Strategic Conservation Planning by Land Trusts:  
*Protecting Freshwater Resources in the Southeast US*  
2005–2010

Introduction

Water is the essence of life. The work of land conservation organizations, which we generically refer to as “land trusts,” is intrinsically intertwined with the twin goals of land and water resource protection. Conservation of land is inseparable from protection of water resources. Successful efforts to conserve land will protect the water resources associated with that land. A tract of land will almost always contain riparian zones along streams, some portion of the watershed, often bodies of water, associated wetland soils and vegetation, and wildlife habitats dependent on those water resources. A valid water protection strategy also cannot be independent from land conservation.

Land trusts actively working to conserve and protect natural places and community green spaces are additionally serving to safeguard and restore water resources. The protection of land equates to protection of water.

The Land Trust Alliance – nationally and in the southeastern United States – promotes the work of land trusts to increase the pace, quality, and permanence of their conservation programs. We advocate collaborative partnerships among land conservation and water protection efforts.

So as to encourage more land trusts to engage in collaborative efforts and strategic conservation planning to protect land and water resources, we have sponsored this compilation of eight case studies. These examples of southeastern U.S. land trusts may serve as models of collaborative partnerships with other organizations to integrate land conservation goals focused on protection of critical stream corridors, watersheds, water supplies, and other water resources.

Over the past five years, the Southeast regional program of the Land Trust Alliance has allocated over $65,000 from its funding from the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation to provide cost-share grants to selected land trusts for “demonstration projects” in strategic conservation planning and collaborative efforts to protect freshwater resources as essential components of their land conservation programs. Beyond many of the projects presented in this collection of case studies, we have also awarded demonstration grants to:

- the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust for development of a Kentucky Aquatics Resources Fund, with initial focus on the Upper Cumberland River, to protect sub-basin and riparian habitats for endangered and threatened aquatic species, and to implement watershed plans with KY Waterways Alliance guidance;
- the Land Trust for Tennessee to establish partnerships and preliminary plans for protection of crucial land and water resources in the Red River basin;
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- The Foothills Land Conservancy of east Tennessee to work in partnership with the Little River Watershed Association and establish a protection plan for key parcels in the watershed along the western border of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and to develop educational materials for landowners;

- the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plan Land Trust to work collaboratively with five local watershed protection groups (additional to the project described in the following case studies) to design and advance “blueways” protection strategies, educate landowners in best management practices in sensitive waterways and wetlands, develop education materials for recreational users and local communities, and implement stream bank restoration; and

- the Oconee River Land Trust in Georgia to design and implement a strategic conservation plan in collaboration with the Upper Oconee Watershed Network that prioritizes and maps areas for protection in the watershed, develop public educational materials about riparian buffer protection and conservation easements, and initiates a landowner contact and education project.

Many other land trusts engage in protection of important streams, estuaries, watersheds, drinking water bodies and aquifers, and water-based habitats. Readers should understand that the following case examples are a small selection from the wider range of experience and accomplishments among the land conservancies operating in the southeastern region of the United States. Notably, most of the land trusts in North Carolina have focused on water resource protection for at least the past dozen years, often receiving financial assistance for protection of watersheds, streams and rivers, and riparian corridors from grants awarded by the State’s Clean Water Management Trust Fund and from stream restoration and wetland mitigation funds.

Our own partnerships in this effort have been with the Southeast Watershed Forum and with the River Network. Individual land trusts can turn to these two organizations for technical assistance and help in forging partnerships with water protection focused groups. Both organizations offer information and instructional resources. We advise land trusts to consult the websites: www.southeastwaterforum.org and www.rivernetwork.org.

With endorsement from the Land Trust Alliance, the Southeast Watershed Forum established a “Community Resource Mapper” online resource now available for use region-wide (see www.watershed-assistance.net). This resource is intended to help land trusts, in partnerships with other watershed protection organizations and public agencies, to initiate or refine strategic conservation planning for purposes of defining critical resource areas and their land protection priorities and agendas. The tool is intended to identify areas for acquisition that
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possess high conservation values (habitat, water quality and supply, riparian buffers, wetlands, etc) and to look for new partners in local collaboration. The “Mapper” is intended to measure the increase or decrease of land protection efforts over time and identify possible gaps where important areas have been missed.

A land trust can access assistance in designing and implementing land and water protection projects from state, regional, and federal government agencies focused on water and land resource protection (inclusive among federal agencies the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration, and other units of the Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture).

The Land Trust Alliance has organized and hosted “watershed resource protection forums” at each of its annual regional conferences for land trusts in the southeastern U.S., in partnership with the Southeast Watershed Forum, the River Network, and the strategic conservation planning program of The Conservation Fund.

It is our hope that this collection of case studies will serve to inspire other land and water conservation organizations to undertake similar collaborative efforts throughout the region. Other land trusts engaged in combined land and water protection projects may use this collection of case study examples to show their allies and prospective supporters that their activities are in common with the work of others. The impressive results of these demonstration projects should serve to enlist greater support for the work of land trusts and their water protection partners from public agencies, private foundations, and other investors and allies.

Acknowledgement and Appreciation: We thank and commend the eight land trusts featured in this report and are grateful to the staff of those land trusts for furnishing information for their case studies. We thank Anne Murphy (now on the staff of the Minnesota Land Trust) for her particularly fine work in compiling, analyzing, editing and designing this report, and we also thank Richard Broadwell (now on the staff of the Conservation Trust for North Carolina) for his assistance in assembling preliminary information about some of the projects. We are grateful to the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Lyndhurst Foundation for financially supporting the preparation of this report.

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April, 2010

By Anne K. Murphy for the Land Trust Alliance

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Getting Started

Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy (CMLC) is an accredited, membership-driven organization that helps landowners protect land and water resources vital to the natural heritage and quality of life of western North Carolina. This mountainous area near the Eastern Continental Divide is relatively rural, although development is threatening the natural and scenic landscape.

Since the early 2000s, CMLC has been engaged in several regional planning efforts to preserve land and high-quality water resources in partnership with communities and other conservation organizations. CMLC, in working with the Upper Broad River Watershed Protection Committee, wanted to develop a parcel-based strategic conservation plan for the Upper Broad River Watershed that would allow them to protect the river’s high water quality, protect the natural and rural character of the land, and establish landscape-level connections between large protected areas in the watershed.

The Upper Broad River watershed is an area of high biological diversity that is threatened by the rapidly urbanizing development of neighboring communities. The majority of land cover in the watershed is forested and the health of the watershed is intricately tied to the health and quality of its forests.

