

CHAPTER 12: COORDINATING LAND USE AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Motivation for the implementation of this plan is a shared desire to retain the natural resources that are essential to the quality of life in North Carolina. Measurable success for the conservation planning will only be completed in the short term through creative and collaborative strategies.

Land costs are skyrocketing across the state. With the increase in population comes an increase in the demand and competition for land and water resources – time is of the essence and a strategy essential. Collaborative planning and the creation of working partnerships will help stretch resources, reduce duplicative work and leverage monies toward common goals. Local, regional and statewide strategies can help this process and give focus to the funds available.

Four major trust funds leverage local, state and federal monies for resource conservation. Each are fiscally limited while at the same time faced with almost unlimited opportunities to fund great projects. Within North Carolina they are: the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the Agriculture and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, the Natural Heritage Trust Fund and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. The Conservation Planning Tool was presented to the Quad Trusts annual meeting in 2007 and 2008, where it was well-received. The NHTF is currently providing financial support for the planning process. One of the goals of this plan is to provide guidance to these trust funds from a statewide perspective. We are working with the four trust funds to incorporate the Conservation Planning Tool priorities into their criteria.

There are many examples of successful partnerships that have collaboratively planned and implemented projects that have conserved land and other natural resources across the state. Here are a few examples:

COASTAL REGION

- **Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaboration:** Southeastern North Carolina and northeastern South Carolina stretch across the lower Coastal Plain and are strongly influenced by the geologic region known as the “Cape Fear Arch.” The Cape Fear Arch is an area slightly uplifted relative to the rest of the coastal plain, even standing as a peninsula at certain times when the rest of the coastal plain was submerged. The Cape Fear Arch is a region of particularly high biological diversity, with habitats that support significant, and often endemic, animal and plant communities. Rapid population growth is fueling urbanization, changing the area’s rural character, and threatening its natural resources. Collaborative partners -- including private conservation organizations, state and federal resource agencies, and local governments -- still see a window of opportunity to plan properly for the anticipated population growth in a way that will allow for

economic development while protecting the resources that make this area so special.

The mission of the Cape Fear Arch is:

Develop and implement a community conservation vision to build awareness, protection and stewardship of the region's important natural resources.

The first goal of the collaborative is “to identify and map the highest priority habitats and species in need of conservation attention in the region.” Communication and coordinated effort among the partners will be made to establish a network of conservation lands and waterways, and to promote the establishment of landscape corridors and buffers, between and adjacent to existing conservation lands to protect and enhance long-term wildlife population viability and genetic exchange and to ensure land management flexibility. To achieve their goals, the Cape Fear Arch will provide a communicative forum to identify opportunities for collaborative action among the participants.

Onslow Bight Conservation Forum is a regional consortium of nonprofit conservation organizations, state and federal resource agencies, and two military installations. Coastal North Carolina's Onslow Bight stretches from Cape Lookout to Cape Fear. A rich mosaic of saltwater marshes, wetlands, longleaf pine savannahs and other coastal ecosystems, it supports several rare and endangered plant and animal species, including the Red-cockaded woodpecker. The region is developing rapidly and beginning to lose its rural character and ecological integrity. The Onslow Bight Conservation Forum was jointly initiated by The Nature Conservancy and Camp Lejeune in response to encroachment issues at the military installation. Most of the partners own land in the region. Partners represent a broad spectrum of land managers and conservation advocates who are working to identify areas that should remain natural, develop political support for land acquisition, and work toward acquiring these lands.

The overarching goal of the forum is to address the growing population and development pressures that threaten the rural character and natural habitats of the Onslow Bight landscape. The forum was modeled on the Sandhills Conservation Partnership, which similarly includes a military agency facing encroachment issues while at the same time managing for endangered species. Since 2001, the forum has provided a place for communication and encouraged collaboration where organizational missions overlap.

The mission of the Onslow Bight Forum is:

To provide for open discussion among the participants concerning the long-term conservation and enhancement of biological diversity and ecosystem sustainability throughout the Onslow Bight Landscape compatible with the land use, conservation and management objectives of the participating organizations and agencies.

As part of its strategy to better coordinate efforts in biodiversity conservation, the forum partners have developed a preliminary conservation plan for regional terrestrial ecosystems, and are working on a complementary plan for conservation of estuarine and marine ecosystems. The forum has been successful in conserving some key lands that provide habitat for a range of native wildlife and plant species. They have done this where the goals of the individual partners have overlapped, and they have been able to pool resources.

Key partners include The Nature Conservancy North Carolina Chapter, N.C. Coastal Federation, N.C. Coastal Land Trust, Endangered Species Coalition, Wildlife Resources Commission, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service Raleigh, and USDA Forest Service Region 8.

- **Albemarle-Pamlico Conservation and Communities Collaborative (AP3C)**
The Albemarle-Pamlico watershed extends from the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, across the North Carolina Piedmont and the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain to the wind- and wave-swept shores of the Outer Banks and the nearshore Atlantic Ocean. The coastal Albemarle-Pamlico Region includes more than 9,299 miles of freshwater rivers and streams and 1.8 million acres of brackish estuarine waters. It encompasses the second largest estuarine system in the country and five major river basins. The ecological importance of the region has been recognized nationally through the establishment of 10 National Wildlife Refuges, the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program.

