

# Appendix 6-A

## Old Sheldon Church Road Scenic Highway Corridor Management Plan

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### Introduction

The Old Sheldon Church Road (see Area Map) has played an important role in the history of the Lowcountry since Colonial times when the road served the plantations in the area as well as the parishioners of Sheldon Church. Now, in modern times, resources along the road offer glimpses into this past through the remains of the Sheldon Church ruins, the entrances to several historic plantations and views of former rice fields. In addition to its historic importance, the road is also one of the few remaining beautiful canopy roads in the Lowcountry. A long, uninterrupted canopy of trees can be seen along one portion of the road, as well as dense forest and natural wetlands.

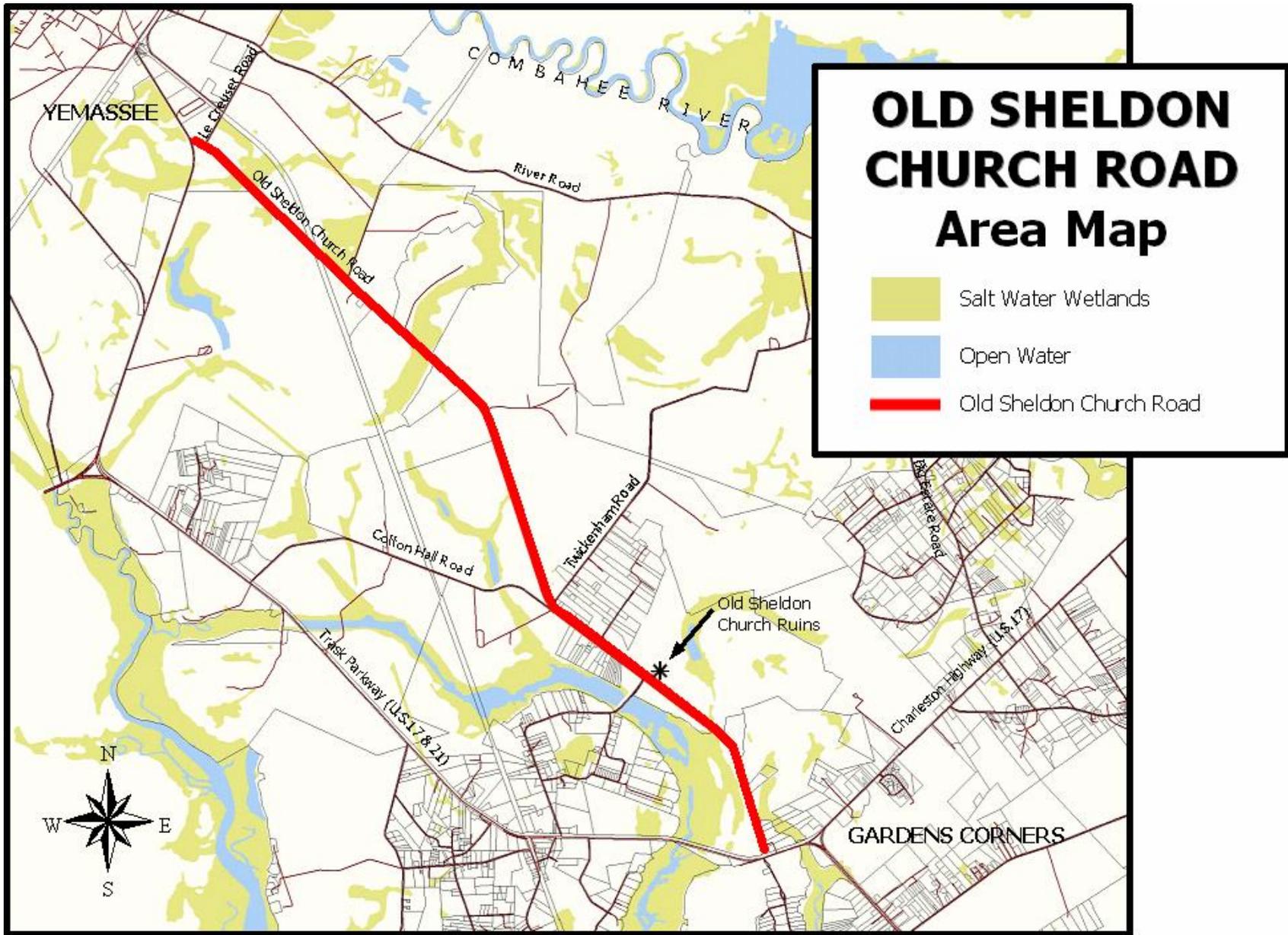
For many years the road was a lightly traveled back road that saw little more than local traffic. In recent years, however, the road has been used as a short cut between I-95 and Beaufort; and traffic, especially heavy truck traffic, has increased. In addition, the rapid growth of Beaufort County could lead to future development that would drastically change the character of this road. An example of this has been a loss of the canopy tree cover along the northwestern portion of the highway, a result of utility line placement. For now, though, most of the Old Sheldon Church Road still has the quiet, natural beauty of the rural landscape that is disappearing at an alarming rate in Beaufort County.

