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CONFLUENCE

Summer 2024 Newsletter

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Community partners celebrate with TLC at the Williamson Agriculture Pavilion (April 2024). Butch Lawter, Johnston County Board of Commissioners; Cheryl Stallings, Wake County Commissioner - District 3; Don Mial, Wake County Commissioner - District 1; Stormie Forte, City of Raleigh At-Large Council Member; Sandy Sweitzer, TLC Executive Director; and Sig Hutchinson, former Wake County Commissioner (Photo: Cara Lewis)

IN THE
PAST FOUR
DECADES,
WE HAVE
PROTECTED
**MORE THAN
25,000
ACRES** OF
NATURAL AND
WORKING
LANDS.

As we celebrate 40 years of conservation, it is with great pride and joy that I share with you: **We have surpassed our current strategic plan to conserve 25,000 acres by 2025!**

As of July 15th, our land protection team closed 25,222 acres. This is about three and a half times the size of Umstead State Park, spread across the Triangle.

No matter how you visualize this milestone, we know that the Triangle region is healthier and more vibrant because of our work to safeguard clean water, protect natural habitats, support local farms and food, and connect people with nature.

Our work is made possible by:

- ✓ Landowners who are committed to protecting wild and working lands for tomorrow
- ✓ Local and state governments who provide a variety of funding resources and preservation programs
- ✓ Volunteers and partners throughout the Triangle who help us maintain our nature preserves
- ✓ Individual, corporate, and foundation donors who helped us double the pace of conservation over the past six years through their financial support

We are grateful for each and every one of you and we remain steadfast in our commitment to be a force for nature.

Sandy Sweitzer, Executive Director



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Margaret Sands, Associate Director of Land Protection West



NATURAL HABITATS & WILDLIFE: "A Wary Doe" by Ross McKinney, 2024 Photo Contest Winner

Matt Rulledge, Associate Director of Stewardship
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Sonya Spruill, Prospect Development Manager
Tanya Dianto, Staff Accountant
Umar Muhammad, Land Stewardship Associate East

We have enjoyed working with our talented summer interns:
Brody Milotte in Communications, Lauren Faye Welsh in Conservation Planning, and Julio and Ava in Stewardship.

SPECIAL THANKS

Thanks to **Sean Wilson, Jack Blackmer, Will Morgan, and Toni Jones** for six years of service on TLC's Board of Directors (two terms), and to **Connor Jarvis** for three years of service. We are grateful to each of them for dedicating their expertise and time to ensure the Triangle remains a vibrant place to live, work, and play.

SURPASSING OUR GOAL TO CONSERVE 25,000 ACRES BY 2025!



TLC staff celebration at Irvin Farm in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (Photo: Jenni Tidrow)

In 2018, TLC set a goal to strategically and permanently protect and steward 25,000 acres of land across the Triangle by 2025. As of July 15th, 2024, we have conserved 25,222 acres.

"It's been a big year for TLC, as we've built on all the hard work and commitment to conservation over the past 40 years," said **Marlena Gutierrez Byrne**, TLC Board Chair. "We could never have hit our goal of conserving 25,000 acres by 2025 without TLC's many partners and generous donors. Surpassing this goal over a year early is just incredible!"

As North Carolina continues to be a top destination for those seeking good jobs and a better quality of life, communities throughout the Triangle are experiencing rapid growth and development. TLC works closely with many others to increase our efforts to ensure that everyone in the Triangle has access to green spaces, clean water, land ownership opportunities, nutritious food, and more ways to connect with nature. These partnerships are critical to our success.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR STRATEGIC CONSERVATION

Thanks to the NC Legislature, State agencies, including the NC Land and Water Fund (NCLWF) and NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (NCADFP), are providing increased support for land conservation. Local counties are also prioritizing land protection in their budgets and long-range plans that provide essential local funding.

Private donations support the professional staff required to identify properties to protect, work with landowners, secure grant funding, and ultimately complete land protection projects. They also help us care for these natural treasures once they are protected and deepen engagement with the public who benefit greatly from forever conserved spaces.

"I am thrilled to see TLC reach this important milestone," said **Will Summer**, Executive Director for the NCLWF. "Since our contribution to TLC's work in the New Hope Creek corridor in our very first grant cycle in 1997, we have awarded over \$32 million to TLC to protect land in the Triangle. I look forward to all the great things our partnership will continue to accomplish in the years to come."

