CENTER FOR Heirs' Property PRESERVATION

HEIRS' PROPERTY MATTERS

Land & Legacy

TEL: 843.745.7055 • FAX: 843.745.7054 • WWW.HEIRSPROPERTY.ORG

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History of HP

Most heirs' property in the Lowcountry is land that was acquired by African Americans after emancipation. Much of this land has been passed down through the generations without a Will so that the land is owned "in common" by multiple heirs.

Our Mission

The Center for Heirs' Property Preservation protects heirs' property and promotes the sustainable use of land to provide increased economic benefit to low wealth family landowners through our legal and forestry education and services.

Our Vision

Our vision is to be nationally recognized as the most trusted and resourceful organization in providing effective education, legal services, and sustainable land use options to help move low wealth landowners out of poverty.

From the CEO

As the new year approaches, I have begun to reflect on how CHPP and its partners have gained ground for heirs' property owners nationally. Heirs' property, once an unknown issue, has gained momentum and we are seeing an uptick in this topic being recognized, inside and outside of South Carolina, as a significant issue by advocates, policy makers, and even federal, state, and local agencies.

Please allow me to share some of these highlights:

- A bill was introduced in the SC Senate to establish an Heirs Property Commission, which has not been done in other states.
- A recommendation was included in the USDA's Equity Commissions Interim Report to Secretary Vilsack to provide grants and/or cooperative agreements to legal service agencies to provide FREE, direct legal services to farmers and rural landowners to resolve their title issues and to have estate plans drafted.
- CHPP held its first Young Foresters Summer Camp at which youth were exposed to forests and the environment around them.
- Our work was included in John Deere's documentary, *Gaining Ground: The Fight for Black Land.*
- CHPP, along with other members of the Sustainable Forestry Land Retention Network, celebrated its 10th year of operating a sustainable forestry program
- CHPP partnered with the American Forest Foundation and successfully obtained a USDA Climate Smart Commodities Program grant to provide technical assistance to help small and underserved forest landowners in SC, AL, KY and WV overcome the barriers that are preventing from engaging into the carbon market.
- CHPP has partnered with corporations, organizations and groups in MS, AL, AR and east TX to obtain a five-year grant to support underserved landowners in resolving their title issues so they can increase their opportunities to access capital and markets for their farming/forestry operations.

Looking ahead to 2024, we want to thank you for your past contributions and invite you to join us in amplifying this issue so additional resources and policies can be generated to prevent the loss of this valuable family asset in South Carolina and across the nation.

Together || Onward

Jennie

Dr. Jennie L. Stephens

...And We Partner On

Chief Projects Officer, Danyelle O'Hara

On August 10th, CHPP's partners from Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Texas, and West Virginia gathered at The Opportunity Center for a day-long meeting. Through CHPP's expansion work, CHPP shares its model and provides select partners with technical assistance, with the goal of expanding direct heirs' property legal and land utilization services in each of the above states. The purpose of the August 10th meeting was for the partners to learn about one another; learn from one another; learn more about CHPP and how we work; and begin a conversation about how we, as a partner network, can collaborate.

Following the meeting, all the partners traveled from Charleston to Florence to attend CHPP's annual 2-day Landowner Symposium. Vangela Wade, Mississippi Center for Justice and Betsy Taylor, LiKEN [Kentucky / West Virginia] made presentations at the Symposium.

The other individuals and organizations represented were: Keisha Abrahams and Deron Lacey from Limited Resources Landowner Education Action Network [LR LEAN — AL]; Elizabeth Hollie and Valynda Jerome-Williams from Legal Services Alabama; Andrea Barnes and Vangela Wade from Mississippi Center for Justice; T'arie Todman and Jonathan Evans from Winston County Self Help Cooperative [MS]; Henry English, Karen Lee, Amy Pritchard, and Kandi Williams from University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff; Joe Childers, Madison Mooney, Kevin Slovinsky, and Betsy Taylor from Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network [LiKEN — KY/WV]; John Cooper, Greg Phillips, and Shane Harrington from East Texas Heirs' Property Initiative.

Supporting our Advocacy Work

13th Annual Danielle Hope Watson Commitment to Justice Award Reception: Honoring David J. Dennis, Sr.

The Center for Heirs' Property Preservation® celebrated the 13th Annual Danielle Hope Watson Commitment to Justice Award Reception on Thursday, September 7th at the Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, South Carolina. This award is given annually to a person that exhibits a legacy of being a champion for social justice impacting communities across the nation.

This year, CHPP had the privilege of honoring lifelong civil rights activist attorney David J. Dennis, Sr., with the 2023 Danielle Hope Watson Commitment to Justice Award. Throughout the 1960s civil rights movements, Mr. Dennis found himself face-to-face with injustice by getting arrested over thirty times for registering disenfranchised voters and participating in the first freedom bus ride from Montgomery, Alabama to Jackson, Mississippi. Now as the founder and director of the Southern Initiative Algebra Project, Mr. Dennis continues to serve as a leader and champion for social justice.

