

CHAPTER 8: COORDINATING LAND USE AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Motivation for the implementation of this plan is a shared desire to retain the natural resources that are essential to the quality of life in North Carolina. Measurable success for the conservation planning can be completed in the short-term through creative and collaborative strategies.

Land costs are skyrocketing across the state. With the increase in population comes an increase in the demand and competition for land and water resources. Collaborative planning and the creation of working partnerships help stretch resources, reduce duplicative work and leverage monies toward common goals. Local, regional and statewide strategies can help this process and give focus to the funds available.

Four major trust funds leverage local, state and federal monies for resource conservation. Each are fiscally limited yet are faced with almost unlimited opportunities to fund great projects. Within North Carolina they are: the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the Agriculture and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. The NHTF is currently providing financial support for the planning process. The Conservation Planning Tool is used for land acquisition and other conservation project planning and decision-making by the N.C. Natural Heritage Trust Fund, and the Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Fund. The CPT is also used by local land trusts and state agencies (including N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C. State Parks, and the N.C. Ecosystem Enhancement Program.

There are many examples of successful North Carolina partnerships that have collaboratively planned and implemented projects to conserve land and other natural resources . Here are a few examples:

STATEWIDE

- **The Conservation Trust for North Carolina**
The Conservation Trust for North Carolina is a non-profit conservation organization that works with governments, agencies, local land trusts and other conservation groups to save the places you love in North Carolina. CTNC provides aid and services to the state's 24 local land trusts, and works directly with willing landowners to protect their property, mainly along the Blue Ridge Parkway. NOTE: Each of the local land trusts can be located through this main Web site. <http://www.ctnc.org/>
- **Green Growth Toolbox**
The Green Growth Toolbox is a technical assistance tool designed to provide communities, local governments, land use planners, planning boards and developers with data and recommendations for conservation of priority wildlife

habitats that can be used in local land use planning, land use policy-making and development design. The Green Growth Toolbox includes a handbook, GIS dataset, and website, and local governments who want to use the Green Growth Toolbox can sign up for daylong training workshops. The Green Growth Toolbox project includes data from the One NC Naturally Conservation Planning Tool, and is a cooperative, non-regulatory effort led by the Wildlife Diversity Program of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

<http://www.ncwildlife.org/Conserving/Programs/GreenGrowthToolbox.aspx>

- The **Mountains-to-Sea Trail of North Carolina** is a 935+ mile trail of footpaths, roads and state bike routes. This trail started in 1973 when the North Carolina General Assembly passed the North Carolina Trails System Act. The State Trails Program within the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation plans and coordinates the development of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail. The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail is a non-profit organization designed to make the vision of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail a reality, through completion and long-term stewardship of a 1,000 mile trail spanning North Carolina's diverse cultural and natural features from Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park on the Atlantic coast.

<http://www.ncmst.org/>

COASTAL REGION

- **Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership**
The Albemarle-Pamlico watershed extends from the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, across the North Carolina Piedmont and the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain to the wind- and wave-swept shores of the Outer Banks and the nearshore Atlantic Ocean. The coastal Albemarle-Pamlico Region includes more than 9,299 miles of freshwater rivers and streams and 1.8 million acres of brackish estuarine waters. It encompasses the second largest estuarine system in the country and five major river basins. The ecological importance of the region has been recognized nationally through the establishment of 10 National Wildlife Refuges, the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program.

The mission of the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP) is to identify, protect, and restore the significant resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system. APNEP pursues this mission with guidance and support from its overarching Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), advisory bodies and regional partners.

APNEP is a cooperative effort jointly sponsored by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, with financial support provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The program area extends across most of the

Albemarle-Pamlico watershed, including the Neuse, Tar-Pamlico, Roanoke, Chowan, lower Roanoke, and parts of the White Oak River basins.