Designation of Old Sheldon Church Road as a Scenic Highway reflects the first critical commitment to preserving this important cultural and environmental area. Growth patterns in Beaufort County, along with large numbers of commuters using the road and a rising number of tourists visiting the Old Sheldon Church ruins, has had a decidedly adverse impact upon this unique road corridor. This management plan is intended to address those factors that could undermine the intrinsic qualities of this roadway in order to preserve the historic character of Old Sheldon Church Road.

**Process:** In the 1990's, a group led by Mrs. Elizabeth Campbell of Sheldon and consisting of interested individuals from the area began work on having the Old Sheldon Church Road designated a S.C. Scenic Highway. Beaufort County backed the effort of this group and on April 13, 1998, the Beaufort County Council passed a resolution in support of the Scenic Highway designation for Old Sheldon Church Road. The Beaufort County Open Land Trust, Historic Beaufort Foundation, and the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League also provided letters of support.

In 1999, the Old Sheldon Church Road Advisory Committee was formed. Members of the group included landowners and residents of the area, a representative of the Sheldon Fire District, and staff from the Beaufort County Planning Department.

On May 31, 2001, Beaufort County formally applied to the SCDOT for Old Sheldon



Church Road to be designated a State Scenic Byway. On September 24, 2002, the South Carolina Scenic Highway Committee met to consider the application. The Committee made a motion to consider the request and asked for a Corridor Management Plan to be submitted. This motion has been sent to the South Carolina Legislature for approval.

On February 5, 2004, the Sheldon Church Road Advisory Committee approved the draft Corridor Management Plan. The effort to date has involved numerous meetings and consultations with government officials, property owners, private sector representatives, and other interested groups. Included were two members of the S.C. House of Representatives – Rep. Edie Rogers and Rep. Catherine Ceips; John Hardee, SCDOT Commissioner for the 2<sup>nd</sup> District; William Ladson, Beaufort County Council; Captain Allan Horton, Beaufort County Sheriff's Department; Wendell Mulligan, SCDOT; Chief Walter Jones, Sheldon Fire District; Tom Chambers, South Carolina Electric & Gas; Reed Armstrong and Jacki Martin, South Carolina Coastal Conservation League; Veronica Miller, Keep Beaufort County Beautiful Coordinator; and Eliza Hill, Member, Northern Beaufort County Corridor Review Board.

**Relationship to the Beaufort County Comprehensive Plan:** The Beaufort County Comprehensive Plan (1997) recognizes the important role that Old Sheldon Church Road plays both historically and as a scenic area for tourists visiting the Old Sheldon Church ruins, a major point of interest. The Cultural Resources Element of the Comprehensive Plan includes the following policy and action item:

- Policy: Create a safer roadway on Sheldon Church Road and protect the Sheldon Church Ruins.
- Action: Work with the S.C. Department of Transportation and Beaufort County to reduce the speed limit and allowed tonnage on Sheldon Church Road and to designate the road as a South Carolina Scenic Highway.

