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Our Mission: To preserve the rural quality of life on Edisto by protecting lands, waterways, scenic vistas, and heritage through conservation and education.

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For Land's Sake

2025 VOLUME I

THIRTY YEARS: STRONG TOGETHER FOR EDISTO

The word fragility conjures powerful imagery that compels us to take action, to make every effort to safeguard and shelter what we hold dear. For the past 30 years, the Edisto Island Open Land Trust has worked to protect the fragility of this special place. On this anniversary year we honor the dedicated efforts of so many who have worked to protect Edisto, knowing there were no guarantees this island would escape the peril that our neighboring islands were undergoing.

Thanks to a groundswell of support for EIOLT since our inception in 1994, Edisto remains a testament to what can be accomplished when passion and perseverance come together. While we celebrate the fact that Edisto is now over 50 percent protected, this special place remains vulnerable to efforts to disrupt all the work that has been done.

Because of our supporters, Edisto has a chance, an opportunity, to continue to look much the same after the next 30 years has passed. This April, we held a celebration at Bay Creek Park to kick off this big anniversary, connect with more of our neighbors and visitors, and to cheer on all those of you dedicated to saving Edisto for the future.



KEEPING EDISTO BEAUTIFUL

Dedicated volunteers, led by Bob Hare and the Environmental Protection Committee, have picked up and hauled away dozens of bags of trash and large items from the side of Scenic Byway 174. We are loving how clean and beautiful the roadside looks, from the Dawhoo Boat Landing to Russell Creek, thanks to their hard work!



YOUNG NATURALISTS

We are thrilled to send ten students from our Young Naturalist program to camp this summer in the scenic North Carolina Mountains at Green River Reserve (GRP)! Fortunately, this camp was spared from the devastation of Hurricane Helene, although it did suffer some damage that required assistance with trail clearing, re-graveling walkways, and preparing for the upcoming season.

The staff at GRP reached out to ask for volunteer help, and my family decided we could lend a hand this spring. After a weekend of helping out, my family and I returned home, tired yet revitalized after a much-needed break from technology, with no cell reception and complete disconnection from electronics, allowing us to fully immerse ourselves in nature.



During our brief stay, we witnessed the genuine love and dedication the staff has not only for the camp but also for the children who visit. It’s a form of healing for people of all ages to reconnect with nature and embrace simplicity.

This is the primary reason why the Edisto Island Open Land Trust wholeheartedly supports sending our students to this camp. The beauty and restorative power of this experience is something our campers greatly benefit from.

Top, left and bottom left photos: Krystal and her family volunteering at Green River Preserve.
Bottom right: Summer campers enjoying the Preserve’s trails. Photo courtesy Green River Preserve.



WATER QUALITY ON THE MEND, MORE GOOD WORK TO COME!

On March 31st the Edisto Island Water Quality Workshop marked the final dollar spent for EIOLT’s second wave of water quality education work and septic system repairs. We had an all-star lineup of experts from Clemson University, USC-Beaufort, and SC Sea Grant Consortium to present on different facets of water quality, ongoing research into pollution sources, and solutions we can all apply at home to help clean up our waterways. If you missed the workshop, a recording of the presentation is live on EIOLT’s YouTube channel.

Over the course of the last 15 months, EIOLT has accomplished three years of water quality work! Utilizing funding from five different grants, we inspected 50 septic systems last year. A whopping 90% of the systems we looked at, 45 in total, needed repairs. Over 50% of those, 26 in total, had to be completely replaced! Since its inception, our septic repair program has fixed 53 systems for Island residents. That underscores just how large of an issue failed and failing septic systems are in our watershed.

As residents of the Edisto Island Watershed, the biggest thing we can all do to improve our water quality on Edisto is to each maintain our own septic system properly. Don’t overload it, flush nothing but toilet paper, avoid damaging the drainfield, and have the system pumped out and inspected every 3-5 years. Even if your system isn’t giving you issues, inspect it! It may unknowingly be damaged or failing, causing pollution when it gets over burdened by rain or excessive use. Most importantly, if your septic system is damaged or showing signs of failing, DON’T WAIT! Have your system repaired immediately.

Although EIOLT’s second wave of funding has come to a close, we’re not done yet! Our education and outreach efforts will continue throughout 2025. Research underway by our partners will help us identify pollution hotspots and high risk areas of the Island to coastal flooding. This, combined with a comprehensive GIS analysis of septic systems across the Island, will allow for targeted work where the most attention is needed. Armed with deep knowledge of the issues at play, we’re hoping to secure at least another \$250,000 in funding to bring back the Program for a third wave of septic system repairs in 2026 as a bigger, better, more efficient, and more impactful program.



