

## INTRODUCTION

### CHRISTINE OLSENIUS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOUTHEAST WATERSHED FORUM

This special report is designed for all city and county officials, land use planners, state agency staff, developers, land trusts and local river and watershed organizations that care about the quality of life in their community. As local governments look to new development for taxable income, it is equally important that they maintain the local natural resources and quality of life that draws people to their communities. With unprecedented growth pressures throughout the Southeast; our community trees, forests, streams, wetlands, coastal marshes and world-class biodiversity are becoming threatened and endangered. **The challenge for local leaders and land use planners is to shape growth patterns that will maintain the unique resources and quality of life that make the South such a wonderful place to live.**

**This report tries to define the economic value of habitat to better understand the economic impact of its loss.** As many coastal communities found in the last hurricane season, loss of coastal wetlands on natural communities is directly linked with the economic health of our human communities.

Habitat is the place where a plant or animal naturally lives, grows, and reproduces—a location that features the food, water, shelter, and living space necessary for that species to survive. It includes forests, rivers, streams, wetlands, coastal marshes, natural parks and open spaces. As we endanger habitat for other species, we ultimately endanger habitat for humans and the consequences have economic implications.

In the 1990's, the Southeast lost more forests, farms and open space to urban sprawl than any other region of the country. But forests, farms and open space offer real economic benefits. A recent University of Georgia study found that homes within 1500 feet of a natural



*Photo courteous of Jo Hickson,  
the Southeast Watershed Forum*

area park are estimated to sell for \$10,648 more than homes farther away. Small and medium-sized parks in Greenville, South Carolina demonstrate a direct impact of proximity to parks and residential property values. Studies show that open space and urban forests have a direct impact on the sales price of neighboring properties. A study in the Washington, DC and Baltimore area shows that permanently preserved open space increases nearby residential property values three times more than open space that could be developed in the future!

**Other studies have shown direct correlations between habitat and economic value. The Congaree Bottomland Hardwood Swamp in South Carolina removes a quantity of pollutants from the watershed equivalent to a \$5 million treatment plant. Loss of 50 percent of its tree cover over 20-years increased stormwater runoff by 17 percent in Chattanooga, Tennessee, reflecting a \$279 million increase to stormwater treatment costs.**

These are economic connections that all local officials, developers and land use planners should consider as they shape growth and development in their communities over the next decade. Your choices in balancing development and preservation will impact your community's economic viability for decades to come.

## PROLOGUE

### JEAN NELSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LAND TRUST FOR TENNESSEE

I encourage you to read this special report, take its message seriously and use its information to guide your local land use planning efforts. This report is of special interest to the Land Trust for Tennessee because it stresses the importance of preserving land to create more livable communities, something we care deeply about.

The Land Trust for Tennessee is dedicated to preserving the unique character of Tennessee's historic landscapes and sites for future generations. We are part of a national movement of local and regional land trusts which work to save America's land heritage by helping landowners find ways to protect their land. We derive great strength in working with excellent partners such as watershed groups, other land trusts, local governments and state agencies.

**There are nearly 200 land trusts throughout the Southeast. I would urge you to seek them out wherever you are located and include them in your local land use planning efforts.** They are a valuable resource and ally in helping communities achieve their conservation objectives.

**Our region has seen significant growth in recent years, and our communities continue to blossom, bringing new businesses and drawing new residents. But the very reason many people live in Tennessee - its rich history, green rolling hills, scenic landscapes, open farmland and rural back roads - must now actively be preserved or these precious unique characteristics will be lost.**



*Photo courteous of  
The Land Trust  
for Tennessee*

Our land trust works with local organizations and landowners to preserve farms, wildlife and plant habitat, land along creeks and streams and historic areas. The main tool for ensuring preservation is called a conservation easement and it is an alternative to just selling the land for development. A conservation easement allows a willing landowner to keep their land, preserve important assets of the land through customized restrictions on future development and obtain certain tax advantages.

Robert Brandt, a Tennessee writer recently reflected on why he thinks land preservation is so important. "The land forms blend together here. The forested ridges of the Western Highland Rim and the rolling bluegrass of the Central Basin. Two distinct topographical regions, geologists tell us. One starts here and the other ends. But you'd never know it. The mix creates the mosaic of field and forest and hill and valley that make this part of Tennessee like no other place on earth."

That is our goal and our dream, to keep Tennessee like no other place on earth as it continues to grow and develop through the coming years.