This management plan is a step toward implementation of this policy and action.

### **Characteristics of the Corridor**

The outstanding cultural, natural, and scenic resources of Old Sheldon Church Road are the primary reasons for its designation as a Scenic Highway, and so are central to this management plan. The road dates to the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and while no exact date is known for the origination of the road, it may have been in existence as early as 1715, and used by settlers and Indians during the Yemasee War. The Prince William's Parish Church, now known as Old Sheldon Church, was built in 1745, and the road would have also served parishioners of the church and the residents of nearby plantations. Although the road has been paved, few modern buildings have been constructed along it, and the trees lining much of the roadway have been retained, thereby preserving the road's historic integrity.

**Cultural Resources:** Cultural resources along Old Sheldon Church Road are nationally significant and include the following:

- Sheldon Church Ruins (Prince William's Parish Church): The church was built in 1745, was burned by British troops in 1770, rebuilt in 1826, and then burned again by Federal troops in 1865. The church was never rebuilt again. The church graveyard is the burial ground for members of several prominent South Carolina families including the Bull, Chisolm, Elliott, Fuller and Heyward families. The church is said to be the first conscious effort in America to imitate a Greek temple. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is open to the public.
- Tomotley Plantation: Tomotley has been a plantation since the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, with several buildings dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Tomotley is best known for a spectacular allée of oaks that was originally planted in 1820. One entrance to Tomotley is on the Old Sheldon Church Road, while another is located nearby on Cotton Hall Road (SC 48). The property also has extensive wetlands that are former rice fields. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- Brewton Plantation: The magnificent oak allée to Brewton Plantation is visible from Old Sheldon Church Road. A plantation since John Bull built it in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Brewton Plantation is named for Miles Brewton, one of the early owners. The present house was built in 1893. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

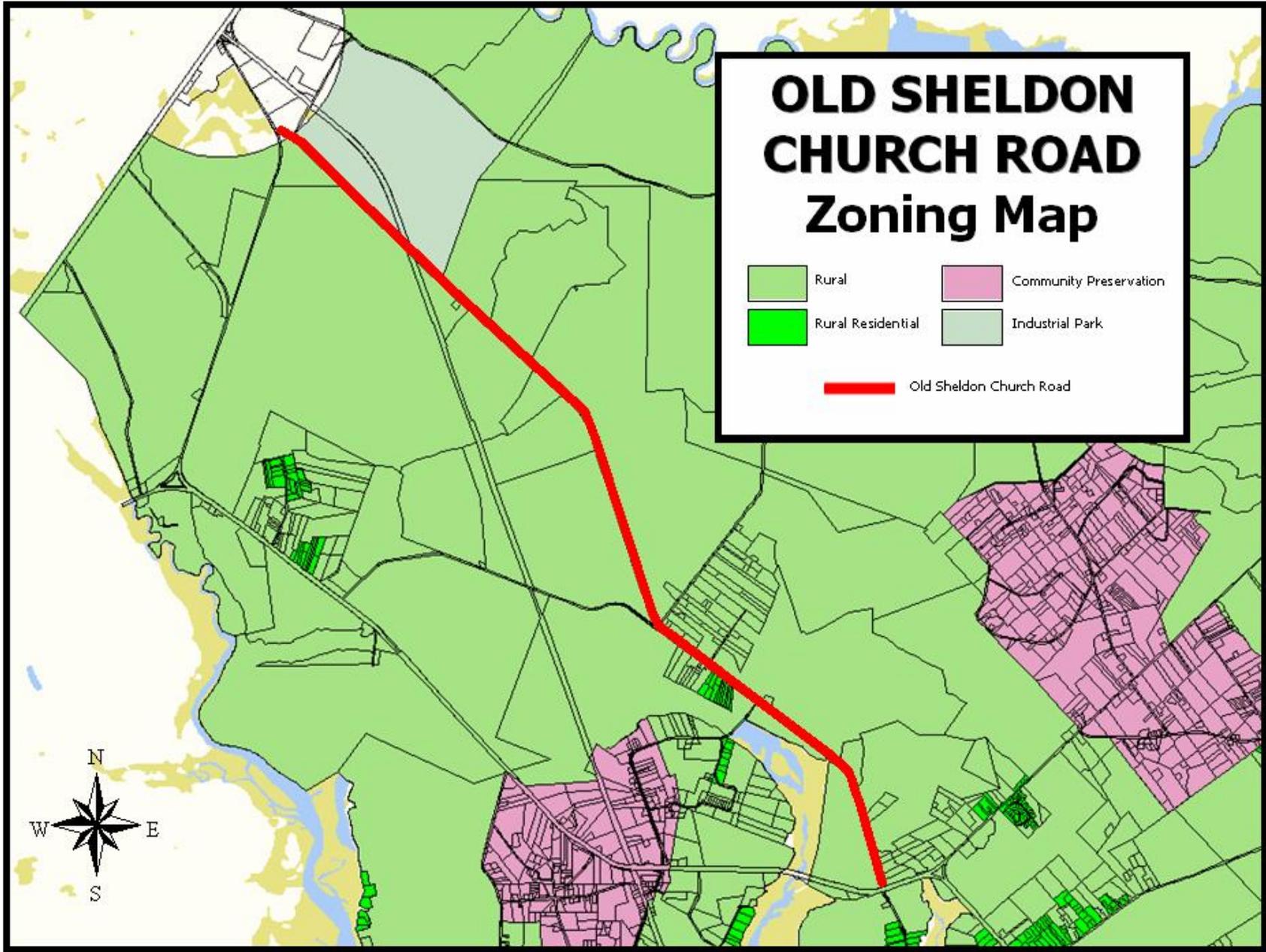
**Natural Resources:** In addition to its cultural resources, the Old Sheldon Church Road corridor is rich in natural and scenic resources. The land adjacent to the road is part of the ACE Basin Project, consisting of approximately 350,000 acres of diverse habitats within the Ashepoo, Combahee and South Edisto (ACE) drainage basins. The mission of the Project is to maintain the natural character of the basin by promoting wise resource management on private lands and protecting strategic tracts by conservation agencies.

