

Dana Beach

London: I am speaking with Dana Beach and he is director of Coastal Conservation. What is your vision for South Carolina over the next decade?

Beach: South Carolina is on the verge, and in some ways, the nation is on the verge of major change, cultural change, environmental change, bad and good, and economic change. And I think South Carolina's opportunities are to get in front of this wave of change that is really even global and anticipate what will position us to be a very successful and competitive place in the future. And that vision to me includes land, energy, and human health. And of course, they are all related. I think they are related around the idea of getting back to more locally based strategies for economic development, for food production, development patterns that allow people to walk and bike, get out of their cars, and energy policies that really promote in a very aggressive and effective way energy conservation. We've got the potential to pull back into the stream of economic activity literally hundreds of billions of dollars in wasted energy that we waste in this country every year almost uniquely we waste it. We are, as a nation, one of the least efficient developed nations in the world. And as a state, South Carolina is one of the least efficient energy users in the nation. So that really puts us up there. And you can say well that is a terrible thing. And it is a terrible thing, but on the other hand, it represents a lot of what we might call low hanging fruit. We can gain tremendous improvements by making relatively modest changes to the way we deal with energy.

London: What are the key issues that we need to address to ensure that we achieve this vision?

Beach: Well, South Carolina like a lot of states that have been traditionally timber-based states is seeing large acreage of land sold for other uses out of the timber market. In South Carolina, for example, Mead Westvaco is selling 400,000 acres of land. And its' not just that that is a lot of land, but it is also very critically located literally right on the edges of our metropolitan regions. In this region in Charleston, for example, 72,000 acres border the Edisto and Ashley Rivers and that is essentially our western greenbelt. So the opportunity is to respond to that, again participate with those companies, try to do a better job of planning, and preserve most of that land. I think we can do that. The beauty of this housing recession is that there is not a whole lot of demand now for new housing. And there really isn't a need here. We've got a tremendous amount of houses that are coming online that will be available for a growing population. So the real opportunity again is to preserve most of that timberland and its existing use, maybe enhance it in terms of its ecological function, make some of it accessible to the public, that isn't now. It's just a stunning array of opportunities but in order to deal with it, we have to have, one, local governments more engaged in planning, we need to look at planning in a regional way, not just in a

1 municipality way, and we also need more money. We need the state, which
2 provides now about \$20 million a year, to increase the amount of funding it offers
3 for land conservation. We rank far behind North Carolina and Florida, for
4 example. North Carolina makes over \$100 million a year available for land
5 preservation. Florida over \$300 million a year. And so we are really a tiny
6 fraction of that and yet we have some, I think certainly, as much of a need as
7 those two states to be able to deal with these large land transactions. And that's
8 not all. I think the other thing that we need to do is make sure that local
9 governments understand the responsibility they have for the future. It's not a
10 business anymore of just keeping your taxes down, though we certainly want
11 them to do that, but it is really creating places that people can live and work and
12 recreate many decades into the future. If they don't do that then we won't have
13 those places left.

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15 **London: We talk about local governments and what their responsibilities**
16 **are. They are right there in the face of the people so they have to get this**
17 **work done but they cannot do it alone. What are the responsibilities from**
18 **the state perspective in terms of ensuring that we do plan for our future?**
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20 **Beach:** The State just passed a bill called Priority Investment Area Legislation.
21 It sounds arcane and sort of bureaucratic but really, what it says is it says local
22 governments need to identify where they are going to grow and where they are
23 going to put public money and infrastructure and they need to do it in
24 collaboration with their neighbors. So that a region, whether its Greenville or
25 Columbia or Myrtle Beach and Georgetown or Charleston or Beaufort, will have
26 to work together to come up with a growth area that is defensible based on real
27 population projections, not somebody's wish list, defensible based on the extent
28 to which infrastructure can be provided and schools, so that we don't leave
29 people having to send children to schools with trailers, and have road capacity
30 and other modes of transportation including, of course, light rail, biking, and
31 walking. And that means better land use planning. The state needs to set a
32 framework. It needs to provide some financial capacity. It needs to lead when
33 big issues like where DOT spends money help determine local development
34 patterns. But the local government needs to be the primary mover, because
35 frankly that is legally its role right now. We don't have regional governments here
36 in SC. We don't have state land use planning. Whether we need that or not is
37 probably an open question but at the moment we don't have it so it's really only
38 an academic question. We need to make sure that local governments step up to
39 the plate, that the state plays its role of framing the issue and providing
40 resources, and the federal government basically reconstructs the system of
41 federal funding for transportation in a way that allows better results than the ones
42 we've gotten for the past 50 years.

