

Trust Adds To Salmon Creek Natural Area

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The property known as the Bal Gra Harbor tract, which includes a half-mile of waterfront with a sandy beach and high bluffs. Photo: Contributed

ELIZABETH CITY – The Coastal Land Trust announced this week it had protected from development almost 300 acres on the Chowan River and turned ownership over to the state.

The property known as the Bal Gra Harbor tract, which includes a half-mile of waterfront with a sandy beach and high bluffs and an interior with mixed pine hardwoods and small ephemeral ponds, was transferred to the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation.

Officials with the land trust said it's the property's location that makes it special.

Immediately to the north of Bal Gra Harbor is a 137-acre tract known locally as the Tall Glass of Water, which Bertie County purchased and intends to use as a public park for recreational purposes and public water access.

Immediately to the south of Bal Gra Harbor is the nearly 1,000-acre tract known as Site X by archaeologists, which the Coastal Land Trust purchased in 2017. This 1,000-acre tract is notable not only for its significant archaeological resources attributable to the pre-colonial period and indicative of settlement by a splinter group of the Roanoke or "Lost" colonists, but also its significant ecological areas, such as cypress gum swamp, hardwood forest, tidal freshwater marsh, and 3.5 miles of frontage along Salmon Creek.

The 2018 transfer of the Site X tract to the state's Division of Parks and Recreation was the first acquisition for the new Salmon Creek State Natural Area. It allowed for the preservation of its significant natural, historical, archaeological, and cultural resources in perpetuity. The Bal Gra Harbor tract will be added to the Salmon Creek State Natural Area.

"We couldn't be more excited about this acquisition, and the prospect of having close to 1,500 contiguous acres set aside for conservation at this very special landscape on the Chowan River," said Lee Leidy, attorney and Northeast Region director of the Coastal Land Trust. "We're especially pleased to be able to partner once again with North Carolina State Parks, adding a strategic tract of land to the Salmon Creek State Natural Area, and with the United States Air Force, providing them a deed of restrictive covenants, which serves to protect the property from development that may compromise critical military training routes overhead."

"Salmon Creek State Natural Area stands out due to its unique archaeological resources, rich cultural history, and pristine ecosystems," said John Fullwood, acting director of N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. "We are grateful that the Coastal Land Trust secured this tract to add to the natural area. We look forward to working with Bertie County as we design complementary plans for our adjoining conservation lands."

The project was made possible through grants from the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Conservation Act program, and funding from the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program through the United States Air Force.

The Coastal Land Trust was founded in 1992 to enrich North Carolina's coastal

communities through conservation of natural areas and working lands, education, and the promotion of good land stewardship. The Coastal Land Trust, a membership organization, has saved 80,000 acres of special places, and has offices in Wilmington, New Bern and Elizabeth City.

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