

Confluence

Fall 2020



Join us in our journey

This newsletter — Confluence — is named for the beautiful spot where the Deep and Rocky rivers come together at Triangle Land Conservancy's White Pines Nature Preserve and join the Cape Fear River. The word conjures up connection, community, coming together. It's also a spot that regularly floods.

This year, we have experienced another kind of confluence: a pandemic that has laid bare racial and economic disparities, a painful but much-needed racial reckoning, and incredibly destructive storms and wildfires. Each of these was a crisis that had been building on its own, but it wasn't until they came together to cause a symbolic flood that everyone had to pay attention.

In June, I wrote a statement on behalf of TLC explaining why a land trust would and should care about racial equity. (You can find the statement linked in the digital version of this letter at triangleland.org.) Our first step is to acknowledge that the history of land conservation, the very core of our work, has perpetuated systemic racism. Every acre of land in this country has a long, often unrecognized or forgotten, history of people who lived and worked there. Every acre in this country was stolen from

Indigenous people so that white people could build wealth. On most of the land we protect in the Triangle, Black people were enslaved by white people, who benefited economically from this forced labor.

When the conservation movement started, white people removed Indigenous people from their homes to create national parks. Today, Indigenous people live on a fraction of their land, and Black and Brown people own less than 2% of farmland. For decades, white people have dominated the conversations around outdoor recreation and limited access to outdoor space for minority people.

TLC began telling these stories at Horton Grove Nature Preserve, where the trails are named after the descendants of the enslaved people who once lived and worked on that land. For years we have joined Stagville State Historic Site in celebrating Juneteenth with our community, including many descendants of those once enslaved on that land.

The second step is to continue open discussions about race, equity, and



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inclusion within our own organization (including with you!) and land trust community. Actively working to dismantle systemic racism is the only way TLC can fulfill our mission to bring the benefits of land conservation to every person in the Triangle.

The experience of opening a nature preserve and inviting people to enjoy the respite of public land in the shadow of a slave community pushed us to overcome our guilt, open our eyes and hearts, shift our perspective, and make changes. Several years ago, TLC staff and board began the long journey to become an anti-racist organization. Much of the work has been internal, like staff and board attending workshops, discussions, and webinars, doing our own reading, and changing processes and policies. We have updated hiring and board recruiting processes and incorporate racial equity into our new board and staff orientation and staff work plans.

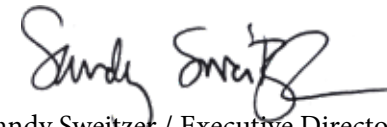
As a white woman, I have found the process scary, exhilarating, depressing, and inspiring — often all at the same time! Personally, one of the most important lessons I've learned is that I'll make mistakes. Of course, we all will! Just like all Americans (of every race and ethnicity), I've been swimming in the water of white dominant culture my whole life. Turning the tide of those floodwaters is central to our mission and will help us become a stronger organization protecting even more land across the Triangle.

Today you'll see signs of this journey at Bailey and Sarah Williamson Preserve, which is now officially open (!!) with 9 miles of walking and


biking trails and two farmers already hard at work. When you visit, please take time to read about the property's long, complicated history on the signs in the breezeway of the White Barn.

Which brings us to the third step: to use our unique position and resources that we have as a land trust to ensure the benefits of land conservation are shared with everyone in our community. The pandemic has made clear the importance of nature for our wellbeing. We believe deeply that land conservation is critical to a healthier and more vibrant Triangle, but we also know the importance of recognizing the way systemic racism has shut out Black, Brown, and Indigenous people from the land conservation movement. In addition to TLC "regulars," hundreds of new people have discovered the 44 miles of TLC trail made possible by our members. Many have even become members themselves (Welcome!).

I invite you to join us on the journey to become anti-racist individuals and organizations. On our website you can explore books, articles, webinars, podcasts, and videos TLC staff have found helpful in our journey. Most importantly, I invite you to learn, ask questions, and make mistakes. We can only hope that this confluence of death and destruction will turn into a flood of connection and community.



Sandy Sweitzer / Executive Director



An aerial shot of the confluence at White Pines Nature Preserve. Photo: Margaret Fields

Welcome to Williamson Preserve!

Triangle Land Conservancy is thrilled to finally open Bailey and Sarah Williamson Farm & Nature Preserve, where 405 acres of forests and fields are home to 9 miles of walking and biking trails, two farmers (with another to start soon!), and a new office for TLC staff and farmers.