In developing a strategic conservation plan, CMLC wanted to focus on the forested riparian corridor and:

- Document and assess the ecological areas and water quality conditions of the watershed
- Document and assess threat
- Develop a prioritization system for protection and restoration of specific parcels
- Develop conservation strategies
- Develop GIS maps of the project area, prioritized parcels, and water quality information

Funding for the Upper Broad River Riparian Corridor Conservation Plan was provided by the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Overall time frame for developing the plan was approximately one year.
Understanding the Community

The Upper Broad River watershed above Lake Lure is approximately 93 square miles in size and encompasses three drainage areas in the southern Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina. The watershed is predominantly forested with a mix of hardwoods, broadleaf deciduous, and conifers. Overall, the watershed is relatively rural with rapidly growing pockets of residential and commercial development.

Lake Lure is a man-made reservoir surrounded by a developing community. At the terminus of three drainage areas, Lake Lure is susceptible to sedimentation and eutrophication. Protection of the headwaters in the forested areas above Lake Lure is essential to protecting not only the downstream resources but the watershed as a whole. Much of the land in the headwaters region is privately owned. CMLC recognized that an ideal strategy to protecting these headwaters should include:

- Protection of wetlands, floodplains, and steep slopes
- Maintenance of streamside vegetation as riparian buffer
- Reduction of impervious surface
- Limiting erosion during construction and keeping sediment on-site
- Post-development treatment of stormwater runoff
- Inspection, enforcement, and maintenance of stream protection measures

CMLC worked in partnership with the Upper Broad River Watershed Protection Committee to identify threats and opportunities within the watershed. The protection committee offers a unique cost share program to landowners who wish to restore streambanks, install structural BMPs or preserve riparian buffer through conservation easements. This program complements the work of CMLC and creates a holistic approach to water quality protection in the Upper Broad River watershed. Through this partnership, the protection committee and CMLC can coordinate land and water protection and restoration opportunities.

CMLC first gathered valuable information and data from several federal and local initiatives aimed at assessing and protecting water quality resources, such as the North Carolina Division of Water Quality (DWQ) stream classifications which designate certain high quality streams as trout waters. In addition, CMLC gathered data on:

- National Hydrography Dataset (NHD)
- Tax parcel information
- Natural heritage data
- NRCS SSURGO soils (hydric and prime farmland soils)
- Land cover from National Land Cover Data and NC Gap Analysis
- Aerial photography to identify 300ft riparian buffers
Setting Priorities

After CMLC assembled data for the strategic conservation plan, they set about building a GIS model to prioritize parcels within the Upper Broad River watershed. They first eliminated properties that weren’t eligible for consideration, such as already conserved land, on account of the large size of the watershed and the number of parcels within it.

CMLC’s primary focus is on forested buffers in the watershed, so they only included parcels that were intersected by an NHD stream. Next, they used an arbitrary cut-off and eliminated parcels under 20 acres in size. They also wanted to exclude rights-of-way along roads, railroads and utility lines. Finally, they eliminated parcels that are already permanently preserved for conservation management.

From the remaining selection of parcels, CMLC chose to assign larger parcels a greater value than smaller ones based on average parcel size in each of the three drainage areas. Because larger parcels are likely to have more forested buffer area and stream frontage, those parcels greater than the average received a value of “1” while smaller parcels received a “0”. CMLC then measured stream length and ranked parcels that had greater than the average stream length a value of “1”. Streams with two-sided measurements greater than the average length also received a value of “1”.

CMLC took DWQ’s stream classifications and assigned values based on water quality. Streams classified as High Quality Waters received a value of “3”, Class B received a value of “2” and Trout Waters received a value of “1”. In addition, proximity to preserved properties is important for building connectivity. CMLC assigned parcels a value of “1” if they were adjacent to existing conservation management properties.

CMLC also assigned value to properties that contain Natural Heritage Element Occurrence records. Hydric soils were included in the analysis and all parcels with hydric soils were given a value of “1”. Finally, parcels were given a value of “1” if they contained wetlands from the National Wetlands Inventory.

After totaling the scores for each parcel, CMLC chose to rank the parcels as High, Medium, and Low for each of three drainage basins within the Upper Broad River watershed. They then took the rankings and combined them with forest buffer data that and assigned values to protection and restoration potential within 300ft forested buffers. This combination of scores determined the final list of priority parcels for protection or restoration of water quality.

The final list identified 29 parcels as high priority for land protection and 10 sites as high priority for restoration. Both the protection and restoration priorities are scattered throughout the watershed. Because this analysis was parcel based, CMLC has landowner information to begin implementing the plan and contacting landowners.
Implementation

After completing the strategic conservation plan, CMLC has a list of priority parcels for protection and restoration of water quality in the Upper Broad River watershed. Because much of the land in the watershed is privately owned, particularly land in the headwaters region, CMLC has a great opportunity to connect with landowners and discuss options for protection. In the downstream reaches of the watershed where development already has a foothold, CMLC has additional opportunities to work with landowners on protection and restoration.

CMLC plans to measure success of its strategic conservation plan by the number of acres protected and linear feet of stream preserved. CMLC is now beginning to implement the plan and is conducting landowner outreach. They are also pursuing additional sources of funding for the purchase of conservation easements and fee lands.

CMLC is building upon their partnerships with the Upper Broad River Watershed Protection Committee, the DWQ, and the Volunteer Water Information Network to coordinate landowner outreach and improve stream water quality sampling and monitoring efforts. Finally, CMLC is beginning to work with county officials and developers on land planning and development practices.

As new data and information become available, CMLC plans to regularly update the strategic conservation plan and adjust rankings as necessary.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of strategic conservation planning, CMLC realized the importance of setting realistic expectations. They realized that while they can’t protect everything, they can partner with other organizations to offer landowners additional options to preserve and restore their properties. CMLC had another learning moment in realizing the drawbacks of having a third party consultant do modeling and analysis work; without a thorough understanding of the analysis and final ranking of parcels, it’s essential to ground-truth the list of priority parcels and make sure it captures all of the criteria and meets the goals of the strategic conservation plan.

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Map of Top 20 Priority Parcels
Getting Started

Congaree Land Trust (CLT) operates in central South Carolina with a focus on protecting natural and scenic lands through voluntary conservation easements. Located in the heart of the State, this mostly rural area surrounding the City of Columbia has high biological, cultural, and historic values but faces growing development pressures. One of the most outstanding features in this area is the COWASEE Basin, a rich area encompassing 215,000 acres with the Congaree, Wateree, and Santee Rivers.

CLT has been actively working with landowners and protecting land in the basin for years. The threat of development pressure and loss of habitat caused the board and staff of CLT to think more strategically. Recognizing not only the need for a strategic conservation plan in the basin, but also a strategic partnership, CLT embarked on a collaborative effort with private landowners, conservation organizations, land trusts, and government agencies to develop the COWASEE Basin Focus Area in 2005.