MISSING FROM THE FOREST: HAVE YOU SEEN THIS TREE?

THE BLUFF OAK (*Quercus austrina*) is a small tree that grows to 50-80ft high. Its trunk has fine vertical flakes of white bark. Its low-hanging limbs blend up into a tall, narrow crown. Its deciduous leaves are an emerald-green and feather-like in shape. These leaves are the length of your outstretched hand but relatively narrow and pointed, with 7 or so irregular, shallow lobes. Their twigs are reddish brown with strongly pointed buds.

Bluff Oaks grow in the coastal plain from Mississippi to North Carolina and down through North Florida. Yet, they are known from only a smattering of trees from a handful of counties in each state. They’re most often encountered perched on a bluff overlooking a marsh or river. Here on the Sea Islands, fertile well-drained soil in maritime fringe forests, in view of the marsh and with a stable shallow water table, seem to be their preferred natural habitat. They occupy a very narrow niche in the Sea Island ecosystem. A niche that is threatened.

You see, Bluff Oaks love to live on bluffs, with a panoramic prospect of the marsh or a view down a bend in the river. But that’s most people’s favorite place to live as well! That’s bad luck for Bluff Oaks. Untold scores of Bluff Oaks have been clear-cut for waterfront development over the last 75 years. They were scarce to begin with and very few trees remain alive in the wild. The populations that do survive are usually just 1 or 2 trees. Less than 10 sites are known globally that house 10 or more trees. Often these populations are 10s or 100s of miles apart. Currently, only a single site in Charleston County is known with surviving Bluff Oaks. Those trees are standing proud today on one of EIOLT’s conservation easements, right here on Edisto Island. Bluff Oaks are a declining species on a collision course with oblivion.



But hope is not lost! Bluff Oaks actually do well as a shade tree in coastal suburbs and developments. They even thrive when reintroduced to their natural habitats on bluffs and banks. We haven’t pushed this species off the bluff yet. There is a space for them in the modern world. We just need to lend a helping hand. Right now, there is active research underway to find and collect acorns from Bluff Oaks across the country. The US Forest Service is even starting a nursery for Bluff Oaks within the Francis Marion National Forest. You can help in this effort too!

The most important thing this effort needs is help finding new Bluff Oak populations. Many of the mature Bluff Oaks still alive today are nestled quietly in people’s yards, on church grounds, near boat landings, or dangling precariously from bluffs along rivers. There very well might be a Bluff Oak standing on the edge of the woods right outside your window! If you think you know where a Bluff Oak is, anywhere in South Carolina, please reach out to EIOLT with the location of the tree. Take some photos of the bark, leaves, and twigs if you can. We need your help in saving this imperiled species on our sea islands.

In fact, during our 30th Anniversary celebration last month, some of our Young Naturalist mentors—Marley, Rain, and Kiersten—shared their experiences from camp last summer and expressed their eagerness to return. All ten students from our Young Naturalists program are incredibly excited to go back this summer. Kiersten looks forward to reuniting with the friends she made last year, Rain is eager to continue exploring nature, and Marley is particularly excited about the delicious food!

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has helped make it possible for the students to attend camp. Without your support, none of this incredible work is achievable. You truly are a life changer!



WHAT COLOR WAS THE HUTCHINSON HOUSE? PAINT ANALYSIS UNCOVERS LAYERS

May is National Preservation Month and here at EIOLT we are celebrating the nearing completion of the Hutchinson House. The preservation philosophy for the Hutchinson House is to take the house back to its c.1885 appearance as Henry (1860-1941) and Rosa (1866-1949) Hutchinson designed. Our National Parks Service grant through the African American Civil Rights Fund is helping to pay for the removal of harmful lead paint down to the original bare wood and repainting the interiors with historically accurate paint and colors.