Many organizations and individuals are interested in shaping a sustainable future that balances the long-term conservation of natural systems with opportunities for the well-being of all the Region's citizens. By coordinating efforts and working collaboratively whenever feasible, they believe it will be possible to realize such a future and at the same time to avoid duplicative efforts and missed opportunities. Therefore, the AP3C draws its membership from many federal, state and private organizations, towns and counties, community interest and development groups. The AP3C is a collaborative effort between The Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense, the N.C. Audubon Society, Albemarle-Pamlico Natural Estuary Program, the Conservation Fund's Resourceful Communities Program, the Black Family Land Trust and many other partners. The collaborative seeks to promote conservation efforts in Northeastern North Carolina, with a sensitivity to and respect for the fact that whole, diverse, communities must shape and participate in order for those efforts to succeed.

The mission of the AP3C is to develop approaches that integrate economic and ecological resilience for the lands, waters and communities of the Albemarle-Pamlico Region; recognize the challenges presented by economic and social distress, climate change, population change and increasing risks to public health; implement collaborative, sustainable solutions for regional well-being. In furtherance of this mission, the AP3C will:

- Develop a shared vision of the Region's future, based on natural resource analyses, changing land use and development patterns and the projected long-term impacts of the Region's challenges.
- Market the shared vision within the Regional community at large and to local, state and federal entities and to non-traditional partners.
- Undertake conservation measures based on the vision for the future by targeting both regulatory and incentive programs that address these challenges by improving the management of private and public lands.
- Promote economic and community development opportunities compatible with the shared vision through community collaborations.

- **SERPASS**

The Southeast Region Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) focuses on sustaining natural, environmental, economic, cultural and national defense resources in the southeastern region. The partners include North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Military Services. Non-governmental organizations and other federal agencies are also involved in specific project implementation. SERPPAS focuses on regional sustainability and protection of ecosystems.

To accomplish this, members have identified a number of projects to address the following key areas/issues:

- Building working relationships between communities and the military to address conservation, economic and sustainability issues
- Promoting conservation of military, agricultural and forestry lands
- Mapping marine/coastal areas of interest and identifying potential stakeholders
- Maintaining working lands
- Promoting land use that is both compatible with and complementary to military requirements
- Preserving the longleaf pine ecosystem and habitats to protect species such as the red-cockaded woodpecker and gopher tortoise

In conjunction with the regional initiative, North Carolina has developed supporting initiatives that supports both the region and the state's One NC Naturally Conservation Planning Tool. North Carolina is endeavoring to ensure that environmental, natural, economic, cultural and national defense resources are sustained through:

- Sustainability of resources that support future state requirements.
- Better cooperation in addressing decisions that result in mutual accomplishments.

- Cooperative planning and leveraging of resources to produce regional benefits.
- Integrated research and mapping of the appropriate county areas leading to the use of common data and information.
- Utilization of common data and information to support a more effective decision- and policy- making program.

To those ends, the initiative will focus on eastern North Carolina and eventually include 42 counties. Specifically, a Strategic Lands inventory will use a developed GIS decision tool to visualize state, local and military mission “footprints” and requirements. The footprints represent four major sectors and will be represented by multiple data layers to include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Military/National Defense: installations, ranges, airspace, compatible use
- Economic: Gray Infrastructure (road/rail/port, energy corridors, urban development)
- Environment/Natural Resources: Green Infrastructure (ecological, working landscapes, marine/coastal)
- Social/Cultural: “Triple bottom line”- Social justice, sustainable economic development, environmental stewardship

The strategic lands inventory will be conducted in multiple phases. The first phase will focus on discovery and acquisition of modeling and data sources. The second phase will produce a prototype mapping/decision/planning model, testing and validation of the model, and the development of a decision support framework and initial deployment. Future phases will be a function of the initial deployment and the need to revise the model and/or expand upon its capabilities.

PIEDMONT REGION

- **Sustainable Sandhills Partnership**
The mission of the North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership is to “coordinate the development and implementation of conservation strategies for the red-cockaded woodpecker, other native biota, longleaf pine and other ecosystems in the Sandhills of North Carolina compatible with the land use objective of the partners.” The partnership is composed of seven organizations that have signed a cooperative charter: Army Environmental Center, Fort Bragg, Sandhills Ecological Institute, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, The Nature Conservancy, Sandhills Area Land Trust and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Other organizations lend input to the partnership, especially through participation in the six working groups tasked with developing conservation strategies and actions. Two of the working groups are focused on conservation planning: one that specifically focused on identifying key areas of the landscape needing protection in order to recover the red-cockaded woodpecker population; and, a working group that focused more broadly to “synthesize biological information

and create a vision to guide long-term conservation of native Sandhills ecosystems.”

- **The Upper Neuse Clean Water Initiative** is composed of a broad and diverse coalition of groups, including five land trusts: the Eno River Association, Tar River Land Conservancy, Triangle Greenways Council, Triangle Land Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land. Two local government associations - the Triangle J Council of Governments and the Upper Neuse River Basin Association - and two watershed protection groups - the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association, and the Neuse River Foundation - also participate. The Conservation Trust for North Carolina, a statewide land trust service provider, coordinates the Initiative.