This partnership, or collaboration, includes CLT, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR), The Conservation Fund, Friends of Congaree Swamp, Richland County Conservation Commission, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Summit County Soil and Water Conservation District. In addition, private landowners who own land within the basin are considered main partners. This collaboration came together with the common goal of promoting conservation. The partners work with willing landowners using a variety of tools to promote stewardship and conservation, including technical and financial assistance to conservation easements.

The partners recognize that public ownership of all of the important biological, cultural, and historical lands in the basin is not practical; the key to this collaboration is the willingness of private landowners to voluntarily protect land within the basin. Sixty-eight percent of the land in the COWASEE Basin is in private ownership and these landowners have historically been good stewards of the land.

Funding for the COWASEE Basin Collaborative Conservation Plan was provided by various small grants and the Land Trust Alliance, totaling approximately $25,000. Overall time frame for developing the plan was approximately one year, although implementation of the plan is an ongoing process among the partners that continues to this day.
Understanding the Community

The COWASEE Basin stretches 215,000 acres across the midlands of South Carolina and includes the Congaree, Wateree, and Santee Rivers. Within the basin is the 24,000-acre Congaree National Park, which contains the largest old-growth bottomland hardwood forest in the eastern United States. Also within the basin is the upper Santee Swamp, which together with the Congaree National Park have the distinction of being recognized as Globally Important Bird Areas by the National Audubon Society.

The basin is a unique and historically important area of the State. Many diverse habitats, such as bottomland forests, high bluffs above the Congaree and Santee Rivers, oxbow lakes, and beaver ponds make this a significant recreational area, with opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, birdwatching, and boating. The basin is also an important research and management area to improve waterfowl habitat and populations.

Working with the COWASEE Basin collaboration, CLT identified a task force of organizations that first completed an inventory of existing preserved land and resources within the basin. They also chose the boundaries for the focus area using a combination of natural and ecological boundaries with some artificial boundaries, including roads.

Prior to this collaboration, there was no existing conservation plan or a forum for organizations to come together and discuss conservation concerns and opportunities within the basin. Much of the data needed for the development of a strategic conservation plan already existed, but it existed within each organization. Regular meetings of the task force allowed the sharing of these important data, including natural resources and ownership records.

Setting Priorities

Development of the strategic conservation plan was accomplished informally through regular meetings of the task force. Using GIS and the data collected through various organizations, CLT and the task force identified all landowners in the 5-county focus area who owned 50 acres or more with exceptional natural resources. The task force recognized that all the properties within the focus area were important, but those larger properties as well as those with the most ecologically significant values were the highest priority properties for the partners.

Interestingly, these large and ecologically significant properties are distributed fairly evenly throughout the focus area of the basin. Most of the significant ecological resources are tied to the exceptional water resources in the basin, such as the rivers, wetlands, and bottomland forests. The task force meets regularly every two months to discuss properties and opportunities to promote conservation.
Implementation

The strategic conservation plan produced by Congaree Land Trust and the task force is an informal one that changes as properties change and as new information becomes available. CLT felt it was important to have early results from this strategic conservation plan and immediately started working with several landowners to protect key tracts of land in the basin.

With that successful start, they have contacted every single landowner in the focus area who owns 50 acres or more. In addition, they have conducted landowner meetings and educational events in the Congaree and Wateree watersheds and individual counties of the basin. Landowner education is an evolutionary process and CLT is continually looking for new ways and strategies to reach its landowners. They are also at work on a coffee table book for landowners.

CLT measures success of their strategic conservation plan by the number of acres protected. An equally important metric is a well-educated public, including politicians and policy makers. CLT has a large organizational focus on education and outreach. By educating the public about conservation values and need for undeveloped property within the COWASEE Basin, they are able to implement their strategic conservation plan. They also have strong collaboration with their partners that allows them to further advance conservation in the basin.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of strategic conservation planning, CLT realized how little the general public knows about the conservation lands and values in their own backyards, but also how eager the public seems to be in learning more about the COWASEE Basin. CLT also realized that with a strategic conservation plan, there is almost never a finish line; this is a very long-term project in which they have to focus on preserving one property at a time and that is often times can take years of cultivation and education to preserve priority properties.

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Map of COWASEE Basin Focus Area
Getting Started

Conservation Trust for North Carolina (CTNC) is a service provider for the 24 local and regional land trusts in North Carolina. By working with land trusts, landowners, communities, and government agencies, CTNC performs a unique role in facilitating and administrating initiatives and grants and coordinating public awareness.

CTNC is a partner in the Upper Neuse Clean Water Initiative, a collaborative effort of Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association, Eno River Association, Tar River Land Conservancy, Triangle Greenways Councils, Triangle Land Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, and CTNC to protect water and land resources in the Upper Neuse River Basin (“Basin”).

The Basin, located in central North Carolina, provides drinking water to over 535,000 people in six counties and eight municipalities, including Raleigh and Durham, which are two of the fastest growing cities in the State. Drinking water protection in this rapidly urbanizing area has been a primary concern of the public, local governments, land trusts, and watershed associations in the basin.

There is growing awareness among those concerned with the region’s water resources that preserving land is a cost effective way to protect high quality water for use as drinking water. As a result, much was accomplished in recent years, not only through private land conservation, but through regulatory measures such as stream bank buffers.

Conservation Trust for North Carolina

Service Area: State of North Carolina

Characteristics: Diverse mix of urban and rural areas throughout the different mountain, piedmont, forested, agricultural, wetland and coastal waters regions of the State.

Acres Protected: 32,170
48 Conservation Easements
39 Assists and Other Protected Properties

Size of Staff: 12 Full-Time

Year Founded: 1991

Annual Budget: $3,000,000

These efforts at protecting drinking water were effective, but the groups involved felt that more could be done. They wanted to collaborate on a multi-jurisdictional, place-based strategy that would identify the most critical parcels to protect drinking water sources. This strategic conservation plan would bring together community leaders and stakeholders to maximize regional ecological, economic, and recreational benefits while preserving drinking water.

Funding for the Upper Neuse Clean Water Initiative conservation plan was provided by the City of Raleigh. While implementation of the plan will continue for years to come, the overall time frame for developing the plan was approximately one year and was facilitated by the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Triangle J Council of Governments (TJCOG).
Setting Priorities

Development of the strategic conservation plan was first accomplished by forming a stakeholder group in 2005, consisting of landowners, key local governments, land trusts, and watershed associations in the Basin. In addition, a technical advisory team was formed that would identify the Basin’s resources, threats, and develop a methodology for the plan. The plan development involved an iterative process for the stakeholders and technical advisory team to coordinate information and discuss and refine priorities and goals.

