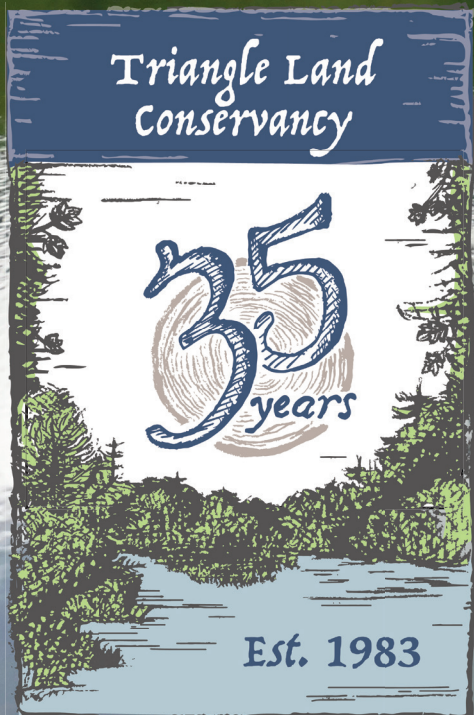


# Confluence

Spring 2018





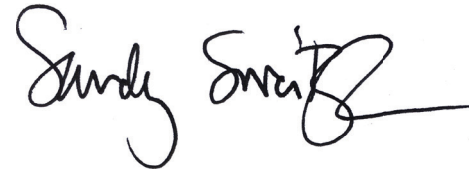
# From the Executive Director

Thirty-five years old is such a great age – well past childhood with so much of life in front of you. On February 17, 2018 Triangle Land Conservancy turned 35. We'll be celebrating this milestone throughout the year with special walks, volunteer opportunities, and the expansion of White Pines Nature Preserve (the very first preserve we opened to the public) with the installation of our 35th mile of publically accessible trail.

You might notice that we've updated the name of our newsletter: *Confluence*. It's a nod to our early years: the confluence of the Rocky and Deep Rivers occurs at White Pines Nature Preserve. The new name acknowledges what this publication aspires to be: a dynamic space where people, conservation, and ideas come together and a launching point for carrying our mission forward.

Since 1983, we've drawn our strength from a dedicated community of conservationists. As we look forward to our next 35 years, we'll continue to rely on you. We're declaring 2018 to be TLC's Year of the Volunteer.

Organizationally, we're enhancing our ability to use volunteers effectively to amplify our work throughout the region. We'll be providing you more opportunities than ever before to get involved with our work. In these pages, you'll read about some of the places and projects with which you might like to be involved.



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[www.triangleland.org](http://www.triangleland.org)

**Our Vision** - We see the Triangle region as an increasingly healthy and vibrant place to live where wild and working lands are protected and everyone has access to open space, clean water, and local food.

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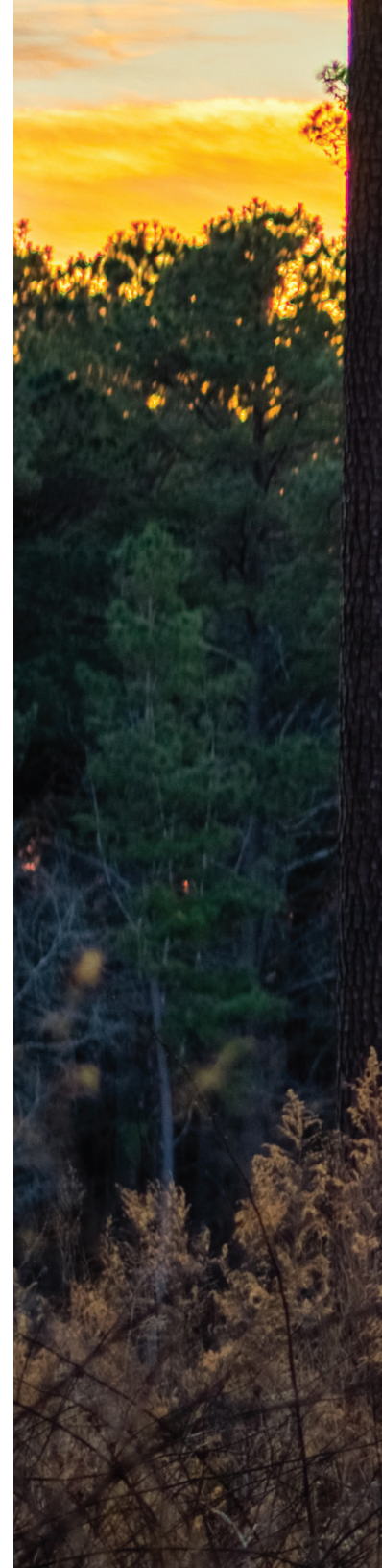






