

# Driving Conservation along South Carolina's Coast

Highways and tourists may not be the first things that coastal resource managers think of when contemplating conservation strategies, but when the U.S. Department of Transportation made a 17-mile stretch of South Carolina highway a national scenic byway last October, it was a significant step toward preserving the natural and rural character of Edisto Island. It is also expected to generate jobs and environmentally friendly tourism for the area.

***“This puts us on the map.”***

*Bud Skidmore, Edisto Island Open Land Trust*

“This seals the importance of Edisto’s value as a national tourist destination,” says Marian Brailsford, executive director of the Edisto Island Open Land Trust, which spearheaded efforts to get the scenic byway designation. “It confirms what locals and faithful visitors have known for decades—that Edisto is a special place worthy of protection.”

National scenic byways are considered exceptional roads through areas that exemplify regional characteristics and possess distinctive cultural, historic, natural, and other qualities. South Carolina Scenic Highway 174—now known officially as the Edisto Island National Scenic Byway—runs through pristine marshes, across

winding creeks, and past farms and locally owned businesses.

“This puts us in the same league as the Florida Keys Scenic Highway, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Selma to Montgomery March Byway,” says Bud Skidmore, a member of the Edisto Island Open Land Trust. “This puts us on the map.”

## Recognizing a Byway

While there are no additional regulations that come with national scenic byway designation, the program was established by the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, as a grassroots collaborative effort to help recognize, preserve, and enhance selected roads throughout the United States.

According to the program website, roads are recognized as national scenic byways by demonstrating they possess at least one of six qualities—archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic.

Since 1996, the program has designated 2,832 routes in all 50 states, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. The Edisto Island National Scenic Byway was one of 42 roads recognized in 2009.

## Part of the Strategy

For the past 12 years, the Edisto Island Open Land Trust has been working to preserve the rural landscape of Edisto Island, which is about 35 miles south of Charleston, Brailsford says. In 2003, as part of its overall conservation



*Edisto Island National Scenic Byway is helping preserve the area's rural character.*

strategy, the land trust set the goal of getting Highway 174 designated as a national scenic byway.

“We have historic farmland and plantation lands all along Highway 174,” she explains. “We recognized that if we could conserve that corridor, it would set the pace for the rest of the island.”

The potential for ecotourism is also expected to help with conservation efforts, says Skidmore. “We’re inviting people to our island who value the birds, land, and water. To be successful, it has to be self-sustaining.”

## Reaching Out

Edisto’s road to scenic byway designation was long and arduous, Brailsford says. It took three years for the land trust to get grant monies to pay for the project, and then another three years to complete the designation requirements.

The primary requirement was developing a corridor management plan that “looks in-depth at the intrinsic value of the corridor, the natural resources, historic resources, recreational opportunities, and what makes it culturally special,” she says.

*Continued on Page 9*