



LAND *for* TOMORROW

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Contact: Kate Dixon

(919) 489-8129 (work)

(919) 698-9024 (cell)

SHORTFALL FOR N.C. LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION REACHES \$335 MILLION IN 2006

Group plans to bring urgency for more funding to the legislature

Raleigh, N.C. – North Carolina’s efforts to protect critical natural resources are struggling, with requests to the state’s land and water conservation trust funds exceeding available funding by \$335 million in 2006, according to the annual *Green Book* report released today by Land for Tomorrow.

“Our swift population growth and the development of natural and farm lands have created an urgent need to protect areas important for clean water, our economy and quality of life,” said Kate Dixon, executive director of Land for Tomorrow. “Rapid development coupled with skyrocketing land prices are making it impossible for the state’s natural resource trust funds to keep up with demands from local governments and nonprofit conservation groups.”

Land for Tomorrow, a diverse partnership of conservationists, farmers, businesses, health professionals and community groups, is asking the General Assembly to approve \$200 million per year for five years for the trust funds. The *Green Book* report details projects the trust funds supported in 2006. Last year, the land and water conservation trusts received nearly 500 applications from local governments, state agencies and conservation nonprofits totaling \$540 million, but were able to provide funding of only \$205 million.

Overall, 290 projects were funded last year. Since 1987, the trust funds have made 1,845 grants to fund projects in every county in the state.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the General Assembly created the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF), Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, Natural Heritage Trust Fund, and Parks and Recreation Trust Fund to support diverse environmental improvement projects. Funding for the trust funds comes through a combination of appropriations, personalized license plate sales and portions of the deed transfer tax.

Just last year, North Carolina pushed past New Jersey to become the tenth most populous state. More than 100,000 acres of forests, farms, stream banks, wildlife habitats and wetlands are being developed each year. North Carolina leads the country in the loss of family farms, and more than 3,300 miles of streams do not meet clean water standards.

Some of the highlights of the 2006 conservation projects were:

- **Walnut Creek** flows under and along every major highway in Cary and south Raleigh on its way to the Neuse River. As the land around it has been built upon, the creek has become more polluted and has flooded homes and businesses with increasing frequency. With CWMTF grant funding, matched by \$1.2 million in City of Raleigh bonds, work is underway to restore 59 acres of wetlands and develop a city park with trails and an educational center about wetlands. In time, this park will be linked through

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greenway trails to neighborhoods all over the city, helping to enhance Raleigh's quality of life, health and economic vitality.

- In 2005, **International Paper Company** made the unexpected and unprecedented announcement that it planned to sell 6.8 million acres in the United States, including 631,000 acres in North Carolina – approximately 2 percent of the total land area in our state. The N.C. Nature Conservancy worked with state agencies to identify the most ecologically significant portions of the land, and then purchased 76,000 critical acres. Much of this land will go into public ownership as state game land, parks and historic sites. In 2006, the CWMTF awarded grants totaling \$16,286,000, and the Natural Heritage Trust Fund awarded \$4,664,000 to help cover the \$80 million purchase price.

The land conserved is along the Chowan, Roanoke and Tar Rivers in northeastern North Carolina and along Juniper Creek in the state's far southeastern tip. Former timber lands are rich with natural treasures, from swamp forests and estuaries to longleaf savannas and alluvial plains. The state's investment will safeguard these lands for years to come, protecting wildlife and the drinking water downstream.

- In Mitchell and McDowell counties, the **Blue Ridge Parkway** intersects with the historic Overmountain Victory Trail, used by militiamen to reach the battle of King's Mountain during the Revolutionary War. The CWMTF has committed \$936,000, and the Natural Heritage Trust Fund has pledged \$1,133,950, matched by over \$1,100,000 from private donations toward a conservation easement that will protect forever an extraordinary 1,680-acre tract that includes 1.6 miles of the trail, nearly seven miles of dramatic forested mountain vistas and seven miles of pristine streams.
- A \$289,000 grant from the CWMTF will be combined with local and federal funds to extend by almost four miles Fayetteville's **Cape Fear River Trail**, a popular trail that more than 300 people walk and bike every day. This expansion will also protect the area's drinking water.
- With two grants totaling \$390,000 from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, Brunswick County will provide canoe access to **Town Creek** off of US-17 and trails and picnic areas on a new 900-acre nature preserve, donated by the N.C. Coastal Land Trust.
- The **Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund** provided five grants that leveraged another \$3.4 million through matching funds and donations. Funded projects include an Alamance County farmland protection plan, planning for agricultural districts in Johnston and Haywood counties, and grants for the transaction costs of conservation easements.

A copy of this year's *Green Book* can be viewed by visiting www.landfortomorrow.org/page229.html.

ABOUT LAND FOR TOMORROW

Land for Tomorrow is a commitment to preserve and protect North Carolina's water, land and historic places. The goal is to increase public awareness for the need to protect additional land and historic places that are critical to the economic well-being and quality of life in North Carolina. Through public education, Land for Tomorrow wants to help the state reach its declared goal of conserving a 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.

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