Photo of Horton Grove Nature Preserve by TLC Member and Volunteer Don Kinney





Photo by Leigh Ann Hammerbacher

# Hidden Gem in the Eastern Piedmont

By Jack Blackmer

## “A Freak of Nature”

Tucked away in the northeastern part of Johnston County along the border with Nash County is The Triangle Land Conservancy’s smallest nature preserve. It is a hidden gem that is more reminiscent of the geology and natural habitats of the Appalachian Mountains. This quiet little place is host to a disjunct mountain community of Catawba rhododendrons (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) normally found on the highest mountain tops some 200 miles to the west! Other mountain species of flora such as

galax, wildflowers and mosses are also growing in a microclimate along a steep north-facing bluff some 100 feet above beautiful Moccasin Creek.

Flower Hill Nature Preserve is owned by Triangle Land Conservancy and opened that property to the public in 1993. Visitors begin at a small parking area along Flower Hill Road just off NC-231 about 5 miles south of Middlesex. An information board and map mark the trailhead of a half-mile path that winds through a beautiful forest of chestnut oaks,



hickories, beeches, maples and other upland species. The trail traces the ridges of a deep ravine, dipping at one point to cross the ravine itself. Visitors in early May are treated to a spectacular display of the purple and rose-colored rhododendrons as they approach the section of trail that follows the bluff. From there the trail winds into the forest and then back to the bluff again for an encore show.

### **A very interesting history**

Prior to the mid-1930's it was known only to local people who visited the bluff in the springtime to have a picnic and enjoy the rhododendrons and called it "Flower Hill." In early 1937, William Ragsdale, Forest Warden for Johnston County, invited Dr. B.W. Wells, a Botany professor at State College (known today as NC State University) to visit with the hopes that interest could be generated to turn it into a public park. Dr. Wells was astounded to find Catawba rhododendrons growing and thriving so far from their mountain habitat. His amazement did not end there having also seen many other species of flora that are indicative of mountainous environments. Dr. Wells believed that the area was a remnant of the ancient Ocoee Mountain Range, which had resisted erosion due to very hard rock. He envisioned Flower Hill as a botanical park that could be of great interest to school children studying botany and other natural sciences.

Tom Lassiter, Editor of the Smithfield Herald, was among those who had been invited to the visit. He published an article on March 2, 1937 and word quickly spread far and wide resulting in thousands of visitors converging on Flower Hill in the springtime of that year. On the first Sunday in May, an estimated 5,000 visitors clogged the roads with their cars around Flower Hill, coming from as far away as Canada. Although numbers vary somewhat regarding the actual count, Bill Ragsdale's visitor registration book was filled to capacity with 3,500 names and it was reported that many more came that day. What an amazing sight that must have been considering the vehicles and road conditions of the depression-era 1930's.

Interest continued for a few years, but the area was never made into a park. The rhododendrons suffered significant damage from unscrupulous

people, and the numbers of visitors slowly dwindled. There was almost no publicity following World War II, and the area reverted to one of only minimal local interest.

### **Renewed interest with conservation in mind**

In the early 1980's, Bruce Woodward, Extension Service Chair of Johnston County notified the newly formed Triangle Land Conservancy of the unique natural area known as Flower Hill. TLC, along with the NC Natural Heritage Program, visited and a report was filed, but no definitive action was taken at that time. With limited resources available, the fledgling conservancy's efforts were focused at that time on purchasing and conserving properties that later became the White Pines Nature Preserve in Chatham County and Swift Creek Bluffs Nature Preserve in Wake County.

The real awakening came in April, 1987, when students in Instructor Don Stephenson's Environmental Biology class at Johnston Community College urged their professor to join them on a visit to Flower Hill. On that visit Mr. Stephenson felt a similar excitement that Dr. Wells experienced a full half-century before. As a Board member of TLC, he began working with other local members and with the Smithfield Herald which ran an article entitled "A 'Freak of Nature,' a place of beauty" to re-kindle interest. On May 15, 1988, TLC sponsored a well-attended public field trip to Flower Hill.

