

From: SC News from SCIWAY <sciway-news@sc-news.net>
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Subject: Enjoy Them Here: SC Photos of the Month + April's Best SC Events

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{ SC's April Calendar + Our Featured SC Event }

April 23 - May 3 — This year's [April Calendar of SC Events](#) is brought to you by the [Great County Fair](#), a two-weekend extravaganza which features daily concerts, amusement rides, a tractor show, quilt displays, laser tag, pig races, a petting zoo, clowns and magicians, and a garden.

[Click to see all the other great South Carolina events coming up in April.](#)

{ Protecting the Edisto: The High Costs of Low Water }

At more than 250 miles, the Edisto River – named for the [Edisto Indians](#) who first inhabited its banks – is the longest undammed blackwater river in North America. It is located entirely within the border of South Carolina, beginning in [Saluda County](#) and [Edgefield County](#), then flowing southeast through 10 more [Carolina counties](#) until it reaches [Edisto Beach](#) and empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

([Tom Taylor](#) of [Greenville](#), 2013 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)

As it nears its terminus the Edisto forms a shared watershed with its two neighboring rivers, the Savannah and Combahee, known as the [ACE Basin](#). Among the largest and most important natural areas remaining on the East Coast, the basin serves as both a National Wildlife Refuge and a National Estuarine Research Reserve. Endeavors to conserve the area, which boasts bottomland for broad floodplains, began in 1989 and now protect more than 217,000 acres. This success was achieved through joint efforts by the SC Department of Natural Resources, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, nonprofit agencies such as Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy, and, most importantly, private landowners. Unfortunately, the protections afforded the ACE Basin do not keep the Edisto

or any other SC river – safe from industry and development.

(Tom Taylor of Greenville, 2012 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)

Recently the waters of the Edisto came under threat when a large, out-of-state agribusiness plans to use the river to irrigate abutting farm land. Walther Farms, the Michigan-based company began planting the state's largest potato farm in early 2014, amassed more than 5,000 acres in [Walton](#) and [Barnwell](#) counties. It originally planned to withdraw 9.6 billion gallons of water per year to grow crops – an amount which, during the summer when river levels run lower, would have reduced Edisto's flow by 35 percent.

(Tom Taylor of Greenville, 2009 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)

Since South Carolina's legislature largely exempts mega-farms from laws protecting our state's water, the non-profit group Friends of the Edisto River brought suit against the agricultural giant. Although the two parties eventually settled and Walther Farms agreed to cut its withdrawal by two-thirds, many believe that our laws are too lax to prevent similar attempts. For example, our existing water withdrawal law passed in 2010, stipulates that large agribusinesses do not need permits to take a river's water and they need to give public notice. Further, these corporations may withdraw the same volume of water from a site with no regard to water flow, meaning they can siphon as much water when the river is high as when it is low. Finally, the law sets the "safe yield" – or total amount of water that can be extracted from a river in any given year – at 80%.

(Tom Taylor of Greenville, 2008 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)

The concern among conservationists is that, despite the compromise, the potential low water levels will still harm the Edisto's ecosystem and limit its flow to the ACE Basin. In fact, the South Fork of the Edisto River was listed as America's sixth most endangered river in 2014 by the watchdog group Friends of the Rivers. The group notes that the Edisto River and its watershed are home to five endangered species: the loggerhead turtle, red-cockaded woodpecker, shortnosed sturgeon, southern bald eagle, and whooping crane. In total, scientists have identified 87 freshwater and 120 saltwater species of fish in the Edisto, and on terra firma the river supports 94 natural ecological communities. Divers including the swallow-tailed kite and [wild turkeys](#), live within its floodplain and make the river a hot spot for birdwatchers, hunters, and hikers.

(Tom Taylor of Greenville, 2012 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)

Conservationists aren't the only ones who are worried, however. Local farmers fear the water needed to sustain their crops will be depleted, while others depend on the river to supply their drinking water during periods of drought. Boaters, fishermen, and purveyors of ecotourism could be affected as well. Many groups understand the devastation that low water levels could cause. South Carolina's laws prevent over-siphoning by local industries and landowners while allowing large agricultural companies to take what they need.

([Tom Taylor](#) of [Greenville](#), 2013 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)

In September of 2014 a lawsuit was filed by five South Carolina property owners to challenge and require corporations to obtain permits for withdrawal and abide by time limits, helping to protect just the Edisto, but all South Carolina rivers. To date, the plaintiffs, who are represented by the [Carolina Environmental Law Project](#), are still awaiting trial. In the meantime, their request for injunction has been denied.

{ [Tom Taylor](#): Teacher, Kayaker, Photographer, Friend }

As you can see from the photos above, [Tom Taylor](#) is a big fan of the Edisto River. In fact, the river is probably his most photographed subject, and he has paddled on the river regularly for years. If we'd like to introduce Tom, who has been a wonderful contributor to the [South Carolina Picture Project](#)

Here at the South Carolina Picture Project, Tom Taylor was the nicest surprise! We first encountered him via [Flickr](#), when we asked to use one of his images. We were delighted when he wrote back and let us know he knew SCIWAY well and had been following us for years. It turns out Tom and the founder of our project, Rod Welch, have a lot in common. Both are avid fans of South Carolina's history, and both worked for years as IT directors in South Carolina schools.

([Tom Taylor](#), Kayaking the Edisto River)

Since working with Tom, we have come to admire him greatly. Like [Tara Bailey](#), the Picture Project editor, Tom was once a teacher, which only endears him to us more. In the spirit of generosity and for the greater good that so many educators seem to possess, Tom has not only become a trusted photographer but also a trusted source of knowledge. In fact, we often go to him with questions when we're stumped, and he is an especially good source of information when it comes to his favorite places: schools, rivers, and South Carolina ghost towns.

Interestingly, Tom maintains one of the best blogs in the state, [Random Connections](#), which is the South Carolina Picture Project in its purpose and has more of Tom's excellent photos. I highly recommend this site to anyone interested in South Carolina's history – you'll be hooked!

It is a pleasure to work with someone who cares as much about South Carolina's heritage as he does. Tom's photos and research give so much to the people of the Palmetto State. He is truly making a difference in terms of the documentation of our state, both culturally and geographically, and we are so grateful. Thank you, Tom!

This message was sent to kestert@aging.sc.gov

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