The technical advisory team developed a GIS-based prioritization of lands within the basin that use weighted model criteria to identify the highest quality lands for water protection. Using TPL’s Greenprint framework, the team developed the plan based on ten water quality and conservation based criteria: riparian areas; wetland retention; vertical hydraulic conductance; drinking water sources; soil type and erodibility; land use; headwater streams; Aquatic habitat; Terrestrial habitat; Working lands.

The technical advisory team created a Water Quality Protection Scenario for each conservation objective using such criteria as 100ft stream and waterbody buffers, floodplain, wetlands, groundwater wells, erosive soils, and land use. Using these crite-
...Priorities (continued)

The technical advisory team created a Water Quality Protection Scenario for each conservation objective using such criteria as 100ft stream and water buffers, floodplain, wetlands, groundwater wells, erosive soils, and land use. Using these criteria, they identified high quality areas that, if preserved, would help preserve downstream water quality.

With feedback from the stakeholders, the team then took the Water Quality Protection Scenario a step further and developed an “Overall Protection Scenario”. Using criteria such as adjacency to protected land, presence or adjacency to significant natural heritage area or heritage species, parcel size, and length of stream frontage on parcels, the second GIS model identified parcels with the highest water quality and conservation value combined. The Water Quality Protection Scenario is used to identify high priority areas for the protection of water quality, while the Overall Scenario adds traditional land conservation criteria and identifies parcels that also capture land conservation priorities.

Having both scenarios allows the stakeholders to meet their water quality priorities and offers additional guidance for the land trusts specific to their mission and the types of land they preserve. The model identified approximately 24,000 acres under the Water Quality Protection Scenario as high priority for conservation of water quality. This figure represents nearly 5% of the total land in the Upper Neuse River Basin.

Implementation

Within the Upper Neuse River Basin, there are six land trusts, four watershed associations, countless local governments and landowners working together to conserve water quality. When the plan was in development, the stakeholder group met regularly. Now, several years later, the individual organizations and agencies meet less frequently, but are still very active in the Basin. Each organization and agency complements each other in the work that they do to protect water quality.

CTNC tracks the number of acres and linear feet of stream frontage protected in the basin. Since the December of 2005, the stakeholders have protected 4,300 acres and an astonishing 45 miles of streams. In its role as facilitator, CTNC will continue to coordinate and monitor the activity in the Upper Neuse River Basin.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of strategic conservation planning and implementation, the land trusts realized that great leadership can have an incredible impact on the pace of conservation. With the vision of Raleigh’s Mayor Meeker and the support of the City Council, an innovative and cross-jurisdictional plan was created and millions of dollars of land acquisition fund have been provided. Collectively, leadership, a committed stakeholder group, and necessary funding resulted in a strategic plan that benefits all.
Map of Priority Lands for Water Quality Protection

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FRESHWATER LAND TRUST
Community-Based Strategic Conservation Plan

Getting Started

Freshwater Land Trust had its beginnings as a supplemental environmental project for Jefferson County in north-central Alabama after the county was found to be in violation of certain provisions of the Clean Water Act in the mid 1990s. In lieu of $30 million in fines, the county agreed to fund a land acquisition project to protect forested stream buffers. It decided to form a local non-profit to carry out land acquisition and restoration under this supplemental project, and Freshwater Land Trust (FWLT) was born.

FWLT spent their first ten years working on implementing the Jefferson County Greenways Program. Under this program, they acquired streamside land on major waterways for water quality protection and open space. In all, they protected 4,342 acres of land with a value totaling $45.6 million.

Following completion of the Greenways Program, FWLT conducted an organizational assessment and strategic plan while achieving accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance. Out of this planning effort grew a desire to develop a strategic conservation plan that encompassed an area greater than Jefferson County with a focus on water quality protection.

The board of FWLT recognized, through their success with the Greenways Program, the value of water quality protection and a watershed approach to land protection. They also recognized the need to expand their service area beyond Jefferson County in order to fill a larger regional conservation need. They aligned their service area with that of the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham to cover eight counties. FWLT realized that in order to protect water quality, they couldn’t focus only on the major waterways as they did under the Greenways Program; they had to consider headwater streams, springs, wetlands and erosion prone areas. FWLT also opted to include critical habitat, recreation, connections between conservation areas, community-identified priorities, and threat.

Funding for Freshwater Land Trust’s Community-Based Strategic Conservation Plan was provided by the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, Susan Mott Webb Foundation, and the Land Trust Alliance. Overall time frame for developing the plan was approximately one year for Phase I, which produced a coarse screen, or first cut, of priority areas.

Freshwater Land Trust

Service Area: 8 counties in north-central Alabama

Characteristics: Diverse mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout the greater Birmingham area with a focus on open space, urban parks and recreation, forested stream corridors, and water quality protection

Acres Protected:
12 Conservation Easements (1,893 acres)
80 Fee Acquisitions (4,440 acres)
2 Assists (3,708 acres)

Size of Staff: 6 Full-Time

Year Founded: 1997

Annual Budget: $460,000
Understanding the Community

The mission of Freshwater Land Trust is to enhance water quality in streams through land conservation, protect open space for biological conservation and public recreation, and to create connections between existing conservation areas. The board and staff of FWLT wanted to incorporate each of these conservation values into a strategic conservation plan and sought to acquire data that would support these values from local and state partners.

With an expanded service area, FWLT also sought community input. They wanted to develop a strategic conservation plan that would not only serve their interests, but would also be relevant and meaningful to the community. With this in mind, they conducted a series of 22 stakeholder meetings throughout their eight county service area and hired a consultant to facilitate these meetings.

The stakeholders represent a very broad sample of the community, as it included city council and planning departments, county commissioners, county health departments, state and federal agencies, state and federal congressional representatives, colleges and universities, boards of education, environmental advocacy organizations, non-profits, sportsman groups, faith communities, community service organizations, business leaders, and FWLT major corporate and individual donors. The stakeholders were tasked with identifying conservation priorities.

Setting Priorities

Because Freshwater Land Trust covers a large geographic area with broad conservation values, they felt it was necessary to break their strategic conservation planning into two phases: Phase I will identify and rank priority focus areas throughout the entire project area and Phase II will identify and rank priority land parcels for protection within those priority focus areas.

Phase I represents a coarse screen, or first cut, of priority areas. In setting priorities for this phase, FWLT took the conservation values from its mission and translated them into quantifiable, measurable attributes that were analyzed in GIS. These values included:

- Water Quality Protection - using steep slopes above 25% since soil erosion is a major threat to water quality protection
- Biological Conservation - using locations of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (GCN) and designated critical habitat for mussels
- Public Recreation - using Spatially Explicit Regional Growth Model (SERGoM) from Dr. David Theobald of Colorado State University to identify high population density areas because recreational needs are best served in and around heavily populated areas
- Connectivity between Existing Conservation Lands - using inventory of protected lands

Shades Creek Wetland

Lake Cosby Preserve
...Priorities (continued)

- Community Conservation Priorities - using the “places that matter” as identified by stakeholder groups
- Anticipated Land Development - using SERGoM to identify areas with increasing population densities

In Phase I, FWLT chose to use the 12-digit HUC watersheds as the planning unit because these watersheds are specific enough to identify priority focus areas and, importantly, they provide general communication with the public without being too specific. A total of 175 HUC-12 watersheds exist in their eight county service area.

