



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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STATE, LAND TRUSTS ANNOUNCE NEW CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Statewide Network To Seek Highest Quality Natural Resource Lands

RALEIGH – The state of North Carolina and a network of local, regional and statewide conservation organizations will combine efforts in a new public-private partnership to promote and enhance land conservation and water-quality protection across the state.

Under a three-year agreement announced today by state Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Bill Ross, the state has contracted with the Conservation Trust for North Carolina to coordinate accelerated land-preservation efforts in the state. The pact capitalizes on the expertise of 22 N.C.-based local and regional land trusts, other conservation organizations and local governments to identify the highest-quality sites for preservation, and to work with private landowners to protect streams and wetlands threatened by development.

“This contract represents an historic step for the conservation of North Carolina’s green lands and blue waters,” Ross said. “It memorializes an innovative partnership that will enable the growing expertise of local land trusts and their broad knowledge of the natural resources in their regions to be used to maximum advantage in the state’s conservation efforts. The brightest economic future belongs to the states that maintain a high quality of place and a high quality of life. This agreement will serve that goal for all North Carolinians.”

The new Ecosystem Enhancement Program (EEP) will manage the project for the state. EEP is an initiative that combines existing efforts in DENR and the state Department of Transportation (DOT) to compensate for the unavoidable impacts of highway construction on streams and wetlands. Funding for the initiative will originate from existing dollars allocated to the state for mitigating such impacts. EEP also will leverage other funding sources for the initiative.

“Partnerships such as this one are vital to receiving the best results for North Carolina,” said DOT Secretary Lyndo Tippet. “The more efficiently that we can conserve quality lands in the state, the better we can move critically important transportation construction that will contribute to our economic well-being.”

“The state, through this agreement to assist in its efforts to mitigate unavoidable damage to streams and wetlands, will gain the expertise, innovation and local knowledge of preservation opportunities that the state’s land trusts bring to the table,” said Reid Wilson, Conservation Trust executive director. “The initiative represents a unique public-private collaboration that will capitalize on the desire of landowners to protect the state’s resources for future generations.”

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The initiative addresses the environmental and economic effects of lost open space in the state. More than 150,000 acres of open space are disappearing each year in North Carolina, affecting quality of life, air and water quality, and the vitality of three of the state's two largest economic engines, agriculture, tourism and military bases.

Under the plan, EEP will identify regions where anticipated environmental impacts will occur, as well as associated conservation needs in various regions of the state. The Conservation Trust will coordinate with local land trusts to identify privately held sites across the state that might be protected voluntarily from future development. The land trusts will receive compensation on a performance basis for screening sites, securing options on EEP-approved tracts, finalizing transactions and monitoring properties into the future.

Landowners willing to participate in the initiative can sell their property outright to the state or enter into a conservation easement, a legal agreement that allows the landowner to maintain ownership and gain tax benefits while requiring property owners to give up rights to subdivide or develop the land.

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