

OUR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Black land loss has reached the crisis stage. While African-Americans amassed 15 million acres of land in the South between 1865 and 1919, by 1999 African-Americans owned a total of 7.7 million acres and only 2.5 million of those acres were farmland. In 1920, Black farmers numbered 925,708 (when 1 of 4 owned their own land) and controlled approximately 14 percent of the nation's farmland. Today, Black farmers have declined in number to approximately 18,000 and they control less than 1 percent of the nation's farmland.

The decline in Black-owned land can, in part, be attributed to the Great Depression and the migration North of thousands of African-Americans throughout the South, in addition to the general decline of small farms in the agricultural industry.

Other major contributing factors, however, are the historical racial discrimination in farm loan practices on the part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which continues today, and the fragmented nature of Black land-ownership, caused by what is called *Heir Property*. One researcher estimates that nearly 83 percent of African-Americans do not possess basic wills or estate plans. Major ownership problems arise when people pass without making provisions for their land, which causes the State to make those decisions. A final, major issue today is the pressure that development and suburban sprawl place on all rural and farming communities. Though the contributing factors are complex and varied, African-Americans need all possible support in their efforts to preserve landownership.

THE BIRTH OF THE BFLT

In September, 2002, a consortium of Black land tenure advocates, community developers, farmers, educators, and land conservationists convened a two-day working retreat in Salter Path, North Carolina to examine the feasibility of creating a land trust to protect Black-owned land.

African-American farmers, Black land tenure advocates, the land conservation community, and university faculty (from 1890 and 1862 institutions) all worked together to develop a vision and road-map for BFLT's formation. A core group of 25 activists worked in committees, and met in Tuskegee, Alabama and Durham, North Carolina, culminating in the incorporation of the Black Family Land Trust in April of 2003.

Black Family Land Trust

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SERVING ALABAMA, GEORGIA, MISSISSIPPI, NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH CAROLINA, AND VIRGINIA

Black Family Land Trust | Ensuring,
Protecting,
Preserving

Who We Are

and

Our Vision

OUR MISSION AND VISION

The mission of the Black Family Land Trust is to ensure, protect, and preserve the natural, historic, environmental, and community resources of African Americans in the United States of America through land ownership. This mission is accomplished through holding, conveying, buying, conserving, and/or selling land, ensuring community economic development, protecting critical land and other natural resources, and preserving historically significant lands and communities for African Americans. The land trust is a partnership among African American landowners, land tenure advocates, land conservationists, educators and community and economic development practitioners.

We envision a nation where:

- ♦ African American families retain ownership of their land, and lost land is returned to Black ownership.



Site of significant historic, cultural, and natural resources.
Property of Ellen Byrd
Furman, AL

- ♦ Land valued by African American communities is protected: productive farms and forests, lands crucial to African American history, culture and heritage, lands that support Black communities, and environmentally sensitive lands.

- ♦ African American families and communities secure and assert the power of citizenship that accrues through land ownership in a democratic society.
- ♦ Current and future generations of both urban and rural Blacks are fully and successfully engaged in the land retention struggle.
- ♦ Education, technical assistance, cooperative ventures and new and existing enterprises enable us to support economically and environmentally sound land stewardship.

PROGRAM GOALS

Working with its partners, BFLT will implement a blend of “conservation land trust” and “community development” initiatives in a unique manner that serves the needs of Black communities. Core programs will include:

- 1) Telling the stories of land loss. Gather, record and disseminate land loss stories to:
 - ♦ Alert Black landowners to land tenure threats.
 - ♦ Educate people to the cultural, spiritual, historical, physical, political, and economic importance of land.
 - ♦ Document the significant historical sacrifices people have made to acquire and retain their land.
- 2) Land protection work. Work with partners to assemble the operating infrastructure – emergency land fund, conservation easement purchase funds, legal staff, land protection staff and conservation easement stewardship capacity – to:
 - ♦ Rescue land from tax and partition sales.
 - ♦ Provide conservation capital to settle heirs’ claims, consolidating family ownership of land.

- ♦ Purchase lost land and return it to Black family and/or community ownership.
- ♦ “Bundle” land protection services with landowner technical assistance: ownership restructuring, estate planning, business planning, etc.



Historic farmhouse on black-owned land
Future site of Conservation-based affordable housing site for Prosperity Unlimited
Kannapolis, NC

3) Economic and community development. Develop and implement mechanisms that support:

- ♦ Community forests and forest coops
 - ♦ Technological upgrade of farm and forest operations
 - ♦ Development of small businesses that address community needs
 - ♦ Establishment of infrastructure for ownership of marketing and production processes – control the process “from the seed to the supper table.”
- 4) Engage the entire Black community by:
 - ♦ Involving young people as the next generation of farmers, foresters and land stewards
 - ♦ Providing education about and assistance in resolving heirs title issues to urban and rural family members alike.