As sanctioned in N.C. Governor's Executive Order #133, APNEP staff is advised by a Policy Board, a Science and Technical Advisory Committee, and an Implementation Committee. www.apnep.org

- **Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaboration**

Southeastern North Carolina and northeastern South Carolina stretch across the lower Coastal Plain and are strongly influenced by the geologic region known as the "Cape Fear Arch." The Cape Fear Arch is an area slightly uplifted relative to the rest of the coastal plain, even standing as a peninsula at certain times when the rest of the coastal plain was submerged. The Cape Fear Arch is a region of particularly high biological diversity, with habitats that support significant, and often endemic, animal and plant communities. Rapid population growth is fueling urbanization, changing the area's rural character, and threatening its natural resources. Collaborative partners -- including private conservation organizations, state and federal resource agencies, and local governments -- still see a window of opportunity to plan properly for the anticipated population growth in a way that will allow for economic development while protecting the resources that make this area so special.

The mission of the Cape Fear Arch is: *Develop and implement a community conservation vision to build awareness, protection and stewardship of the region's important natural resources.*

The first goal of the collaborative is "to identify and map the highest priority habitats and species in need of conservation attention in the region." Communication and coordinated effort among the partners will be made to establish a network of conservation lands and waterways, and to promote the establishment of landscape corridors and buffers, between and adjacent to existing conservation lands to protect and enhance long-term wildlife population viability and genetic exchange and to ensure land management flexibility. To achieve their goals, the Cape Fear Arch will provide a communicative forum to identify opportunities for collaborative action among the participants. www.capefeararch.org/

Onslow Bight Conservation Forum is a regional consortium of nonprofit conservation organizations, state and federal resource agencies, and two military installations. Coastal North Carolina's Onslow Bight stretches from Cape Lookout to Cape Fear. A rich mosaic of saltwater marshes, wetlands, longleaf pine savannahs and other coastal ecosystems, it supports several rare and endangered plant and animal species, including the Red-cockaded woodpecker. The region is developing rapidly and beginning to lose its rural character and ecological integrity. The Onslow Bight Conservation Forum was jointly initiated by The Nature Conservancy and Camp Lejeune in response to encroachment

issues at the military installation. Most of the partners own land in the region. Partners represent a broad spectrum of land managers and conservation advocates who are working to identify areas that should remain natural, develop political support for land acquisition, and work toward acquiring these lands.

The overarching goal of the forum is to address the growing population and development pressures that threaten the rural character and natural habitats of the Onslow Bight landscape. The forum was modeled on the Sandhills Conservation Partnership, which similarly includes a military agency facing encroachment issues while at the same time managing for endangered species. Since 2001, the forum has provided a place for communication and encouraged collaboration where organizational missions overlap.

The mission of the Onslow Bight Forum is: *To provide for open discussion among the participants concerning the long-term conservation and enhancement of biological diversity and ecosystem sustainability throughout the Onslow Bight Landscape compatible with the land use, conservation and management objectives of the participating organizations and agencies.*

As part of its strategy to better coordinate efforts in biodiversity conservation, the forum partners have developed a preliminary conservation plan for regional terrestrial ecosystems, and are working on a complementary plan for conservation of estuarine and marine ecosystems. The forum has been successful in conserving some key lands that provide habitat for a range of native wildlife and plant species. They have done this where the goals of the individual partners have overlapped, and they have been able to pool resources.

Key partners include The Nature Conservancy North Carolina Chapter, N.C. Coastal Federation, N.C. Coastal Land Trust, Endangered Species Coalition, Wildlife Resources Commission, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service Raleigh, and USDA Forest Service Region 8.

www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/northcarolina/placesweprotect/onslow-bight.xml

- **Strategic Lands Inventory - SERPASS**

The Southeast Region Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) focuses on sustaining natural, environmental, economic, cultural and national defense resources in the southeastern region. The partners include North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Military Services. Non-governmental organizations and other federal agencies are also involved in specific project implementation. SERPPAS focuses on regional sustainability and protection of ecosystems.

