

# Regional land trust organized

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Saving wetlands, river valleys, forests and prairie is the goal of a new program to protect important natural areas in and around Calgary from development.

While it's still in its initial stages, organizers of a Calgary-area land trust say they are hoping more ecologically-sensitive land can be spared from the bulldozer as the population of Southern Alberta continues to boom.

"There's a heightened awareness that we're losing our natural and agricultural landscapes and that these landscapes are important from an economic, health and community point of view," said Tracey Tarves, project manager for the Calgary Parks Foundation.

"There's a need to have an organization that will be another tool for landowners to conserve their lands."

After two years of discussion with the City of Calgary, the Municipal District of Rocky View, the M.D. of Foothills and several other non-profit organizations, the parks foundation is co-ordinating the creation of a regional land trust for all three municipalities. Similar to long-established rural land trusts like the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the goal of the trust will be to protect sensitive areas by purchasing them, accepting land donations or having landowners register a conservation easement on their property to prohibit its development in the future.

The idea came out of a 2002 confer-

ence on protecting Calgary's "green infrastructure" for future generations.

"The overwhelming response was (that) there needs to be a vehicle by which land can be donated and/or purchased," Tarves said.

"The parks foundation has been approached on many occasions by landowners who want to donate their land but don't fit into the criteria of existing land trusts."

A public forum on the trust, which has yet to be given a formal name, will be held Feb. 19 at 7 p.m. at the South Calgary Community Centre, 3130 16th St. S.W.

The City of Calgary has a land trust to accept property donated towards low-income housing projects but no mechanism for accepting land donated for environmental preservation.

Tarves said the trust is hoping to avoid conflict over future land-use issues, such as the current battle between Spruce Meadows and city council, by consulting hundreds of affected parties including governments, conservationists and land developers.

Ducks Unlimited, one of the trust's founding organizations, agrees, saying the trust will provide another option for protecting disappearing wetlands and other wildlife habitat.

The City of Calgary's parks department is drafting a policy to protect the approximately 8,000 wetlands within the city limits. Officials estimate more than 90 per cent of the city's swamps, sloughs and marshes have been lost to development.

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