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Editorial: The University of South Carolina should use the Wedge or sell it

BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF

JAN 23, 2020



The Wedge Plantation, also known as the William Lucas House, is pictured on Wednesday, May 8, 2019. Lauren Petracca/Staff
BY LAUREN PETRACCA LPETRACCA@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

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The University of South Carolina says it has no timetable for deciding what to do with The Wedge, its vast Santee Delta plantation with a historically significant but deteriorating home. That's not good enough.

The school has not used the property for several years, and preservation-minded neighbors have been dismayed about what they see as its steadily worsening condition. Selden “Bud” Hill is among them. As emeritus director of McClellanville’s Village Museum, Mr. Hill has kept tabs on the property and has little good to say about the university’s recent stewardship. “The porch is so soft that you bounce when you walk on it,” he said.

Since 2014, the university had been asking \$4 million for the 500-acre-plus property in the heart of the Santee Delta, but it ultimately got no takers, perhaps because its asking price was \$800,000 more than its own appraisal. The school only shared that appraisal some five months after reporter Tony Bartleme sought it under the state’s Freedom of Information Act.

More frustratingly for those who care about The Wedge and appreciate its unique importance in the Santee Delta, the school isn’t saying much at all about its future plans — other than it is studying its appraisal and has no timetable for action.

The university once used the property for a research station, similar to the use by its previous owner, Richard Dominick, but that was many years ago. As far as a potential research site, the university already has access to Hobcaw Barony, a much larger former coastal plantation site just north of Georgetown.

The appraisal also indicated any new owner would need to spend at least \$500,000, possibly twice as much, to renovate the house. The university purchased it for \$1.2 million in 1990.

Maybe the university can find some appropriate use for it, but that seems unlikely, given its recent history. And the university cannot benefit from tax credits designed to help owners of historically important properties; only those in the private sector can.

Meanwhile, the house is showing other signs of neglect, including missing paint and falling shutters. These may not reflect more serious structural issues, but they’re certainly signs that the property is not receiving the kind of care it deserves.

The house, built by Jonathan Lucas' son William Lucas around 1830, is considered an important survivor in the Santee Delta. Forty years ago, its architecture was deemed significant enough to place it on the National Register of Historic Places.

It should be noted the University of South Carolina isn't the only government entity that owns but has neglected a historically significant structure around here. The U.S. Forest Service owns the Tibwin Plantation house outside McClellanville, as well as the Walnut Grove Plantation and an old Civilian Conservation Corps camp building near Awendaw, all of which are also being neglected. That is shameful but it's no excuse for what's happened with The Wedge.

Demolition by neglect of historic buildings is always sad to see, but when the building is owned by a public body, it's worse. The university may be run by a staff overseen by trustees appointed by lawmakers, but in the bigger picture, it's an arm of our state — and by extension all South Carolina residents. It has a duty to act responsibly in preserving the history that makes our state a special place.

It should do so.

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.postandcourier.com/business/real_estate/an-old-publicly-owned-plantation-deep-in-the-santee-delta/article_69992168-370f-11ea-a8df-6382f7fe1769.html

An old, publicly owned plantation deep in the Santee Delta faces an uncertain future

BY TONY BARTELME TBARTELME@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

JAN 18, 2020



The Wedge Plantation, also known as the William Lucas House, is pictured on Wednesday, May 8, 2019. Lauren Petracca/Staff
BY LAUREN PETRACCA LPETRACCA@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

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The Wedge, a deteriorating 1,500-acre plantation in the heart of the Santee Delta, has been taken off the market while its owner, the University of South Carolina, decides what to do with the historic property.

In its September report [“Our Secret Delta,”](#) The Post and Courier documented how USC had allowed the property to fall into [disrepair](#).

A visit revealed paint falling in strips, shutters hanging off windows, a porch that had begun to sag.

“It seems like demolition by neglect,” said Randal McClure, director of The Village Museum in McClellanville. “It’s a property that’s central to the history of the Santee Delta.”