Williamson Preserve fulfills all four of the benefits of conservation TLC seeks to achieve for the community: protecting natural habitats, safeguarding clean water, supporting local farms and food, and connecting people with nature. It is TLC's first public preserve to host both trails and farmers in partnership with several organizations.

The opening of this preserve also marks a new chapter in the long history of this land. Throughout U.S. history and in the conservation movement, the history of land and the Black, Brown, and Indigenous people who lived and worked there has often been erased. Thanks to grants from the Triangle Community Foundation and The Jandy Ammons Foundation, TLC has worked for more than a year with the UNC Community Histories Workshop to begin to share a fuller story of this land. Before you head off on the trails, you'll have an opportunity to read about this history on kiosks at the preserve or on our website (both of which we'll be updating periodically).

Like all land in the U.S., Indigenous communities once lived, farmed,



More detailed historical information about the preserve is posted on the breezeway walls of the White Barn, which TLC restored as new office space.

fished, hunted, and passed through the preserve and surrounding area. Throughout the American South, after colonists and their descendants took land from Indigenous people, white families established plantation agriculture — this preserve was once part of a 3,000-acre plantation, where enslaved Black people were forced to work. After the Civil War, the land remained a farm, eventually transitioning from cotton to tobacco. Over time, Black families bought land and established their own farms in the area, some of which are still operating today, while many others lived as tenants on white-owned land. In the last few decades, this region has become one of the last rural areas in the ever-growing Wake County.

In 2013, TLC acquired the land from Bailey and Sarah Williamson's daughters, Betty Brandt Williamson and Sally Greaser, who donated more than 60% of its value in order to ensure the farmland, water, and forests their parents loved were protected forever. Funding from Wake County, the NC Land and Water Fund, individuals who generously donated to TLC's Our Water, Our Land campaign, Johnston County, and the Environmental Enhancement Grant Program made the purchase of this nature preserve possible.

Now, this land helps protect streams that flow into the Neuse River, ensuring clean drinking water for people who live east of the Triangle. Farmers on this land use regenerative practices, which help build healthy soils, protect waterways, increase biodiversity, improve animal and crop health, and increase overall farm resilience.

Starting today, the story of this land will include you. We plan to build 5 more miles of trail in the coming months, and we're excited to welcome people to walk and bike through the preserve. We hope you'll enjoy your visits, and that you'll continue to come back as we learn and share more about the preserve's history, bring more farmers on to the land, and eventually host guided hikes and offer local food at the preserve. See the next page for more details about visiting!



Photo: Mavis Gragg



Raleigh artist Autumn Cobeland painted two scenes from Bailey and Sarah Williamson Preserve. Above is an image of the Green Barn visible from across Frog Pond, the first pond you will encounter when entering the preserve from the parking lot.



What to know before your visit:

- Trails can be accessed via the Neuse River Greenway or at the parking lot at 4429 Mial Plantation Road, and hours are dawn to dusk.
- After rain, check the trail status before you go. The preserve is often closed after rain to protect the trails and prevent run-off into streams. For now, trail status will be updated at trianglemtb.com, at torc-nc.org, and on [TLC's Facebook page](#).
- **Most trails at Williamson Preserve go in one direction.** Sunday-Wednesday, walkers turn right at trail intersections, and bikers and runners turn left. Thursday-Saturday, walkers turn left, and bikers and runners turn right.
- Dogs must be on leash at all times for the safety of other visitors, wildlife, and livestock. Do not interact with wildlife or livestock, and do not touch or approach any farm equipment.
- **Please take all trash, including dog poop bags, with you when you leave.**
- Full rules and a map are online at triangleland.org/williamson.



Students with Triangle Bikeworks, a Carrboro-based organization that provides outdoor opportunities for youth of color, tested out the trails in July during a video shoot with Land, Ltd. The full videos can be viewed at triangleland.org. Photo: Land, Ltd.



Sharing your #HikeTLC experiences

In July, we put out a call to hear about your #HikeTLC experiences, and we loved seeing the photos and stories come in from people across the Triangle! It's clearer than ever that we need beautiful outdoor spaces for fresh air and space to unwind. Thank you to everyone who submitted photos, essays, and creative pieces! All entries can be viewed online at triangleland.org.