To accomplish this, members have identified a number of projects to address the following key areas/issues:

- Building working relationships between communities and the military to address conservation, economic and sustainability issues
- Promoting conservation of military, agricultural and forestry lands
- Mapping marine/coastal areas of interest and identifying potential stakeholders
- Maintaining working lands
- Promoting land use that is both compatible with and complementary to military requirements
- Preserving the longleaf pine ecosystem and habitats to protect species such as the red-cockaded woodpecker and gopher tortoise

In conjunction with the regional initiative, North Carolina has developed supporting initiatives that supports both the region and the state's One NC Naturally Conservation Planning Tool. North Carolina is endeavoring to ensure that environmental, natural, economic, cultural and national defense resources are sustained through:

- Sustainability of resources that support future state requirements.
- Better cooperation in addressing decisions that result in mutual accomplishments.
- Cooperative planning and leveraging of resources to produce regional benefits.
- Integrated research and mapping of the appropriate county areas leading to the use of common data and information.
- Utilization of common data and information to support a more effective decision- and policy- making program.

To those ends, the initiative will focus on eastern North Carolina and eventually include 42 counties. Specifically, a Strategic Lands inventory will use a developed GIS decision tool to visualize state, local and military mission "footprints" and requirements. The footprints represent four major sectors and will be represented by multiple data layers to include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Military/National Defense: installations, ranges, airspace, compatible use
- Economic: Gray Infrastructure (road/rail/port, energy corridors, urban development)
- Environment/Natural Resources: Green Infrastructure (ecological, working landscapes, marine/coastal)
- Social/Cultural: "Triple bottom line"- Social justice, sustainable economic development, environmental stewardship

A Strategic Lands Inventory (SLI) is an integral part of the SERPPAS model, which includes the combining of partner mission requirements (i.e., the "good map") and land suitability mapping. An SLI uses a rule-based, expert-opinion approach to developing to criteria used in a land suitability analyses. Ultimately, the purpose of an SLI is to engage local communities in the creation of regional

models and maps that will be the basis for sustainable land use and related policies.

The strategic lands inventory will be conducted in multiple phases. The first phase will focus on discovery and acquisition of modeling and data sources. The second phase will produce a prototype mapping/decision/planning model, testing and validation of the model, and the development of a decision support framework and initial deployment. Future phases will be a function of the initial deployment and the need to revise the model and/or expand upon its capabilities. <http://serppas.org/projects/ImplementationModels/StrategicLands.aspx>

PIEDMONT REGION

- **Chatham Conservation Partnership**

The Chatham Conservation Partnership (CCP) consists of over 50 organizations and participants, including federal, state, and local government agencies, non-profits, business owners, developers, farmers, and other landowners whose mission is to develop and implement strategies for a community conservation vision that builds awareness, protection, and stewardship of Chatham County's natural resources. The CCP recently developed a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Chatham County that serves as the state's first countywide conservation plan. The conservation plan identifies and describes the county's important natural resources, and recommends strategies to guide the conservation of a sustaining network of natural areas, surface waters, working lands, and wildlife corridors. The plan also serves as an educational tool, guide for development review and future land use decisions, and can support funding for further conservation planning and conservation projects in the county. In addition to the plan documents, GIS data and an online mapping tool are available that allow the production of instructive maps and reports that can be used to evaluate the patterns, trends, and conservation values in Chatham County.

<http://chathamconservation.wikispaces.com/>

- **CONNECT Our Future**

"CONNECT Our Future" is a process in which communities, counties, businesses, educators, non-profits and other organizations work together to grow jobs and the economy, improve quality of life and control the cost of government. This project will create a regional growth framework developed through extensive community engagement and built on what communities identify as existing conditions, future plans and needs, and potential strategies. It is supported by a \$4.9 million HUD Sustainable Communities Grant and \$3 million in local in-kind public and private matching resources. The CONNECT Our Future three-year process will engage public, private and non-profit organizations across the 14-county region (PDF). It is based on, and builds from, the region's CONNECT vision.

CONNECT Our Future is guided by the following core values. These values were generated by extensive community input and adopted by the majority of jurisdictions within the 14-county region.