The natural resources found along Old Sheldon Church Road are dominated by natural forested and manmade (impoundments) wetlands. Interspersed with these wetlands are pockets of mixed upland forests and, along the northern end, deciduous upland forest and some planted pine. One of the most significant natural features of Old Sheldon Church Road is a long canopy of trees running along the road from its intersection with U.S. 17/21 to Cotton Hall Road, a distance of approximately three miles. The canopy appears sporadically on other sections of the road as well.

The myriad of habitat types that occur along Old Sheldon Church Road contributes to the variety of wildlife that utilizes these resources to rest, nest and forage. The wetlands provide for migratory waterfowl, birds of prey, neotropical migrant and resident songbirds, as well as other terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna. Evergreen hardwoods and shrubs, which provide the forage and habitat for wildlife, dominate these wetlands. The upland forests consist largely of hardwoods with a mixture of pine species.

### **Land Use and Preservation Efforts**

The Old Sheldon Church Road corridor is located in an area of Beaufort County designated as Rural in the County's Comprehensive Plan (1997). The vast majority of properties along the road are also zoned either Rural or Rural Residential (see Zoning



Map), which are the least intensive zoning districts in Beaufort County. One exception is a swath of land along the extreme northwestern portion of the road that is zoned Industrial Park. This area is adjacent to the Yemassee town limits.

Much of land along the road is currently undeveloped. Except for a vacant store located at the corner of Old Sheldon Church Road and Twickenham Road, a nail salon close to the intersection of Old Sheldon Church Road and US 17/21, and the Old Sheldon Church ruins, what development there is along the road is residential (both conventional and mobile homes), mostly on small lots. Land along the road within the Industrial Park area is currently undeveloped.