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44 **London: For years, we have known that climate change was on the**
45 **horizon. We've had scientific reports and the reality was known. Why do**
46 **you think it has taken so long to get into the mainstream conversation?**

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Beach: That's a fascinating question and a sociological study could be written on it. I think that there are two or three main reasons. One, we are so torqued in the state, and nationally too, by ideological interests that we can basically be standing here with water up to our chests and still people would be debating whether climate change is real. There is no doubt about it. The International Panel on Climate Change has come out with many, many reports and very extensively studied and peer reviewed showing that we have a problem. We are going to face rising sea levels, drier climate, and a warmer climate. So, the question is not whether we save energy or not. If we save energy, we can avoid some of the worst outcomes. We have built in climate change that we cannot avoid. So rather than having this ideological debate, we need to get down to the brass tacks of the science and have cities and the state and the federal government all collaborate on how do we adapt our communities to climate change that will happen unavoidably and how do we prevent the worst case from happening. I think the second problem is really that it is such a big issue. We've never faced this kind of a global challenge in our history as a species. And so we really aren't equipped to deal with it, and in fact, the analogy that I heard drawn is between some of the reactions in the Jewish communities during War World 2. They simply chose not to believe because it was so horrific what Hitler was doing and many of them simply said it can't be true, we will not accept that. And as a result, they didn't prepare for it and not that one wonders what they could have done, but they didn't prepare for it. There was a lot of denial. That is just a natural human reaction. We go through it individually when we have serious health problems and communities go through it and cultures go through it. We went through a period of cultural denial about global warming and to some extent, we are still in that. But we need to get over that and kind of deal again with the specifics of science and of mitigation and of adaptation. If we do that, we can build an economic and an environmental agenda around it that makes a whole lot of sense beyond just dealing with global warming. It's something that really will be beneficial to us in the long run and especially to South Carolinians.

London: Speaking of the long run, do you think the next generation of South Carolinians will be better off or worse off than we are today?

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Beach: I think we will be a whole lot different and I hope we will be better off but part of why we will be better off is if we culturally shift to remove the equation of income and wealth with happiness and prosperity. I think to the extent we began to refocus on our communities and the attributes that we sometimes overlook or even dismiss as insignificant - going to a farmer's market, being able to walk to work, having children who can walk to school. There's no monetary characterization of those things except that it is negative. If a child walks to school, you don't buy the gas, so it doesn't go into GDP. That's wrong. That's a wrong way to look at it. Though if we can deconstruct this equation that says more economic activity always mean more happiness, then we will be a better off community in the next three to four decades.

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London: How does the condition of our natural and cultural resources relate to the state's prosperity?

Beach: Well, its economics. Environment is economics. Everything we build here and everything we are here is based on our natural resource inventory. Our landscapes, we are where we live. So from a simplistic approach, to the extent we are able to attract new businesses that can move anywhere as often said knowledge based industries, we are going to have to be able to offer quality of life. We certainly don't offer a high quality school system. We don't offer, in some ways, a deep array of cultural opportunities, unlike a city like New York, but we do offer a higher quality of life. If we don't protect that, then we lose that competitive edge. But even beyond that, things like global warming, for example. If we began to react now, the cost of adapting now and of mitigating will be much less than if we wait. And we will also have the attendant benefits of energy conservation. For poor people, if we insulate every new house to the highest extent that we can, we have folks who are poorer paying lower electricity bills. They are better off. They can go out and buy the things they need to buy. So this agenda is very, it's a broad agenda, it's positive, if it's constructed that way. But we got to get past a lot of the scare tactics. I've heard consistently, well if South Carolina does so-and-so, it will become less economically competitive. I don't think that's true. We just had a big announcement of '07 recruitment to this region, to the Charleston Tri-county region, and David Ginn who is the head of the regional development authority, had an organizing principle behind all of it. In fact, it was quality of life. People who moved here thought it was a great place to work and a great place to live. And he said it was not the number one factor in every case but it was a common criteria throughout every job, every business recruitment initiative.

