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Land trusts weaving greenways network

By [Todd Cohen](#)

CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- Working with communities in 15 counties, a new coalition of land trusts and foundations aims to piece together a 500-mile network of greenway trails its organizers believe will help raise awareness about nature, connect citizens and neighborhoods, promote exercise and recreation, and boost the region's quality of life.

"Our landscapes are being consumed at an alarming rate," says Dave Cable, executive director of the Catawba Lands Conservancy and the new coalition, known as the Carolina Thread Trail. "While we benefit from economic development, it is important to balance that development with thoughtful conservation."

Carolina Thread Trail has kicked off the public phase of a campaign to raise \$40 million in private support, some of which will be used as matching funds to secure state and federal grants.

Overall, including government grants, the pricetag for the project is expected to total \$110 million to \$150 million.

Chaired by Ruth Shaw, retired CEO of Duke Power, the fundraising effort in its quiet phase already has raised \$14.5 million from Duke Energy, the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, The Wachovia Foundation and Foundation for the Carolinas.

The effort also secured startup funding from Foundation for the Carolinas, the Women's Impact Fund and the Miami-based John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which now has given a total of \$450,000.

Greenway trails in the region, which includes counties in North Carolina and in South Carolina, total an estimated 30 to 40 miles but rarely are connected to one another or to other natural areas, says Cable, a former director at Wachovia Trust.

What's more, he says, the region lacks a regional infrastructure for solving problems.

"Greenway trails, for which there is great energy in the area, will benefit greatly from added connectivity," says Cable, who holds undergraduate and graduate degrees, respectively, in environmental science and geology, and in natural resource planning.

Carolina Thread Trail aims to develop the greenway network by inviting local communities to participate, and then giving them tools to design and create their legs of the network.

"We're creating a regional vision by empowering local governments," Cable says.

The coalition, coordinated by the Catawba Lands Conservancy, will award grants for planning, designing, acquiring and constructing greenway corridors.

The coalition already has awarded two pilot grants, one to Gaston County in North Carolina, the other to York County in South Carolina.

Communities will use planning grants to pay for consulting services from The Trust for Public Land in San Francisco, which will work with each community to develop a greenways master plan showing local corridors for the Carolina Thread Trail.

Communities will use design grants to design the local trail at the parcel level, showing its actual location, and will use acquisition grants to buy the easements or land to be conserved along the trail.

In addition to the Charlotte-based Catawba Lands Conservancy, partners who so far have joined the coalition include the Land Trust for Central North Carolina in Salisbury, Foothills Conservancy in Morganton and, in South Carolina, Nation Ford Land Trust in Rock Hill and Katawba Valley Land Trust in Lancaster.

Duke Energy, in addition to contributing cash, also has pledged to contribute land once the participating communities determine the location of their local trails, Cable says.

Participating communities also can use donations to the coalition to secure state and federal grants that require local matching funds, he says.

The idea for Carolina Thread Trail grew out of an initiative known as "Voices and Choices" that was launched in the late 1990s to spur regional problem-solving.

Having helped fund that effort, Foundation for the Carolinas followed up with a study that concluded land conservation would be the most effective focus for environmental grants it makes, a decision that led to its support for the Carolina Thread Trail.

Land conservation, says Cable, "is an important investment for the future to ensure that our natural resources and landscapes are preserved."

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