In the last year alone, TLC protected over 1,300 acres valued at \$25 million.

WAKE COUNTY

In 1984, TLC protected its first property: 5 acres in northeastern Wake County. Temple Flat Rock is a state designated Natural Heritage Area and has now expanded to include 17 acres of restored grassland and 12 acres of forest along with a rare granitic rock outcrop.

Forty years later, Wake County and TLC celebrated an important farmland preservation project when father and son, James and Matthew Bailey, placed 125 acres of their Wendell farm into the Wake Soil and Water Conservation District's (WSWCD) Farmland Protection Program. TLC will hold and monitor the easement in perpetuity to ensure the land is protected.

"Because of this easement, these nearly 125 acres of fertile farmland and gorgeous forests will forever be protected from new development," said **Shinica Thomas**, Chair, Wake County Board of Commissioners, at a dedication celebration earlier this year.



James and Matthew Bailey at their farm in Wendell, NC (Photo: TLC Staff)

By investing over a million dollars of deferred agricultural tax funds to this project, Wake County facilitated one of the largest single-county dedications of farmland preservation funds in the state. Both Johnston and Wake Counties have allocated rollback taxes from Present Use Value to fund farmland preservation. These are taxes paid when farmland is sold for development. In the past two years the county has dedicated close to \$8 million for farmland protection through this program.

JOHNSTON COUNTY

In his 2024 State of the County address to the Johnston County Board of Commissioners, Chair **Butch Lawter** cited land use as one of the six priorities for Johnston County. In the last year alone, the county has helped TLC protect over 300 acres of farmland and forests.

"Thanks to willing landowners, the state of North Carolina, local counties and municipalities, as well as the military, we have succeeded in doubling the pace of conservation in the past six years."

-Sandy Sweitzer,
TLC's Executive Director

"We've stepped up in a big way by committing Present Use Value funds to preserve farmland through conservation easements," said Lawter. "And the Board continues to support Triangle Land Conservancy by approving funds to support projects in our annual budget. Last year the county dedicated \$825,000 to preserve open space and farmland in Johnston County."

Johnston County is ranked 19th out of all 3,143 counties in the country for potential farmland loss in the next 15 years.

WAKE COUNTY AND CITY OF RALEIGH

TLC has also had long partnerships with Wake County and the City of Raleigh to support land protection around Falls Lake. The three organizations worked together in January of 2024 to protect a vast wild area of northern Wake County that helps ensure critical water quality protection of the City of Raleigh's main drinking water supply, Falls Lake.

"We were thrilled to partner with TLC and the City of Raleigh to protect this unique 320-acre property," said **Chris Snow**, director of Wake County Parks, Recreation and Open Space. "In addition to nine headwater streams that flow directly to Fall's Lake, this conserved tract has over five miles of stream as well as a portion of a designated Natural Heritage Area. It also connects four properties previously conserved with

funding by the Raleigh Watershed Protection Program and Wake County Open Space Bonds, creating 800 acres of contiguous unfragmented open space adjacent to the lake."



We Did It! Celebrating conservation wins with cake! (Photo: TLC Staff)

"Since 2006, Raleigh has strongly supported land conservation projects as the best means to protect water quality through our Watershed Protection Program," said **Edward Buchan**, Assistant Director for Raleigh Water. "Given the tremendous growth the Triangle area is experiencing, water supply watershed protection is more important than ever, and we are excited this property will be protected

in perpetuity. We also deeply appreciate the partnerships with Wake County and Triangle Land Conservancy in helping to protect these critical natural resources."

In total, the Raleigh Watershed Protection Program has helped protect over 10,000 acres of land and 130 miles of stream in its 20-year history, supporting clean drinking water for over 1 million people.

"The City of Raleigh is proud to support one of the most innovative and effective watershed protection programs in the country over the past 20 years," said **Stormie Forte**, At-Large Council Member for the City of Raleigh. "By partnering with TLC to protect land and water, we will be providing clean drinking water for Raleigh and all the communities we serve for generations to come."

CITY OF DURHAM AND ORANGE COUNTY

Orange County's Land Legacy Program recently supported TLC's conservation of a farm on Terry Road in eastern Orange County, upstream from the City of Durham's drinking water supply.