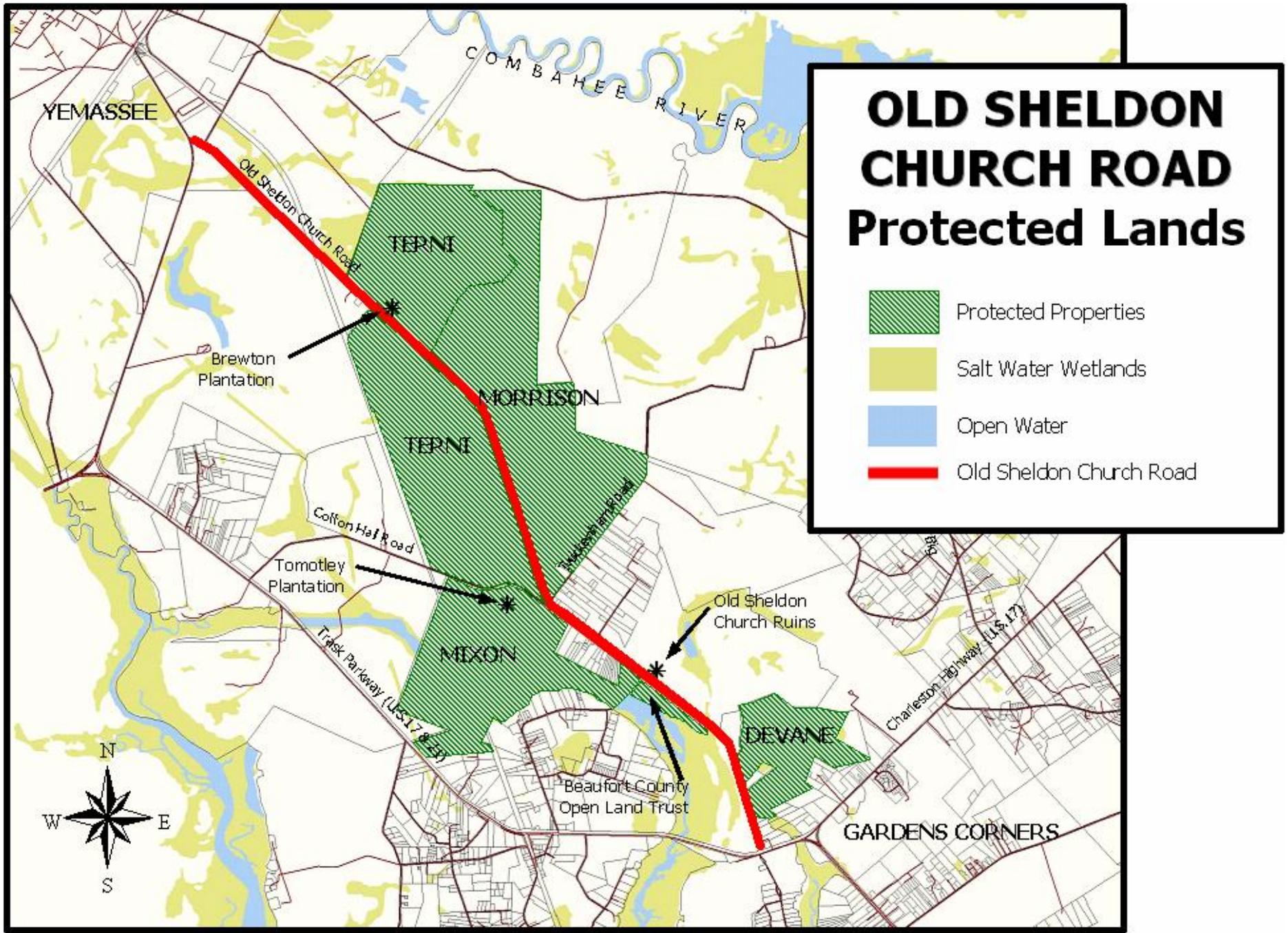
About 50 percent of the property along both sides of Old Sheldon Church Road is protected, either through conservation easements or ownership by conservation agencies (see Protected Lands Map). This amounts to 3,892 acres. As mentioned in the previous section, voluntary protection of private land helps to promote the goals of the ACE Basin Project. As a result of these protection measures, there are only a small number of sizable properties along Old Sheldon Church Road that can be developed in a way that could dramatically impact the corridor. These numbers make personal contact, discussions, and exchange of information possible, while recognizing the legacy of good stewardship among landowners.