### **A new threat**

Interest began to build after the field trip and it was soon learned that one of the owners of a key 10-acre portion of Flower Hill were planning to subdivide their land for residential development. TLC quickly took steps to attempt to acquire the land, and Don Stephenson took the leadership role by forming the Johnston County Committee. The committee worked tirelessly to garner support and funds for the purchase, but as the deadline approached, the efforts to raise the needed \$45,000 in time were falling short. First Citizens Bank stepped up with an offer for a 90-day interest-free loan, along with making their own \$2,000 contribution, both of which were critical to the success of the project. The committee compiled mailing lists and made presentations about the efforts to conserve the



property to businesses, churches, and civic organizations throughout the county. TLC appealed to its members and the Smithfield Herald provided coverage and articles on the progress of efforts for the purchase. Donations and small grants from county organizations and citizens from all over the region began to add up. The grassroots effort successfully raised the needed funds, all the while instilling community appreciation and concern for preservation of the site.

### **Conserved forever to be enjoyed by all**

Flower Hill Nature Preserve was opened to the public in 1993 and is conserved forever. A plaque near the beginning of the trail lists the names of all the donors who contributed \$1,000 or more and expresses appreciation to all who contributed any amount. According to Mr.

Stephenson, “The preservation of Flower Hill was a collective effort of many people in Johnston County, TLC members from across the region both near and far, many civic groups, businesses and even a few individuals from out-of-state. I was fortunate to play a leadership role in these efforts and was very thankful for the confidence, trust and support of TLC donors, donors, and the Johnston County Committee throughout the process.”

Although Flower Hill is the smallest of TLC’s seven public nature preserves, its unique qualities rank it right up there with its bigger siblings. For more information on this hidden gem, including directions and a trail map, visit TLC’s website. 🌿



Jack Blackmer has a bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering from Michigan State University. Jack has worked in the environmental management field for over 25 years. He has been a member of the Triangle Land Conservancy for more than 20 years and has become an active volunteer in his retirement. He serves on the Conservation Strategies and Development Committees and is a Site Steward for TLC's White Pines Preserve.

Photo by Karen Bearden



# Our Year of the Volunteer



Photo by Chris Fowler

By Margaret Sands

In 1983, a group of dedicated volunteers decided to donate their time to the cause of conserving land for tomorrow in the rapidly growing Triangle. Today, their initial investment has grown into 35 years of high quality conservation work, over 18,000 acres of permanently protected land, and 7 public nature preserves with over 30 miles of trails.

Today we have 9 ongoing volunteer programs that help us maintain and steward the land in our care, build new trails, connect people with nature, and tackle office tasks. Last fiscal year, over 270 people donated 2,493 hours of service to TLC, an 800 hour increase from the year before! Some

Visit <https://www.triangleland.org/give/volunteer> to learn more about opportunities to make a difference by using your time and skills to support TLC's conservation work.

of these volunteers came out with their company or organization for an event like MLK Day of Service, others helped us to put on an event like Wild Ideas, Andrea Laine led hikes at Horton Grove Nature Preserve, Jack Blackmer gave public presentations to groups all over the Triangle, and Conservation Corps did the equivalent of \$15,000 of trail work to get Brumley Nature Preserve open. When we asked for help, the response was overwhelming, and we realized that perhaps we should ask more. Now, in our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we are seeking to grow that spirit of giving back that started TLC and use it to help bring our work to the next level in what we have dubbed "The Year of the Volunteer!"

After four training sessions, three TLC staffers have begun the process for Triangle Land Conservancy to become a certified Service Enterprise. The Service Enterprise Initiative is a national initiative led by Points of Light that strengthens the capacity of nonprofits to fundamentally leverage volunteers and their skills to address community needs. Service Enterprises are organizations that deeply integrate volunteers through a comprehensive research-based assessment, training, consulting and certification model to successfully deliver on their missions. We are finishing up our action plan and have already put some exciting new developments into place, including volunteer trainings, job descriptions, monthly e-newsletters, and research for volunteer tracking software.

Some of our next steps include: selecting and implementing tracking methods to be used for all programs, hosting regular volunteer trainings, publishing calls for specific volunteer jobs to support goals laid out in our strategic plan, and empowering and training volunteer captains to lead groups of other volunteers.

