**Port Royal Sound Foundation**
**Grant Report: $500,000 Operating Grant from the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism**
**Date: 4/22/2025**

**Overview**

The Port Royal Sound Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving the Port Royal Sound for the environmental, cultural, and economic well-being of our area. In 2023, the Foundation was awarded a $500,000 operating grant by the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT). This strategic investment has significantly enhanced the Foundation’s ability to fulfill its mission and serve the citizens and visitors of South Carolina.

**Goals Achieved**

**1. Expanded Educational Programming**
The grant allowed the Foundation to increase the scope and frequency of its environmental education initiatives. Key achievements include:

* Reaching over 3,500 community members for public programs, including animal lectures, art projects, outdoor recreation, and more.
* Teaching more than 5,000 students across Beaufort, Jasper, and Hampton counties through field trips and classroom presentations.
* Enhancing curriculum-aligned content focused on estuarine ecology, conservation, and the cultural history of the region.

**2. Increased Public Access & Visitor Engagement**
With this funding, the Foundation improved public amenities and programming at the Maritime Center:

* Welcomed over 32,000 visitors in 2024.
* Introduced new interpretive exhibits and hands-on displays for all ages.
* Hosted guided nature walks, kayak tours, and citizen science programs, deepening public engagement with the local environment.

**3. Strengthened Community Partnerships**
The grant supported the expansion of collaborations with local organizations, including:

* Partnering with area schools, historical societies, and marine scientists to develop joint programs.
* Working with tourism and hospitality partners to promote sustainable visitation to the Sound.
* Establishing a Level 2 citizen science program with updated and enhanced protocols for data collection, which already has 36 active volunteers monitoring water quality around the watershed.

**4. Enhanced Operational Capacity**
Operational support from the SCPRT grant allowed the Foundation to:

* Maintain full-time staffing in key areas such as education, facilities, and outreach.
* Invest in staff training and professional development.
* Ensure the long-term sustainability of core programs and services.

**Public Benefits**

The impact of this grant extends well beyond the Foundation’s walls, providing tangible benefits to the broader public:

* **Environmental Stewardship**: By educating citizens about the ecological importance of Port Royal Sound, the Foundation fosters a more conservation-minded community.
* **Economic Development**: Increased tourism and visitation to the Maritime Center contribute to the local economy, supporting jobs and small businesses.
* **Youth Engagement**: By inspiring the next generation of scientists, educators, and environmental stewards, the Foundation is investing in the future of South Carolina.
* **Cultural Preservation**: Programs highlight the unique cultural heritage of the Lowcountry, including Gullah/Geechee history and maritime traditions.
* **Accessibility**: Programs and exhibits are designed to be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that individuals of all ages and abilities can enjoy and learn from the Foundation’s offerings.

**Conclusion**

Thanks to the generous support of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism, the Port Royal Sound Foundation has not only strengthened its infrastructure and programs but also expanded its reach and relevance to the public. The grant has enabled meaningful progress toward environmental education, cultural representation, and sustainable recreation, ensuring that Port Royal Sound remains a treasured natural resource for generations to come.