- A Strong, Diverse Economy...that supports a wide variety of businesses and enterprises
- Sustainable, Well-Managed Growth...that maintains quality of life, protects open space and environmental quality, retains the natural character of the region, and maximizes the efficiency of infrastructure investments
- A Safe and Healthy Environment...with good air and water quality
- Increased Collaboration among Jurisdictions...on issues that transcend boundaries, including growth management, transportation, and environmental concerns, in a manner that recognizes both regional and local needs
- Enhanced Social Equity...through community leadership and cooperative volunteerism
- High Quality Educational Opportunities...that are available to all residents

<http://www.connectourfuture.org/>

- **Greater Uwharries Conservation Partnership**

GUCP is currently comprised of thirteen partner organizations, including the N.C. Zoo, Land Trust for Central North Carolina, Piedmont Land Conservancy, North Carolina Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Yadkin-Pee Dee Lakes Project, N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, N.C. Plant Conservation Program, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, N.C. Environmental Defense and U.S. Forest Service.

Partners are working toward conservation in the Greater Uwharries region -- a region of high biological diversity that supports nationally significant occurrences of plant and animal communities. This region has been identified in North Carolina's Wildlife Action Plan, the Nature Conservancy's Piedmont Ecoregional Plan and One North Carolina Naturally as one of the highest priority areas for conservation efforts in the Piedmont. In addition, the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership has identified the free-flowing Pee Dee as one of the four highest priority watersheds for aquatic wildlife conservation throughout the entire southeast.

The mission of the Greater Uwharries Conservation Partnership is: *To work for the long-term conservation and enhancement of biological diversity and ecosystem sustainability throughout the Greater Uwharries landscape compatible with the land use, conservation and management objectives of the participating organizations and agencies.*

In addition to carrying forward their individual missions of conservation, the partners are at present collaborating on a conservation plan, including map, for natural ecosystems in the Greater Uwharries.

<http://centralparknc.org/component/content/article/45/98-conservation.html>

- **Sandhills Conservation Partnership**

The mission of the North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership is to *coordinate the development and implementation of conservation strategies for the red-cockaded woodpecker, other native biota, longleaf pine and other ecosystems in the Sandhills of North Carolina compatible with the land use objective of the partners.*

The NCSCP was formed in 2000 with the specific intent to facilitate collaboration between various federal, state and non-profit conservation groups for the purpose of conserving the vanishing longleaf pine ecosystem and recovering the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker in the North Carolina Sandhills. The current Steering Committee members represent the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army at Fort Bragg, U.S. Army Environmental Command, North Carolina Office of Conservation, Planning, and Community Affairs, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation, North Carolina Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Sandhills Area Land Trust and the Sandhills Ecological Institute.

The NCSCP continues to seek input from over 18 stakeholder organizations as it continues to develop a landscape-level strategic conservation plan for the Sandhills. County and municipal viewpoints about conservation issues have been provided through the Fort Bragg/Pope AFB Regional Land Use Commission. This group was revitalized for the sole purpose of providing community based input into the partnership's planning process. <http://www.ncscp.org/>

- **The Upper Neuse Clean Water Initiative**

Land trusts work with landowners, state and local governments, and other conservation organizations to protect drinking water sources across North Carolina. In the Piedmont, one of the most effective efforts is the Upper Neuse Clean Water Initiative (UNCWI). CTNC coordinates this partnership of seven nonprofit organizations and local governments that seeks to protect the lands most critical for ensuring the long-term health of drinking water supplies in the Upper Neuse River Basin. The 770-square-mile Upper Neuse basin contains nine public drinking water reservoirs that together serve more than 600,000 people in Wake, Durham, Orange, Granville, Franklin, and Person counties.

In 2006, the UNCWI partners created a sophisticated conservation plan that targets the most important tracts of land to conserve in order to protect water quality. Since then (as of April, 2012), the land trusts have protected 63 properties that include 63 miles of stream banks on 6,170 acres. Another 12 properties with 24 miles of stream banks on 2,210 acres are in the works.

