

SECURING NORTH CAROLINA'S FUTURE

A Five-Year Plan for Investing in Our Land,
Water and Quality of Life | May 2012



LAND *for* TOMORROW

North Carolina's forests, farms, wetlands and other natural lands contribute to our health, economic prosperity and quality of life. Rapid residential and commercial development over the last several decades has resulted in the loss of millions of acres of these important lands. Recognizing the challenge, individual citizens, organizations and public officials across North Carolina have sprung into action – investing money, time and effort to protect places that matter across the state.

State government efforts, particularly the work of the state's four conservation trust funds, serve as the foundation for North Carolina's land conservation strategy. The trust funds provide an important source of funding for land acquisition and conservation projects, often leveraging one to two times as much funding from private, non-profit or other sources. They also fund critical planning efforts to help North Carolina invest its conservation funds wisely and to help communities determine how to meet their own conservation needs.

The report, *Securing North Carolina's Future* (available at www.landfortomorrow.org), tracks the state's progress toward the conservation goals set in 2005 by Land for Tomorrow and proposes a new set of goals for the years to come. It tells three stories about the state's conservation efforts:

- The story of the **tremendous progress** North Carolina has made toward preserving places that matter across the state;
- The story of the **recent decline in funding** for land conservation – a decline that puts the state's future economic vitality and quality of life at risk; and
- The story of what could be – a vision of a healthy, prosperous and vibrant North Carolina that protects what's best about our natural lands and working landscapes – **a vision that can become a reality if we commit the necessary resources.**

Today, North Carolina is at an important crossroads. To secure North Carolina's economy, quality of life and treasured environment, the state must reinvigorate its commitment to land conservation.

Land conservation is a critical tool to enhance North Carolina's economic prosperity, health and quality of life.

- **Economy** – North Carolina's working farms and forests are a cornerstone of the state economy. Agriculture is a \$32 billion industry in North Carolina that employs 120,000 people, while forestry contributes another \$6 billion to the state's economy. Visitors to North Carolina's state parks sustain more than 4,900 full-time equivalent jobs and generate \$290 million in sales each year. Finally, conservation projects themselves create short-term jobs – a 2009 study found that 40 jobs are created for every \$1 million invested in reforestation, land and watershed restoration, and sustainable forest management.



Big Yellow Mountain CREDIT: DAVID RAY/TNC

- **Clean air and water** – Land conservation reduces pollution of our waterways, cleans our air, and safeguards lands that protect against flooding. The services provided by undeveloped land in North Carolina are valuable – a study by the Trust for Public Land estimated that land already protected through the state’s four conservation trust funds will deliver \$3.67 billion in economic benefits through 2020 – a return of four dollars in benefits for every dollar invested.
- **Quality of life** – The state’s investments in parks and recreation, open space, and the protection of local food sources help maintain a high quality of life that attracts people to North Carolina. More North Carolinians are enjoying outdoor recreation than ever before – 14.25 million people visited North Carolina state parks in 2011, tying an all-time record.

North Carolina has made tremendous progress in preserving places that matter.

- Since 2005, approximately 389,400 acres of land across North Carolina have been protected from development through a variety of public and private actions.
- North Carolina has also made significant progress in identifying and prioritizing the most important natural and working landscapes and watersheds for protection. From the completion of local natural heritage inventories and farmland protection plans in many North Carolina counties to the development of the state’s Conservation Planning Tool, citizens and government agencies now have better resources than ever before for evaluating and coordinating conservation efforts.

However, due to recent reductions in state funding, key conservation needs remain unmet.

- North Carolina has met only one of the goals for conservation recommended in Land for Tomorrow’s 2005 report, *Saving the Goodliest Land* – the goal for preservation of working forests. In all other areas, North Carolina either fell short of achieving the goals, or its achievement of the goals could not be documented. (See Table 1, back page.)
- The pace of land conservation in North Carolina has slowed dramatically in recent years, largely due to cutbacks in funding of the state’s four conservation trust funds, as well as other land acquisition efforts. Between 2005 and 2008, an average of 75,160 acres of land was

FIGURE 1. *Land Conservation in North Carolina by Year*

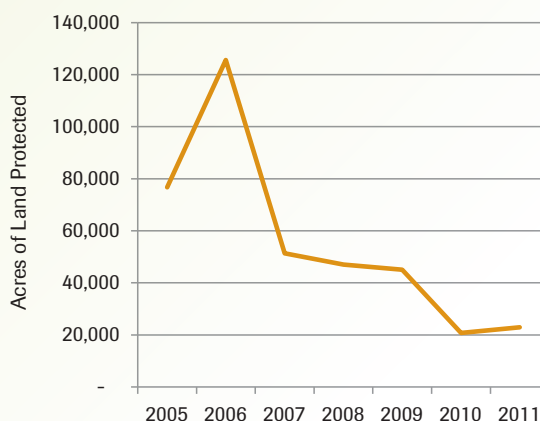


FIGURE 2. *Conservation Trust Fund Grants, 2007 & 2011*

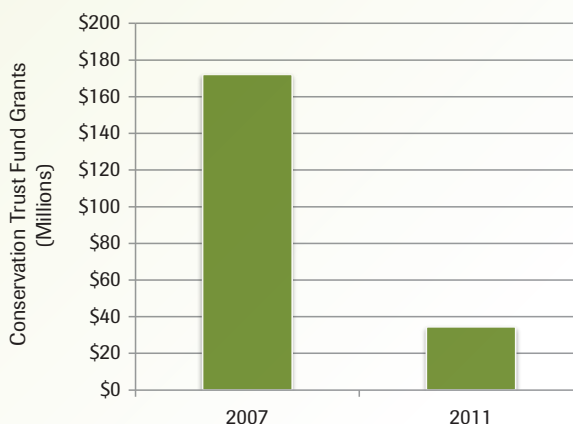


FIGURE 3. *Gap between Funding Requests and Grants Issued by North Carolina Conservation Trust Funds (2011)*



protected in North Carolina per year. Between 2009 and 2011, an average of only 29,582 acres of land per year was protected. (See Figure 1.)

