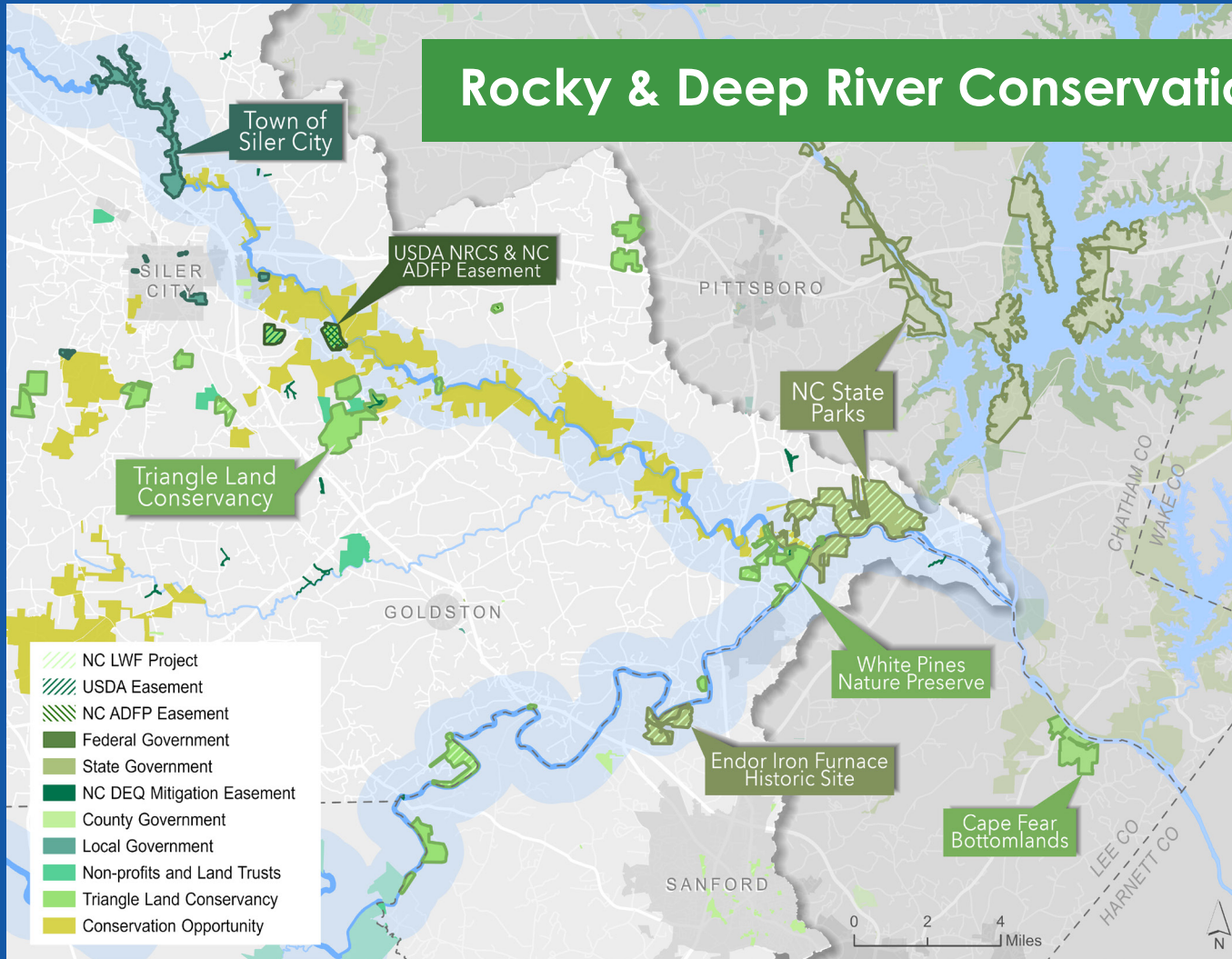


Rocky & Deep River Conservation Management Plan



The Rocky and Deep Rivers collectively flow 155 miles and drain 1400 mi² of land in the Upper Cape Fear River Basin. Noted for their rich ecological and recreational value in the region, these rivers support a diverse collection of plant animal species, the Deep River State Land and Water Trail, and drinking water for the Town of Siler City and Sanford. The rivers are also home to the largest remaining populations of the endangered Cape Fear Shiner. Despite these important functions, only 6% of land within 2 miles of the Rocky and Deep Rivers in Chatham and Lee Counties are currently under permanent conservation protection.

