

WakeNature Preserves Partnership

www.WakeNature.org

The mission of the WakeNature Preserves Partnership (WakeNature) is to organize and provide resources to identify ecologically valuable, publicly owned open spaces within Wake County and to build capacity for appropriate management and long-term stewardship of those areas.

Background: Despite significant efforts to purchase and preserve open space in Wake County, the following challenges exist:

- knowledge is incomplete about the most ecologically valuable, publicly owned natural areas in Wake County;
- there is limited active management planning and stewardship of publicly owned open space in Wake County known to have high ecological value;
- stewardship and conservation management may not be subjects that Parks and Recreation agencies are well informed about or able to provide with limited staff and budgets;
- despite high levels of interest in nature-based recreation, the average Wake County resident knows little about our local natural heritage.

WakeNature brings together natural resource professionals and representatives of local governments, universities, state agencies, and nonprofit organizations to build capacity of local governments in Wake County to identify the most valuable natural resources areas they own and to help provide resources to improve environmental stewardship of these areas. Our activities may include, but are not limited to, organizing service-learning opportunities through NC State University, providing capacity building and technical assistance opportunities, assisting with the organization of volunteer groups, and applying for project-specific grants.

WakeNature encourages a coordinated approach to classifying and managing the most ecologically valuable natural areas in Wake County, as well as better public education about our local natural heritage. We envision a county-wide, cross-jurisdictional brand of *WakeNature Preserves* that highlights Wake County's finest natural areas and aids public awareness and appreciation of these special places.

WakeNature seeks to build capacity in four major areas to promote better stewardship:

Identification: WakeNature has developed criteria for identifying ecologically valuable natural areas that could become *WakeNature Preserves*.

Inventory: Quality management planning and stewardship begins with documenting existing natural resources. We aspire to create natural resource inventories of all *WakeNature Preserves*.

Classification: A consistent brand – *WakeNature Preserve* – for the most ecologically valuable natural areas across the County will help improve public awareness and appreciation of Wake County's natural heritage, as well as support for stewardship efforts and future bond referenda.

Management Planning and Stewardship: Best practice conservation management includes developing and implementing management plans for natural areas. The Partnership can help facilitate resources to assist with management planning and stewardship for *WakeNature Preserves*, aided in part by NC State service learning projects and classes.

Selected Activities and Accomplishments

- Designated Wake County's Turnipseed Preserve as the first *WakeNature Preserve* in Wake County in collaboration with Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (2011).
- Worked with the City of Raleigh to create *Nature Preserve* and *Protected Natural Area* classifications within the Raleigh Parks system. Raleigh designated four parks as *Nature Preserves* and one as a *Protected Natural Area* (2011).
- Received the Regional Award from the City of Raleigh's Environmental Award Program, for demonstrated environmental stewardship for the region (2011).
- A WakeNature panel was featured as the opening session during the annual Outreach Scholarship Conference, as an example of effective partnership among university, government, and non-government organizations (2010).
- Instituted a series of technical capacity-building workshops every spring and fall:
 - Managing early successional habitat (Fall 2013)
 - Developing management plans for natural areas (Spring 2013)
 - Managing invasive plant species (Fall 2012)
- Facilitated and led multiple volunteer efforts to support stewardship of ecologically valuable natural areas in Wake County. These include planting lupine and removing invasive plants at Wake County's *Turnipseed WakeNature Preserve*, invasive plant removal at Mitchell Mill State Natural Area, and participation in Service Raleigh activities.
- Provided technical assistance to Wake County's parks departments seeking input on management planning for parks and natural areas. For example, NC State University students have contributed more than 6,000 person-hours to inventory and other activities through service-learning courses.
- Received resolution of endorsement for our efforts from the Wake County Mayors Association (2008).
- Developed a management plan template detailing issues to be considered when developing a management plan for ecologically valuable natural areas.

For more information about the WakeNature Preserves Partnership, please visit www.WakeNature.org or contact George Hess at george_hess@ncsu.edu or 515-7437. (2012 Sept 20)