

Michael F. Easley
Governor



State of North Carolina
Office of the Governor

For Release: **IMMEDIATE**
Date: April 30, 2004

Contact: Samantha Slapnik
Phone: 919/733-5612

GOV. EASLEY ANNOUNCES CONSERVATION PARTNER OF THE YEAR AWARDS
N.C. Departments of Environment and Natural Resources and Transportation Recognized

RALEIGH - Gov. Mike Easley today announced that the N.C. Land Trust Council, a coalition of 23 local and regional land trusts across the state, awarded Government Conservation Partner of the Year awards this week to the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the N.C. Department of Transportation.

The annual awards acknowledge the partnership between government and local and regional land trusts to protect land and water resources in the state. The departments received recognition for their role in creating the N.C. Ecosystem Enhancement Program (EEP), an initiative that supports both the vitality of natural resources and responsible growth.

“North Carolinians can be proud of the innovation and determination exhibited by these agencies in creating a national model for proactively protecting our state’s resources,” Easley said. “This initiative is breaking new ground in restoring, enhancing and protecting our environmental treasures while maintaining our quality of life, continuing our economic growth and ensuring the health and well-being of our citizens.”

EEP is designed to help offset unavoidable environmental impacts associated with transportation construction and economic development. North Carolina committed its resources in July 2003 to create the initiative, which differs from similar programs in other states in that funding is dedicated to environmental protection before impacts occur. EEP also works to provide high-quality, cost-effective projects for watershed improvement and protection.

In October 2003, EEP entered into an innovative agreement with the Conservation Trust of North Carolina to coordinate accelerated land preservation efforts in the state. The agreement capitalizes on the expertise of 22 North Carolina-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.

(MORE)

Governor's Press Office
State Capitol, Raleigh, NC 27603-8001
(919) 733-5612 - Toll Free 1-800-662-7005
FAX (919) 733-5166

EEP's preservation partnerships to date have helped to protect 17,125 acres of high-quality sites, including 69 miles of streams; another 4,575 acres of wetlands are currently under option or awaiting final acquisition, with an additional 38 miles of streams. The EEP also partners with more than 20 private biological-engineering and mitigation-banking companies on wetlands-restoration and enhancement programs across the state.

Awards also went to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which joined with the state in sponsoring the agreement that established EEP's operational procedures.

###