

# Wetlands Protection: *Partnering with Land Trusts*

## South Jersey Land Trust Restores Critical Wetland Habitat

The South Jersey Land Trust received an EPA Five Star Restoration Grant to restore 42 acres of wetland habitat within the Cedar Lake headwaters of the Great Egg Harbor Wild and Scenic River. The project will provide critical nesting and feeding habitat for various species of resident and migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. Project partners include the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and Ducks Unlimited. The land trust is actively promoting watershed protection in the local community through educational programs and by providing volunteer opportunities for residents to monitor the project site. For more information on this or other EPA Five Star Restoration Projects, visit [www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/restore/5star](http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/restore/5star).

*We are prone to speak of the resources of this country as inexhaustible; this is not so. We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received, and each one must do his part if we wish to show that the nation is worthy of its good fortune.*

— President Theodore Roosevelt



## Introduction

**A**s we realize the tremendous ecological and socioeconomic values that wetlands provide, protecting and restoring our nation's wetlands has become a national priority. Wetlands are important in helping control floodwaters, in providing erosion control, and in maintaining water quality. In addition, they provide critical wildlife habitat for numerous species. Wetlands also provide valuable open space for visual and recreational enjoyment.

Approximately 75% of the remaining wetlands in the lower 48 States are privately owned. By conserving and restoring wetlands, landowners act as stewards working to preserve wetland ecosystems for their uses and for the benefit of future generations.

Land trusts can help those private landowners who want to be stewards of the land, who appreciate the value of natural spaces, and who want to leave an enduring legacy.

## What is a Land Trust?

Land trusts are independent, non-profit organizations that work with landowners who are interested in conserving open space. Land trusts often work cooperatively with government agencies by acquiring or managing land and by researching open space needs.

The private land conservation movement in the United States is experiencing a period of tremendous growth. Since 1985, the number of land trusts operating in the United States has more than doubled to over 1,200 organizations, conserving more than 6.2 million hectares.

## How do Land Trusts Operate?

Land trusts can purchase land for permanent protection, accept land donations, or acquire conservation easements, which permanently limit the type and scope of activities that can take place on the land.

Land trusts protect a variety of land types. A recent survey conducted by Land Trust Alliance indicates that wetlands, river corridors, and watersheds are the top three priority areas for land trusts. Land trusts also provide programs in environmental education and participate in land-use planning efforts in their communities.

## TOOL BOX

### *Conservation Easements*

- Conservation easements are voluntary and permanent legal agreements between landowners and land trusts, conservation organizations, or government agencies. Easements protect the conservation values of a parcel of land by limiting its present and future uses. Landowners and land trusts negotiate the easement terms, which are designed to protect the land's conservation value while allowing landowners to retain ownership and use.
- Easements are uniquely flexible tools in that they are designed to reflect landowners' needs and wishes for the land. Landowners retain the right to own and sell the property, but the easement restrictions will always remain with the property, attached to the land.

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE WETLANDS CONSERVANCY

### Protecting Oregon's Wetlands

The Wetlands Conservancy (TWC) is one of Oregon's first land trusts. It was founded in 1981 to conserve, protect, and restore the physical and ecological values of wetlands, other aquatic systems, and related uplands.

The Conservancy accomplishes its mission by accepting donations of conservation easements, land parcels, and conservation funds. TWC manages over 800 acres of wetlands throughout the state.

Through its *Stewardship Program*, the organization provides outreach assistance to citizen groups, private landowners, and watershed councils on wetland conservation and restoration. TWC is also leading the coordination of a new statewide strategy to protect biologically important wetlands.

The "Oregon's Greatest Wetlands" project identifies, maps, and gathers information on the state's critical wetlands. TWC is taking a lead role in promoting and enhancing collaboration and partnerships among other non-profits, community groups, individual landowners, and state and federal agencies.

In 2001, TWC published *Heroic Tales of Wetland Restoration*, which describes 12 rural landowners who changed their farming practices to reclaim wetlands, streams, and rivers. The book describes the vision, passion, and perseverance that were necessary to achieve success. To purchase a copy or learn more about TWC's role in wetland restoration, visit the organization's website at [www.wetlandsconservancy.org](http://www.wetlandsconservancy.org).



Esther Lev, The Wetlands Conservancy

The Wetlands Conservancy manages over 800 acres of Oregon's wetlands.

## SACRAMENTO VALLEY CONSERVANCY

### Protecting Vernal Pools

The Sacramento Valley Conservancy is a private, non-profit land trust founded to preserve the beauty, character, and diversity of the Sacramento Valley landscape. The organization works with citizens, property owners, developers, public agencies, and other non-profit organizations to preserve land for agricultural, natural resource protection, recreation, and wildlife habitat purposes.

In 1998, the organization set its sights on establishing a 3,000-acre vernal pool preserve in south Sacramento County. Vernal pools are unique wetlands that occur on the floor and within the foothills of California's Central Valley. These wetlands support a diversity of specialized plants and animals that occur nowhere else in the world. Unfortunately, they are also one of the most rare and threatened ecosystems in the world.

In 2002, the organization received a low-interest revolving fund loan from the Water Resources Control Board for \$995,000 to purchase 281 acres of vernal pools within the preserve. This purchase brings the total protected land within the Sacramento Prairie Vernal Pool Area to over 2,000 acres. Visit [www.sacramentovalleyconservancy.org](http://www.sacramentovalleyconservancy.org) for more information.

### Why Partner with a Land Trust?

**1 Tax Incentives** — Land trusts' nonprofit status brings a variety of tax benefits. Donations of land, conservation easements, or money may qualify you for income, estate, or gift tax savings. The grantor of a conservation easement may receive a charitable income tax deduction for the value of the easement. For an estate tax, the grant of an easement usually results in a lower property value and, therefore, a lower value for the federal estate tax.

**2 Long-term Stewardship** — Land trusts can act more quickly than public agencies and often can be more flexible and creative. Land trusts that accept a conservation easement also accept the responsibility of monitoring and enforcing the easement terms in perpetuity.

**3 Ensured Protection** — Some wetlands, waters, and adjacent habitats may not fall under the jurisdiction of state and federal environmental statutes. Donating or placing easements on these areas ensures that they will remain protected for the current landowner and for future generations.

EPA 843-F-03-017  
Office of Water

### Resources

Land Trust Alliance .....	<a href="http://www.lta.org">www.lta.org</a>
The Trust for Public Land .....	<a href="http://www.tpl.org">www.tpl.org</a>
The Nature Conservancy .....	<a href="http://www.tnc.org">www.tnc.org</a>
EPA Wetlands Program .....	<a href="http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands">www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands</a>
EPA Five Star Grant Program .....	<a href="http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/restore/5star">www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/restore/5star</a>