



LAND *for* TOMORROW

Saving the Goodliest Land: A Five-Year Plan for Investing in North Carolina's Land, Water, History and Future

Executive Summary

In 1585, Sir Walter Raleigh sent Lieutenant Ralph Lane and a group of surveyors to establish the first English colony in the New World. Adventuring off Roanoke Island, Lane's men explored the mainland to the west and declared it "to bee the goodliest soile under the cope of heaven."

That "goodliest soile" became North Carolina. Since then the farms, forests, fields, mountains, rivers, sounds and oceans have provided livelihoods for our citizens and astonished visitors with their beauty. Lane's men were right: we truly live in the "goodliest" land.

Today, the quality of North Carolina's natural and rural lands and its water are just as important as they were 400 years ago.

- A significant amount of the state's jobs and gross product depend on quality land and water including those in tourism, agriculture, forestry fishing and on military bases.
- Other businesses strongly consider quality of life and a healthy environment for their employees when they make decisions about where to locate.
- Public health depends on safe drinking water, clean air and places to exercise.
- Our quality of life is enhanced by the state's parks and trails, places celebrating our history and the sheer beauty of the land.
- North Carolina's geographic diversity produces a special variety of native plants and animals that makes this one of the world's ecological "hot spots."

North Carolina is a "hot spot" for people. Between 1990 and 2000 our population grew by 21% and is expected to increase by 50% by 2030. You can travel almost anywhere in North Carolina and see firsthand the pressures our population creates on the land. More than one million acres of natural and rural areas have been developed over the last decade. North Carolina lost more prime farmland between 1987 and 1997 than any other state except Ohio and Texas. And for the first time since the 1930s, forest acreage declined.

To help protect these critical areas, the General Assembly created the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, Natural Heritage Trust Fund and Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. The General Assembly also set a goal of conserving one million acres of critical lands between 2000 and 2009. Significant progress has been made, but efforts have fallen short because of lack of funding. The Farmland Preservation Trust Fund has received no funding for the last two years. In 2004, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund had only \$62 million in appropriations compared to \$350 million in grant requests. Protecting our critical land is only going to get harder and more costly.

Because of the need to expand land and historic conservation efforts in North Carolina, several of the state's leading nonprofit organizations joined together to form Land for Tomorrow in 2003.

Their goals are to:

- Build awareness of the importance of land conservation and historic preservation to North Carolina's future.
- Advocate for expanded funding to meet that need.

Land for Tomorrow began its work by interviewing business, government and nonprofit leaders from across the state and polling registered voters and farmland owners to learn more about what people in North Carolina think about conservation. We studied conservation finance techniques used in North Carolina and other states to develop a better understanding of options available to increase funding at the federal, state and local levels.

Based upon this information, research into land and historic properties in North Carolina and current programs to protect them, and advice from more than one hundred experts, the Coalition presents this report, *Saving the Goodliest Land: A Five-Year Plan for Investing in North Carolina's Land, History and Future*, which:

- Examines changes in land use and ownership that are creating economic, public health, ecological and quality of life challenges in urban and rural areas.
- Recommends how the state can address these challenges by increasing funding for land conservation and historic preservation.
- Recommends the following five-year conservation goals:
 - **Rivers, Wetlands, Floodplains and Coastal Waters** – 6,000 miles of stream banks and flood plains
 - **Working Farms** – 50,000 acres of productive farmland
 - **Working Forests** – 25,000 acres
 - **Local Parks and Trails** – 35,000 acres and needed trail and park facilities
 - **State Parks and Trails** – 60,000 acres and needed trails and facilities
 - **Game Lands and Other Natural Areas** – 150,000 acres
 - **Historic Places** – Restore 350 historic landmarks for public use and protect 3,000 acres of important archeological sites and land around State Historic Sites
 - **Land Visible from Scenic Highways** – 50,000 acres along the Blue Ridge Parkway and other scenic highways
 - **Urban Forests** – Increase tree canopy in areas that are not meeting air quality standards
- Estimates that the projected cost to North Carolina state government to meet these conservation goals is an additional **\$200 million annually for five years** which can be used to leverage federal, local and private matching funds.
- Recommends creating one new initiative to help communities take advantage of their critical land and historic places to create sustainable jobs and a higher quality of life.
- Recommends building on the State's excellent existing conservation trust funds, One North Carolina *Naturally* program and the creative, vibrant work of local governments, nonprofits and community groups to accomplish these goals.

Land for Tomorrow presents this plan as a proposal for discussion. We hope it will be used by legislators, state agencies, citizens and organizations to craft an action plan to save North Carolina's critical land and historic places and ensure a bright future for our citizens and communities.

If we're successful in this effort, our children and grandchildren will still think of North Carolina as the "goodliest land" with:

- Clean air and water
- Sustainable jobs and vibrant communities
- Thriving farms and forests
- Places to enjoy the beauty of North Carolina, to exercise, to hunt and fish
- Places of historic significance and ecological value

In 1971, North Carolina voters approved Article XIV, Section V of the State Constitution, which mandates that we must use "every appropriate way to preserve as part of the common heritage of this State its forests, wetlands, estuaries, beaches, historical sites, openlands and places of beauty." Implementing *Saving the Goodliest Land* is the best way to follow through on that Constitutional commitment.

We must protect North Carolina's critical land and historic places now. There will be no second chance.