The emcee for this year's reception was Raphael James, an award-winning news anchor for WCSC's Live 5 News. The keynote for the evening consisted of a special address from CNN Commentator Bakari Sellers highlighting the importance of passing the torch and continuing injustice work generationally.

Past award recipients have included Judge Richard E. Fields, Judge Alex Sanders, Dr. Theodore S. Stern, Ret. Chief Justice Ernest A. Finney, Jr., Honorable Lucille S. Whipper, Ret. Chief Justice Jean H. Toal, Rev. McKinley Washington, Jr., Judge Bernard Fielding, Attorney Armand Derfner, Esq., Christine Osburn Jackson, Dr. Millicent E. Brown, and Rev. Nelson B. Rivers, III.

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The 8th Annual Landowner Symposium

CHPP hosted the hybrid 8th Annual Rural & Limited Resource Landowner Symposium - Expanding Opportunities for Landowners on August 11th and 12th at the Florence Civic Center in Florence, SC. In attendance, the Center had over 150 attendees from across the US including: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and D.C. Sponsored in part by SC NRCS, this event provided opportunities for landowners to connect directly with service providers and experts in the field. Sherry Reaves, Region 8 Deputy US Forester, delivered the keynote address. Landowners were provided with expanded knowledge of forestland management and business, agroforestry, Silvopasture practices and the heirs' property relending program. Florence County Probate Judge Cartrette shared about the probate process, and the importance of wills and estate planning. 92% of attendees that completed a confidential survey indicated that they learned more about aspects of starting a forestry business.

Following the symposium, we received positive feedback including requests for services and outreach events and interest in participating in the next Symposium.

Landowner Symposium Sponsors:

Partners

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SC Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee

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8th Annual Unique Lowcountry Outing and Feast

On Saturday, November 18th, CHPP hosted the 8th Annual Lowcountry Outing and Feast at the historical Jenkins Institute continuing the tradition of this annual fundraiser. A brief program was shared including learning more about the Jenkins Institute [Jenkins Orphanage] from our guest speaker, Mrs. Johanna Martin-Carrington, while also learning more about the impact the Center has made this year. The Annual Unique Lowcountry Outing and Feast is a fundraiser focused on bringing together all supporters and potential support for a celebration of what has happened and what's to come.

The incredible feast was catered by Jonathan Ford, sounds provided by Zandrina Dunning, founder of the ZD Experience, and drinks provided by Carolina Cocktails.

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Our Community Impact

Legacy Building: Preserving Family Land

In 2019, Tim McCoy was approached by a timber buyer about the three hundred acres of forested land his family owns. Tim McCoy's forest land located in Kershaw County was stocked with in-demand, high-value timber. However, Ryan Gaughf, the interested buyer, was unable to strike a deal with Mr. McCoy because the land was heirs' property.

The Center officially started offering forestry services in Kershaw County in 2022 and legal services in the Spring of 2023. After several meetings with our forestry team, Mr. McCoy is one step closer to capitalizing on the land that has been in his family for over 140 years.

Tim McCoy's great-grandfather, Benjamin Seegars, purchased 195 acres on March 12, 1882. On February 1, 1907, he acquired another 108 acres. A former slave, Benjamin Seegars, and his children worked the land for decades - growing tobacco, corn, wheat, and cotton. Benjamin Seegars and his wife Olive lived on the property their entire life and had nine children [five boys and four girls]. Benjamin worked the land until his death in 1945 when he passed away without leaving a will. Three of his sons [Cornelius, Wesley, and Captain] remained on the land and continued to farm various crops well into the mid-1950s.

After attending a Center seminar in Sumter, South Carolina in 2021, Mr. McCoy began building out his family tree and now represents the collective family interest in the property. He's started working with our foresters in the region and will soon begin the process of obtaining a clear title through our legal team.

His ultimate goal is effectively managing the forest resources and leaving something for future generations to enjoy that his great-grandfather Benjamin Seegars left for the family.

Tim McCoy, Great-grandson of Ben Seegars is determined to keep this land in the family.

CHPP Forester Henry Poole gathering timber data on the McCoy property.

It's A Family Affair: Building A Family Tree

Mr. Johnnie Doughty had an intake on April 28, 2020, and was accepted as a client with CHPP legal services on July 30, 2020, for a Petition to Determine Heirs [PTDH] for his father, Lee Doughty who passed away in 1987. The family's goal was to put all the owners' names on the deed, to be able to farm the property, build homes, and pass the property down to their children.

CHPP and Mr. Johnnie Doughty worked together over the years to complete a full family tree in preparation to file the PTDH. In October 2022, the Center's legal team drafted and filed a Petition to Determine Heirs for Mr. Lee Doughty on behalf of Mr. Johnnie Doughty. The Center helped to move the case to a final hearing where the Court determined the heirs of Mr. Lee Doughty, and the heirs' share of the property. The family property which had its title cleared is approximately 28 acres. The legal services provided will help the Doughty family to use the property as farmland and create generational wealth they can pass down to their children.