Paint peels from the front door of the Wedge Plantation outside of McClellanville on Wednesday, May 8, 2019. Lauren Petracca/Staff

BY LAUREN PETRACCA LPETRACCA@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

The image shows a National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form. The form is titled "National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form" and is part of the "United States Department of the Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service". It includes sections for Name, Location, Classification, Owner of Property, Location of Legal Description, and Representation in Existing Surveys. The form is filled out with information about "The Wedge" plantation, including its location in Charleston, South Carolina, and its historical significance.



National Historic Register The Wedge

In the 1970s, it housed a globally recognized insect laboratory operated by Richard B. Dominick. Dominick collected more than 25,000 moths and 1,000 butterflies from the plantation, which he called “the world’s largest bug trap.”

After Dominick died in 1976, his family sold the property to USC, which also used it for research. The university later shuttered the lab and put the house on the market, asking \$4 million in 2014.

No takers emerged.

Last year, the university ordered a new appraisal, which the newspaper obtained under the state’s Freedom of Information Act. The newspaper submitted its FOIA in July. It took more than 5 months for the university to release the public records.

The appraiser set the market value as \$3.2 million and stated that it would cost between \$500,000 and \$1 million to renovate the house.

The image shows an appraisal report from Appraisal Consultants, Inc. The report is titled "APPRAISAL REPORT OF A LARGE TRACT OF LAND KNOWN AS THE WEDGE PLANTATION ABOUT 4 MILES SW OF THE CLEVELANDE IN CHARLESTON AND GEORGE TOWN VILLAGES, Santee Delta, South Carolina". It includes the effective date of the appraisal (September 16, 2019) and the date of the report (October 1, 2019). The report was prepared for Derek A. Greiner, University of South Carolina, and prepared by Appraisal Consultants, Inc.



Appraisal of The Wedge

“The Wedge is not currently for sale,” said Jeffrey Stensland, interim chief communications officer for USC.

He said university officials are studying the appraisal to decide their next moves. They have no timetable to do this, he said.

Meantime, the property continues to degrade, frustrating historians and preservationists.

“There is a sense of urgency,” said Selden B. “Bud” Hill, emeritus director of The Village Museum. “Every day they let it sit there rotting it gets worse.”



Tommy Graham, a retired McClellanville builder who restored historical structures across the Lowcountry, said only a handful of truly important historic plantation homes are left in the Santee Delta. The Wedge is one of them, he said.

“They’re letting it melt away,” Graham said, adding that the house shares features found in downtown Charleston mansions. “It’s special, especially because of its connection to the Lucas family.”

Jonathan Lucas arrived in Charleston in 1786 and found new ways to automate rice milling. His son, William Lucas, also was an inventor and built The Wedge.

Their work generated enormous profits for plantation owners. But, as with Eli Whitney's cotton gin, the Lucas-designed mills also increased demand for more slaves, binding the South to slave-based agriculture.

Hill and McClure said The Wedge isn't the only important historical property in the area that's threatened by neglect.

The U.S. Forest Service's two-century-old [Tibwin Plantation](#) house in the Francis Marion National Forest is in even worse shape, propped up by timbers. [Walnut Grove Plantation](#) and an old Civilian Conservation Corps camp building near Awendaw also are in disrepair.

The Forest Service recognizes that both Tibwin and Walnut Grove need work, said Jason Moser, district archaeologist for the Forest Service. Moser said he joined the district in September, "and Tibwin is definitely on my radar as one of the top three projects we need to do." He said the agency likely will need to find partners outside government to come up with the kind of money to restore those plantations and find sustainable uses for them.

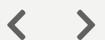
But it's galling to Hill and McClure that important publicly owned properties are going to seed.

"They need to do the right thing and sell The Wedge to someone who will use it, and same with Tibwin," Hill said.

Photos: Inside the Wedge Plantation

The Wedge Plantation, also known as the William Lucas House, is located outside of McClellanville.