Taking our grandchildren for a walk, we came across these beauties. I love the history of Flower Hill and wrote a letter to thank one of the original donors. My mother talked about Flower Hill telling us about picnics around May First and how beautiful the flowers were. Going to Flower Hill was a special event back in the day!

—Nancy Faber, Kenly/Photo of Flower Hill Nature Preserve



My favorite hour of the day is just after dawn when the moon kisses the sky “good day.”

When I first walked into this space I felt my breath getting whisked away like a cold breeze that snaps you into presence. The sight I held before me chilled me to my core. I felt a sadness there that I knew well; like a familiar song. A bluesy song. That kind of sadness that beckons you to hold on to so tightly as if to squeeze the tears from your eyes. And there were tears on my cheeks but what I felt in the wake of the chilly breeze was joy.

—Walter Horne, Bahama/Photo of Horton Grove Nature Preserve

Do you long for hiking experiences that are more like the mountains but want to stay closer to home these days? Do you enjoy woods, water and diverse flora and fauna on your hikes? Well this one is for you — the Schoolkids Trail in White Pines Nature Preserve.

Following the yellow markers from the upper parking lot, you soon pass by an old homesite and a small pond formed by an earthen dam. After the intersection with the Rocky Bluffs Trail you are high above the Rocky River and begin a long descent to the water. In the springtime, many mountain laurels may be in bloom and ephemeral wildflowers dot areas along the sides of the trail.