In GIS, watersheds were assigned scores based on each of the above criteria. A watershed received a score of 0-5 based on the presence of each criterion, or conservation value. After scoring all of the watersheds, FWLT designated the top 15 scoring watersheds as Priority 1, the next 19 watersheds as Priority 2, and the next 25 as Priority 3. The purpose of ranking, and limiting the number, of watersheds was to realistically select a number of priority watersheds that FWLT could expect to protect over the next ten years.

Upon closer inspection of the priority areas, FWLT decided, for programmatic reasons, to designate at least one Priority 1 watershed in each county and it re-ranked the highest scoring watershed as Priority 1 in those counties without a Priority 1 watershed.

Implementation

With Phase I now complete, Freshwater Land Trust has identified priority focus areas within each of the eight counties they serve. These broad priority areas have helped them better understand where to focus their efforts for water quality and open space protection, biological conservation, public recreation, and connectivity of conservation lands. In addition, they have community input and buy-in to their strategic conservation plan.

FWLT is now beginning Phase II of its strategic conservation plan to further refine the priority areas by identifying land parcels. Using additional data such as streams, wetlands, springs, roads, utilities, and tax parcels, they will develop a ranked list of priority parcels that will help them best fulfill their mission.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of strategic conservation planning, Freshwater Land Trust realized the value of taking a watershed approach to land protection. Using the 12-digit HUC watersheds as a planning unit allowed them to develop a plan that was specific enough for them to focus their efforts and general enough for the community to grasp. Having stakeholder input was key to developing a strategic conservation plan that was relevant to the community.
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High Country Conservancy
Upper Linville River Riparian Corridor Conservation Plan

Getting Started

High Country Conservancy (HCC) protects the natural resources of northwestern North Carolina’s High Country by conserving land with significant ecological, cultural, recreational, and scenic value. The High Country region, which contains portions of the Blue Ridge Parkway and several Wilderness Areas, has incredible biodiversity and high quality water resources. With rapidly growing development, particularly in the recreation and tourism industries, HCC has to be able to utilize their limited resources in a strategic and focused manner.

The board and staff of HCC chose to develop a strategic conservation plan for the Upper Linville River watershed, a unique area with exceptional natural resources and considerable threat of development. The watershed is situated among some of the highest mountains in the Appalachian range and its waters supply drinking water to much of the growing Piedmont region of North Carolina. A designated natural river, the Linville River connects two important features in the landscape, the Grandfather Mountain International Biosphere Preserve and the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area.

HCC had a growing awareness of the importance of the Upper Linville River watershed from their partnership work with other conservation organizations, including The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, and Avery County Soil and Water District. In developing a strategic conservation plan, HCC wanted to identify and prioritize parcels of land where voluntary land protection would benefit overall stream and watershed health. In addition, they wanted to identify areas appropriate for restoration of wetlands. Their goal was to produce a planning document and tool that focused specifically on the riparian corridor of the Upper Linville River and could be used not only by HCC, but their partners as well.

Funding for the Upper Linville River Riparian Corridor Conservation Plan was provided by the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund through the Conservation Trust for North Carolina. Overall time frame for developing the plan was approximately one year, although implementation of the plan is ongoing.
Understanding the Community

The Upper Linville River Watershed is approximately 44 square miles in size and contains over 86 miles of streams. The Upper Linville is part of the larger Catawba River Basin and is very near the Eastern Continental Divide. Located among some of the highest mountains of the Appalachians, the Upper Linville River watershed has important implications for downstream water resources in the Piedmont region.

The Upper Linville River watershed connects the Grandfather Mountain International Biosphere Preserve to the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area, the nation’s first designated Wilderness Area. Because the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area protects the lower section of the river, HCC wanted to focus their efforts on protecting its upper reaches. They knew that they wanted to focus on the headwaters of the Linville River because headwater regions are fragile and sensitive to the effects of stream degradation. Excessive sedimentation, nutrient loading, and unusually high water temperatures were the largest indicators of poor stream health and water quality in the area.

HCC examined existing land and water plans in northwestern North Carolina, including the Division of Water Quality’s watershed plans. Because the Catawba River plan contained little information on the Linville River, they set about collecting their own data and information. They first gathered significant data on population trends in the watershed, which they felt was essential in explaining the increased development and urbanization of the area. They also collected information on threats to water quality, including point source pollution as measured by the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), highway construction and maintenance projects, and agriculture.

The Upper Linville River watershed is characterized by high elevation slopes, cold trout streams, and rich valley floodplains, and in order to protect these resources, HCC gathered extensive natural resource data. They collected information on soils and slope in and effort to determine erosion prone areas and wetlands. In addition, they studied the dominant natural communities of the watershed, including boulderfield forest, northern hardwood forest, rich cove forest, Canada hemlock forest, swamp forest-bog complex, and sand and mud bar, among others. HCC also acquired the inventories of natural heritage elements and stream classifications. Finally, they gathered data on riparian buffers, which was supported through the use of aerial photography.

It was important for HCC to develop a strategic conservation plan that was parcel based, so they also acquired tax parcel information. Having a parcel-based system would allow them to easily identify landowners and assemble other pertinent contact information.
Setting Priorities

Development of a GIS model allowed HCC to analyze, rank, and prioritize a list of priority parcels that would protect and improve the health of the Upper Linville Riparian watershed and its riparian corridor. They identified the overall criteria as important natural resources, threats to watershed health, and riparian buffers. After all of the data had been collected and field research completed, HCC scored all parcels in the watershed based on presence or absence of criteria. For example, if a parcel had a wetland present on it, it received a value of “1”, while a parcel with no wetlands received a value of “0”.

Because riparian corridors are essential to success of this strategic conservation plan, HCC developed a different scoring system for riparian vegetation with values ranging from “1” to “3.5” and riparian length and width with values ranging from “1” to “3”.

HCC added the cumulative scores together for the parcels and ranked them into three groups: High, Medium, and Low. The results yielded 111 land parcels totaling 6,485 acres. The average parcel size of the priority parcels is 65 acres, with the largest parcel being 655 acres and the smallest one being less than one acre.

These priority parcels represent lands directly adjacent to streams and that have the greatest potential for protecting and improving the health of the Upper Linville River riparian corridor and watershed.

