

CASE STUDY: SANDHILLS FAMILY HERITAGE ASSOCIATION COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING

SUMMARY

CHALLENGES

- Land Loss
- Loss of Cultural Heritage
- Proximity to Ft. Bragg

TOOL

- Community Asset Mapping

RESULTS

- Natural Resource Protection
- Landowner Education
- Community Assets and Goals Identified
- Heritage Preservation
- Sustainable Community Economic Development

LESSONS LEARNED

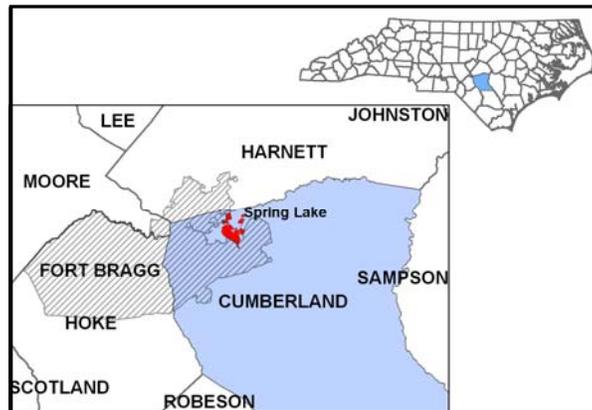
- Involving all Community Members is Key
- Preserving Culture Preserves Land
- Land Trusts Play Unique Role



Project: Sandhills Family Heritage Association

Partners:

- **Local Partners:** Sandhills Family Heritage Association, Bethel A.M.E. Zion Baptist Church, Cumberland County Tourism Authority, Fayetteville Convention and Visitors Bureau, Kingdom CDC, Town of Spring Lake, Williams Chapel, area businesses and churches



- **Regional / Statewide Partners:** NC Agricultural Advancement Consortium, NC Arts Council, NC Community Development Initiative, NCSU Cooperative Extension Service, NC Department of Agriculture, NC Division of Forest Resources, NC Rural Center, Sandhills Area Land Trust
- **Federal:** Fort Bragg Cultural Resources

Location: The Sandhills region, with its longleaf pine/ wiregrass ecosystem has long been recognized by environmental conservationists as one of the most distinctive and endangered ecosystems in the country. The Sandhills comprises seven counties in south central North Carolina, including Fort Bragg military reservation. On the human side of the system, the region is home to a nationally significant aspect of African American culture that has flourished in this landscape.



Community members at SFHA workshop

Challenges:

- **Loss of African American farm- and land-ownership:** While 218,000 African American farmers owned more than 15 million acres in 1910, less than 18,000 farmers owned less than 2 million acres in 1992. Due to agricultural downturns in some cases, land loss among African American families is more often due to racially-discriminatory lending practices, “heir property” or fractionated ownership, or forced partition sales. In the Sandhills, the creation of Fort Bragg military reservation caused the loss of countless acres of African American-owned lands.
- **Proximity of Fort Bragg:** Located in North Carolina’s Sandhills region, Fort Bragg military reservation can bring job creation and other economic benefits to surrounding communities. It also creates need for housing,

services, and the need to limit development in close proximity to the military base.

- **Loss of Cultural Heritage:** The Sandhills region has a strong history of entrepreneurship; businesses included home remedies, community barbershops, eateries. The spirit and lore that connects these ventures with the next generation are in danger of being lost.

Tool: Asset mapping is a strengths-based approach to community development that can be a critical building block for connecting environmental conservation and sustainable economic development in minority, rural and low-wealth communities. Typically, community assessments focus on problems and deficits and try to identify solutions. Asset mapping, on the other hand, inventories a community's natural, cultural, historical, scenic, forestry and agricultural resources. It sets the stage for deliberate planning to: 1) preserve and protect resources, 2) identify assets, and 3) sustainably use the resources for community improvement strategies such as eco-tourism or heritage tourism development as well as local business development and creation of jobs built around the local resource base.



The process is inclusive, interactive and involves a wide range of community members with varying connections to the land and resources.



Local growers and Home Remedies

While the process looks different in every community, asset mapping usually begins with a community map that is divided into areas to be inventoried.