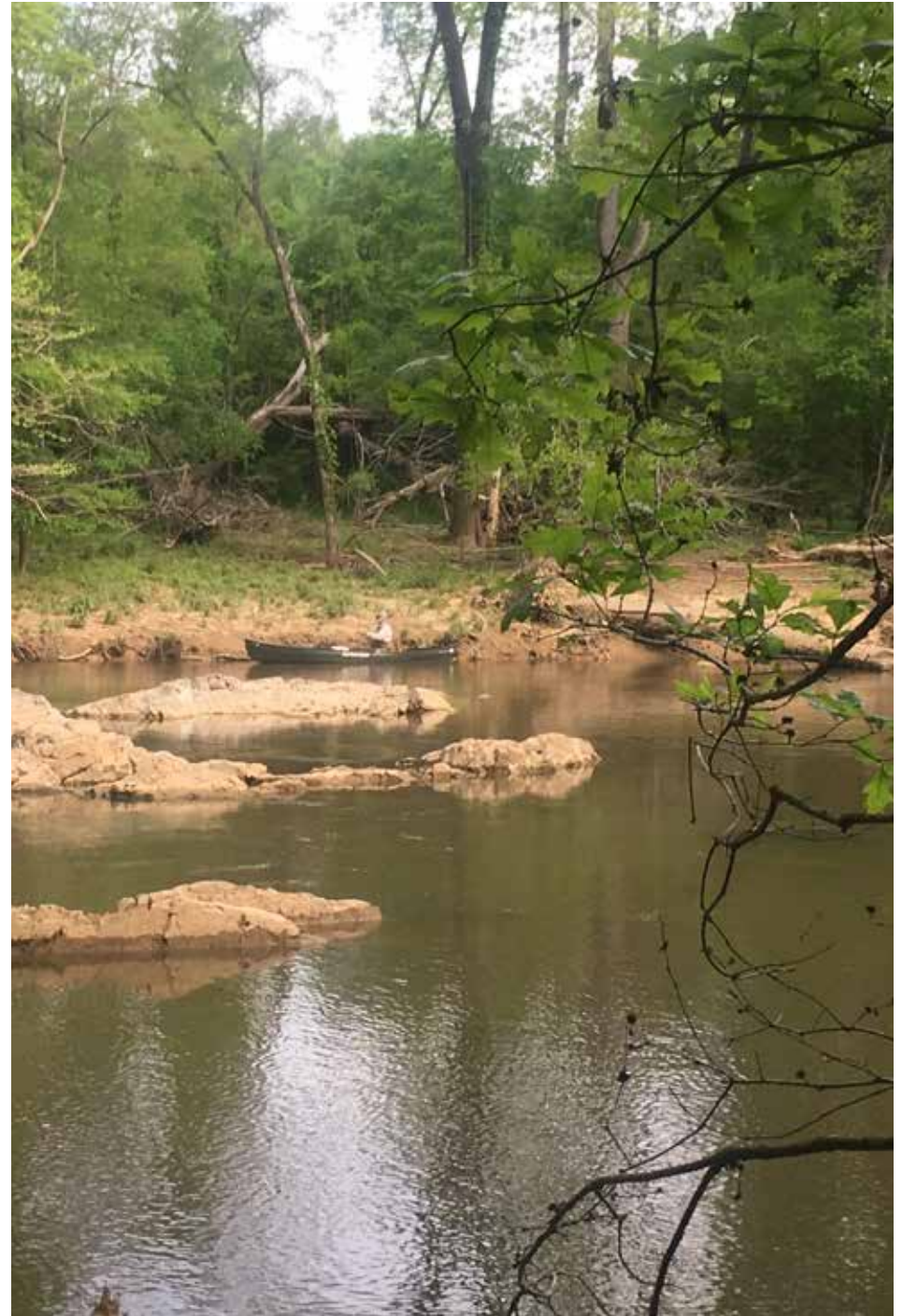


Near the river you are amazed at huge rock outcroppings and you notice parts of heavy old cables lying over some of the rocks. These are remnants of a cable bridge built in the 1920s to allow children living on what is now the preserve to cross the river to attend a

one-room schoolhouse on the north side. You take a moment by the river to gaze at the water, the rocks and across to the far shore while realizing that the view you see is much the same as it was a hundred years ago.

After continuing on the trail across the floodplain you begin a long climb up the bluff. You enjoy hiking through the beautiful hardwood forest with the river far below. At the end of the trail the shortest way to the parking lot is to backtrack to the White Pines Trail, but instead you follow the Deep Bluffs Trail to the Gilbert Yager Trail, enjoying more great water views and hiking through deep ravines. It has been a memorable hike and you plan to return again soon.

—Jack Blackmer, Cary/Photos of White Pines Nature Preserve





New Hope Creek at Johnston Mill Nature Preserve by Bill Warren, Chapel Hill

Perhaps I should be ashamed to admit that until COVID I knew little about TLC. While I have lived in Orange County nearly 30 years, I was a professor at UNCG until relatively recently. My husband worked in the Raleigh area and so our professional lives took us over 100 miles a day, 100 miles apart for many years. Our professional lives and the usual home/life care left little time for pleasure hiking in our personal time.

Serendipitously, I met two new friends on a senior women's basketball team, just prior to COVID's appearance in North Carolina and the cancellation of senior sports; the three of us had remarkably similar interests in the outdoors. After basketball practices were stopped one of the women suggested a weekly hiking group, practicing social distancing.

I was nervous about leaving the house. After all, we were under a stay-at-home order. Nevertheless, I decided to give it a try. Our experiences together in the out-of-doors renewed my sense of wonder for new habitats, new places to explore together, and new friendships. Each of us had different areas of interest and expertise but we were all avid learners about the natural world. RM is an outstanding birder. SL is an incredible hiker and nature observer. Both of them know more about plants than I've ever known although the more we walked the more I remembered from forays decades ago in distant states.

I know a fair amount about reptiles and amphibians and have an inkling about a lot of fauna and flora. I had interacted with the PLC and supported The Nature Conservancy. But as our sallies and friendships morphed, I have during our TLC explorations at most of the properties, felt like I am the luckiest person in this time of COVID concerns.

—Catherine Matthews, Efland

“Our experiences together in the out-of-doors renewed my sense of wonder for new habitats, new places to explore together, and new friendships.”

Conservation Highlights

TLC increases focus in Lee County

Thanks to a generous donation from Tommy F. Bridges, TLC has been able to increase our conservation efforts in Lee County. Land Protection Manager Margaret Sands has taken the lead on working with Lee County landowners to conserve their land. While nothing has been finalized yet, there are some promising new projects in the works that showcase each of TLC's three main land transaction types. A fee-simple purchase transfers full ownership of the land from the landowner to TLC. With a conservation easement, TLC works with a private landowner to set guidelines for the land and how it can be used. These rules stand regardless of whether the original landowner sells the land. A bequest is when land is left to TLC in a will. Bridges's donation has enabled TLC to have the resources to work on these projects, and we look forward to more exciting outcomes in Lee County. Drone footage of Lee County is available in the digital version of this article at triangleland.org.

