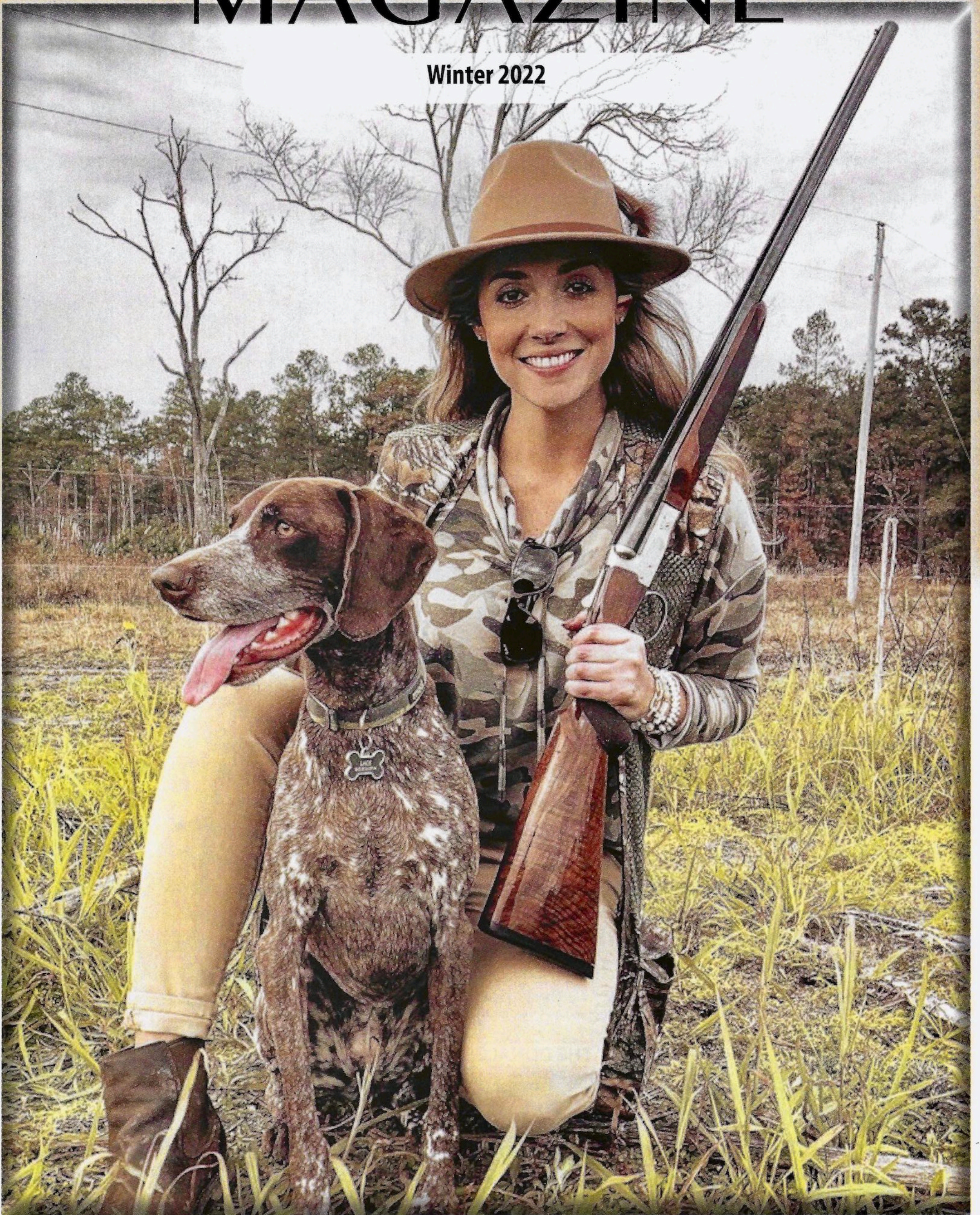


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One of the last great places

Trends in Lowcountry land sales

By PRIOLEAU ALEXANDER



Nothing as picturesque as a South Carolina waterway. Image by Kylie Jeffords.

As every reader of the *Charleston Mercury* knows, we are deeply committed to conservation and appreciative of those landowners who think of future generations when making their present-day decisions. Even though you and I may never set foot onto a particular tract of land, what happens there matters to everyone, hunter, nonhunter and even those who are anti-hunting.