As we embark on this Year of the Volunteer, you can expect some changes, and probably some growing pains, but we know that if volunteers can be the seed that sprouts 35 years of conservation work, you can help us get through the next 35 years too! 🌱





The Conyers family with TLC  
Staff at the WindSong Farm.  
Photo by Chris Fowler

### We're here to help!

Land trusts have many options when it comes to conserving land. Two of the most popular options are fee simple and conservation easements, but there are many different methods that can be used to protect the places that you love. Triangle Land Conservancy helps landowners in six counties (Chatham, Durham, Johnston, Lee, Orange, and Wake) find the conservation option that's right for you. To learn more about how TLC can help you, visit [triangleland.org/conserve](http://triangleland.org/conserve)

## Recent Conservation Projects

Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC) closed on three projects in the last weeks of 2017 that protect an additional 194 acres in the Triangle region. The Beaverdam Lake project (Wake County), WindSong Farm project (Wake County), and Portofino Uplands project (Johnston County) were each protected by conservation easements.

### Windsong Farm Project

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places as The Joseph Blake Farm, this property adjacent to TLC's future Walnut Hill Preserve in the Marks Creek Priority Conservation Area. The Farm is one of the properties that make up the rural historic district of which Walnut Hill is a part. Established ca. 1860, the farmstead comprises buildings dating from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. Protection of the property will protect the historic viewshed along Mial Plantation Road, the gateway to the Walnut Hill Preserve. The property

has 750 feet of frontage on the dirt portion of Mial Plantation Rd and together with Walnut Hill will protect the entire viewshed along the southern portion of this road. TLC's 2001 conservation plan for the watershed included the protection of the scenic, rural, historic character of the landscape as a primary goal for conservation efforts in this area. In addition, the site is located at the headwaters of several tributaries that flow to Marks Creek and the Neuse River. The farm has a 3-acre pasture adjacent to Walnut Hill and is dotted with large mature oaks that help support wildlife habitat. Conservation of this tract will help create a scenic rural entryway for the future Walnut Hill preserve, protect important farmland, and help fulfill the goals and vision established as part of the Marks Creek Rural Landscape Initiative.

TLC has been working in the Marks Creek Rural Landscape and Shotwell community since the late 1990s. The area was identified as one of TLC



original priority landscapes in the Triangle. Since this time TLC has worked with Wake County and other partners to implement a long-term conservation vision for this area. In fact, this has been one of TLC's most successful conservation planning and implementation efforts. Over 2,200 acres of land have been protected with an investment of \$18 million from many community partners. The Blake Farm is a key piece that connects many of these conserved tracts, including Walnut Hill, and a prime example of the bucolic rural character that is becoming increasingly rare across Wake County.

### **Beaverdam Lake**

This property sits less than 1,000 feet from the Neuse River in Wake County. Just minutes from the City of Raleigh and Town of Knightdale, this scenic property is one of the largest remaining tracts in Raleigh's ETJ. The property is mainly forested, but contains a small farm site and a 50-acre lake. Produce from the farm, Old Milburnie Farm, can be found at the North Hills and Wake Forest Farmer's markets as well as in several local restaurants. The lake and the surrounding woods help filter and retain runoff before it reaches the Neuse River, a drinking water resource for many downstream users. The property has been a recreation haven for the owners, their friends, and family since the 1930s. The property protects the scenic viewshed from Old Milburnie Road and Beaverdam Elementary School. A potential future greenway could help increase these connections. In the meantime, this area provides a great habitat corridor connecting into the Neuse River Corridor. The property has a bottomland hardwood swamp with large swamp chestnut oaks, elm, and ash. Large white oaks and tulip poplars can be found throughout all the forested areas. These habitats are home to wood ducks, herons, warblers, box turtles, and even river otter.

TLC commends the strong conservation values of the



Photo by Leigh Ann Hammerbacher

Beaverdam owners, especially Frances Bobbie and Van Webb. They donated over 90% of the easement value and have created a true land legacy with the Beaverdam Lake Property.

### **Portofino Uplands**

Finally, the Portofino Uplands project protects just over 39 acres and is the first of a two-phase project in Johnston County that will protect both a scenic pastoral viewshed and pasture as well as a future 1-mile corridor of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST). The MST is a footpath stretching almost 1,200 miles across North Carolina from Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains to Jockey's Ridge on the Outer Banks.