Implementation

With a list of priority parcels, HCC is working with their partners to create a network of interested organizations protecting the Linville River. Partners in implementation include The Nature Conservancy, Avery County Agricultural Extension, Trout Unlimited, and several local landowners. HCC is also trying to create a network of interested landowners to help make inroads with other key landowners in the watershed.

HCC plans to measure success of the strategic conservation plan by the number of protected lands, new contacts, partnerships, and healthy trout populations within the watershed.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of strategic conservation planning, HCC realized the value of the building relationships with landowners through meetings, phone calls, and repeated contact. They are building and cultivating a network of educated landowners to voluntarily protect this important and watershed.
Map of Upper Linville River Priority Parcels

Land parcels adjacent to the Upper Linville River and its main tributaries were prioritized according to criteria indicative of a healthy riparian corridor. These included instances of superior ecological integrity and certain dimensional requirements such as parcel size, riparian width and riparian length.

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Getting Started

The Land Trust for Tennessee (LTTN), an accredited land trust, operates throughout the entire state of Tennessee. Their mission to preserve natural and historic landscapes and sites for future generations has brought them into 47 counties, where they have protected over 50,000 acres in the past ten years.

With a service area covering such a large and diverse area, LTTN has to be strategic and focused in their approach to land protection. In many areas of the state, they have forged lasting public/partner efforts to preserve a combination of public open and recreational spaces as well as private lands. Such partnerships have allowed them to leverage their resources and preserve more land in less time.

Not far outside of the greater Nashville area is an ecologically rich and historically significant region called the Duck River Highlands. Primarily an agrarian community, the Duck River Highlands region has somehow managed to escape the rampant development that has transformed neighboring communities. In 2005, a number of Duck River Highlands farmers and residents contacted LTTN for help in assessing their options for conservation.

LTTN wanted to develop a strategic conservation plan that would, in its first phase, identify and assess the rich ecological historical, and cultural resources that characterize the Duck River Highlands area. In completing this first phase, they would work hand-in-hand with local residents to develop a plan for protecting these important resources. LTTN identified three goals for the strategic conservation plan:

- Identify key natural and man-made resources
- Outline options for preserving these resources
- Establish a framework by which the stakeholders (local residents) could address conservation and development concerns

Funding for the Duck River Highlands Plan was provided by the Tennessee Historic Commission, National Park Service, Tiffany & Company Foundation, and community members through local fundraising initiatives. Overall time frame for developing the plan was approximately fifteen months. A local resident and historian was contracted to do the plan with technical review and management by LTTN.
Understanding the Community

The Duck River Highlands region is approximately 25 square miles in size and includes the watersheds of three tributary streams to the Duck River: Snow Creek, Leipers Creek, and Lick Creek. The Highlands contain exceptional natural, historic, and cultural resources.

Home to historic Williamsport and the Natchez Trace trade route, the Highlands is rich in history and architecture. Water resources abound in the Highlands; the Duck River watershed, which includes all of the Highlands region, is one of the most biologically diverse rivers in the nation. Numerous headwater streams, spring, waterfalls, wetlands, and floodplains are vital to the health of the region.

The first step in developing the strategic conservation plan was to inventory these extensive resources. LTTN first sought to record the historical and cultural resources using state historical survey data form as well as a special survey of barns and agricultural buildings under the Barn Again! Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the American Farmland Trust. Next, LTTN conducted an agricultural survey to document farms over 25 acres in size and included detailed information about ownership, crops, livestock, and conservation practices. Finally, LTTN inventoried the vast natural resources in this largely undeveloped region.

Setting Priorities

Development of the strategic conservation plan was first accomplished by inventorying the extensive historic, cultural, and natural resources of the Duck River Highlands region. LTTN used a survey team to meet with landowners and record important information relating to historic structures and agricultural practices. Not only did this provide them with facts and figures on buildings and use of buffers strips, but it also gave them a valuable history of each property, sometimes dating back several generations. The survey team took photographs of all the resources and collected GPS points of each significant feature.

In documenting the natural resources, the survey team studied the soils and geology of the Highlands area to determine the locations of prime farmland and erosion-prone soils. They also examined the unique geology and limestone caves that are a unique and rare feature of the area. Since water resources play such an important role in the overall health of the Highlands, the survey team studied and documented the Duck River and its tributaries, including Snow Creek, Leipers Creek, and Lick Creek. Each of the tributaries is fed by headwater streams and springs and is surrounded by a number of wetlands and floodplain forests.

LTTN also explored the different habitats and land cover that characterize the Duck River Highlands, such as woodlands, grasslands, and meadows and...
...Priorities (continued)
the many species that live in these habitats. Many rare, threatened, and endangered species such as the birdwing pearly mussel, gray bat, and bald eagle call the Highlands home.

In completing their thorough inventory, LTTN also examined the history and architecture of the region as well as existing parks and recreation, even though very little land in the Highlands is publicly owned.

Following completion of the inventory, LTTN developed several recommendations for their stakeholders, the landowners who own land in the Duck River Highlands. Their recommendations include:

- Establishing a local citizen organization to further facilitate planning efforts,
- Formally designating special resources like Century Farms
- Voluntary conservation programs through NRCS
- Alternatives to conventional development like cluster housing or agricultural zoning
- Open space protection through conservation easements
- Historic site protection

The Duck River Highlands Plan is a thorough inventory that will allow LTTN and their landowners to better assess their conservation options.

Implementation

After completing the first phase of a strategic conservation plan for the Duck River Highlands, LTTN has presented their inventory to the Highlands community and has been working with the landowners who they’ve reached through this effort. They’ve protected six priority properties and are now developing targeted analyses using GIS to further identify priority areas.

LTTN plans to measure success of the plan not only by the number of acres and properties protected, but also by the number of people reached. They have made significant progress with the people of the Highlands and have had key community members join the board of LTTN.

Not only does LTTN have a thorough inventory of the historic, cultural, and natural resources of the Duck River Highlands, but they’ve captured the information in a beautiful book that has become a valuable community resource.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of strategic conservation planning, LTTN was greatly impressed by how willing landowners and the general public were to open up and tell their stories about the Duck River Highlands. They were initially worried about not being accepted by the community, but through this strategic conservation planning effort, they were welcomed and made lasting partnerships.
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Getting Started

The Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain (LTMCP) has a broad mission of preserving open spaces and green places in the unique patchwork of the Mississippi coastal plain. LTMCP is a community land trust in every sense; they were formed by community members in response to growing development pressures and they remain very citizen-focused. They maintain that land conservation is valuable to everyone’s quality of life and have developed lasting partnerships with the communities of southern Mississippi.