1 of 9





Reach **Tony Bartelme** at 843-937-5554. Follow him on Twitter @tbartelme.

MORE INFORMATION



Editorial: The University of South Carolina should use the Wedge or sell it

Test your knowledge of Russian trolls, outdated laws and more with our weekly news quiz

TONY BARTELME

Tony Bartelme is senior projects reporter for The Post and Courier. He has earned national honors from the Nieman, Scripps, Loeb and National Press foundations and is a three-time finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Reach him at 843-937-5554 and @tbartelme

https://www.postandcourier.com/news/sc-coastal-residents-don-t-want-power-lines-across-the/article_a3b97272-c9c7-11e9-89d5-3f4fa9b93ea8.html

SC coastal residents don't want power lines across the Santee Delta

BY BO PETERSEN BOPETE@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

AUG 29, 2019



Conservationists and area residents continue to oppose a needed electric transmission line if it comes across the treasured Santee Delta. Lauren Petracca/Staff

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McCLELLANVILLE — First and foremost: no electric transmission line across the relatively wild lower Santee River delta. That's what Tommy Graham will tell federal regulators.

Graham, among a vocal crowd of McClellanville-area residents, isn't so sure about the other two route options offered by Berkeley Electric Cooperative either. And 7,500 co-op customers in the northern end of the county now depend on the sometimes flickering, outage-prone co-op power feed the line is planned to improve.

That makes for another contested round of public comment and hearings on the newly released federal [environmental impact statement](#) that could clear the way for one line or the other — five years after the opposition derailed the last impact statement.



BUSINESS

Public hearing set for proposed power line to McClellanville

WARREN L. WISE

This time around, there's more urgency for the co-op and for the customers. Development planned along the U.S. Highway 17 corridor north of Mount Pleasant is going to mean more people pulling from those electric lines.

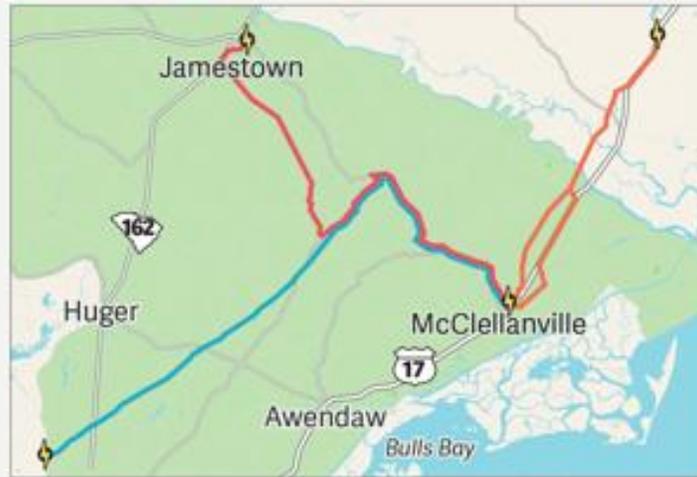
“The primary reason for the line has always been to improve service reliability for our members in that district,” said co-op spokesman Micah Ponce. “However, as more people continue to move into the area the growth in the electrical load is becoming more of a concern.”

In 2014, the co-op wanted to run a transmission line, one of those spread-eagle arrays of towers and high tension lines, across the delta just upstream of the U.S. Highway 17 bridge.

New routes for electric line

Berkeley Electric Cooperative has proposed two new routes for an electric transmission line that would avoid it crossing the Santee River delta.

— 2019 option 1 — 2019 option 2 — 2014 proposed line ⚡ Substation



SOURCES: USDA; CENTRAL ELECTRIC POWER, LOUIS BERGER

BRANDON LOCKETT/STAFF

The Santee is the lifeblood of the fishing and hunting communities that make up the rural county. It's a spread of marshes and channels nearly as large as the Charleston metro area, teeming with ducks and alligators.

Sand from its outflow is thought to have created the island-scape of the vast Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge where it empties.



