

# Orange County Lands Legacy Program

Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks and Recreation

Orange County's ***Lands Legacy Program*** was created by a board of commissioners' resolution on April 4, 2000. The purpose and mission is to work with willing landowners and other partners to protect and conserve the county's most important natural and cultural resource lands before they are damaged or destroyed. The program is administered by the Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks and Recreation (DEAPR).

Through Lands Legacy, the County has completed projects in all seven townships. That success was achieved with the help of many partners, including dozens of landowners interested in conserving their land through the granting of permanent conservation easements. Other key partners included Triangle Land Conservancy, Eno River Association, OWASA, Duke University, and other local governments. The County has also partnered with state and federal agencies that awarded over \$5 million in grants for park acquisition/construction and for conserving farms and open space.

Over the first 17 years of Lands Legacy, Orange County acquired land for eight new parks, preserved all or portions of 20 active farms (1,930 acres), and conserved nearly 1,500 acres of natural open space in the Eno River, Cane Creek, Little River, and New Hope Creek watersheds upstream of public water supply intakes. A list of completed projects is attached.

## ***An evolving focus for the program***

Lands Legacy was established to protect the following types of land:

- Parkland
- Natural areas and wildlife habitat (including prime forests)
- Riparian buffers (especially in public water supply watersheds)
- Prime farmland
- Historic and cultural sites

During the first few years Lands Legacy focused on parkland acquisition, and then shifted its focus to farmland preservation, responding to farmer interests and grants for purchasing conservation easements. More recently, the program has worked to conserve land along rivers and streams—thereby helping to protect our public water supplies and securing areas for low-impact recreation.

## ***The cost of conservation***

Orange County's land conservation over the past 17 years cost the County \$5,195 per acre—much less than 1% of the County's budget over that period. Those funds went toward the direct conservation of 3,401 acres by the County, plus an additional 1,338 acres acquired by the State for Eno River State Park, for the portion of Little River Park located in Durham County, and for other local conservation easement projects.

Over time the price of land has risen



steadily in this region, and after the recent economic slowdown, prices are expected to begin to rise again. Some of the land the County purchased through Lands Legacy is “land banked” for identified future parks. In the meantime, that land is in stewardship, with much of it in use for agricultural production through temporary arrangements with nearby farmers.

### ***Part of a state and regional effort to protect vital resources***

Lands Legacy is part of a statewide effort to identify the most important resource lands and to distinguish them from areas more suitable for future development. Orange County was an active participant in the **Triangle Greenprint** and **One NC Naturally**, and is working with neighboring jurisdictions to extend the **Mountains-to-Sea Trail** through the central Piedmont. Most recently, Orange County is an active partner in the **Eno-New Hope Landscape Conservation** group collaborating to identify high-priority landscape corridors that connect a network of critical wildlife habitats in a four county region.

### ***An award winning program***

Lands Legacy has been recognized for its successful efforts. In 2007 Orange County received the national **Excellence in County Planning Award** from the National Association of County Planners. The program was also twice runner-up for the national **County Leadership in Conservation Award** by the National Association of Counties and Trust for Public Land. In 2003 the Conservation Trust for NC recognized Orange and Durham counties with the **Government Partner Conservation Award** for joint establishment of Little River Regional Park. And in 2007, the NC Soil & Water Conservation Society awarded Orange County the **Local Government Conservationist Award**.

### ***Still important to conserve land?***

Through Lands Legacy, Orange County has made long-term investments in preserving its precious natural and cultural heritage—part of the county’s foundation for maintaining a vibrant quality of life. With the Triangle Region expecting nearly 100,000 new residents by 2020<sup>1</sup>, and two interstate highways running through the county’s midsection, the protection of these assets will reap countless benefits in the future. Those assets include our “green infrastructure”—a web of natural green space, vital for wildlife corridors, recreational trails, and protecting the many rivers and streams that supply our drinking water.



Another critical part of that resource base is the county’s prime farmland, a major part of the local economy. Lands Legacy has responded to the agricultural community’s interest in preserving farmland, and in doing so helped to recapitalize participating farms with an infusion of funds and an opportunity to diversify their products to meet the demands of the strong *local food* movement—all without reducing the local tax base<sup>2</sup>.

Finally, many important historic and archaeological sites, part of our cultural heritage that contributes to tourism, are being lost due to lack of information and adequate safeguards, and over 40 percent of the County’s most important natural heritage areas remain unprotected.

---

<sup>1</sup> NC’s population is expected to increase by nearly 11% reaching a population of nearly 10.6 million (2010-2020). The Triangle region’s population is expected to be 34% of the growth. (Source: UNC Carolina Population Center)

<sup>2</sup> Local property taxes were unaffected because the farms were already enrolled in the present use value program; more than half of the funds used to purchase easements were from state/federal grants and landowner donations.

