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**For Immediate Release**

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**Land for Tomorrow Releases New Poll:  
Three Out of Four Voters Support Conservation Funding**

Despite declining state revenues, three out of four North Carolina voters believe that land and water conservation funding should be included in next year's state budget, with 66 percent supporting an appropriation of \$95 million or more, according to a statewide poll released today by Land for Tomorrow.

"This poll makes it clear that North Carolinians believe the Legislature should fund programs that conserve land, safeguard water quality, and preserve farmland," said Reid Wilson, Executive Director of the Conservation Trust for North Carolina and a member of the Land for Tomorrow steering committee.

"The results of this survey reflect the strong value that North Carolinians attach to land and water conservation," said David Metz, the pollster who conducted the survey. "Voters believe these investments are critically important, even in tough economic times."

Other highlights of the poll included:

- 64 percent of those polled support funding for farmland preservation
- The levels of support cut across party, ethnic, gender and rural/urban lines.
- Eighty percent of Democrats, 70 percent of Republicans, and 70 percent of independent voters support conservation funding.

Wilson noted that, because of the state's budget shortfall, conservation has taken several big hits in recent months:

- In February, the governor transferred \$100 million from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund to the General Fund, leaving 156 previously approved projects in 71 counties in limbo. That includes \$27.7 million in projects where local land trusts already bought property or have legal obligations such as signed contracts or options with landowners.
- Earlier this month, the governor transferred \$6 million from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and \$2.8 million from the Natural Heritage Trust Fund to the General Fund.
- Last year, the General Assembly authorized the sale of \$50 million in bonds to be split between the Natural Heritage and Parks and Recreation trust funds for approved conservation projects. Only \$10 million of the bonds have been issued, and the recently passed Senate budget removes the authority for the sale of the remaining \$40 million.
- Revenues to those two trust funds are down by more than 30 percent because of the economic downturn.

- The Senate's proposed tax rewrite eliminates the Conservation Tax Credit, which gives private landowners a tax credit for donating voluntary land protection agreements that restrict development on their property in the future.

The Governor's proposed budget for 2009-10 includes \$75 million for the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. The Senate's proposed budget includes \$95 million. Neither budget includes funding for the Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, which received \$4 million in the current budget. The House has not yet presented its budget.

The state has four publicly funded conservation trust funds – Clean Water Management, Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation, Natural Heritage, and Parks and Recreation. The first two are funded by appropriations from the General Assembly. The others are funded through a share of the deed excise stamp tax and bonds.

"North Carolinians recognize that conservation funding is vital to our health and quality of life, and to getting our economy back on track," said Wilson. "Agriculture, forestry, tourism and outdoor recreation businesses all depend upon healthy natural areas that land and water conservation provides."

The poll was conducted April 19, 20 and 21 by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates, surveying 600 registered voters. It has a margin of error of four percent. The poll was distributed today (April 29) during Land for Tomorrow's Lobby Day at the Legislature.

#### **ABOUT LAND FOR TOMORROW**

Land for Tomorrow is a partnership of 200 conservation, business and agriculture groups and local governments committed to preserving and protecting North Carolina's land and water. Its goal is to increase public awareness for the need to protect additional lands that are critical to the economic well-being and quality of life in North Carolina. Land for Tomorrow seeks to help the state reach its declared goal of conserving one million acres, and ensure that critical land will be available to provide clean air and drinking water, strengthen our communities, promote job growth and enhance the quality of life for generations to come. For additional information about Land for Tomorrow, visit [www.landfortomorrow.org](http://www.landfortomorrow.org).

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