Facilitators or pre-identified leaders help participants pinpoint resources in each segment of the map. A variety of community resources are mapped: a historic school, the local swimming hole, a hunt club, sites where community events take place, etc. Participants identify community resources; these are recorded on the map with a numbered dot; and a corresponding number is recorded on a flip chart with a description of the place, person, or event. Entering this information into a Geographic Information System (GIS) allows for



SFHA members perform for International Travel Writers Association

continual updating and refining. (For information on asset mapping, see <http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/227/227.htm>.)

In the end a productive asset mapping process creates a community-based environmental management plan that develops and sustains natural resources in a way that generates livable wages and jobs and improves the quality of life for everyone in the community. Participants are often surprised to recognize the wealth of assets in their area. The process builds community investment in "place" and can be used effectively by land trusts and communities in identifying shared goals and opportunities.

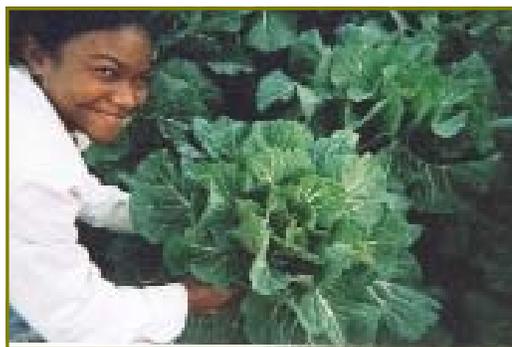
Results:

- **Community Group Organized:** Established in 2001 with the support of The Conservation Fund's Resourceful Communities Program, the Sandhills Family Heritage Association (SFHA) is a community-based nonprofit that provides programs and services to build economic self-sufficiency; to preserve the natural and cultural resources of African American families in NC's Sandhills region; and to continue the traditions that have helped sustain their community and culture for hundreds of years. SFHA is among the first African American organizations to simultaneously undertake land conservation and sustainable community economic development in the country. The group recognizes that the preservation of their culture is inextricably linked to the land.
- **Asset Map Created:** SFHA created an asset map in 2003, focusing on historically African American communities in Harnett and Cumberland Counties. Assets were mapped to: 1) capture and retain community history from 130 elder interviews and story telling; 2) identify significant entrepreneurial /

commercial and social sites and hubs of community activity in the segregated rural south (barber shops, car repair garages, juke joints, baptismal ponds); and 3) research and reconstruct original African American land holdings prior to land loss as cultural connections to the land have sustained their community for generations.

- **Natural Resource Preservation:** SFHA partnered with state and federal forestry agencies to help minority landowners preserve their land and earn income to ensure that it can be maintained and passed forward to future generations. A senior gardening project linked elders and youth to share gardening and agricultural traditions, including medicinal herbs. SFHA produced “Healing from the Land,” a booklet that captures earth-based healing traditions and information about herbs, plants, tree bark, fruit leaves and other natural remedies.

Earlier this spring SFHA opened the community’s first African American farmer and craft market on the site of a civil rights era community center. SFHA conducts regular workshops to educate the community about legal issues related to land retention and management, sustainable and alternative agriculture as well as health and nutrition. Two African American families received assistance in developing forest management / stewardship plans; seven families were involved in the community gardening effort; more than a dozen landowners are growing crops for sale at the farmers market; and hundreds of dollars a week are being generated through sustainable uses of lands.



The Gardening and Gleaning Project connected elders and youth to learn traditional practices.

- **Cultural Heritage Preservation:** SFHA offers tours of significant sites in the community, including a civil rights era community center; a replica of a brush arbor where slaves worshipped prior to formal construction of churches; and a section of the “Old Plank Road” that was the longest in the country at 129 miles and was a major connector for commerce in pre-Civil War North Carolina. These sites have been the basis for family reunion celebration tours of the area that attracted international travel writers (2006) and National Public Radio (2007). Oral histories were combined with old photographs to create the publication, “Preserving Our Family Heritage.” The Sankofa Festival is held annually to celebrate and preserve cultural heritage traditions. The book, tours and festival are sources of earned income.

Lessons Learned:

Preserving culture preserves land. As the availability of large land tracts diminish, land trusts are in a pivotal position to affect conservation and land use strategies. Willingness to explore new approaches like working with small tract minority landowners, public and private partnerships and cross-sector collaborations will be important to conserving open space. Land trusts provide guidance on land conservation strategies, connect communities with conservation professionals and provide important mapping and land use trend tools — information that many communities would not otherwise have.

Participants in the Gardening and Gleaning Project