Resolving Property Titles

Ms. Coleman is a widow that had property willed to her. She had questions about the probate process and CHPP's legal team corrected a few critical items previously filed in the probate court. We assisted in filing the deed. We are proud to announce that the two property titles were cleared this year for Ms. Coleman. During this process, Ms. Coleman's children learned more about the probate process for future generations. The CHPP legal team looks forward to assisting additional families with their probate and Will preparation needs.

Successfully Working Against the Clock

During one of CHPP's seminars in Colleton County, Ms. Jenkins, an attendee, learned for the first time that SC had a 10-year deadline to probate an estate. Her husband had died in April 2012 having two properties in his name. Immediately after the seminar she called for assistance. Noting that the anniversary of her husband's passing was close to the ten year deadline, an appointment with an attorney was scheduled the next day for Ms. Jenkins. She qualified for our services, and we were able to get her into the office five days later to sign all the probate paperwork. She hand-delivered paperwork to the court the same day so that the estate could be opened, and the deadline would be met. The probate went smoothly due to her being fully prepared and we are proud to say that both titles were cleared.

Media Features

Gaining Ground - The Fight for Black Land

John Deere's new documentary, *"Gaining Ground: The Fight for Black Land,"* in collaboration with Al Roker Entertainment, explores the history and plight of black farmers in America as it aims to build awareness around the issue of heirs' property, the leading cause of involuntary black land loss. The Center is a featured organization, including our CEO, Dr. Jennie Stephens.

Check out the full trailer of *Gaining Ground: The Fight for Black Land*, Al Roker Entertainment, Inc., and Eternal Polk production on https://gainingroundthefilm.com.

Stay tuned for more information on a full screening of the documentary in 2024!

Featured in Minority Landowner Magazine

Forester David Bourgeois and landowner Anthony C. Williams were featured in the Minority Landowner Magazine's 2022 Farmers of The Year Issue.

Mr. Williams owns nearly 67 acres of land in Orangeburg County, SC with approximately 37 acres that were deemed abandoned farm fields. His mission was to ensure that the next generation in his family was set up to receive land. Mr. Williams consulted with the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation® for guidance. CHPP foresters and the Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS] worked with Mr. Williams to replant areas that were cutover, including planting trees within his abandoned farmland. The CHPP aims to assist landowners in creating a land use management pathway for South Carolina families. These opportunities are great ways for our landowners and forestry team to collaborate ensuring sustainable use of family land.

Youth Engagement

CHPP Collaborates with South Carolina Forestry Commission on Youth Workshop

On October 24th and 25th, forester James Williams volunteered with over 150 fourth graders at Wood Magic in Harbison State Forest with the South Carolina Forestry Commission. James led the "Gifts of the Forest" station where students learned about biomass, erosion, sustainable forest management, and careers in forestry.

After each lesson, James led the students in a group activity called "The Web of Life". The students had to use the lessons they learned about forestry to connect the different pieces of the forestry ecosystem together. The students really enjoyed working together to "capture" James in their web.

Beth Foley and team enjoyed the activities glowing review of James' engagement and educational leadership to his managers via email. David Bourgeois made a point to bring it up during their weekly forestry meeting. James really enjoys working with kids and getting them excited about forestry and is looking forward to volunteering next year.

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CHPP Hosts Inaugural Young Foresters Summer Camp

The Center for Heirs' Property Preservation® collaborated with ReZsaun Lewis, Executive Director of Lowcountry Youth Services, to organize and conduct a week-long camp aimed at educating young people about forestry and providing them with valuable experiences in the forests.

The camp, carefully planned and executed by the two organizations, offered a comprehensive curriculum covering various aspects of forestry, including tree identification, forest ecology, and sustainable forest management practices. The participants, all youth from the local community, had the opportunity to learn from experienced forestry professionals and engage in hands-on activities. During the camp, youth took trips to Bee City, a demonstration forest owned by the Center and Santee Canal State Park.

The camp's goal was to instill in the young participants a deep appreciation for the natural world and equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible stewards of the environment. By the end of the week, the 13 participants had gained a newfound respect for the forests and a sense of pride in their ability to contribute to their preservation. The Center for Heirs' Property Preservation® Young Foresters' Camp is funded by the USDA Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education.

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HEIRS' PROPERTY RETAINED ISSUE NO. 27 FALL 2023

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Did you know that you can give to the Center in another way? When you give to our endowment fund beyond your regular giving, you help build an organization that lasts. Since only a portion of the fund is used each year, what you give grows. And what grows sustains our mission as a permanent source of support. To learn more, contact Brett Wadford at bwadford@heirsproperty.org or 843.745.7055

Welcome to the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation

"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships". - Michael Jordan

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Chief Projects Officer

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Development Associate

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Thank You! Your Giving Matters... in every way that you do it!

Whether you give your time, your talent, or your treasure- we appreciate the love and compassion that you have for the Center. Thank you for supporting and believing in our work as you are helping us make a difference in the lives of many families.

We will have a special edition in early 2024 to recognize our donors who gave September 1, 2022 through the end of December 2023. If you have not given yet this year, there is still time to make a powerful, life-changing difference in helping to protect family land, build generational wealth, and grow working landscapes for future generations. There are many ways to give whether that is online, by check, monthly, quarterly, or one time. Every gift matters.