"By partnering with TLC on this conservation easement, which includes 35 acres of active farmland and 15 acres of forested lands, we are conserving critical aquatic habitat that is upstream from the City of

Durham's source of drinking water," said **Chris Hirni**, Land Conservation Manager, Orange County Land Legacy Program. "We look forward to continuing to work with private and non-profit partners such as TLC to protect important resource lands in Orange County."

LEE AND CHATHAM COUNTIES

With funding from US Fish and Wildlife Service and The Conservation Fund, TLC recently completed a conservation plan that recognizes the immense value of the Rocky and Deep Rivers and develops strategies to protect their integrity in a changing landscape. The plan calls for



Attendees at TLC's community presentation in Sanford view a map of Lee county featuring conservation project sites, preserved farm areas, and paddle access points along rivers. (Photo: TLC Staff)

protecting 10% of land within two miles of the rivers in the next ten years (7,600 acres), increasing to 25% over 25 years (19,000 acres by 2050).

As part of the planning process, TLC conducted several stakeholder and outreach meetings over the past year to provide opportunities for community input. Lee County officials are also working with TLC to support funding for conservation. TLC has submitted several grant applications to NC Land and Water Fund (NCLWF) and the

NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (NCADFP) to protect priority land identified within the plan. This and other work in Lee County was generously supported by private donations from long-time TLC member and Lee County resident **Tommy Fraiser Bridges**, who approached TLC several years ago to learn how his family could support increased land protection in Lee County. Such generous support from public and private partners makes it possible for TLC to protect land.

White Pines Nature Preserve in Chatham County was the second major land acquisition project for TLC in 1987 and TLC's first public nature preserve. Located at the confluence of the Deep and Rocky Rivers, this mountain-like sliver of the Piedmont provides a refuge for a broad collection of mountain, piedmont and coastal plain flora and fauna. Thanks to willing landowners, White Pines Nature Preserve, renowned for its isolated population of white pines (*Pinus strobus*) now protects more than 270 acres.

In the past year, TLC has protected several more properties in Chatham county including a donated conservation easement on a 38-acre family farm in the Silk Hope region. This property will remain as open space and farmland which feature rich soil, an intermittent stream (which feeds into the Upper Cape Fear watershed), hardwood forest, and a partially wooded pasture maintained for the benefit of rescue donkeys.

Another important conservation project in Chatham county is located between Fearrington Village and Jordan Lake, one of the largest sources of drinking water and recreation sites in the state. In 2023, TLC permanently conserved 248 acres of undeveloped, forested land that buffers land around Jordan Lake managed by the Army Corps of Engineers. Over 7,500 feet of streams flow through this property directly into Jordan Lake, the drinking water source for the Towns of Cary, Apex, and other local communities.



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FARMLAND: "Williamson Farmland in October" by Martha Elliott

CATAWBA TRAIL FARM: A MODEL FOR PROTECTING AND REDISTRIBUTING LAND



Delphine Sellars holding the time capsule containing a copy of the land deed transfer and historic artifacts. (Photo: TLC Staff)



TLC staff Katia Griffin-Jakymec, Kietra Hyman, and Cara Lewis at UCAN's time capsule burial ceremony. (Photo: Aniya Bourne)

In 2008 TLC purchased a parcel of land from a developer because of its vibrant wildlife habitat and proximity to the Little River, which feeds into Falls Lake and provides drinking water to the City of Raleigh.

Designated as "Snow Hill IV," the land that became Catawba Trail Farm was once part of the Snow Hill Plantation. Owned by the Camerons, North Carolina's largest slave-owning family, the plantation once had nearly 1,000 enslaved people working the land.

Delphine Sellars and her sister, **Lucille Patterson**, first set foot on the property in 2016 after inquiring with TLC about land available for community gardening.

"I remember hearing **Bo Howes**, TLC's Director of Land Protection & Stewardship West, saying TLC had a property I might want to see," said Sellars, a former social worker who headed Durham County's extension office for nearly a decade managing programs to help home gardeners and farmers grow sustainable produce. She learned about the

“

"Imagine waking up to find that your greatest dream has come true. That's what ownership of the Catawba Trail Farm means to me and UCAN."