Generous financial support from local and state government agencies has been critical to this success. In particular, the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the City of Raleigh, Durham County and City, and Orange County have contributed substantial resources to protect high priority lands. UNCWI partners worked closely with Raleigh and Durham to help establish “watershed protection fees,” small monthly allocations (averaging only 40 cents a month per household in Raleigh) based on water use, to fund purchases of properties and conservation easements. These dedicated revenue sources ensure that there will be significant funding available in the future for protecting land to safeguard water quality. In addition, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and the Natural Resources Conservation Service provided UNCWI with a generous grant as part of its Healthy Watersheds through Healthy Forests Initiative. The grant enables the land trusts to work with forest landowners to place conservation easements on their properties and/or implement forest stewardship plans.

<http://www.ctnc.org/land-trusts/statewide-land-protection-programs/upper-neuse-clean-water-initiative/>

- **Wake County's Open Space Program**

Wake County's Open Space Program, the first of its kind in North Carolina, is working in partnership with local non-governmental organizations, municipalities and state/federal agencies to protect remaining open space in the county. The program's overarching objective is to protect 30% of Wake County's land area (or roughly 165,000 acres) as permanent open space. The Open Space Program protects land as open space in two primary ways: Wake County purchases parcels of land and conservation easements in targeted conservation areas. Wake County awards matching funds to partnering organizations so they can purchase land and conservation easements.

<http://www.wakegov.com/parks/openspace/Pages/default.aspx>

- The **Piedmont Triad Regional Council** promotes cooperation and collaboration among its local government members by coordinating planning activities among local, regional, state, and federal agencies. For more than four decades, the Regional Council planning staff has played an active role in leading and convening regional planning projects and programs. Piedmont Together also includes the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART), this 12-county regional plan has three primary focus areas: the economy, the environment and communities. When complete in 2014, the regional plan will provide tools and strategies to communities across the region that will help the Triad continue into the future as a prosperous, beautiful and friendly place. This project is made possible through the generous support of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Sustainable Communities.

<http://www.ptrc.org/index.aspx?page=115>

- **Carolina Thread Trail**

Catawba Lands Conservancy, lead agency for the Carolina Thread Trail, and The Trust for Public Land have partnered to spearhead planning and implementation of the Carolina Thread Trail. The Carolina Thread Trail will be a regional trail network that will eventually reach 15 counties (Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cherokee, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, Union, counties in North Carolina; Chester, Lancaster, York counties in South Carolina) and more than 2 million people. While not every local trail will be part of the Carolina Thread Trail system, it will link the regionally significant trails and many regional attractions. <http://www.carolinathreadtrail.org/>

MOUNTAIN REGION

- **The Western North Carolina Vitality Index**

The Mountain Resources Commission released the Western North Carolina Vitality Index in 2012, created in partnership with the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and the U.S. Forest Service Southern Research Station. The project utilized the expertise of public and private sector representatives and university faculty, including the staff of the Renaissance Computing Institute (RENCI) at the University of North Carolina-Asheville.

The Western North Carolina Vitality Index reports on the 27 counties of Western North Carolina through the perspectives of the region's natural, social, built and economic environments. The index was designed to assist local governments, interest groups and the public in furtherance of the Mountain Resources Commission's overall mission to "take care of our natural resources to enhance and sustain quality of life and ensure the long term health of our region and our people."

The index can be used by local government officials, interest groups and the public to:

- Preserve the heritage and culture that defines western North Carolina communities while strengthening public health.
- Improve the region's local economic activity and expand its influence.
- Promote development that accommodates healthy growth.
- Protect the region's unique natural resources.
- Compare western North Carolina to the rest of the state and the nation.
- The Western North Carolina Vitality Index serves as a free online resource, providing the 183-page report for download, a directory of data searchable by category and a GIS viewer for integrating multiple data sets.

<http://www.wncvitalityindex.org/>

- **Blue Ridge Forever:**

Blue Ridge Forever is a campaign led by 13 land conservation organizations to engage the public and raise financial resources to safeguard land and water in the southern Blue Ridge mountains for present and future generations. Blue

Ridge Forever has a five-year goal to protect 50,000 acres in Western North Carolina. Our region-wide Conservation Vision guides us in connecting protected lands on a landscape scale with attention to places containing important wildlife habitat, water quality, cultural and economic significance, and scenic value.

<http://www.blueridgeforever.info/>