Almost 20,300 acres conserved in the Triangle

Staff are still hard at work to meet our goal of conserving 25,000 acres by 2025! Just days into TLC's new fiscal year in July, we conserved 37 acres through a fee-simple donation in Orange County. The McQueen property was donated by Ida McQueen with assistance from her daughter Ellen. Transaction costs were covered by a mini-grant from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. The property will have a conservation easement held by Orange County. It is bordered on two sides by Phil's Creek and is mostly mixed hardwood forest.

TLC also recently conserved 55 acres known as the Patterson Thornton property, which protects the remaining 22 acres of the Calvander Laurel Bluff Natural Area as designated by the Natural Heritage Program. TLC already holds an easement along Morgan



Morgan Creek runs through the Patterson Thornton property.

Creek that protects the northern portion of the Natural Area. The property protects 3,400 feet of Morgan Creek just two miles upstream of University Lake, which is the drinking supply for Chapel Hill and Carrboro. It also protects a mature stretch of bottomland forest that contains several oxbow pools, which offer prime breeding habitat for salamanders. The topography of the property is interesting, with extremely steep slopes, making space for large boulders and massive beech trees. In the spring, this area is covered with trout lily (*Erythronium umbilicatum*), Catesby's trillium (*Trillium catesbaei*), bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), hepatica (*Anemone acutiloba*), and crested iris (*Iris cristata*).



Swift Creek Bluffs, one of Shellie Lempert's favorite TLC preserves. Photo: Erika Zambello

Gifts that endure

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Triangle Land Conservancy has received numerous calls from people who are updating or making their estate plans. In these uncertain times, more and more people have been thinking about the future — not just about their own, but about the future of people they might not ever know.

A planned gift to TLC is one of the best ways to ensure land is protected long after we are gone. Supporters who include TLC in their estate plans become members of the Heritage Society so we can recognize their dedication to conservation in their lifetimes. We're grateful to those who are ensuring land can be protected for future generations as TLC continues to accelerate the pace of conservation in the Triangle.

To help make it easier for people who have already started thinking ahead, TLC partnered with FreeWill to provide our community with an

innovative, free, online resource that guides people through the process of writing a will in 20 minutes or less. More information is available at freewill.com/triangleland.

Recently, Shellie Lempert, who lives in Raleigh and is a TLC volunteer, decided to include TLC in her estate plans. As a longtime supporter and user of public lands and green spaces, she was excited to learn about the FreeWill tool.

Shellie lived in the Triangle for several years before finding TLC preserves, and she likes that they are often quieter than nearby state parks. She recently completed the TLC Hiking Challenge to explore more nature preserves and trails in the Triangle.

When the pandemic first broke out, she found herself heading to White



Shellie Lempert during her Hiking Challenge at Johnston Mill Nature Preserve.

Pines Nature Preserve — which is now her favorite TLC preserve — to get some fresh air and contemplate the world. She also enjoys Swift Creek Bluffs and Flower Hill because they remind her of the mountains.

Shellie appreciates that conservation efforts have protected wooded areas in the region.

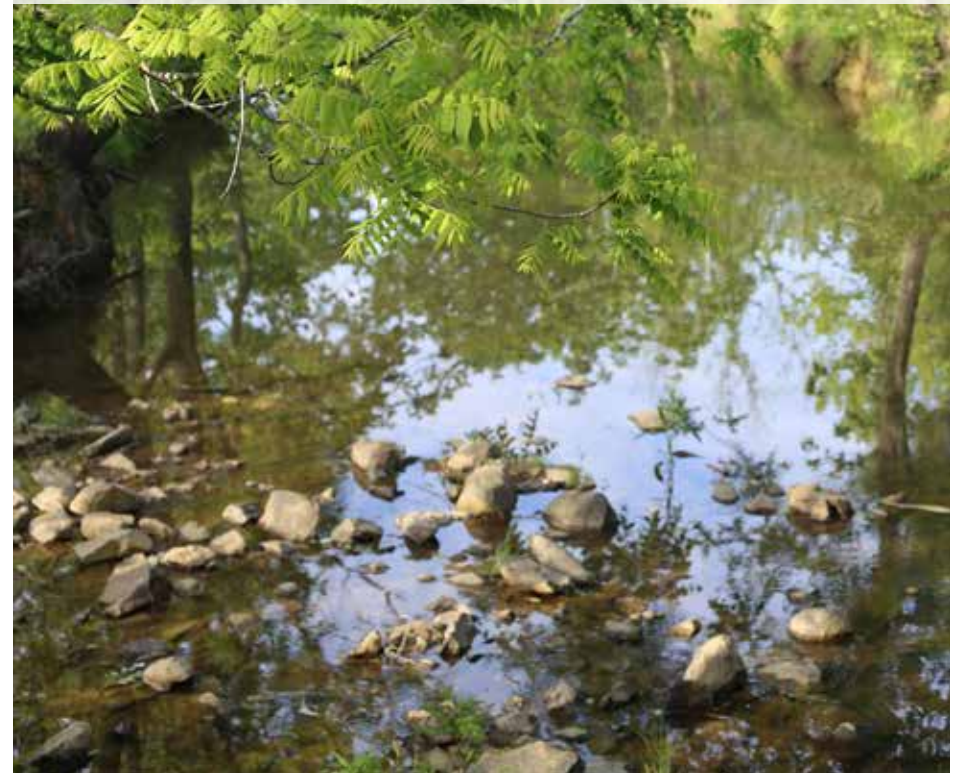
“Here in the Triangle, there’s the greenways, and there are so many preserves like those protected by TLC, as well as parks,” she said. “It’s really nice that it keeps the area from being a concrete jungle.”