Chloe Ochocki
 Conservation Planner
cochocki@triangleland.org



6%
 River corridor
 permanently
 conserved



9100ac
 Permanently
 protected land



60%
 Forest



20%
 Agriculture



4%
 Development



Change is Coming...

The Research Triangle was identified as the fourth fastest growing region of the United States in 2022.

This area was once home to a booming coal industry with a tragic local history. Development is once again knocking on the door. Four large projects have already been announced for the region totaling over \$23 billion in investments, 12,000 jobs, and 22,000 new residences. The time to plan for conservation is now!

We have a goal to...

1

Prioritize projects with the highest impact for our resources

2

Assess and mitigate threats to future work

3

Find opportunities to convert temporary conservation agreements into permanent protection



Stakeholder Outreach

There are important challenges to consider when planning for future land management. To create a plan with the most robust recommendations, we asked the experts.

Practitioner Interviews

13

People interviewed from 8 organizations

12

Questions on strategic priorities, funding, capacity challenges

Community Survey

74

Respondents in a 2-week response window

4.5/5

Personal importance rating

91%

Think there isn't enough being done

98%

Would like to see more land conservation along the rivers

Community Identified Threats

65%

Poorly planned watershed development

39%

Industrial discharge

28%

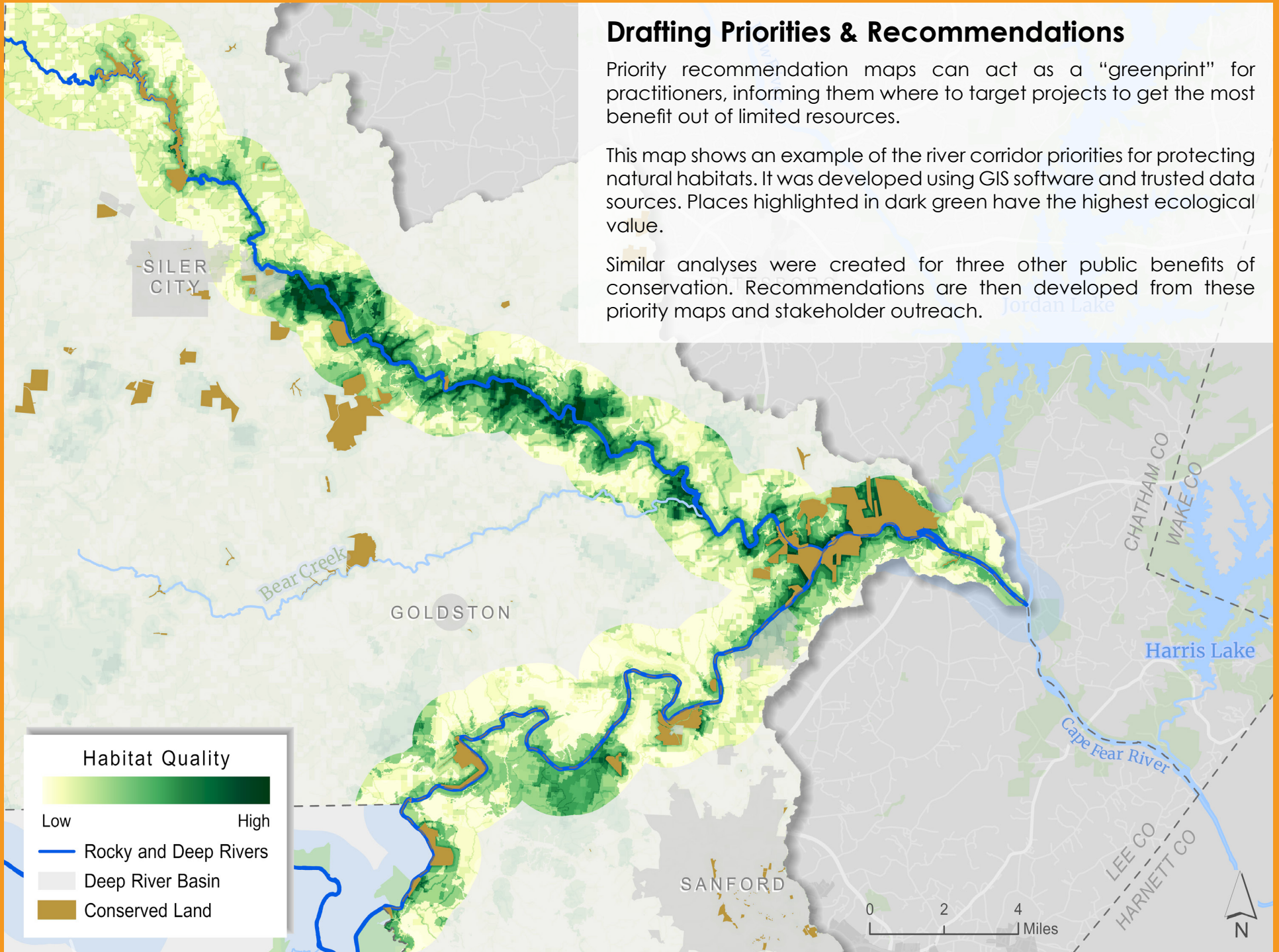
Sedimentation & urban runoff

Drafting Priorities & Recommendations

Priority recommendation maps can act as a “greenprint” for practitioners, informing them where to target projects to get the most benefit out of limited resources.

This map shows an example of the river corridor priorities for protecting natural habitats. It was developed using GIS software and trusted data sources. Places highlighted in dark green have the highest ecological value.

Similar analyses were created for three other public benefits of conservation. Recommendations are then developed from these priority maps and stakeholder outreach.





Protecting Natural Habitat Goals

Protect land within each of the 19 different Natural Heritage Program identified significant and diverse natural communities in this area. Prioritize projects that connect fragmented pieces of protected land, protect species of concern, preserve intact forests, or have restoration opportunities.



Safeguarding Clean Water Goals