In response to unchecked development in the Turkey Creek watershed, a historic area with high conservation value, community leaders approached LTMCP about the benefits and need for a greenway. A coalition was initially formed, but due to the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina, progress was halted. In 2005, LTMCP wanted to build upon the work of the coalition and develop a long-term, strategic conservation plan for the Turkey Creek watershed with an engaged partnership of conservation organizations, state agencies, community leaders, and the general public.

LTMCP and the watershed partnership identified the overall goal of improving water quality in the Turkey Creek watershed by:

- Creating a community greenway
- Identifying and implementing ecological restoration projects
- Creating environmental education opportunities
- Building partnerships for implementing the plan

The purpose of the Watershed Implementation Plan was to develop community citizens groups who would lead in developing partnerships with other agencies and community groups.

Funding for the Turkey Creek Watershed Implementation Plan was provided by an EPA grant with technical assistance from Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Hurricane Katrina extended the overall time frame for developing the plan from two years to two and half years.
Understanding the Community

Turkey Creek flows approximately 13 miles in southeastern Mississippi before its confluence with Bernard Bayou. The watershed drains 11,000 acres and is marked by some of Harrison County’s busiest roads and businesses as well as thousands of acres of wetlands and water resources. Turkey Creek is a popular waterway for recreation and is surrounded by bottomland forests, freshwater marshes, and scrub-shrub habitats with numerous listed plant and animal species.

Turkey Creek is a DEQ impaired waterbody as the result of human activities, including the filling of wetlands, dredging/channelizing of wetlands, timbering within and surrounding wetlands, habitat fragmentation from development, exotic species invasions, direct and indirect chemical contamination, and uninformed zoning ordinances. Within the Turkey Creek watershed is a historic African American community, called the Turkey Creek Community, which was formed by a group of emancipated slaves in 1866. The community is critically threatened by an airport expansion, municipal annexation, commercial sprawl, and wetland destruction. Resulting flood and erosion issues prompted Harrison County Board of Supervisors to contact LTMCP for help.

At the time LTMCP became involved with the watershed, lack of communication between citizens, government officials, and development had created many problems. Because LTMCP had solid partnerships with the communities and organizations in the watershed, they organized three community meetings with the purpose of asking the citizens what they felt was important to protect. The results of these meetings were very positive and helped to strengthen LTMCP’s ties with the community and gather important data.

Setting Priorities

Development of the strategic conservation plan was first accomplished by recognizing effective community leaders and government officials who were interested in developing a watershed partnership within the Turkey Creek community and would work in a non-confrontational manner. LTMCP established a steering committee for the plan, a technical committee, and several community committees that consisted of a steering committee, task force on education, recreation, and public health, and a task force for environmental preservation and watershed planning.

The steering committee first identified goals and concerns to be addressed in developing an implementation plan that would serve as an overall guide for improving water quality in Turkey Creek. They also identified additional partners to complete the steering committee and added the technical commit-
Implementation

LTMCP and the steering committee remain active in implementing the goals determined in the Turkey Creek Watershed Implementation Plan. They have acquired parcels along the identified greenway as well as additional parcels in partnership with the City of Gulfport and various CIAP grants. The technical team has developed and sponsored educational projects in water testing and provided education to the area youth. Additional acquisitions will be acquired through partnerships with MDOT and the Corps of Engineers in 2010.

Success of the plan will be measured by community participation, land acquisitions, and the completion of the protection and restoration goals.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of strategic conservation planning, LTMCP was surprised that they were able to join the community discussions and have a positive impact instead of a rehashing of old political wars. The community commented that this was the first time they were asked what they wanted instead of being told what would happen.

In addition, the devastation from Hurricane Katrina reinforced the need for the plan and restoration but also served to help engage more citizens and communities.
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GETTING STARTED

Mountain Conservation Trust of Georgia (MCTGA), an accredited land trust, permanently preserves the natural resources and scenic beauty of the mountains and foothills of northern Georgia through land protection, collaborative partnerships, and education. Situated at the southern end of the Appalachian mountains, northern Georgia contains exceptional biodiversity and natural resources that are threatened by the growing sprawl of Atlanta and second home developments.

MCTGA originally focused much of their strategic land conservation efforts in Pickens County but quickly saw value in expanding their approach to the surrounding counties. One area in particular held special appeal to them: the Upper Etowah River Basin. The Upper Etowah River Basin covers five counties and 400,000 acres of high quality streams, hardwood forests, floodplains, and wetlands.

Realizing that preserving land strategically in the Upper Etowah River Basin would require substantial resources, MCTGA convened a consortium of conservation partners to assist them. The consortium included MCTGA, Cherokee County Government, Dawson County Government, Forsyth County Government, Gilmer County Government, Pickens County Government, Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, The Nature Conservancy, the Georgia Conservancy, the Mountain Stewards, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Land Conservation Program, Livable Communities Coalition, and the Trust for Public Land.

The Upper Etowah River Basin consortium was formed to identify the route of a regional greenway in the basin with the long-term goal of linking existing conservation areas by protecting adjoining lands along priority streams and rivers. Each of the members signed a memorandum of understanding to guide efforts to creating a regional greenway, or loop plan, pursue grant funding to pay for land purchases and conservation easements, and other steps necessary to protect properties.

Funding for the North Georgia Conservation Loop Plan was provided entirely through MCTGA membership dollars and a settlement case. Overall time frame for developing the plan was approximately one and a half years.
Understanding the Community

The Upper Etowah River Basin encompasses 400,000 acres in five counties near the sprawling city of Atlanta. Because the watershed is in close proximity to this growing metropolitan area, it is facing significant threats in the form of increased stormwater runoff, sedimentation, and chemical contamination of the river and streams. The Etowah River is a high quality water resource with high biodiversity. There are 76 species of native fish, including three listed under the Endangered Species Act.

While there was an existing Habitat Conservation Plan for the Etowah River, there were no master land use or comprehensive plans in the participating counties that MCTGA could incorporate into the loop plan. MCTGA and its partners had to collect and assemble the necessary data for the plan.

They began by building a database of tax parcel information so that they could produce a strategic conservation plan at the parcel level. They then proceeded to build an inventory of existing conservation lands so that they could make connections between these lands. MCTGA also gathered extensive data on the natural resources of the Upper Etowah River Basin.

Together with their partners, MCTGA assembled a large clearinghouse of GIS data that was used to identify the route of a regional greenway through the Upper Etowah River Basin.

Setting Priorities

Development of the strategic conservation plan was accomplished through GIS and overlay analysis. MCTGA had in-house GIS expertise and was able to minimize costs by doing the work themselves. Using GIS and the data they had compiled, they identified the highest quality streams in the basin and mapped these with scenic byways and the inventory of existing conservation lands.

