



**OPEN SPACE  
INSTITUTE**

**The Open Space Institute  
Southeast Resilient Landscapes Fund  
Science Advisors Overview**

**Program Overview**

The Open Space Institute's (OSI) Resilient Landscapes Initiative engages land trusts and public agencies across the eastern United States to respond to climate change. Through the Initiative, OSI seeks to increase (1) protection of lands, through acquisition and conservation easements, that can facilitate adaptation of plants, animals and natural systems to climate change, and (2) access to and use of climate science. OSI's Resilient Landscapes Initiative is underpinned by *Resilient Sites for Terrestrial Conservation*, an approach developed by scientists at The Nature Conservancy to identify places most likely to be resilient to climate change.

OSI is now launching the Southeast Resilient Landscapes Fund, with \$6.2 million from The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, to apply the TNC resiliency science in nine southern states (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia). The Fund will make capital grants to land protection projects located in two to four focus areas that will be selected during the first half of 2014. In 2013, OSI inaugurated a companion fund in the northeastern states, as well as a Catalyst Grant Program that advances the understanding and application of TNC's resiliency science.

The Resilient Landscapes Initiative helps decision-makers ensure that the places they conserve today will support a diversity of plants and animals tomorrow, within the context of a changing climate. This approach is based on research indicating that sustaining species diversity across the landscape is a function primarily of three key physical factors: the complexity of landforms above ground, the connectivity of natural systems, and the diversity of geology types. At the heart of this science is that while we cannot predict exactly how species and habitats will respond to climate change, we can identify places that provide the greatest climatic options for the greatest number of species.

**Southeast Region Focus Areas**

OSI will use a two-step process – a science filter and a feasibility filter – to select two to four focus areas within which OSI will make land protection grants available. These

focus areas will lay within the nine Southeast states encompassed in TNC's southeast terrestrial resilience analysis. The sites will likely be between 500,000 acres and 1.5 million acres each.

The science process, which will be informed by a group of expert advisors (see list below), will ultimately identify places that the resilience analysis indicates are most likely to support the greatest degree of species richness as climate changes. After narrowing potential focus areas based on the science, OSI will then finalize focus areas for the fund based on feasibility factors such as threats to conservation targets, availability of private and public matching funding, land trust capacity, and conservation opportunities. Within the final focus areas, OSI will distribute capital grants for land acquisition projects that will help ensure protection of species and habitats today and into the future.

### **Science Advisors Role**

To advise OSI staff on the science process, we will convene an expert group of science advisors with diverse knowledge of climate change science, conservation biology, species vulnerability, and landscape resiliency, conservation planning, and the geography of the southeast. Specifically, the group's tasks will include the following:

1. Review TNC resiliency science and data;
2. Review OSI's approach in the northeast region and advise on its applicability and potential adjustments necessary for the southeast;
3. Identify any complementary data sets or approaches that are specific to the Southeast that should be accounted for in selecting sites; and
4. Inform OSI's feasibility criteria relating to land use and ownership patterns that are specific to the southeast.

OSI will host an inaugural half day meeting of Science Advisors and OSI Staff in Atlanta, GA, to review the data, set forth expectations for the science review process, and determine key issues to be addressed. Advisors will be asked to participate in one or more follow-up conference calls over the subsequent three months. OSI staff may also consult the science advisors individually for their expert opinion on specific topics or geographies.

## Science Advisors

- **Linda Pearsall:** Conservation, Planning and Community Affairs Director, North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (retired)
- **Rua Mordecai:** Science Coordinator, South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative
- **Gary Knight:** Director, Florida Natural Areas Inventory
- **Jon Evans:** Assistant Provost for Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability and Professor of Biology, Sewanee, The University of the South
- **Rob Baldwin:** Associate Professor, School of Agricultural, Forest, and Environmental Sciences, Clemson University
- **Jon Ambrose:** Assistant Chief, Nongame Conservation Section, Wildlife Resources Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

## OSI Organizational Background

The Open Space Institute (OSI) protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and sustain communities. We do so through acquisition, financing, stewardship, research and advocacy. Founded in 1974 to protect significant landscapes in New York State, OSI has been a partner in the protection of nearly 2.2 million acres in North America, including 2 million acres preserved with loans and grants for high priority conservation transactions. A leader in environmental conservation, the Open Space Institute leverages our knowledge and attracts resources for strategic investments to make innovative land conservation happen.

With a budget of \$31 million, OSI has a staff of 42 employees and a 26-member Board of Trustees. The OSI Board is comprised of regional and national environmental, philanthropic, legal and financial leaders, and is chaired by John H. Adams, founder and former president of the Natural Resources Defense Council. The staff is led by Christopher J. Elliman, CEO. Peter Howell, Executive Vice President, oversees OSI's Conservation Capital and Research Programs. David Ray, OSI's Southeast Field Coordinator, is responsible for day-to-day management and implementation of the Southeast Resilient Landscapes Fund and will be the primary liaison with the Science Advisors. Abigail Weinberg, OSI Research Director, oversees the Catalyst Program, and Jennifer Melville, OSI's Vice President for Conservation Grants and Loans, coordinates the Resilient Landscapes Initiative.