

## NEWS

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### DRINKING WATER PROTECTED THROUGH UTILITY RATE PROGRAM

#### U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Greenville, SC

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When an entire city relies on drinking water from one reservoir, that resource should be actively protected. An [impact report](#) released today by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment) highlights a creative approach to protection in Raleigh, North Carolina. The report features the Upper Neuse Clean Water Initiative (Initiative), a dynamic partnership between Raleigh Public Utilities, the Conservation Trust for North Carolina (CTNC), and other partners. The program was supported in part by an award from the Endowment and the federal USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Forested areas across the country act as natural filtration systems for community water supplies; forests provide clean drinking water for nearly two-thirds of the American population. With the rapid increase in urbanization in many areas, however, this natural process of purification is being threatened by encroaching development and dwindling forest filters.

Some communities have decided to be proactive about the problem. The City of Raleigh, for example, has placed a high priority on protection of the Upper Neuse Basin, home to the Falls Lake Reservoir. The Reservoir acts as the main water supply for the City, which has a service population of 560,000 people. In recent decades, the Reservoir has faced increasing levels of runoff from development, threatening the quality of Raleigh's water supply. Recognizing that forested watersheds are a natural solution to this threat, the City joined together with various partners to actively protect the Upper Neuse Basin.

The Initiative enforces this protection by conserving land around the basin to act as a natural buffer, preventing harmful containments from entering Falls Lake and keeping encroaching residential and commercial development at bay. Land acquired from private landowners is done so on a voluntary manner – most landowners are excited to place their land in an easement as they see direct monetary and ecological benefits from this form of protection. Funding for land acquisition stems from a utility rate program, which is based on a volumetric charge on water usage per month. The added fee represents a generally-held belief among the local population that watershed protection benefits the community as a whole. The average residential user pays around \$0.57 a month for the program, which generates around \$2.25 million a year devoted to watershed protection.

Since the program's inception, the Initiative has collected over \$15.5 million and enabled the permanent protection of more than 7,600 acres of crucial land—including over 80 miles of streams. The Initiative's strong public support and success in watershed management has positioned Raleigh as a model example for similar projects around the state. Further, the program's success demonstrates how green and grey

infrastructure can be utilized to ensure clean drinking water continually flows into both Falls Lake and Raleigh households.

Watershed protection efforts can be very cost-effective for consumers. New York City's watershed protection efforts in the Catskills contributed to a 10-year extension of the city's filtration avoidance determination, potentially saving up to \$10 billion that would be required for a new treatment facility. An analysis conducted by the Beaver Watershed District of Northwest Arkansas calculated a benefit of \$7.63 for every \$1 spent on protecting existing forest land, an excellent natural filter of pollutants and sediment.

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The **U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities** (the Endowment) is a not-for-profit public charity working collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative, and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation's working forests and forest-reliant communities – [www.usendowment.org](http://www.usendowment.org)