



# The North Carolina Botanical Garden Foundation Land Trust

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Every day, the United States loses over 4,000 acres of land to development, according to the Land Trust Alliance – 325 per day here in North Carolina. For many people, these sobering statistics are an abstraction. It’s hard to grasp the enormity of the loss or perceive how one person can help make a difference. Supporting groups working to protect conservation lands, including the North Carolina Botanical Garden and North Carolina Botanical Garden Foundation (NCBGF), is one way to start.

The United States has an incredible collection of national parks, monuments, forests, and wildlife refuges; states have their own parks and forests; and the North Carolina Plant Conservation Program holds over 14,000 acres in 25 preserves throughout the state, with more on the way, solely for protecting land that supports the state’s rarest plants. These public lands

are vulnerable, however, because they are ultimately controlled by elected officials and political appointees. Many historical safeguards of our public lands are now in jeopardy due to weakened and reversed protections from oil and gas exploration, mining, and logging.

The vulnerability of public lands means our best hope for conservation may be on private lands. The Nature Conservancy, for example, owns nearly two million acres in the US and holds over three million acres in conservation easements. Other private land trusts around the country hold over 57 million acres for conservation in perpetuity, either through ownership or by holding conservation easements. Within North Carolina, 25 land trusts protect approximately 1.5 million acres, and although small, the North Carolina Botanical Garden Foundation owns

128 acres of conservation land and 199 acres of conservation easements.

The first statement in the 1967 NCBGF Articles of Incorporation is “to receive funds, and to hold lands, regardless of geographic location, for the use of the North Carolina Botanical Garden in carrying out its objectives of conservation, scientific investigation, teaching, public service and public recreation.” In other words, NCBGF’s formative directive was to serve as a land trust.

NCBGF is the third oldest land trust in the state after the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust (founded in 1883) and the Eno River Association (founded in 1966). The “regardless of geographic location” clause in the Articles allowed the Foundation to receive lands anywhere at a time when land trusts were few and far between, and these

**Left: A tree at Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve. Land donations from Duke Power and private citizens helped create the 17-acre preserve in the mid-1980s, along with five acres from conservation easements. The preserve became a State Dedicated Nature Preserve in 2002.**

**Right, Top: The North Carolina Botanical Garden Foundation (NCBGF) held several special events to raise funds to buy Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve.**

**Right, Middle: NCBGF president Anne Lindsey, Charlotte Jones-Roe, and Johnny Randall signed paperwork in 2007 to add six acres, the Joslin Slope, to Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve.**

**Right, Bottom: Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve. Photo by David Blevins**

more distant lands were transferred to an appropriate land trust once they were established.

Today the Laurel Hill and the Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserves (at 99 acres) represent ecologically exceptional lands held by NCBGF for biological diversity protection, and the Morgan Creek Preserve, owned by the Town of Chapel Hill, is the largest conservation easement at 92 acres. And NCBGF is in the process of adding another ecologically exceptional 13-acre parcel, with help from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Orange County, private donations, and the Town of Chapel Hill.

Many states have funding programs for land conservation purchases and tax incentives for conservation easement donations. North Carolina led the way for tax credits back in 1983. Landowners who donated a conservation easement or conservation property to a qualified land trust could claim an income tax credit

(as opposed to a tax deduction) equal to 25 percent of the fair market value, which helped conserve approximately 250,000 acres of natural areas and farms throughout the state.

This enormous land conservation incentive was repealed in 2013 by the North Carolina General Assembly, so landowners can no longer claim this state income tax credit. Movement is afoot by many local land trusts to encourage the state legislature to reinstate this successful program, which provided tremendous public benefits for protecting air and water quality, wildlife habitat, and working farms.

Over 150 years ago, Henry David Thoreau said that “in Wildness is the preservation of the World.” Since Thoreau’s time, wildness in the continental US has been whittled to a near vanishing point. To prevent further decline, we can support our land trusts through donations of funds, land contributions, and by donating conservation easements.

## SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL LAND TRUST

To learn more about how you can support the North Carolina Botanical Garden’s conservation efforts, see the Garden’s website and/or contact Stephen Keith @ 919-962-9458 or [Stephen.Keith@unc.edu](mailto:Stephen.Keith@unc.edu). The North Carolina Botanical Garden manages several conservation and natural area properties, including Battle Park, the Coker Pinetum, Penny’s Bend, the Piedmont Nature Trails, Mason Farm Biological Reserve, and Stillhouse Bottom. To support the immediate conservation needs of the Garden, including land management, restoration, and outright land purchase, you can make a gift designated to the Botanical Garden Conservation fund (525239) or online at <https://give.unc.edu/gift/bot>.

Find your local land trust through the nationwide Land Trust Alliance ([landtrustalliance.org](http://landtrustalliance.org)) or the statewide Conservation Trust for North Carolina ([ctnc.org](http://ctnc.org)). Find information from either site on the tax benefits available for land or conservation easement donations.

## CONSERVATION EASEMENT

A conservation easement is a voluntary and legally binding agreement between a land owner and a land trust that places permanent conservation protection on a parcel of land.