### **Threats to the Corridor**

During meetings of the Old Sheldon Church Road Advisory Committee, problems and concerns about the corridor were discussed. These issues are summarized in this section and can be grouped into three major topics: safety issues (including traffic volumes and speed, truck traffic and parking at the church ruins), aesthetic issues (including maintaining the tree canopy along the road, signage, and litter control), and land use issues (including the potential for incompatible development, and furthering conservation/preservation efforts). Goals and strategies developed to address these issues are detailed in Section 6.

**Safety Issues:** Many of the problems identified by residents and landowners are related to traffic. Use of the road as a short cut between I-95 and US Hwy. 17/21 has resulted in increasing traffic volumes, including truck traffic, on a roadway that is not capable of supporting such traffic loads. The current posted speed limit along the road is 55 mph, except for a short segment in front of the Old Sheldon Church ruins where the speed limit drops to 45 mph. Speeding is a common occurrence, and the lack of shoulders and location of large trees and drainage ditches close to the pavement present very real safety issues.

Another safety issue relates to parking at the Old Sheldon Church ruins, a major point of interest to tourists. Currently, the only available parking is a pull off on the side of the road, creating a dangerous situation for those getting in and out of vehicles as traffic goes by at a high rate of speed. On occasion, the property across from the ruins is available for parking, but this creates a situation where visitors must cross the road. In November 2000, Rep. Edie Rogers contacted John Hardee, SCDOT Commissioner for the 2<sup>nd</sup> District, regarding the concerns expressed by the Committee. As a result, speed limit reductions (to 45 mph) and new signage alerting travelers to pedestrians were implemented near the Old Sheldon Church ruins in 2001. Because these



measures only apply to a very small section of the road, however, they are easy to ignore and very hard to enforce.

**Aesthetic Issues:** Deep, vegetative buffers and tree canopies along the roadway are essential to maintaining the scenic and historic appearance of Old Sheldon Church Road. The Advisory Committee identified several visual intrusions that have the effect of degrading the corridor's appearance and character. Chief among these is litter.

Roadside litter and illegal dumping blight the viewscape and endanger wildlife. Currently, trash along Old Sheldon Church Road is periodically picked up by workers employed by the Bull Point development (covering US 17/21 to Old Bailey Road) and Brewton Plantation (from Old Bailey Road to the northwestern end). The County, through its litter control program, picks up the trash once it has been bagged.

Although State law prohibits littering, there are no signs along the road that give the fines for this activity, it is not routinely enforced, and use of the road as a short cut for commuters only adds to the problem. Additional help with litter control may be extremely difficult because, again, there are no shoulders along the road and traffic goes by at excessive speeds, making volunteer efforts extremely dangerous.

Another aesthetic issue raised by residents and landowners is the manner in which the SCDOT maintains the right of way along Old Sheldon Church Road. The DOT uses equipment to periodically clear the edge of the road of debris and overhanging vegetation. Obviously, this presents a challenge to any road with a scenic tree canopy and thick natural vegetation. It is also standard for the DOT to leave piles of brush along the roadway after maintenance, which results in unsightly clutter.

**Land Use Issues:** The vast majority of land along Old Sheldon Church Road is currently vacant, providing opportunities for future development. The County should discourage poorly planned and designed lighting, signage and landscaping, which can degrade the appearance and character of the corridor, detracting from its scenic qualities.

About one-half of the land along the corridor is protected through conservation easements or ownership by conservation agencies. Several large parcels adjacent to the road, however, are not similarly protected, including the land surrounding the Old Sheldon Church ruins. Inappropriate development near the ruins would adversely impact the historic setting of this National Register site.