ARCHIVES

McClellanville residents slam proposed power plans

BY Katie West

kwest@postandcourier.com

Not just residents objected. The U.S. Forest Service has raised concerns about potential damage to the Francis Marion National Forest through which the line would run. The environmental advocate Coastal Conservation League also came out against the line running either through the forest or across the delta.

“We’ll continue to oppose any lines that cross (either),” said spokeswoman Caitie Forde-Smith.

The delta line would still be the preferred, most economical route for the co-op.

TO COMMENT

Public meetings/comments on the proposed routes for a Berkeley Electric Cooperative transmission power line:

Tuesday, Sept. 17, 5 to 8 p.m., Santee St. James Elementary-Middle School, 8900 North U.S. 17, McClellanville.

Wednesday, Sept. 18, 3 to 6 p.m., Jamestown Baptist Church Life Center, 4339 North U.S. 17A, Jamestown.

Comments by Oct. 22.

Email to comments-mcclellanville@louisberger.com or mail to Lauren Rayburn, USDA Rural Utilities Service, 160 Zillicoa Street, Suite 2, Asheville, NC 28801

But “there were clearly concerns that were voiced about crossing the Santee delta” in the previous, 2014 round of comments and hearings, said Mark A. Svrcek, chief operating officer of the Central Electric Power Cooperative, which supplies wholesale power through the transmission lines.

The first of the new options would be to run the power through an existing transmission line across the Santee River upstream near Jamestown and Highway 17 Alternate and build lines to McClellanville through the Francis Marion National Forest along a route that hasn’t been specified yet.

The other new option would be to build a line from a distribution line in Cainhoj, near Mount Pleasant, that would also run through the forest but at least somewhat along a natural gas pipeline easement.



NEWS

Uncertainty in the air for workers at SC’s largest coal burning power plant

BY BO PETERSEN [BOPETE@POSTANDCOURIER.COM](mailto:bopete@postandcourier.com)

That would be the least favored and most expensive option because of safety concerns, and the building and maintenance costs, Svrcek said. Also, a distribution line doesn't provide as much power.

The new line is an established need, that's not in question, "that's an important thing to be aware of," Svrcek said.

The co-ops are trying to work through the Forest Service concerns. The conservation league is evaluating the draft impact statement released for public comment.

Graham and his upper-county neighbors know they need more reliable power, and one of the two new options might be OK, he said. But he's skeptical.

"It's a travesty to run the line through the forest. It's a travesty to run the line through people's yards. There we are between a rock and a hard place," he said. "If we don't turn out on the 17th (for a public hearing in McClellanville), say something important and relevant, we're in trouble."

Reach **Bo Petersen** at @bopete on Twitter or 843-937-5744.