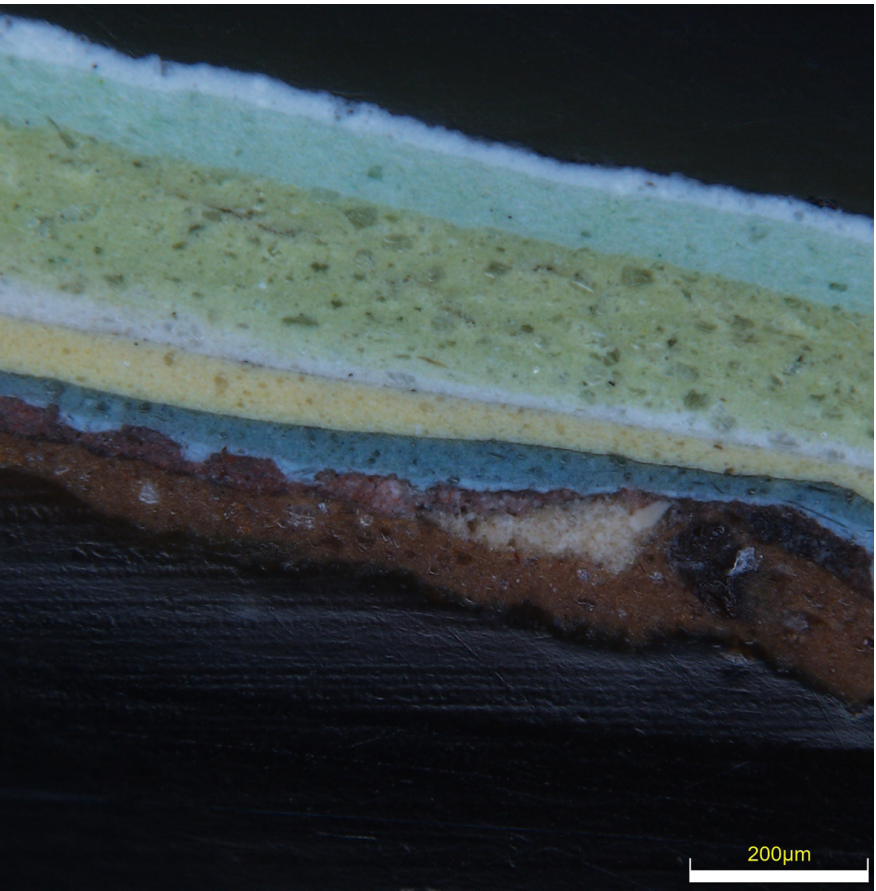
Photos: Patricia Ploehn taking and analyzing paint samples from the Hutchinson House. Courtesy of Warren Lasch Conservation Center.

One of the final steps in the preservation process of the house is determining the original paint colors of the interiors. Thankfully we have talented Preservation Specialists nearby at the Warren Lasch Conservation Center who we employed to take and analyze paint samples throughout the Hutchinson House; Patricia Ploehn was the Historic Preservation Specialist in charge of the Hutchinson House paint analysis project.



The paint samples are microscopic in size and include a portion of the wood substrate to ensure the complete paint stratigraphy is intact. Each sample is cast in a polyester clear resin that is then cured and polished, and then examined microscopically. Each paint stratigraphy is color matched using the Munsell Color System, the standard for scientific color matching. The Munsell colors are then color matched via a computer program to find the comparable commercial colors. After a tremendous amount of research and analysis, the original color scheme of the interior rooms is determined.

The original interior colors are right in line with Henry and Rosa Hutchinson’s eye for design and are extremely fashionable for the late 19th century with a deep, rich color-palette for the downstairs rooms of their home. Except for the door casings and handrails of the upper floor, the second floor bedrooms were likely not painted until the 1950s when Lula Hutchinson Whaley (1887-1974) took over as head of household after her parents’ passing.



The main family room on the western side of the first floor was painted nine times, the most of any room in the home. The paint sample stratigraphy shows the most modern white paint on top and the oldest colors at the bottom. The first two coats of paint for this room is a rich reddish-brown color, most closely matching Sherwin-Williams, Cajun Red color. Henry and Rosa’s bedroom on the east side of the first floor of the house, was two-toned with walls a deep golden yellow and contrasting trim work and mantle, a darker-hued red brown.

The elemental analysis showed a high lead content in the earliest layers of paint. Of course, preservation doesn’t always mean using exactly the same products of the past, but those that are most historically appropriate and environmentally kinder than those in the past. For the Hutchinson House, we are sourcing solvent-free Linseed Oil paints.

INTERPRETATION TEAM HIRED

In other Hutchinson House news, we are thrilled to announce the hiring of VZBLYF (Visible Life), led by J.E. Azmi out of Philadelphia, PA. Azmi served as Interim Chief Curator of the International African American Museum (IAAM) in Charleston from 2020-2023 among many other distinguished curatorial posts. Azmi and his team of highly talented designers, curators, and museum fabricators will lead the interpretive portion of the Hutchinson House project funded through the Mellon Foundation’s Humanities in Place grant received in 2023.

Top: Paint sample from the first-floor west room of the Hutchinson House. Courtesy of Warren Lasch Conservation Center.

Bottom: Benjamin Moore’s first color card from the 1880s. Courtesy of Benjamin Moore’s Facebook Page.