MCTGA produced a series of maps of the priority streams, scenic byways, and existing conservation lands. Using a basic visual analysis, they identified the most logical route for the regional greenway. The greenway is bounded by the Burnt Mountain Preserve in Pickens County where it runs south along Long Swamp Creek to its confluence with the Etowah River in Cherokee County, to the confluence of the Etowah River and Amicalola Creek in Dawson County, north along Amicalola Creek and the Dawson Wildlife Management Area to the proposed Amicalola Scenic Byway, and back north to the Burnt Mountain Preserve. The greenway also identified a northern spur that links the loop to the Cartecay River in Gilmer County.

MCTGA wanted to build public access into the greenway plan and also wanted to identify and establish buffers to the river and its tributaries that are in excess of Georgia mandates. By connecting high quality buffer areas with existing conservation lands, and allowing some public access, MCTGA will protect and improve the Upper Etowah River Basin.
Implementation

Implementation of the North Georgia Conservation Loop Plan is ongoing with MCTGA and its partners. The plan identified approximately 85 properties in each of the five counties of the Upper Etowah River Basin. In an effort to reach priority landowners and raise awareness, MCTGA conducts outreach events in the basin and contacts landowners through phone calls and publications. They also make use of GIS technology and maps to tell the story of the basin. They measure success of the plan by the number of preserved properties and public access opportunities, new members reached, and the overall health of the river basin.

Building upon the success of the regional greenway and the consortium of partners, MCTGA is currently working on a companion plan. The North Georgia Conservation Blueway Trail is a collaborative effort to create a barrier-free canoe route and public access to the waters of northern Georgia. In working with the Upper Etowah River Alliance, the Coosa River Basin Initiative, the Mountain Stewards, Georgia DNR, and city and county officials, MCTGA hopes to expand and improve upon the five existing public access points to the Etowah River and raise awareness about conservation and the unique and diverse riparian corridor of the basin.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of strategic conservation planning, MCTGA realized the value of thinking and acting regionally; they were able to organize a consortium of diverse partners with the common goal of establishing a regional greenway.

MCTGA also recognized the value in having in-house GIS expertise. They were able to offer a service to their partners and in exchange, were invited to the table for planning meetings. Being able to offer a service like GIS opened doors for them and helped strengthen partnerships.

Finally, MCTGA learned that one of their most effective implementation skills is thinking creatively and not taking “no” for an answer.

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Map of North Georgia Conservation Loop
APPENDIX A
Other Strategic Conservation Plans in the Southeast US

1. Central Virginia Land Conservancy (VA)

    *Amherst County Land Prioritization Plan* - This project was initiated by CVLC in order to define and execute a conservation land prioritization process for Amherst County, Virginia, and to produce maps illustrating areas of high and low conservation value. This is the first known attempt to identify and prioritize land within Amherst County based upon its cultural, historic, aesthetic and biological importance to the community.

2. Conservation Trust for Florida (FL)

    *Florida Ecological Greenways Network Plan* - The adoption of new base boundaries of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) in 2004 by the Florida Greenways and Trails Council resulted in additions to the FEGN that were not prioritized since the first delineation of priorities preceded the boundary update. The updated plan delineates priority classes for those additions, simplifies priority classes, and determines whether any changes in priority classes are warranted especially regarding adding new Critical Linkages.

3. Conservation Trust for North Carolina (NC)

    *Blue Ridge Forever* - Blue Ridge Forever is a collaborative partnership of western North Carolina local land trusts and national conservation organizations working in the region. Goals of the partnership are to: 1) raise support nationwide for protection of the Blue Ridge, and 2) work collectively to maximize effectiveness.

4. Freshwater Land Trust (AL)

    *Five Mile Creek Partnership* - The Five Mile Creek Greenway Partnership has worked together since 2002 to develop a series of parks and greenways along the entire 28 miles of Five Mile Creek in a larger effort to improve the creek's water quality and to provide recreational opportunities for area residents. This Partnership has received national press coverage as a great example of regional cooperation and won the Phoenix Award in 2007. The Phoenix Award honors individuals and groups who are working to solve the critical environmental challenge of transforming blighted and contaminated areas back into productive places.

    *Village Creek Partnership* - The purpose of the Village Creek Partnership is to develop a series of parks, greenways and open spaces along the entire stretch of Village Creek with the goal of enhancing water quality and the quality of life for the residents who live along its banks.
APPENDIX A

Other Strategic Conservation Plans in the Southeast US

5. Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain (MS)

   Friends of Red Creek - The purpose of this collaborative partnership is to protect and restore the Red Creek watershed and provide recreational and educational uses for local residents.

   Tchoutacabouffâ Watershed Partnership - The purpose of this collaborative partnership is to protect and restore the Tchoutacabouffâ River watershed and provide recreational and educational uses for local residents and schools.

   West Boley Creek Watershed Partnership - The purpose of this collaborative partnership is to protect and restore West Boley Creek and its watershed and to provide recreational and educational uses for residents and school groups.

   Old Fort Bayou Watershed Partnership - The purpose of this collaborative partnership is to protect and restore Old Fort Bayou watershed and to design and create a blueway for canoeing/kayaking for residents and visitors. The blueway serves a recreational as well as educational purpose.

6. Lowcountry Open Land Trust (SC)

   ACE Basin Task Force - Established in 1999, the ACE Basin was the first Focus Area organized under the Joint Ventures of the North American Waterfowl Act. Cooperative efforts among landowners, public agencies and private conservation organizations have resulted in the protection of 128,300 acres.

7. National Committee for the New River (NC)

   Winkler Creek Riparian Corridor Conservation Design Plan - This project combined Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools and techniques with field surveys to identify and prioritize tax parcels. The GIS system was used to complete the preservation and restoration matrix. High-resolution infrared color photography was used in conjunction with comprehensive field reconnaissance to survey and rank each riparian parcel. Field surveys were conducted to assess riparian corridor quality and integrity. Each category was ranked high, medium, or low using a numerical category in order to rank the parcels.
APPENDIX A

Other Strategic Conservation Plans in the Southeast US

8. New River Land Trust (VA)

New River Valley Land Prioritization Plan - The purpose of this project was to increase the effectiveness of the NRLT’s efforts by identifying high-priority conservation lands and the owners thereof within the New River Valley of Virginia. Using a GIS-based decision support system to prioritize land within the New River Valley, the conservation plan identifies and ranks priority properties.

9. Triangle Land Conservancy (NC)

Marks Creek Rural Lands Initiative - The Neuse River/Marks Creek conservation plan serves as an update to the 2001 conservation assessment prepared by Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC). As a follow up to the assessment, TLC and its partners designated high priority tracts for land protection and restoration. The prioritization focused on areas of mature forests, steam frontage, areas of wetlands and floodplains, and core scenic areas.