Each of the projects were protected by utilizing conservation easements. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between landowners and TLC that permanently limits the uses of land in order to protect conservation values of that property. Easements often limit the right to subdivide or develop properties. Conservation easements benefit the public by protecting land for future generations and the environment. Landowners retain rights to own and use the land and the ability to sell it or pass it on to their heirs. Conservation easements are permanent. Conservation easements are a great tool for protecting local farms as they can enable a farmer to continue to manage and own the land. In addition, they can also make this land more affordable for future heirs or other farmers if the land is sold. 🌿



# Schoolhouse of Wonder at Brumley Nature Preserve

“We’ll send your kids home dirty, tired, and happy... guaranteed!” How could TLC not support Schoolhouse of Wonder’s (Schoolhouse) promise?

If TLC has a responsibility to protect wild and working lands in perpetuity, we need to help children fall in love with the outdoors. “Brumley is an awesome backdrop for camps,” Marty Jorgensen, Orange County Site Manager of Schoolhouse, explains.

“It’s important for kids to have the opportunity to get outside, especially in urban and suburban areas like the Triangle,” Matt Rutledge, Associate Manager of Stewardship, explains. “I read recently that kids today average 8 hours of screen time a day between phones, television, and computers, so giving them the opportunity to connect with nature is now even more important. TLC’s partnerships expand our capacity to reach more people, like these children.”

Schoolhouse is one of TLC’s partners that helps fulfill our mission along with Learning Outside, a nonprofit year-round outdoor kindergarten at J. Logan and Elinor Moore Irvin Nature Preserve in Orange County and Center for Human Earth Restoration (C.H.E.R.), which leads educational fieldtrips for youth on many TLC properties in Wake County.

These partnerships amplify TLC’s work of connecting people with nature. “Campers and staff get to discover and explore different areas of the forest like ‘Rocky Woods,’ ‘the Boneyard,’ and ‘Forest Village,’” Jorgensen continues. “Each location offers a unique setting for games, different plants and animals to discover, cool rocks to examine, amazing forts to build, and more... Walking into Brumley feels like there are



Photo courtesy of Schoolhouse of Wonder





infinite possibilities—places to explore, games to play, and nature to see. As a publicly accessible nature preserve, it is awesome to have parents ask about coming back and have their children show them around—getting families interested in getting into nature even outside of camp!”

In the fall of 1989, Schoolhouse offered its first program, a half-day nature experience for Triangle homeschoolers that came to be known as “Outdoor School.” Since that time they’ve expanded their programs to offer camps, field trips, leadership training, and family fun at locations throughout the region. Schoolhouse began offering programs at the George and Julia Brumley Family Nature Preserve in Orange County in 2016.

All summer, kids attending Schoolhouse camps play field and forest games, splash in creeks,

search for critters, whittle, and more. The older groups do more skills-based activities like building shelter, archery, game creation, and creek exploration.

For older youth, Schoolhouse offers a Counselor-in-Training (CIT) program, which places teens in camp groups where they can practice leadership skills and work on individual goals. With both campers and CITs, Schoolhouse staff strive to connect with each person and nurture them toward being their best self.

Schoolhouse programs certainly help TLC connect people with nature, but their work doesn’t end there. Jorgensen relates, “We believe passionately that open-hearted children become open-minded adults.”

Visit [schoolhouseofwonder.org](http://schoolhouseofwonder.org) for more information about their programs at Brumley. 🌿





# Meet TLC Member + Volunteer Manisit Das

Words and photographs courtesy of Manisit Das

I grew up in West Bengal, a province in the eastern part of India bordered by the Himalayas on its north and the mangrove forests with the mighty Royal Bengal Tiger in its southern extremities. After finishing my MS with a major in Chemistry back in India, I switched gears and moved to the US to pursue a Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Sciences at UNC-Chapel Hill in 2015. I am currently in the 3rd year of my Ph.D. Apart from my research, I am deeply passionate about science communication, nature conservation, and hiking. I am a Co-organizer of ComSciCon Triangle, an annual workshop in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina, aimed at training STEM graduate students to communicate their sciences to diverse audiences.