London: Is there the political will to accomplish what needs to be accomplished in order to ensure that we maintain our quality of life?

Beach: Well with all due respect to the legislators in Columbia who are responsible and who are forward thinking and there are a number of them in both parties. The people are going to have to lead on this and the business community is going to have to lead on it. The legislature, if you go up there, you hear a very different conversation. You hear a very ideological conversation, it's a partisan conversation, it's not about the or mostly about the welfare of the larger interest of the state. It's he did so-and-so for me, so I'm going to do so-and-so for him or he did so-and-so to me so I'm going to do it back to him. And that's not the kind of conversation that we need. The other thing, too, is there is so much timidity in Columbia. I'm on the Governor's Energy Policy Committee and someone raised the issue of taking the cap off the sales tax for cars which would, of course, generate a lot more money because it's capped at \$300. So if you buy a Bentley, you pay the same thing as someone who buys a Toyota Corolla pays. Well, this idea, because if people bought more elaborate cars

1 maybe they would use more gas and they would have to pay more and that
2 would be a price signal to be more conservative. Well, the senator presiding
3 over this discussion laughed and said well we couldn't possibly do that as if this
4 were an inside joke that no one could even do that. The fellow who made the
5 suggestion said well I guess this really raises the question of how serious are we
6 about dealing with global warming. And this was a guy from the timber industry
7 who said it. And I think that's the question. If we think only inside the box of the
8 legislature and all the sort of petty rivalry that goes up there, in both parties, then
9 that's not the place the solution is going to be crafted. It's got to be crafted from
10 engaged citizens, from the business community and delivered to the legislature
11 with the expectation that they will implement it.

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13 **London: Are there any other topics that are particularly important to you?**

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15 **Beach:** Well, human health. That's something I haven't mentioned before but I
16 think that we in the environmental community and we in the state have been a
17 little bit blasé about what our environment does to our health. We, on the coast
18 at least, have prevailing winds often from the ocean we don't have as big a
19 problem with air pollution as say Columbia or Greenville, both of which are on the
20 verge of nonattainment for federal air quality standards. We have to realize that
21 we are growing up as a state and with that growing up, we begin to assume some
22 of the same problems that occur in the mid-Atlantic states and in the north east,
23 and in California, where you really have to worry about the air that you are
24 breathing. Now we can avoid a lot of that by being smart. But we first have to
25 come to grips with the fact that it is a problem. And for example, as we discuss
26 whether or not to expand the port of Charleston, ports being the single largest
27 source of unregulated air pollution in the world. We need to put squarely on the
28 table the issue of human health, both the neighborhoods that are immediately
29 adjoining the port which are the ones that receive the biggest negative impact but
30 also the larger region, because everybody is going to be at some detriment if we
31 don't deal with air pollution.

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33 The other issue that is on the front burner is mercury. We've got every coastal
34 river in the state contaminated with levels of mercury where you are either
35 advised to eat no more than either one or two fish or no fish depending on what
36 river you are in. And the reason for that is coal burning power plants. It's some
37 from South Carolina, its some from out of state. We don't need to get into a
38 debate about well it's their problem in Alabama and we can't do anything about it.
39 We need to take the responsibility in our state to deal with the problem and then
40 taking the moral high ground, insist that they deal with their problem too. And
41 that will happen. So I think that again we need to get out of the silo mentality
42 where one entity over here, whether it is the Santee Cooper or the State Ports
43 Authority, does this one thing. We produce energy from coal. That's Santee
44 Cooper's motto. They are employees of the State. Santee Cooper is owned by
45 the state of South Carolina. They have an obligation to do things beyond just
46 build more plants to produce more energy. They have to look at alternatives that

1 are beneficial to the state as a whole. Same thing with the State Ports Authority.
2 Our state agencies need to be much more responsive and responsible to the
3 larger constituency that they serve.
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