Prioritize land conservation along the Rocky and Deep Rivers and in public drinking supply watersheds. Protect land with tributary streams and wetlands. Support projects with co-benefits to reduce sedimentation, flooding impacts, and tributary pollution.



Supporting Local Farms and Working Lands Goals

Protect land with prime farming soils and high productivity, versatility, and resilience potential. Prioritize projects enrolled in the present use value program and within voluntary agricultural districts. Focus efforts where the American Farmland Trust predicts high levels of urban development threat.



Connecting People with Nature Goals

Protect land along the Deep River State Trail and adjacent to greenways or other managed area. Prioritize projects that address gaps in service and increase greenspace access for vulnerable or underserved communities.

Recommendations

- Protect 10% of land within 2 miles of the rivers in 10 years (7,600 acres) and 25% in 25 years (19,000 acres).
- Work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to explore options for a new Urban National Wildlife Refuge.
- Build off the existing capacity of the Deep River State Trail, connecting contiguous land parcels when opportunities to do so arise, and acquiring land conducive to support paddle access. Improve corridors that connect Siler City and Sanford to the main stem of the trail.
- Support dam removal projects upstream that benefit migratory fish species, such as shad, and connect disparate populations of Cape Fear Shiner.
- Fund programs that help support new and beginning farmers especially underserved Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) communities to retain working lands, such as Triangle Land Conservancy's Good Ground initiative.
- Establish sustaining sources of revenue for farmland protection. For example, dedicate the present use rollback taxes in each county to support farmland protection to match federal and state resources such as the NC Agriculture Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund.
- Support the investments made by Siler City, and its partner Sanford, in upgrading the Siler City wastewater treatment plant capacity to reduce point source pollution discharge into Loves Creek and the Rocky River.
- Support individuals through transitioning their working lands to prevent further conversion when land ownership changes, by utilizing resources offered by organizations such as American Farmland Trust.
- Work with Sanford, Siler City, and Pittsboro to dedicate a watershed protection fund based on volumetric use, to support future clean water focused conservation in their service area.

Access the full plan and data at
<https://triangleland.org/deep-rocky-river-conservation-initiative>