My first hike after coming to the US was in Shenandoah National Park during the Fall of 2015. That was a gorgeous hike with a lot of fall colors and inspired me to pursue hiking as a hobby. I haven't hiked much back in India, as most jungles and forests have a high abundance of wild predators making them more suitable for safari over hiking. As I started identifying trails around me, I became gradually aware of the public lands maintained under the NC State Park system. I was initially inclined to the mountains and began frequenting the trails in the state parks and national



forests around the Blue Ridge Parkway and distributed over western NC. However, as I set my foot on to the parks in Piedmont and coastal NC, I was mesmerized by the incredible natural diversity of North Carolina. That was when I decided I have to hike all 41 NC State Parks!

I think the most crucial learning I got is that there are natural wonders all around us, and most of the times we miss them. We don't look closely enough and rush through our life's trails. Hiking also provided me motivation for my Ph.D. grind. As you undertake your journey, it is easy to question your efforts, give up, not push oneself hard, but often after the most strenuous of trails comes the grandest overlooks. I hold that lesson to my heart.

My first TLC hike was at Swift Creek Bluffs back in 2016. At that time, I wasn't much aware of TLC. In the first day of the year in 2018, I went for a hike in the White Pines Nature Preserve around dusk, with my friend. It was really cold for NC, about 20° F outside, and parts of the Deep and Rocky rivers in the preserve were frozen! That wasn't a sight commonly seen in Piedmont. While returning, we saw the magnificent Supermoon rising from the forest. I couldn't ask for a better First Day Hike! It was the





first time I took a serious note of TLC. I started reading about the organization's efforts and became aware of the public preserves within my reach, the Triangle area. Within a short time, I became active with the conservancy. I hiked all of the public preserves but Flower Hill (I am waiting for the rhododendrons to bloom in spring), started volunteering and became a member of the organization.

All preserves and trails are precious to me, and in my experience, every new day paints a forest differently. I really enjoyed Horton Grove Nature Preserve. You get to see a lot of diversity within a short span of time, ranging from grasslands to pine and hardwood forests. It is also an excellent spot for birding. 🌿





# Wild Ideas in Raleigh and Durham

Triangle Land Conservancy's Wild Ideas series provides a unique venue for experts and the community to share their innovative ideas to improve lives through conservation by safeguarding clean water, protecting wildlife habitat, supporting local farms and food, and connecting people with nature.

Wild Ideas for Walnut Hill took place on November 14, 2017 and focused on TLC's future nature preserve, the Sarah and Bailey Williamson Preserve at Walnut Hill, and in addition to the usual fast-paced presentations and expo, the event also offered participants the chance to engage with staff and community stakeholders at conversation stations. The event took place at Market Hall in downtown Raleigh and featured local beer from Brewery Bhavana. Wild Ideas for Clean Creeks on March 20, 2018 and was held at ReCity Network in Durham. The event marked TLC's 10th installment of this series and the 10th anniversary of Durham Creek Week.

Details about future Wild Ideas events may be found at [triangleland.org](http://triangleland.org). 🌿



Photos by Don Kinney

Thanks to our Wild Ideas sponsors!



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# Upcoming Events

Registration for many TLC events is limited and required. Please register and reserve your spot online at: [triangleland.org/events](http://triangleland.org/events).

## April

### 19 Whole Foods Market 5% Day All Day at

**Triangle-area Whole Foods Market locations** | On April 19, 5% of sales from all six Triangle area stores will be donated to Triangle Land Conservancy. Please mark your calendars now and come see us that day at the TLC tables in any of our regional Whole Foods Market stores to meet with TLC volunteers, board members, and staff.

### 21 Trail Crew 9:00am-12:00pm at Horton Grove Nature Preserve

| Celebrate Earth Day Weekend on April 21st by improving access to permanently conserved land that features endemic habitats and storm water protection and natural filtration. This

work day will extend the existing trail system available for visitors to this popular nature preserve located in northern Durham County. Volunteers will help to hand dig trail and clear rocks and roots from the path under the supervision of Senior Land Manager, Walt Tysinger. Volunteers should be six years of age or older and minors must be accompanied by an adult or guardian. All tools will be provided but volunteers may bring their own work gloves if they prefer.

### 28 Rhodo Ramble 10:30am Flower Hill Nature Preserve

| Learn how Flower Hill Nature Preserve got its name! Join us for a traditional early spring nature walk at this Johnston County jewel to view the magnificent blooms of Catawba rhododendron and other wildflowers. These spring blooms drew thousands of visitors to the property in the 1930s. We'll learn from two local botanists about what makes them so special, especially in this location! This ~1 mile hike is free and open to all in the community.



Please look for us in your workplace giving campaign!





**tlc**

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