- Between 2007 and 2011, the amount of money granted by the state's conservation trust funds for all purposes declined by 80 percent, from \$172.1 million to \$34.5 million. (See Figure 2.)
- In 2007, the state's four conservation trust funds were able to fund nearly half of the requests they received. By 2011 they were able to fund less than one-sixth of funding requests, even as reduced land prices provided a unique opportunity to secure conservation land at low cost. (See Figure 3.)

North Carolina must reinvigorate its commitment to protecting places that matter. Land for Tomorrow recommends that the state work to achieve the following five-year conservation goals.

- **Rivers, wetlands and other critical source waters** – North Carolina should seek to ensure permanent protection for natural buffers that protect water quality in rivers and streams, while also protecting existing wetlands, headwaters of ecologically important rivers and streams, and lands in water supply areas. Over the next five years, North Carolina should seek to protect buffers along an additional five percent (1,750 miles) of the state's rivers and streams, while protecting 200,000 acres of wetlands and watershed lands.
- **Working farms** – North Carolina should protect existing farmland and return idled farmland to production, helping to satisfy the growing demand for healthy, locally-grown food and maintain the strength of the state's agricultural economy. Over the next five years, the state should protect 50,000 additional acres of agricultural land through long-term easements and land donations, while continuing to encourage farmers to participate in Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts and other programs to keep working farms active.
- **Working forests** – North Carolina should protect existing forested land within the state's designated Forest Legacy Areas, those forest areas in the state that have been identified as most ecologically valuable and threatened by development. The state should act to protect 25,000 additional acres of forested land in Forest Legacy Areas through the use of conservation easements and other tools.
- **Local parks, trails and greenways** – North Carolina should expand its local parks, trails and greenways to continue to provide recreational opportunities for our growing population, acquiring and developing 14,000 acres of local parks over the next five years. The state of North Carolina should support local governments in achieving this goal through grants from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and assistance to local governments in implementing their parks and recreation plans.
- **State parks and trails** – North Carolina should expand state parks to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for our growing population and enrich the state park experience by protecting new types of land that are underrepresented in the system. North Carolina should plan on adding 40,000 acres of state park land in the next five years, while making progress toward completion of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail and other key state trails.
- **Game lands and other natural areas** – North Carolina should protect lands that serve important natural functions and are home to our most special plant and animal species while providing new places for North Carolinians to fish, hunt and enjoy the outdoors. North Carolina should add 50,000 acres of new state game lands and other natural areas in the next five years.
- **Land visible from scenic highways** – North Carolina should continue to preserve scenic land and properties with other conservation value that are visible from the Blue Ridge Parkway and North Carolina Scenic Byways. Over the next five years, the state should seek to protect an additional 20,000 acres of land along the Blue Ridge Parkway and Scenic Byways.

These goals could be achieved with the investment of approximately \$812 million by the state over the next five years, which will leverage millions of additional dollars from federal, local and private sources.

By reinvesting in land conservation and taking other steps to protect the state's most vulnerable and valuable natural lands and working landscapes, North Carolina can help ensure a prosperous future and high quality of life for all North Carolinians.

TABLE 1. Evaluation of 2005 Five-Year Goals and 2012-2017 Conservation Goals

Type of Land	Previous Five-Year Goal	Achieved, 2005-11	Five-Year Goal, 2012-17	Investment Proposed (in millions)
Rivers, Wetlands and Other Critical Source Waters	6,000 miles of stream banks and floodplains	1,733 stream-miles of buffers protected through the Clean Water Management Trust Fund	1,750 stream-miles of buffers/greenways, amid 200,000 acres of protected wetlands and watershed land	\$269.3
Working Farms	50,000 acres of productive farmland	36,800 acres of farmland protected	50,000 acres of productive farmland	\$51.4
Working Forests	25,000 acres within Forest Legacy Areas	114,000 acres protected within Forest Legacy Areas	25,000 additional acres within Forest Legacy Areas	\$50.0
Local Parks and Trails	34,000 acres and needed trail and park facilities	4,115 acres protected through the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund	14,000 acres	\$120.9
State Parks and Trails	60,000 acres and needed trail and park facilities	33,300 acres of new state parks	40,000 acres, plus completion of 700 miles of the 1,000-mile Mountains-to-Sea Trail	\$177.0
Game Lands and Other Natural Areas	150,000 acres	118,900 acres of Game Lands and lands in the Natural Heritage Program and Plant Conservation Program	50,000 acres	\$93.6
Land Visible from Scenic Highways	50,000 acres along the Blue Ridge Parkway and other scenic highways.	13,584 acres of land near the Blue Ridge Parkway	20,000 acres along the Blue Ridge Parkway and state Scenic Byways	\$50.0
Total				\$812.2



Land for Tomorrow is a coalition of conservation, agriculture, wildlife and hunting/fishing groups, business organizations, local governments, and other concerned citizens. Its goal is to mobilize the conservation community to protect funding for the state's four conservation trust funds – the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF), the Natural Heritage Trust Fund (NHTF), the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) and the Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFPTF). Funding for these trusts is controlled by the North Carolina General Assembly.

To obtain a copy of *Securing North Carolina's Future*, or for more information about Land for Tomorrow, please visit www.landfortomorrow.org.