MORE INFORMATION

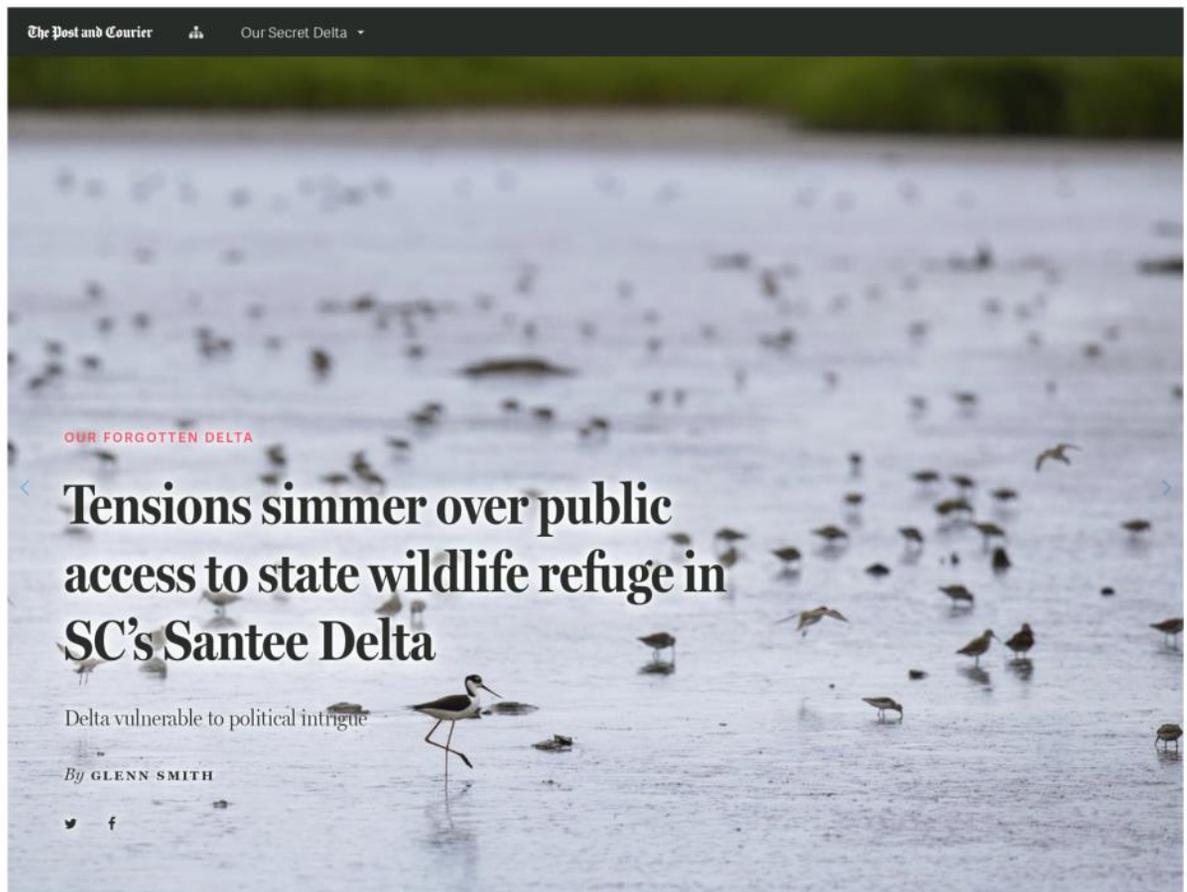


Editorial: Keep power lines out of the Santee Delta

BO PETERSEN

Science and environment reporter. Author of *Washing Our Hands in the Clouds*.

Friday, January 24, 2020
12:20 PM



Tensions have simmered for years between locals and the state over how much access the general public should have to a 24,000-acre wildlife preserve smack in the middle of the Santee Delta.

The Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center north of McClellanville is considered one of the delta's crown jewels, with a diverse mix of remote barrier islands, former rice fields, pristine beaches and pine forests teeming with birds and alligators. It's named after the late owner of the Boston Red Sox who decided it to the state to be managed for wildlife research and education.

The general public is allowed on the site only for programs, small tours and occasional nuisance hunts.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources, which manages the property, says the goal is to safeguard this special place so it can be enjoyed for many generations to come, as Yawkey intended.

The Post and Courier Our Secret Delta



Researchers count eggs from an alligator nest for a study on reproduction patterns at Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center. Lauren Petracca/Staff

But some locals have chafed at what they perceive as heavy-handed efforts by DNR and the Massachusetts-based Yawkey Foundation to keep people from enjoying the rich bounty of the preserve.

Things came to a head in the spring when DNR added a clause to its updated regulations making it illegal to trespass, fish or hunt in marsh waters or on the beaches throughout the center. Sportsmen saw the move as an overreach that unjustly limited access to public waterways and beaches.

State Sen. Stephen Goldfinch, a Georgetown Republican whose district includes the preserve, countered with a proposed budget restriction to keep DNR “from prohibiting hunting and fishing within navigable waters” at Yawkey. Conservationists, DNR officials and others worried the proviso would open the protected wildlife area to hunting, threatening a decades-long alligator research project, among other things.

