



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
Statewide North Carolina Public Poll

Prepared  
by  
The Kitchens Group  
for  
*Land for Tomorrow Coalition*

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## **Methodology**

The Nature Conservancy, on behalf of the North Carolina *Land for Tomorrow Coalition*, commissioned a public opinion survey of seven hundred and eighty-seven likely voters in North Carolina. These voters were interviewed in a random sample conducted March 1-5, 2004. Respondents were screened for voter registration, and the sample was balanced according to all known demographic factors. All interviews were conducted by telephone. The margin of error for this survey is +/-3.5%, with a 95% confidence level. A 95% confidence level is acceptable in social science research. This refers to the fact that 95 times out of 100 these results will fall within this margin of error. The poll was conducted by The Kitchens Group of Maitland, Florida.

The Kitchens Group has conducted three statewide surveys in North Carolina between April 2000 and March 2004. A comparison of the demographics in each survey reveals the samples are comparable enough to track certain questions.

## **Most Important Issue Facing North Carolina**

In each of the three polls since April 2000, respondents were first asked to name the issue they think is the most important for the Governor and Legislature to address. In 2000, the economy barely made the radar screens of these voters. Education dominated as the leading concern in April 2000 (29%). While education continues to be a concern (19%), it does not merit the same level of preoccupation as the economy (40%). No other single issue was mentioned by more than 7% of those polled.

## **Growth and Development Issues**

Some of the most interesting findings, in the survey, focused upon growth and development. A significant shift in attitudes about growth has occurred within the last two and a half years. In June 2002, only 31% said they thought growth and development of land in their area of the state was occurring too rapidly and steps needed to be taken to discourage more growth. That number has increased to 43% in the current survey.

## **Environmental Concerns**

More than 70% of respondents saw the following environmental issues as very or somewhat serious in North Carolina:

- 84% pollution of rivers and streams
- 75% loss of wildlife habitat
- 74% air pollution
- 73% loss of farmland

### **Competing Needs**

Another significant finding in this survey is that 59% of North Carolina voters say, even though the state has a budget crisis and other competing needs like education and health care, open space and farmland must be preserved before it is lost to development. Although voters see the economy and education as primary issues facing North Carolina, a strong majority say part of the budget should be allocated for the preservation of open space.

### **Popular Features of a Land Protection Program**

More than 60% said the following features of a state level land protection program would make them more likely to support the program:

- 86% protection of rivers like the Catawba, French Broad and Neuse
- 82% protection of small family farms and farmland
- 80% protection of drinking water
- 78% provision of matching funds to help local governments preserve land
- 78% preservation of historic sites like battlefields, historic homes and churches
- 77% preservation of forests
- 76% preservation of scenic views
- 68% provision of more public access to beaches and coastal areas
- 65% protection of habitat for animals like the black bear and red cockaded woodpecker
- 63% creation of more local parks close to home
- 61% preservation of areas that would be open to the public for hunting and fishing
- 57% provision of more hiking and biking trails and areas for canoeing and kayaking

### **Sources of Funding**

Respondents were asked about a variety of ways of paying for an open space protection program. One proposal is to issue bonds. Almost 65% said they would be more likely to support bonds if the bonds cost the average family only \$27 per year or less than \$3 per month.

### **Public Education Campaign**

The data from this survey points to the necessity of conducting a campaign to inform voters about key conservation issues. The poll indicates how strongly they respond to specifics about issues, such as the disappearance of 2.5 million acres of wetlands, the loss of coastal wetlands, farmland, and forest areas, and the expected increase in population. The statistics, coupled with information about what types of land a conservation program would protect, are very compelling information to voters.