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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Public Private Partnership Formed to Secure Historic Property on the Catawba River

LANCASTER COUNTY, SC (July 17, 2023) — The Nisbet Family, Catawba Nation, South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT) and the Open Space Institute (OSI) today announced a collaborative effort to purchase approximately 600 acres on the Catawba River in a rapidly developing region of Lancaster County, just 30 minutes from Charlotte, NC. The property, known as the Nisbet Tract, consists of one mile of frontage on the Catawba River in the heart of the Catawba Nation's ancestral lands.

The property, which was once proposed for a 1,000-home development, today has a different future as the owners of the property, the Nisbet family, seek a conservation and public recreation outcome for the land. As a result, an inspiring collaborative partnership that includes the Nisbet Family, Catawba Nation, SCPRT, OSI, and others, has coalesced to acquire, protect, and create a plan for this incredible property and its use and enjoyment of current and future generations.

The Nisbets, who have owned the land for more than 100 years, entered into an option agreement with OSI, a leading land conservation organization that specializes in public use, to purchase the property.

The rolling, river-front property harbors mature piedmont hardwood and floodplain forests, a host of wildlife species, and an inviting 5-acre pond. Once secured, it would contribute to a growing network of protected lands and provide publicly accessible open space, outdoor recreation opportunities, and clean air and water.

"Our family has owned the property for over 100 years. Our father, William Oliver Nisbet, believed in family, fellowship, and community involvement," said Caroline Nisbet Hewett. "We are proud and truly honored for the opportunity to continue Oliver Nisbet's legacy by preserving this property for the use and enjoyment of generations to come. We are thankful to Open Space Institute for their assistance to help turn the land into a community space."

Formerly part of the Catawba Nation's vast 144,000-acre territory, the Nisbet Tract includes a singular active clay vein of Catawba clay that is regarded as a sacred living resource by the Nation. Catawba clay is the lifeblood of the Catawba Nation and has been used continuously by the Catawba people to make

their namesake pottery and sustain their community for more than 6,000 years. During the Great Depression, Catawba women made and sold pottery to help Catawba people survive. In modern times, Catawba pottery has become a well-regarded form of Native American art with pieces made from the clay located on the Nisbet Tract featured in art museums throughout the world.

“Catawba citizens have been creating functional and artistic vessels from the clay holes on the Nisbet Tract for over a century. The Nation acknowledges the Nisbet family’s long friendship in allowing citizens access to the clay to safeguard this important cultural practice,” said Chief Bill Harris. “We also thank OSI and SCPRT for their commitment to partnering with the Catawba Nation to preserve and protect all Catawba cultural resources on the Nisbet Tract and ensure Catawba citizens access to the clay holes in perpetuity.”

A focus of the partnership is to ensure that the Nation has perpetual access to and co-management of the Nisbet clay pit. An existing 151-acre conservation easement placed on the property by the Nisbet family and held by the Katawba Valley Land Trust (KVLT) includes the clay pits and the riverfront that provides additional protection to the property’s ecological and cultural resources.

“South Carolina State Parks is entrusted with protecting and sharing some of the most treasured natural and cultural resources in the Palmetto State,” said Duane Parrish, Director of SCPRT. “With the Catawba Nation’s engagement and support, we envision creating a state park in Lancaster County that weaves together the Park Service values of stewardship and service with the preservation and celebration of the Catawba’s cultural connections to the land and river. We are honored for the opportunity to share the Catawba’s history and culture with generations of visitors, and we look forward to expanding public access to outdoor recreation in one of the state’s fastest-growing regions.”

“OSI’s distinctive role in this exciting partnership is to coordinate partners, secure funding, and acquire and steward the property until it is appropriate to transfer into public ownership,” notes Dr. Maria Whitehead, OSI Vice President and Southeast Director of Land. “It’s a privilege to work toward a collective vision that protects the incredible natural and cultural resources and honors the people that have loved and been sustained by this land.”

OSI is simultaneously seeking funding from the South Carolina Conservation Bank, County, and foundation and corporate partners. The Knobloch Family Foundation, Lancaster County, Duke Energy and Arras Foundation have committed funding support. OSI intends to purchase the property by the end of 2023 and will hold title to the property until the State is prepared to accept the land as a donation.

“KVLT was created to protect the natural resources, cultural resources, open lands, waters, and vistas of aesthetic value in the Catawba River Valley,” said Dr. Michelle Evans, Executive Director of KVLT. “This property showcases all of these important values and KVLT is committed to our role of ensuring these values are stewarded in perpetuity in partnership with South Carolina State Parks.”

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View and download images here: <https://scprt.widencollective.com/c/tsnmwl8n>

The **Catawba Nation** is a federally recognized native Nation with trust lands in North and South Carolina. The Nation’s government headquarters is located in Rock Hill, SC. The Nation has existed on its aboriginal

lands in the Piedmont area of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia along the banks of the Catawba River since time immemorial with artifacts dating back at least 6,000 years. To learn more about the history, culture, and current government services of the Catawba Nation, please visit catawba.com.

South Carolina State Parks is responsible for managing and protecting thousands of acres of natural, cultural, and recreational resources, ranging from deep mountain wilderness and old-growth forests to battlefields, waterfronts, and wetlands. Today, the state park system includes 47 operational parks and six historic properties, offering thousands of campsites, two 18-hole golf courses, two saltwater fishing piers, lakes, ponds, and hundreds of miles of hiking and riding trails. Additional parks will be opening in the near future. Find photos, maps, and information about each park, and stay up-to-date on future park openings, at southcarolinaparks.com.

The **Open Space Institute** protects scenic, natural, and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands, and sustain communities. Founded in 1974 to protect significant landscapes in New York State, OSI has been a partner in the protection of nearly 2.3 million acres in North America, including more than 50,000 acres in South Carolina. Visit OSI Southeast online at openspaceinstitute.org/southeast.