matched by other donors.

Total project cost for completing the acquisition of the 300-acre portion of the Thompson Farm property is estimated at \$1,269,650 as detailed below. To date, \$300K in private funds are committed, and TNC will apply for an additional \$901,095 in funding from the Knobloch Family Foundation to cover the outstanding project costs.

How long it took to complete application

Confidential Items

No

Other Relevant Application Details

No!