Both sides ultimately backed down. Goldfinch withdrew his proviso and DNR removed the clause. Both sides also agreed to discuss other options for protecting the center without unfairly penalizing boaters.



Mary Ware with the state Department of Natural Resources tests a yolk from a sea turtle nest at Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center. One yolk out of each nest is tested to find out what the mother has eaten and if there are any heavy metals present. Lauren Petracca/Staff

DNR Capt. Robert McCullough said that effort has gone well. While hunting remains forbidden in the preserve, "we have always been and will continue to support people using the waterways back there."

"Everyone is on the same sheet of music right now," he said.

Goldfinch doesn't see it that way. He said dozens of constituents have complained to him over the years about being ticketed or hassled by DNR for trespassing on Yawkey's expansive South Beach or boating around area creeks.

The senator's father was ticketed seven years ago for illegally hunting alligator in Mosquito Creek in the center. Goldfinch said his father took a disabled veteran hunting and the gator was bagged in public waters. His father chose to pay the \$470 fine, Goldfinch said, even though he probably would have prevailed if he had challenged the ticket in court.



An alligator protects her nest from researchers at Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center. Lauren Petracca/Staff

Goldfinch said the incident was just one of example of how the folks that run Yawkey treat public lands like "a fiefdom that's only there for them and their families to enjoy." He said he has no desire to open the wildlife preserve to hunting; he is just trying to protect access to areas the public is entitled to go. The Yawkey Foundation seems bent on curtailing that access, and DNR caves in to the group's wishes at every turn, he said.

"Why does a dead man from Boston get to dictate what we do with our public lands?" he said. "It is shameful that we allow this to happen."

deep enough for a boat to travel and the boat can get to it. Most coastal tracts are open to the public as far as the high water mark, or the dunes.

Still, DNR's McCullough said that access isn't absolute. Several beaches along the coast, including portions of Yawkey, have restricted areas set aside to protect nesting sea turtles and birds.



An aninga, sometimes called snakebird or water turkey, calls out in the Santee Coastal Reserve. Lauren Petracca/Staff

McCullough and Goldfinch agree that more signs and educational efforts are needed to help the public understand which areas are open and which are off-limits. Talks this spring yielded a proposed map that clearly delineated that access, but Goldfinch said he balked at DNR's desire to have the Yawkey Foundation weigh in on that plan.

McCullough said the agency must get input from everyone involved, and he firmly believes everyone agrees on the ultimate goal: protecting Yawkey for future generations.

"It's a great resource down there, a beautiful place that we want to maintain for years to come," he said. "We want people to be able to enjoy that spot 100 years from now."



Landscape of the Santee Delta allows for unique data collecting on alligators

https://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-keep-power-lines-out-of-the-santee-delta/article_504c9848-d66b-11e9-9184-1b75ab85a3f9.html

Editorial: Keep power lines out of the Santee Delta

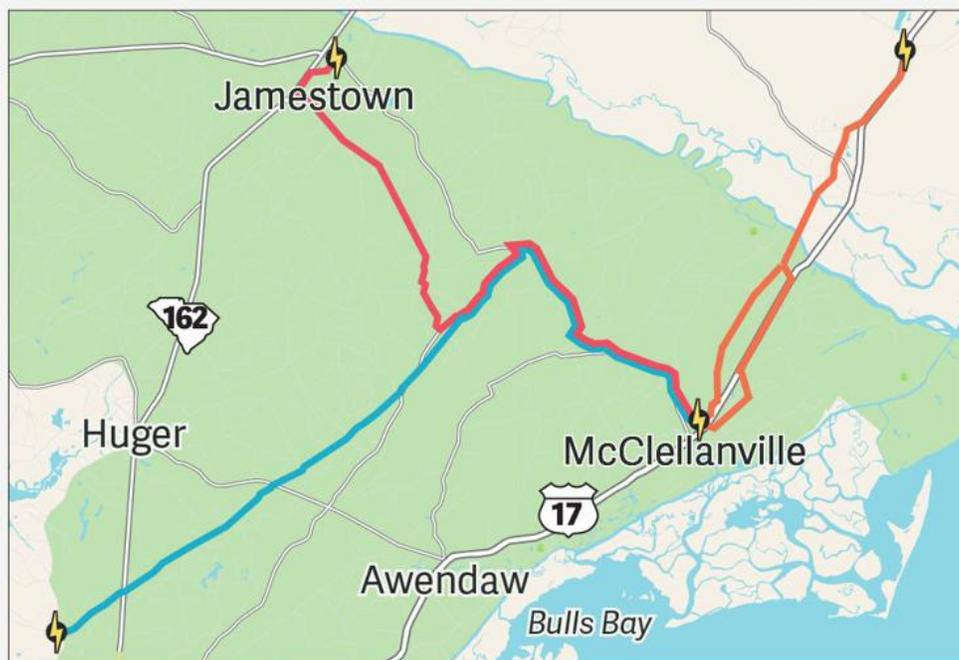
BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF

SEP 13, 2019

New routes for electric line

Berkeley Electric Cooperative has proposed two new routes for an electric transmission line that would avoid it crossing the Santee River delta.

— 2019 option 1 — 2019 option 2 — 2014 proposed line ⚡ Substation



SOURCES: USDA; CENTRAL ELECTRIC POWER, LOUIS BERGER

BRANDON LOCKETT/STAFF

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After years of study, the federal Rural Utilities Service is once again moving ahead with plans for Central Electric Power Cooperative to run a 115-kilovolt transmission line to McClellanville to increase reliability and carrying capacity for rural eastern Charleston County.

The plan favored by Central Electric, the Belle Isle route, presents an unacceptable threat to the environmentally fragile Santee Delta. All Belle Isle options should be dropped from consideration due to the environmental, ecological and broader cultural resource considerations associated with the delta.

Two new alternative routes would avoid the delta.

One of them, the Jamestown route, would run east from Jamestown parallel to S.C. Highway 45 through the Francis Marion National Forest, then hook northeast along an existing right-of-way for a 230-KV line and a natural gas pipeline before turning southeast to McClellanville, where a new substation would be built.

The other path, called the Charity route, would start at a substation close to the Nucor steel plant near Huger and run northeast along the same power line/pipeline right of way through the national forest, then turn southeast and follow the same path as the Jamestown route to McClellanville.



Public hearings for proposed Santee Delta transmission line

If it's determined that the power line must be built after full exploration of alternative energy proposals such as solar, national forest routes following existing rights of way should be given top consideration.

Generally, alternatives should be limited to previously disturbed lands along those already established rights of way. Specifically, the Charity alternative along the existing gas line right of way through the national forest should be recommended in order to minimize further impact to the natural landscape.

The Coastal Conservation League and other environmental groups rightly have voiced plans to oppose any solution that would include stringing new power lines across the Santee Delta.

Jason Crowley of the CCL said the league remains staunchly against the Belle Isle route but was still analyzing the environmental and habitat impacts of the two new proposals and hadn't taken a position on them.

"We still believe (the Rural Utilities Service) hasn't adequately explored other options such as solar and battery storage" to improve reliability, he said.

Photos: Scenes from the Santee Delta

 +37

Additionally, McClellanville is beyond the regional urban growth boundary, and Mr. Crowley worried that increased capacity for electrification would only fuel "misdirected growth." He is correct in warning against actions that would encourage development on the fringes of the metro area and worsen the Charleston area's sprawl problems.

During previous discussions, SCE&G offered to improve its existing power distribution service coming from the south as an alternative to the Santee Delta line. An SCE&G spokesman also had expressed a willingness to work with the two co-ops on a power line alternative. But a spokesman for SCE&G successor Dominion Energy, Paul Fischer, said that while Dominion was aware of the siting process, “we have not been formally asked to participate in the project.”