- Delphine Sellars, Executive Director,
Urban Community AgriNomics

property by serving on TLC's Board of Directors, but the history of the 176 acres of land was still not well known.

Delphine vividly remembers her first visit to this abandoned property. Massive fallen trees were strewn about, and dilapidated buildings were covered in brambles.

The only road leading in and out of the property became an impassable mud bath after heavy rain. Yet, she had a vision

with a clear image of a working farm where people could raise their own food and she could create a community to teach new and future farmers.

By spring of 2018, Delphine and Lucille, along with many dedicated volunteers at Urban Community AgriNomics (UCAN) set out to restore the dilapidated historic farmstead into what is now the Catawba Trail Farm (CTF) and Community Garden.

HOME TO ONE OF THE LARGEST SLAVE PLANTATIONS IN THE SOUTH

The land was once crossed by part of the Catawba Indian Trading Path - 510 miles of interconnected trails and river crossings linked by roads and paths between the Chesapeake Bay region and the Catawba, Cherokee, and other Native American towns in the Carolinas and Georgia. William Johnston was the first white owner of the 400-acre Snow Hill Plantation starting in 1763. His partnership with Richard Bennehan

led to the creation of Stagville Plantation, at one time the largest plantation in the Southeast with over 30,000 acres and 900 enslaved people.

In the past five years, it became clear to TLC that the seeds planted by UCAN on this property were growing more than food or even community, and soon their vision and connection to this land had outgrown the original arrangement. Together, TLC and UCAN decided that maintaining a landlord-tenant relationship between the organizations - even with no money changing hands - would only further perpetuate a racist cycle without advancing either organizations' mission.

REDISTRIBUTING LAND TO HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

On January 12, 2024, TLC formally transferred ownership of the 176-acre Catawba Trail Farm to Urban Community AgriNomics. One of the state's largest transfers of property from a land trust to an African American-led nonprofit, the deal represents TLC's first **Good Ground** project. The Good Ground Initiative (GGI) serves as a model for a growing conservation movement to increase land ownership by historically underserved institutions and individuals as well as access to and participation in conservation resources.

At Catawba Trail Farm, TLC used years of accumulated conservation funding to provide land access and sovereignty at no cost to UCAN. Conservation easements were also used to ensure the conservation values of the property remain intact in perpetuity.

Later in the spring of 2024, UCAN hosted a special ceremony with TLC to bury a time capsule on the property.

"We are grateful for this moment of reflection on our journey and gratitude for those who paved the way," said Sellars. "The capsule holds treasures like the land deed, signed by UCAN and TLC members, coins featuring Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Sacagawea, an 1800s handmade nail, seeds from our farm, images of UCAN's history, and a flash drive containing our story and articles. Scheduled to be opened in 50 years, the time capsule is a testament to our enduring legacy."

TLC has been honored to be a part of Urban Community AgriNomics' journey, and for the transfer of this special piece of land and history to be a part of our legacy.



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CATAWBA TRAIL FARM



Celebrating a historic land deed transfer on January 15, 2024: Margaret Sands, TLC's Associate Director of Land Protection, Delphine Sellars, UCAN Executive Director, Lucille Patterson, UCAN Assistant Director, Kietra Hyman, TLC's Good Ground Manager, and Sandy Switzer, TLC Executive Director (Photo: TLC Staff)



Produce packed by volunteers for a free food distribution to the community. (Photo: Aniya Bourne)



Lucille Patterson, UCAN Assistant Director and long-time volunteer and peanut farmer, Maude Lyons (Photo: TLC Staff)



TLC Staff with 2024 PINES Graduates from Knightdale High School: Ava, Tadrion, KJ, Julio, and Delaney (Photo: Tara Stanford)

CELEBRATING 2024 PINES GRADUATES AND NEWLY CREATED INTERNSHIPS

Pathways Into Natural Environments and Science (PINES) was created to establish opportunities for high school students to network and explore careers in conservation and natural resources.

TLC's PINES program returned this spring for its third year, welcoming 10 students from Knightdale High School (KHS) to learn about and explore the outdoors with us. This immersive program is a paid fellowship that connects students with professionals working in the field of conservation and provides opportunities to experience nature and community learning.