## Lands Legacy Program: Completed Projects

<b>Project</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>McGowan Creek Preserve</b>	63	2000	Protect public water supply (Upper Eno watershed); low-impact recreation
<b>Little River Regional Park</b>	136*	2000	Low-impact recreation & watershed protection; Joint project with Triangle Land Conservancy, Durham County, and Eno River Association.
<b>Twin Creeks Park (<i>Moniese Nomp</i>) &amp; Educational Campus</b>	193	2001	Future district park; co-located with schools (now includes section of Jones Creek Greenway)
<b>Seven Mile Creek Preserve</b>	134	2001	Protect portions of natural heritage site; nature preserve with low-impact recreation
<b>Walters Farm (I)</b>	71	2001	Agricultural conservation easement. Protects prime farmland, Back Creek watershed and scenic vista
<b>Blackwood Farm parkland</b>	152	2001	Future park with historic farmstead, prime farmland, natural heritage site, historic roadbed, scenic vistas
<b>Shy Conservation Area</b>	45	2002	Conservation easement donation; protects Cane Creek watershed, prime farmland, and natural area
<b>New Hope Preserve</b>	1	2003	Conservation easement for planned trail along New Hope Creek; links to Duke Forest trails.
<b>Walters Farm (II)</b>	223	2003	Agricultural conservation easement in Back Creek watershed
<b>Volpe Conservation Area</b>	24 5	2004 2010	Conservation easement protects land adjacent to Eno River and tributary streams
<b>Starfield Conservation Area</b>	4	2004	Conservation easement donation; protects portion of Currie Hill natural area; public trail corridor
<b>Cedar Grove Park Expansion</b>	12	2004	Expansion of facilities for the Northern Human Services Center and park complex
<b>Lemola Ayrshire Farm</b>	77	2004	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland, Morgan Creek corridor, Pickard Mtn natural area.
<b>Adams Preserve</b>	27	2004	Forested natural area on Bolin Creek; protected in collaboration with Town of Carrboro
<b>Steep Bottom Branch Preserve</b>	65	2004	Natural heritage site protected in partnership with the Triangle Land Conservancy
<b>Ward Farm</b>	112	2004	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland in Back Creek and Upper Eno watersheds.
<b>Millhouse Road Park</b>	67 10	2004 2007	Future park with farmstead and natural heritage area
<b>Lloyd Farm</b>	125	2005	Agricultural and watershed conservation easement; acquired jointly with OWASA
<b>McPherson Farm</b>	47	2005	Agricultural and watershed conservation easement; acquired jointly with OWASA
<b>Lewis' Heartleaf Preserve</b>	10	2005	Protects portion of a natural heritage area with small Population of rare plant endemic to NC and VA
<b>Keith Arboretum &amp; Preserve</b>	45	2006	Conservation easement; protects arboretum and mature forest adjacent to natural heritage site
<b>Fickle Creek Farm</b>	60	2007	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland for local producers in the Cane Creek watershed

\* Little River Regional Park includes another 255 acres located in Durham County

<b>Project</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>Latta Dairy Farm</b>	138	2007	Agricultural conservation easement; protects dairy and prime farmland in the Little River watershed
<b>New Hope Preserve</b>			Acquired for future park with parking, education, nature trails and wildlife habitat along New Hope Creek. Joint project with Durham County, Triangle Land Conservancy, and State of NC.
➤ New Hope Creek Trail	1	2005	
➤ Hollow Rock Access	7	2006	
➤ Penny / Hanging Rock area	22	2006	
➤ Dallas Branch Natural Area	27	2007	
➤ East side of Pickett Road	11	2011	
<b>McKee Farm</b>	92	2007	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland and stream buffers in Cane Creek watershed
<b>Tate Farm</b>	80	2007	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland and stream buffers in Back Creek watershed
<b>Lee Farm</b>	62	2007	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland and stream buffers in Little River watershed
<b>Northeast District Park</b>	143	2007	Future county park on Schley Road.
<b>Breeze Farm</b>	295	2008 2012	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland historic farmstead, streams in Little River watershed
<b>Eno Confluence Natural Area</b>	110	2009	Conservation easement; protects farmland and stream buffers within Eno River Assoc. natural area
<b>Seven Mile Creek Preserve</b>	13	2010	Future public gateway to nature preserve
<b>Covey Creek Conservation Area</b>	8	2010	Conservation easement; protects stream corridor upstream of Little River and natural heritage site
<b>Sykes Dairy Farm</b>	160	2011	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland and stream buffers in Cane Creek watershed
<b>Brooks Farm</b>	114	2012	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland and stream buffers in Upper Eno River watershed
<b>Thompson Farm</b>	40	2012	Conservation easement; protects prime farmland in the Back Creek watershed
<b>Collins Creek Conservation Area</b>	11	2013	Conservation easement protects forested stream corridor (Collins Creek and three feeder streams)
<b>Sevenmile Creek Conservation Area</b>	35	2013	Conservation easement protects mature forest & wildlife habitat adjacent to County nature preserve
<b>Davis Conservation Area</b>	3	2014	Cons. easements protect forested buffer on Haley Crk, upstream E Fork Eno River & Eno confluence
<b>West Ten Soccer Park (addition)</b>	38	2016	Adjacent land acquired for future expansion of Soccer.com Soccer Park
<b>Capt. John S. Pope Farm</b>	73	2016	Ag. conservation easement jointly held with ERA; protects farmland/streams, Upper Eno watershed
<b>Headwaters Nature Preserve</b>	60	2016	Mixed forest with headwaters of Old Field Crk; adj. to Greene Tract owned by OC, Ch Hill, Carrboro
<b>Persimmon Hill Farm</b>	90	2016	Ag. conservation easement; protects farmland and stream buffers in S. Hyco Crk watershed
<b>Lick Creek Conservation Area</b>	30	2017	Conservation easement protects mature forest, wildlife habitat & forested stream buffer
<b>Center Stream Farm Addition</b>	25	2017	Ag. conservation easement protects farmland and forested stream buffer on Center Stream

Orange County contributed funds to the State of North Carolina's purchase of Poplar Ridge (134 ac.) and Eno Wilderness (808 ac.) for additions to Eno River State Park in 2003.

Orange County contributed funds to the Botanical Garden Foundation's purchase of a 6-acre addition to the Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve in 2010.

Orange County contributed \$45,000 to Eno River Association's acquisition of conservation easements from Infinity Farm (61 ac.) and along Buckquarter Creek (41 ac.) in 2013