### **Corridor Vision**

The overall vision for the Old Sheldon Church Road Scenic Highway is as follows:

*Preserve the outstanding historic, natural, and scenic resources of Old Sheldon Church Road.*

## Goals and Strategies

**GOAL:** *Facilitate safe vehicular and pedestrian traffic along Old Sheldon Church Road to enhance its appeal as a Scenic Highway.*

- Work with the SCDOT and law enforcement to decrease the posted speed limit to 45 mph along the entire road and enforce it.
- Provide additional signage in appropriate places along the road to alert drivers to slow-moving agricultural equipment and deer crossings.
- Work with the SCDOT to designate US Alt. 17 as a truck route from Yemassee to US 17/21 to help divert truck traffic away from Old Sheldon Church Road.
- Coordinate with the St. Helena's Episcopal Church to acquire and develop a small parking area adjacent to the church grounds so visitors will not have to pull onto the road shoulder or cross Old Sheldon Church Road to visit the ruins.

**GOAL:** *Protect the Old Sheldon Church ruins as an outstanding historic resource.*

- Coordinate with the Beaufort County Sheriff's Department and the St. Helena's Episcopal Church to investigate and implement measures to decrease vandalism at the Old Sheldon Church ruins. Measures to be considered include lighting, a locking gate, higher fencing, signage, increased surveillance, etc.

**GOAL:** *Protect and restore the tree canopy and other natural areas along the corridor.*

- Develop written guidelines in cooperation with the SCDOT for use in maintaining the right of way (cutting, trimming, clean-up) along the corridor.
- Work with SCE&G to explore ways to mitigate the visual impact of the existing transmission lines along the roadway, including the feasibility and cost of moving the lines farther away from the right of way and planting a vegetative buffer along the road to restore the tree canopy.
- Require any new utility easements to be set back at least 50 feet from the right of way to maintain the tree canopy. Require new utility structures, such as communication towers and power-transmission lines, to be built in ways that minimize visual impacts to the highway.

**GOAL:** *Prevent visual intrusions that may degrade the corridor's appearance and character.*

- Amend the Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance to include Old Sheldon Church Road in the County's Highway Corridor Overlay District. Under this overlay district, the Northern Beaufort County Corridor Review Board will review architecture, landscaping, buffers, signage, and lighting for new non-residential

projects to ensure appropriateness and compatibility with the character of this corridor.

- Encourage property owners, conservation organizations and the County (through the Rural and Critical Lands Program) to purchase development rights or to secure conservation easements for critical parcels bordering the corridor.
- Maintain the rural zoning designations along the corridor.
- Encourage landowners to continue voluntary good stewardship of their land and maintain a communications network to inform and educate landowners about issues related to the corridor.
- Continue to coordinate with the County's Litter Control Program to ensure adequate volunteer help to pick up litter along the roadway. Provide signs along the road that set fines for littering and enforce them.

### Implementation

Not all recommended strategies can be implemented at once. Some strategies will require a one-time effort while others will be ongoing. Still others will require much time and effort organizing and building partnerships and identifying funding sources to achieve results. Overseeing the implementation of this Plan will primarily involve the following entities:

- Citizen Steering Committee: Residents and landowners along Old Sheldon Church Road and surrounding areas are vital to ensuring that the goals and strategies outlined in this Plan are achieved. Up until now, an ad hoc advisory committee has been the driving force behind the effort to designate Old Sheldon Church Road as a Scenic Highway and develop this management plan. The work of this committee will now shift to implementation of the goals and recommendations outlined in the previous section.
- County Planning Department: The County Planning Department will continue to serve as staff to the Steering Committee and act as a liaison with other County and State agencies as necessary.
- Corridor Review Board: The Northern Beaufort County Corridor Review Board will review all proposals for non-residential development along the corridor in terms of architecture, lighting, landscaping, and general site layout.
- Historic Preservation Review Board: The Historic Preservation Review Board will review all applications for construction or demolition affecting those properties along the corridor that are on the National Register.

In addition to these specific entities, the implementation of this Plan will rely to a great extent on successful partnerships with the SCDOT, Beaufort County Council, the Sheriff's Department, SCE&G, and the St. Helena's Episcopal Church to ensure that Old Sheldon Church Road remains a Scenic Highway.