Landowners' management practices ensure our wildlife thrives in balance. Their investments in conservation keep our white-tailed deer population healthy and migratory birds flying through our region. Eagles and hawks once again rule the skies of the Lowcountry, and the fortunate may catch a glimpse of our region's stealthy bobcats and red foxes. Our fish population is legendary.

These things don't "just happen" when man and nature attempt to occupy the same space ... man is at the top of the both the ecosystems and the food chain, and has the ability to destroy or enjoy what God has blessed us with. To be sure, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources puts forth a herculean effort to conserve our natural

resources, but they have only a fraction of the funding and manpower available to private landowners.

The Lowcountry has changed dramatically in the past 30 years. If a native were to teleport from 1990 to today, the entire region would be — quite literally — unrecognizable. Urban sprawl stretches from Awendaw to Ravenel, and the development of new housing communities shows no signs of slowing. The actual center of our population hovers somewhere around Goose Creek, and Mt. Pleasant Towne Center, once a northern outpost, is now actually in the center of the town.

We cannot blame anyone, of course. We bragged about our slice of paradise, and people listened. Then they moved here. And when a population grows,

so grows the need for housing, goods, services, retail, entertainment, dining and recreation.

The good news is the word "conservation." To the north, south and west are vast tracts of privately owned land stewarded by owners who are assisted by land trust nonprofits, hunting conservation groups, wildlife preservation organizations and of course the state of South Carolina.

The big step for a conservation-minded landowner to take is to "donate" an easement on their property to a qualified land trust, of which we have several excellent ones here in S.C. It is a big step because the landowner is receiving tax benefits but also committing to a partnership that will be attached to their land forever — thus the easement is not

something to be “entered into lightly or unadvisedly.”

Qualified land trusts, of course, want what’s best for everyone — but it’s easy for a well-meaning landowner to overlook something they’d like to have in the future. It’s possible the easement may not allow for a landing strip or a telecommunications tower or a borrow pit that would provide clay or sand for road repairs. In addition, definitions, rules and “best practices” evolve over time — and a landowner might be delighted to abide by current regulations, then discover they must expand protections when the “best practices” guidelines are revised.

Conservation easements are a huge reason our Coastal Plains are so well protected, and their importance cannot be overstated. It is, however, important a landowner receive exacting guidance from qualified professionals.

To learn more about South Carolina’s “state of conservation,” we interviewed several of the region’s leaders in the area of rural land sales. Each answered a series of questions, and below is what we discovered.

C. J. Brown
Brown Land & Plantations Advisors



We haven’t seen much change in terms of people buying S.C. land. Large hunting tracts and plantations are certainly unique purchase, and as a result will always attract unique buyers, but they all seem to share a few things whether they’re from S.C. or out of state — a deep appreciation for the state, the land, the wildlife and the history and intrinsic values that come with these properties. Buyers are typically sportsmen and -women who are conservation

minded and are flocking here for the same reasons we all love the great state of S.C.

We’re seeing conservation is paramount among our buyers, and they’re looking for areas with like-minded neighbors. Security, sustainability and access to sporting opportunities are among the main things buyers are seeking.

I feel incredibly lucky to benefit from the work of so many others who have protected and continue to protect vast acreage in the ACE Basin and Lower Savannah River. Key individuals like Wise Batten, Charles Lane and many others have made it their life’s work to protect land, and we all owe them a debt of gratitude. We’re seeing younger and younger buyers who are looking for the chance to leave a legacy of hunting and fishing to the next generation. That’s conservation in motion, and that’s exciting.

Many of the properties we have worked on have conservation easements in place, and their borders are protected in perpetuity. We continue to encourage those that do not have them to research placing their property under conservation easement. But encouraging easements is just the beginning. To me conservation is a holistic approach to land management with wildlife and hunting at the core. The by-product of wildlife conservation and hunting is generational: It breeds tradition, community, value for the land and the long-term success of the Lowcountry lifestyle.

One of the best ways to ensure value on your property in the future is to simply take care of it from a conservation and wildlife perspective. Improving waterfowl or quail habitat, or creating sanctuaries for game and wildlife food plots — these are things every landowner can do to benefit wildlife and enhance the value of their property, as well as the surrounding properties.

I’m very energized by new owners who are willing to spend the time and commit financially to improve and maintain properties at a high level. Plantation and high-quality recreational properties are expensive ... and they’re expensive to maintain. However, the good Lord isn’t making any more of it, and we must take care of what we have. It’s certainly important to mention the quality managers and employees who are working on these properties as well. Their knowledge, direction and boots-on-the-ground service to the land are key.