

**Importance of Land & Water Conservation to North Carolina's  
Economy and Future  
Remarks to the Land and Water Conservation Study Commission  
by Kipling Godwin, Chair, Columbus County Board of  
Commissioners  
Wednesday, October 11, 2006**

Thank you. Senator Albertson, Representative Allen, Members of the Study Commission, Members of the Staff and Guests.

I am Kip Godwin, Chairman of the Columbus County Board of Commissioners, and I am here today to speak briefly about the importance of land and water conservation and the task your Commission has undertaken.

Lots of important things happened during the 2006 session of the General Assembly that will positively affect the future of North Carolina. But, I believe none will be more important than the work and focus of the Land and Water Conversation Study Commission.

**Why is the work of this Study Commission so important?** North Carolina is growing at an unprecedented rate. Our population increased by 21% between 1990 and 2000 and we expect that growth to continue (and even accelerate) for the next several years. By 2030, we expect a full 50% increase in our State's population. This ever-increasing population growth along with expanding residential and commercial development puts our land and water resources under intense pressure.

As our State changes and grows, our land and water conservation efforts must also change and expand in order to meet the challenges of this century. Adequate conservation of land and water will require a renewed effort and commitment from our state leaders, conservation and recreation organizations, the private sector and citizens.

Last month, I attended the Rural Center's Rural Partners Forum, where North Carolina Farm Bureau President Larry Wooten spoke of the major factors affecting our state's agricultural sector. The number one issue is our state's growth. "We are losing farmland at faster than the national rate . . . our farmlands are disappearing at a rate of two areas per minute. In 2004 alone, North Carolina lost almost 4,000 farms." As one who grew up on a family farm, and spend a large part of my career encouraging the youth in the Future Farmers of America, to "believe in the future of agriculture," these are alarming statistics!

The window of opportunity for the conservation of our natural resources is quickly closing. The state's population is rapidly expanding, land fragmentation is increasing, and water resources are already stretched to the limits in many areas (including right here in the Triangle).

We often (short sightedly) look at the upfront investment costs of these efforts. But, I want to encourage the Commission to consider the long-term cost of our failure to conserve these resources. I contend that the loss or decline of these resources will have a much greater negative impact on the state's economy than is readily apparent. Inaction will have a negative impact on local economic development from the loss of hunting, fishing and other recreational tourism; it will lead to increased state and federal regulations; it will increase costs to businesses and industries; and it will impact the cost of public services including municipal water supply and treatment. Furthermore, the cost of acquiring land to serve the public's interests will only increase over time.

We are, and rightly should be, proud of the important work already being done in the area of land and water conservation in North Carolina. Many other states look to us as a leader in this area. The Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, Natural Heritage Trust Fund and Parks and Recreation Trust Fund have made tremendous strides in addressing the conservation, recreation and historic needs of North Carolina with the limited financial resources

available to them. These efforts are grossly under funded. One of the most important tasks of this Commission is to generate funding strategies for these efforts that will substantially improve the success of these groups' efforts. We have the mechanisms in place to accomplish the task – what we lack is adequate funding.

That's why the statewide, collaborative efforts of Land for Tomorrow are so important. They have offered a solution to the need for additional funding for the existing efforts of these organization and have put forth what I believe are some pretty exciting proposals for expanding the economic impact and opportunities of land and water conservation efforts.

The cost of building new parks, managing sensitive plant and wildlife areas, preserving significant historic sites, and saving our farmland does not get less expensive over time. In fact, if we do not adequately fund these land and water conversation efforts now, not only will they be more cost prohibitive in the future, many of these important places will be lost forever. That is not a chance we can take.

**Why is the work of this Study Commission so important?** Because it deals with our state's future. It is an issue of what kind of North Carolina we want for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I have complete confidence that the Commission will make wise and far-reaching recommendations that future generations will look back on and say, "**thank you.**"