The Coastal Conservation League earlier recommended that Central Electric and Berkeley Co-op avoid the transmission line altogether by providing solar power, while improving the existing system so there would be a dependable level of redundancy in case of a serious outage.

Smaller-scale improvements or alternative power sources would serve the needs of that area without the environmental destruction of towering transmission lines.

Public hearings on the proposals will be held Tuesday and Wednesday, and public comments will be accepted through Oct. 22 by email, comments-mcclellanville@louisberger.com, or by writing to Lauren Rayburn, USDA Rural Utilities Service, 160 Zillicoa St., Ste. 2, Asheville, N.C., 28801.

Anyone concerned about the environment should attend the meetings to voice their concerns. We must protect the extremely vulnerable Santee Delta.

**NEWS****SC coastal residents don't want power lines across the Santee Delta****BY BO PETERSEN BOPETE@POSTANDCOURIER.COM**[MORE INFORMATION](#)



An epic story about power, beauty and how one of SC's last great places faces new threats

Letters to the Editor: SC lawmakers must ban e-cigarettes flavors

Letters to the Editor: More natural gas infrastructure needed in SC

https://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-protect-south-carolina-s-fragile-santee-delta-from-transmission/article_59ad032a-f1c6-11e9-8261-a7aaef86043d.html

Editorial: Protect South Carolina's fragile Santee Delta from transmission line

BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF

OCT 19, 2019



Conservationists and area residents continue to oppose an electricity transmission line if it crosses the treasured Santee Delta. Lauren Petracca/Staff

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The most logical and least environmentally damaging way to get more electricity to northern Charleston County is to run a high-voltage line through an existing right of way that cuts through the Francis Marion National Forest.

Other options call for running the 115-kilovolt transmission line across a broad section of the ecologically sensitive Santee River delta — a disastrous proposal opposed by hunters, fishermen and environmental groups — or cutting a new path west to east through the national forest from Jamestown to McClellanville, which also would be destructive.

It's unfathomable that Central Electric Power Cooperative would prefer the so-called Belle Isle route through the environmentally fragile and unique Santee Delta. Any Belle Isle options must be dropped from consideration because of their threats to the environmental, ecological and broader cultural resources that make the delta a South Carolina treasure.

The Rural Utilities Service, the federal agency in charge of making route decisions, has a Tuesday deadline for accepting public comments. Anyone who cares about preserving the Santee Delta and the national forest needs to say so by advocating for the Charity route that goes through the existing right of way. Email comments to comments-mcclellanville@louisberger.com or send by mail to Lauren Rayburn, USDA Rural Utilities Service, 160 Zillicoa St., Ste. 2, Asheville, N.C., 28801.

The Charity route would start from a substation just east of the Cooper River and follow an existing power line and pipeline route to S.C. Highway 45, then jag toward McClellanville. Most importantly, it doesn't cross the Santee Delta and would require the removal of fewer trees compared to the other routes.

The proposed transmission line route has been debated for about a decade, and a final decision is probably more a year away. While the Rural Utilities Service is the decision-maker regarding the route, Central Electric and Berkeley Electric would build the transmission line.

The electric power industry is changing is fast. And while we would like to see a creative solution for increasing capacity and reliability — local solar generation and battery storage, for example — we understand the utility's obligation to provide reliable electricity to the area. However, it is almost certain that expanded capacity would invite unwanted development in and around Awendaw and McClellanville, both well beyond Charleston County's Urban Growth Boundary.

As James O. McClellan III of McClellanville put it in a letter to the editor on Saturday, the transmission line is “neither wanted nor needed by the people who live in the area.” The population is growing by only 2% annually, he wrote, adding that the power line would “facilitate an explosion of uncontrolled growth.”

So we’re not convinced that the existing 25-kV transmission line, formerly owned by SCE&G and now Dominion Energy, couldn’t be upgraded or replaced, or that there isn’t another common sense solution.

But the Rural Utilities Service is concerned only with the routing. And at this juncture, the public can and should help steer the agency along the path of least of resistance, which is the Charity route.