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## **Our View: Legislators should let voters decide on funding preservation effort.**

Back in May, the future looked sunny for a high-powered coalition called Land for Tomorrow.

Headed by former N.C. governors Jim Martin, Jim Holshouser and Jim Hunt, the group was pushing a \$1 billion bond issue that would preserve rivers, wetlands and coastal waters, save working farms and forests, create new parks and trails and preserve historic sites.

The preservation effort is essential, and it needs to begin soon. As the state's population blossoms — it's expected to grow 50 percent by 2030 — many natural treasures are threatened by development. If we don't preserve them now, we'll begin losing them. That's not just a matter of aesthetics — tourists pump nearly \$15 billion a year into the state's economy to enjoy our land and its history. We've got an investment to protect.

Today, the land initiative is stalled in the General Assembly, as the governor and legislative leaders resist adding the additional bonding to the state's debt. While we usually salute governmental frugality, we can't support this attempt at it — if we don't pay now, it will cost us a great deal more in the future.

Nobody's making land anymore, but we are using it up, building on it and paving it over, at an accelerating pace. If we don't begin an equally accelerated effort to save our special places, we will lose them, and ultimately lose the economic benefit that they generate.

This bonding package belongs on the November ballot. If the voters decide on frugality too, so be it. But the General Assembly and governor should give them the option.

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