



Mr. Raleigh West, Executive Director
South Carolina Conservation Bank
2711 Middleburg Drive, Suite 308
Columbia, SC 29204

22 January 2024

Dear Director West and members of the South Carolina Conservation Bank Board,

I am writing to express the wholehearted support of the Gopher Tortoise Council for the Korn Tortoise Preserve project that is up for your consideration. Full funding for this project will bring significant benefits to the citizens of South Carolina, while providing a wide range of important ecological benefits. Our organization was established in 1978 with the goal of conserving the gopher tortoise and its habitat across the range of the species; acquisition of the Korn Tortoise Preserve project in South Carolina is a critically important contribution to this effort.

The approximately 304-acre Korn Tortoise Preserve has a remnant gopher tortoise population and adjoins the 1,700-acre Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve (AGTHP), managed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). This preserve affords Aiken County residents, as well as visitors from other areas, the chance to hunt, ride horses, view wildlife, and hike in some of the most well-managed longleaf pine sandhill remaining in the state. We understand that, if Aiken Land Conservancy is able to acquire the property via this funding award, they will ultimately transfer the property to SCDNR to be added to the AGTHP, which we also fully support. Together these lands will also enhance the conservation of gopher tortoises and other imperiled species.

The Korn Preserve contains at least 10 other species currently listed as threatened or endangered in South Carolina, including the red-cockaded woodpecker, spotted turtle, Sandhills darter, and Sandhills lily. Burrows constructed by gopher tortoises also support many species on the landscape. The addition of the Korn Preserve to the AGTHP will benefit the preserve by increasing the capacity to support more gopher tortoises helping to ensure that the gopher tortoise is precluded from federal listing in the future, with the resulting regulations such a listing would bring.

South Carolina has made tremendous investments in the last decade to support gopher tortoise conservation through land acquisition. This project provides an excellent opportunity to continue those positive efforts, and to bring direct benefits to the gopher tortoise and South Carolina residents at the same time. As a result, the Gopher Tortoise Council strongly supports full funding of Aiken Land Conservancy's application for funding to acquire this special piece of property.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Eric Sievers
Senior Co-Chair
Gopher Tortoise Council