Shellie has lived in the Midwest and West, so she’s appreciative of the many incredible spots that have helped clear her mind and encourage her creative side. Now, inspired by some of the earlier conservationists who recognized the importance of nature, she wants to make sure future generations have green spaces to explore and find comfort in as she has throughout her life. She hopes part of her legacy will help TLC conserve more land.

“I feel most peaceful in nature, and I want to share that with others,” she said. “It’s sad to me that we have so little green space for so many people.”

Introducing FreeWill

Your ongoing support ensures TLC can continue to accelerate the pace of conservation. By including TLC in your estate plans, you will make a lasting gift to protect that land in perpetuity, at no cost. TLC has partnered with FreeWill to provide you with a way to support future conservation efforts. Whether or not you choose to include a gift to TLC or another nonprofit in your will, we invite you to visit FreeWill.com/TriangleLand



What's New at TLC

TLC welcomes two new AmeriCorps members

This month, our new CTNC AmeriCorps members Kayla Ebert and Elena Peterman start their terms! Kayla will be working on environmental education and outreach as our Community Outreach and Engagement Associate, while Elena will be focused on engagement at Bailey and Sarah Williamson Preserve. In June, we bid farewell to CTNC AmeriCorps members Dymond Generette and Elicia Senff, who are both doing exciting things in the Triangle.

Watch *Conservation Conversations* to learn about TLC's work

After everything shut down, we worked hard to start a new webinar series, *Conservation Conversations*. We now have a great video library showcasing TLC's work and our partners' work. If you've ever wondered if you can take your kids backpacking, what regenerative farming has to do with conservation, or all the steps required to protect land, you can learn about these topics and more at triangleland.org/conservationconversations.

Record number of TLC Hiking Challenge finishers

It's been incredible to see so many new entries in the TLC Hiking Challenge in 2020! Through July, 364 people enrolled in the challenge and completed 440 hikes — almost double the number who participated in the same period last year! All of our preserves have seen record use during this time.

Brogden Bottomlands named Wetland Treasure

The 1,120-acre Brogden Bottomlands, TLC's largest land project ever, was named a Wetland Treasure by the Carolina Wetlands Association. The property is situated along the Neuse River and is home to a massive floodplain that helps reduce flooding and filter stormwater runoff. TLC protected this property in October 2019.



AmeriCorps members Elicia Senff and Dymond Generette finished up their AmeriCorps terms in June.



Brogden Bottomlands is an important habitat corridor, absorbs more carbon than it releases, and helps prevent downstream flooding.



Wild Ideas for Wildflowers



TLC and the North Carolina Botanical Garden
are bringing Wild Ideas online on **Oct. 28!**

Stay tuned for more details and registration at triangleland.org/wildideas.

Illustration of passionflower: Lauren Burnham

Thank you to our Williamson Preserve Opening sponsors!

While we weren't able to have our big Grand Opening celebration, we couldn't have opened the preserve without the support of our many sponsors!



**The Cannon
Foundation, Inc.**





Front cover photo by Land, Ltd.

Back cover photo by Caroline Gilmore

Thank you.

By supporting TLC, you've brightened the days of so many people during these tough times. You've helped ensure that there are always places where our community can find refuge and wonder in nature.

triangleland.org/give