Currently, the PINES program engages students from KHS where TLC has been involved for more than five years. We are especially proud of our recent graduating seniors: **Ava, Tadrion, KJ, Julio, and Delaney.**

New this summer, TLC created two stewardship internships specially designed for PINES graduates to develop more advanced knowledge in land conservation and stewardship skills. These internships are supported by a generous local family who was inspired by the program and has deep interest in helping to foster students' growth in the field of conservation. This support along with several other private and corporate donations have secured a strong future for PINES.

Graduates **Ava** and **Julio** applied, were accepted, and began working full-time in June with **Umar Muhammad**, Land Stewardship Associate East at Williamson Preserve. They will assist with supporting prescribed fire planning and execution, creating invasive plant eradication plans, maintaining nature preserves, and leading volunteer groups

- Originally from Michigan, Ava has always enjoyed math and learned about the PINES program from a poster she saw at KHS.

She's particularly interested in trail maintenance and what's involved in keeping trails open and accessible.

- Julio grew up in Puerto Rico and has lived in New Jersey and North Carolina. Always interested in science, he heard about the PINES program after hearing Ava give a talk to his animal science class at KHS.
- Both Ava and Julio had high praise for TLC and the PINES program. They particularly enjoyed meeting speakers who met with students throughout the year to discuss topics ranging from geology and birding to foraging and outdoor survival skills.

TLC works to help support students in their future plans, including planning tours of local universities, assisting in the college application process, and continuing to engage with alumni through internship opportunities. Students receive a stipend while participating in the program. In addition to high school involvement, TLC prioritizes regular engagement with PINES alumni through programs offering ongoing educational programs.



2024 Summer Interns: Ava and Julio (Photo: TLC Staff)

DIQUAN EDMONDS



Diquan Edmonds at TLC's Brumley South Nature Preserve (Photo: Stacey Sprentz)

Recognizing a lack of diversity within the conservation field, PINES was created in 2022 by former staff member **Diquan Edmonds**, with the goal of establishing pathways of opportunities into the conservation and natural resource fields for students from Knightdale High School, which is just a few miles from TLC's Bailey & Sarah Williamson Farm and Nature Preserve. Since then, the program has doubled in size - from five to ten students - and has seen all graduating seniors off to college to begin programs of study in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.



PINES students and TLC staff after a meeting at Williamson Nature Preserve (Photo: Olivia Garcia)

PARTNERING WITH CORRAL TO EMPOWER YOUNG WOMEN WITH EQUINE THERAPY

In an environment where non-profits are often perceived as working in silos, CORRAL Riding Academy and TLC demonstrated the power of synergy by pooling resources and expertise to create a more substantial impact on the community.

Located in Cary, CORRAL is a faith-motivated nonprofit that equips adolescent girls in high-risk situations through a long-term, holistic program of equine therapy and education to prepare each girl and her community with skills, resources, and opportunities so that she can gain access to a bright future.

Over two years ago, through the unwavering support and partnership with TLC through our NextGen Farming Program, CORRAL gained access to the Bailey and Sarah Williamson Preserve after losing their lease on a nearby property along the Neuse River.

CORRAL needed access to farmland and fields for their horses and a facility for the girls in the program. TLC was able to provide fields for the horses to graze through our programs for new and beginning farmers.

TLC's NextGen Farming Program - As part of the TLC's commitment to investing in local food production in Wake County, we host several new and beginning farmers who use sustainable agriculture practices that include regenerative cattle grazing, native plant propagation, and small-scale produce production. Although horses once roamed on the farmland at Williamson, no horses are allowed on any of our trails.

To express appreciation for letting the riding academy have access to the farmland, fields, and ranch house at Williamson for over a year, CORRAL team members presented TLC with a painted barn quilt at a special

gathering in March at the preserve. Several young women reflected on their experience and the power of making new friends and gaining new confidence.

In addition to preparing the fields at Williamson for horses, volunteers from CORRAL also devoted many hours to cleaning out the ranch house on the property so that the girls had a place to meet for programs and activities.

"This partnership underscores CORRAL's commitment to collaboration over competition within the non-profit sector, dispelling misconceptions surrounding the perceived rivalry among such organizations," said **Joy Currey**, Executive Director at CORRAL. "Together, we are stronger and better positioned to address the challenges facing our community."