The Upper Neuse Clean Water Initiative issued a comprehensive science-based conservation plan that targets the highest priority lands to protect water quality in nine drinking water reservoirs, including Falls Lake. The initiative, a growing coalition of conservation organizations, landowners, government agencies and watershed protection groups, will use the plan to guide land protection efforts aimed at stemming continued degradation of water quality.

- **Greater Uwharries Conservation Partnership** is currently comprised of thirteen partner organizations, including the N.C. Zoo, Land Trust for Central North Carolina, Piedmont Land Conservancy, North Carolina Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Yadkin-Pee Dee Lakes Project, N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, N.C. Plant Conservation Program, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, N.C. Environmental Defense and U.S. Forest Service.

Partners are working toward conservation in the Greater Uwharries region -- a region of high biological diversity that supports nationally significant occurrences of plant and animal communities. This region has been identified in North Carolina’s Wildlife Action Plan, the Nature Conservancy’s Piedmont Ecoregional Plan and One North Carolina Naturally as one of the highest priority areas for conservation efforts in the Piedmont. In addition, the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership has identified the free-flowing Pee Dee as one of the four highest priority watersheds for aquatic wildlife conservation throughout the entire southeast.

The mission of the Greater Uwharries Conservation Partnership is:

To work for the long-term conservation and enhancement of biological diversity and ecosystem sustainability throughout the Greater Uwharries landscape compatible with the land use, conservation and management objectives of the participating organizations and agencies.

In addition to carrying forward their individual missions of conservation, the partners are at present collaborating on a conservation plan, including map, for natural ecosystems in the Greater Uwharries.

- **Wake County's Open Space Program** is working in partnership with local NGOs, municipalities and state/federal agencies to protect remaining open space in the county. The program's overarching objective is to protect 30 percent of Wake County's land area (or roughly 165,000 acres) as permanent open space.

The Open Space Program began in earnest when, in 2000, 78 percent of Wake county voters authorized an open space bond for \$15 million. Due to skyrocketing land costs, voters approved a second bond for \$26 million in 2004.

- The **Mountains-to-Sea Trail** planning and development efforts are currently focused on the eastern piedmont section of the trail, specifically the portion of the MST that will connect Greensboro's Lake Townsend to Falls Lake State Park in north Raleigh. Interested citizens and state and local government staff met in 2006 to define the route that this section will follow. Workshop participants identified a primary MST route, as well as seven connector trails. Several local government officials signed resolutions of support endorsing the draft map. In addition, significant work is being done along the Neuse River in Wake County extending into Johnston County.

MOUNTAIN REGION

- **Blue Ridge National Heritage's** mission is to protect, preserve, interpret and develop the unique natural, historical, and cultural resources of Western North Carolina for the benefit of present and future generations, and in so doing to stimulate improved economic opportunity in the region. It is currently creating a 25-county management plan.
- **Burke County:** Several open space and recreational planning projects are ongoing in Burke County. First, the trail planning around Lake James and the Catawba River is nearing completion. The county has been working with local stakeholders and the National Park Service Rivers Trails & Conservation Assistance Program to develop a regional multi-use trails plan that incorporates the future establishment of the trail corridor for the National Park Service Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (from Pisgah National Forest, through the new portion of the Lake James State Park, and down the Catawba River to Morganton), the Lake James Loop Trail, and bikeway connections from surrounding neighborhoods and future development. Additionally, the county is partnering with the Duke Power Company to increase and enhance public access to Lake James, the Catawba River and the Johns River through trails, expanded public access areas and parks, as well as additional boat launch facilities. Planning is also underway for a trail corridor along the Johns River

which will provide connectivity from Caldwell County (Wilson Creek) to Lake Rhodhiss. Finally, development of new zoning amendments encourages open space preservation within new developments through conservation-design techniques.

- **The Land-of-Sky Council of Governments** is currently leading a number of open space planning projects. Specifically, it is in the process of undertaking a Green Infrastructure Plan for the four county area. This is being done with the technical assistance of the Conservation Fund and NCDENR. Funding for the project is coming from several foundation sources. It is also assisting the NCDPR trails staff with preparing a regional trails plan that will eventually connect the DuPont State Forest to the French Broad River Basin and then north to Madison County.
- **The city of Asheville and Riverlink** continue to acquire property for expansion of the Wilma Dykeman greenway on the French Broad River. Another group based in Asheville (under the leadership of the Department of Commerce staff) is working on an initiative called “Year of the Park” – to be held in 2008. The project is being designed to raise awareness of open space needs and will be held in conjunction with the groundbreaking of the new park in downtown Asheville in Pack Square.
- **Blue Ridge Forever:** Though not affiliated with local government, the numerous land trusts working in western North Carolina have formed a new entity known as Blue Ridge Forever, which will provide a forum for unified fundraising potential at the national level. Through a fairly rigorous review process, the group has identified 24 target areas to focus on, and funding strategies are currently being formulated to acquire lands within them.