Looking ahead, CORRAL Riding Academy and Triangle Land Conservancy are excited about the prospect of future collaborations, including the potential development of a third farm in Durham. By continuing to work together, both organizations aim to expand their impact, reach more individuals in need, and foster a culture of collaboration that transcends traditional boundaries within the non-profit sector.



Alums from CORRAL Riding Academy presenting a painted barn quilt to Sandy Switzer, TLC Executive Director and Heather Szaro, TLC Farm Coordinator on March 20, 2024 (Photo: TLC Staff)



TLC's Amaya Horner, Kayla Ebert, and Olivia Garcia greet guests arriving at Three Bears (Photo: TLC Staff)



Glow in the dark signage at the 2024 Statewide Star Party (Photo: TLC Staff)

STARGAZING WITH RALEIGH ASTRONOMY CLUB

On the first Friday of each month, astronomy enthusiasts and stargazers gather at Three Bears, one of TLC's private properties located in Creedmoor, NC, to see the night sky with members from Raleigh Astronomy Club (RAC). In April, TLC and RAC hosted a Statewide Star Party as part of the 2024 NC Science Festival. TLC staff worked with local partners to offer fun activities including eclipse art, a night hike through the forest, and toddler story time. Volunteers from RAC set up powerful telescopes for attendees to look at celestial wonders including Orion's belt, the Pleiades cluster, both Dippers, and the North Star.



The OREO moon phase activity was a hit with all ages. (Photo: Olivia Garcia)



Little stargazers were excited to learn about the night sky, and receive special eclipse glasses! (Photo: Olivia Garcia)



Read A Night of Miraculous and Extraordinary Magic by **Ella Howie**, Education & Outreach Intern



Examining nighttime visitors at Moth Night! (Photo: Laura Warman)

MOTH NIGHT WITH BACKYARD BUTTERFLIES

As part of celebrating Pollinator Week, TLC partnered with Backyard Butterflies to host our first Moth Night at Brumley Nature Preserve.

Guests arrived around sunset to visit five collection stations complete with sheets and lights to attract moths. This free event open to all ages was a huge hit. And observations were submitted as citizen science data to help scientists better understand moths and the health of our local environment.

Lior Carlson and **John Jarvis** founded Backyard Butterflies in 2018 and their organization hosts a variety of educational events, including ongoing moth nights, for the public. Given the outpouring of positive feedback on this first-of-its-kind event at Brumley, we are excited about hosting more opportunities for people to connect with nature after dark!



Rosy Maple Moth (*Dryocampa rubicunda*)



Read *Moth Madness* at Brumley Nature Preserve by Brody Milotte, Communications Intern.

CELEBRATING NATIONAL TRAILS DAY WITH TRIANGLE MOUNTAIN BIKE ENTHUSIASTS

In June, TLC partnered with Triangle Trails Initiative, Oaks and Spokes and Triangle Off-Road Cyclists (TORC) to host and celebrate the official opening of a favorite, but unofficial, mountain-biking trail known as "286." A popular destination for fatBire enthusiasts throughout the Triangle, the 286 trail system includes east and west sections situated between the Raleigh-Durham airport, William Umstead Park and the towns of Cary and Morrisville.

Attendees at the celebration enjoyed guided rides and hikes, food trucks, and connecting with the Triangle mountain bike community. Members of the Crank Arm Brewing



Crank Arm Brewing Cycling team member notes mountain bike trails at Williamson Nature Preserve (Photo: TLC Staff)



"National Trails Day felt like the perfect day to celebrate the long-awaited opening of 286. We appreciate TLC and all of our partners who create and manage trails for the community to enjoy."

- Rashawn King, Program Manager for Triangle Trails Initiative

Cycling Team and NC Adapted Sports led trail rides for various levels of riders to experience 286.

Wake County Open Space began leasing the 286 tract from Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority in 2023 making the 286 east section of trail legal for mountain biking. The county plans to rebuild and expand trails on this section of land. TLC was excited to celebrate the opening of 286 on National Trails Day.

"We manage 55 miles of trail in the Triangle and some of our most popular trails were designed for mountain bike riders," said Leigh Ann Hammerbacher, Director of Land Protection and Stewardship East. "We couldn't do our work without our community partners, many of whom helped make the official opening of 286 a success."



Guided bike rides were available for riders, and cats, of all ages. (Photo: TLC Staff)



An unrestricted view of forever protected farmland under blue skies in Willow Spring, NC.
(Photo: TLC Staff)

EASEMENTS

Triangle Land Conservancy offers a variety of conservation options for landowners who want to preserve and protect their land. This includes establishing conservation **easements**, a voluntary but legally binding agreement which allows the owner to remain in control of their property and use the land, sell it, or pass it on to heirs while forever protecting the land by limiting development.

Conservation easements are binding and stay with the property even if it is sold to another owner – meaning the land’s natural resources and value are forever protected. TLC will hold and continue to monitor the easement in perpetuity.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THERE IS AN EASEMENT ON A PROPERTY?

Most of us are surrounded by easements every day. Examples in suburban areas include utility easements, road easements, sidewalk easements, and drainage easements. Many neighborhoods are planned with easements in mind that may include playgrounds, pet exercise areas, and landscaping.

These are considered “affirmative” easements because they empower access required to specific areas and allow specific activities, such as recreation. A common example is a power easement that allows an electricity company to install and maintain electrical power lines, above or below ground, on private property. These easements may or may not have related signage as residents in cities and suburban neighborhoods are used to seeing local crews walking around or through yards or shared spaces to conduct road maintenance, remove fallen trees from public greenways, etc.

Conservation easements that include large parcels of land, such as many of the nature preserves protected by TLC, are considered “negative easements” because they honor the landowner’s desire to restrict the use of the land. Therefore, these easements almost always are identified by boundary postings and recorded with the Register of Deeds in the appropriate county.

Boundary postings are signs posted along the perimeter of an easement to indicate land that is not accessible to the public. Many farm easements have irregularly shaped boundaries, such as buffer strips around wetlands or streams, so these posted signs are necessary to ensure compliance with the terms of the conservation easement and prevent trespassing and unauthorized activities.

Although technically classified as negative easements, rural and farm easements often allow continued hunting, farming and forestry, and even future homesites. And conserving and protecting land and water is almost always a positive!



TLC boundary postings help prevent trespassing and unauthorized activities.
(Photo: TLC Staff)

STEWARDSHIP OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

When TLC protects lands, either by owning it or by holding a conservation easement, we make a promise to take care of that land in perpetuity. Stewardship of conservation easements includes regular site monitoring visits, responding to landowners’ questions, maintaining positive relationships with landowners and neighbors, building relationships with new landowners, ensuring easement violations are resolved, responding to landowners’ requests to exercise reserved rights, and amending easements when necessary. Stewardship of owned properties extends to include, when necessary, ecological restoration and more active management.

Many land trusts including TLC have a **land steward** that conducts onsite monitoring by visiting easement properties at least once a year

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to observe and evaluate the condition of the land, compliance with legal agreements and permitted practices, and identifying notable changes and potential issues or concerns. Examples of easement violations include signs of trespassing, lost habitat, polluted streams, unauthorized vegetation removal, and unapproved structures or roadways.

Hannah Royal is the Stewardship Manager at TLC, and she is responsible for the management and monitoring of 175 easements. This is accomplished through the support of a team of volunteers who monitor some of the TLC conservation easements.

As more land is conserved throughout the Triangle, it takes more time to steward our conservation easements. In 2019, TLC created a volunteer easement monitoring program to allow us to conserve and monitor more land with the help of well-trained, dedicated TLC volunteers who perform monitoring visits with willing landowners.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN MONITORING CONSERVATION EASEMENTS?

Inspections for monitoring easements can take countless forms ranging from aerial observation and remote imagery to onsite visits. The location and size of the property often determines what types of monitoring are necessary.

TLC mainly does onsite inspections, walking the boundaries of over 175 conservation easements annually.

Onsite monitoring provides a thorough way to check on most conservation easements and can often include meeting with the landowner to stay informed and aware of issues or plans that may not be visible during an inspection.

Many land trusts including TLC have a land steward that conducts onsite monitoring by visiting easement properties at least once a



Hannah Royal, TLC's Stewardship Manager, manages and monitors conservation easements held by TLC throughout the Triangle.
(Photo: TLC Staff)

LANGUAGE OF CONSERVATION

year to observe and evaluate the condition of the land, compliance with legal agreements and permitted practices, and identifying notable changes and potential issues or concerns. Examples of easement violations include signs of trespassing, lost habitat, polluted streams, unauthorized vegetation removal, and unapproved structures or roadways.

DATA COLLECTION, RECORD KEEPING, AND REPORTING

Completing an onsite monitoring job can take several hours or up to an entire day depending on the drive time to and from the property, the number of acres to inspect, along with taking photos and entering observations and findings. While software programs have made the process more efficient, there is still a considerable amount of processing, paperwork, and reporting required after each site visit.

Depending on the legal agreements and number of organizations involved in a conservation project, site visit reports are submitted accordingly. Many landowners who have conservation easements with TLC also have agreements with state organizations such as the NC Land and Water Fund and NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Trust Fund.

EACH EASEMENT IS UNIQUE AND CONTROLLED BY THE LANDOWNER

Each conservation easement agreement is different, based on the needs of the owner(s) and the unique characteristics of the property. Earlier this year, **Lola Stephenson Delbridge** voluntarily placed her 50-acre farm in Willow Spring, NC into a conservation easement with TLC. The Stephenson Delbridge family will continue to own their land, but the conservation easement with TLC will restrict the ability to develop the land to protect its conservation and agricultural value.

The Stephenson Farm has a mix of hay fields, pine plantation, and hardwood bottomland forest and wetland where it borders Middle Creek. This diversity of habitats provides a home for a variety of wildlife, and the property contains about 30 acres of prime soil—the best soils for productive agriculture. This conservation easement is the second land protection project completed with the Delbridge family, adding 17 acres of forested floodplain on Middle Creek TLC purchased from them last year with support from Johnston County.



Lynette Delbridge, Catherine Quinn, and Lola Delbridge with TLC's Conservation Easement sign that will be displayed on the property. (Photo: TLC Staff)



EASEMENTS: DID YOU KNOW?

Conserving land is a big decision and often involves working with numerous public and private entities. Some key points for landowners to consider include:

- **Ownership retained:** You retain your private property rights and can sell, lease, or pass your land on to your family.
- **Flexible:** Farming, forestry, hunting, recreational uses, and a limited number of house sites and/or property divisions may be permitted.
- **Financial benefits:** You may be able to significantly reduce your federal income tax liability for several years, starting the year you conserve your land. Compensation through local, state, and federal grant funding may also be available.
- **Estate planning benefits:** Conserving your land can help you with estate planning, reduce your estate taxes, and allows for transition to the next generation.
- **Tailored to you:** All conservation easements are unique to the land being conserved and to your vision for your property.
- **Voluntary:** All landowners who decide to conserve their land with a conservation easement do so voluntarily.
- **Permanent:** Conservation easements remain with the land; thus, TLC will steward your land in perpetuity.

For more information on easements or conserving your land, scan the code below or contact one of TLC's land protection staff members to learn more and understand your options.



2024 TLC PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Each year, we receive many beautiful and compelling photos from both amateur and professional photographers. TLC's annual photo contest offers these dedicated photo lovers an exciting challenge and allows us to see our nature preserves through their unique lenses.

This year's participants could submit photos in four categories that represent each of TLC's four public benefits: safeguarding clean water, protecting natural habitats, supporting local farms and food, and connecting people with nature.

IMAGE CATEGORIES AND 2024 WINNERS:

WATER: "Brumley North Pond on Cedar Grove Trail" by Barbara Szombathalvy

NATURAL HABITATS & WILDLIFE: "A Wary Doe" by Ross McKinney

FARMLAND: "Williamson Farmland in October" by Martha Elliott

HUMAN CONNECTIONS with NATURE: "Williamson Mountain Biker" by Deborah Hage

Winning photos from the 2024 TLC Photo Contest on display (Photos: TLC Staff)



UPCOMING EVENTS



NORTH CAROLINA
BOTANICAL
GARDEN

OCTOBER 23

Save the date for Wild Ideas!

Join us at **5:30 pm** to learn about natural habitats at the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill.



DECEMBER 3

During this global day of giving your donations will be **DOUBLED** to protect and care for the lands you love.

HUMAN CONNECTIONS with NATURE: "Williamson Mountain Biker"
by Deborah Hage, 2024 Photo Contest Winner



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