

WakeNature Preserves Partnership Frequently Asked Questions

What is a *WakeNature Preserve*?

A *WakeNature Preserve* is a natural area within Wake County that contains high-quality examples of plant and animal populations, natural communities, geological features, landscapes, or ecosystems. It is bounded, dedicated, and managed to ensure the long-term conservation of those natural resources and to provide people with the opportunity to experience and learn about those resources in a contemplative, natural setting.

More specifically, a *WakeNature Preserve*

- is a high quality natural area that preserves the biodiversity of the region by contributing to the long-term viability of plant and animal populations, natural communities, geological features, landscapes, or ecosystems;
- contains at least one exceptional or outstanding natural area as defined by *WakeNature Preserve* criteria;
- is owned and managed for the long-term (preferably permanent) conservation of the natural resources contained therein;
- has a management plan that addresses the elements outlined in the WakeNature Preserves Partnership's management plan template;
- has been approved, and is subject to periodic review for continued designation, as a *WakeNature Preserve* by the WakeNature Preserves Partnership or another body designated by the Partnership;
- is identified as a *WakeNature Preserve* with signage and branding that is consistent County-wide;
- meets one or more of the objectives/purposed outlined in the *WakeNature Preserve* criteria.

What's so special about being a *WakeNature Preserve*?

Receiving the distinction of being a *WakeNature Preserve* is a signal that the property contains very high quality examples of natural heritage and resources in Wake County. It also means that the owner/manager of the land is making a concerted effort to be a good steward of these outstanding resources by completing a natural resource inventory and site-specific management plan as well as implementing stewardship efforts to protect the quality of the resource and the public's experience of nature there. The title *WakeNature Preserve* is like a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval – a place where the public can go to enjoy a superior nature experience and know the resource is being stewarded appropriately.

Why do natural resources need to be cared for? Can't we just let these places be?

Without proper stewardship and management, high quality natural areas will likely degrade as a result of invasive species intrusion, encroachment, dumping, or inappropriate use. To care for something, or recognize it as valuable, you first must know what you have; this is why we inventory resources. Once you know what you have, then you can develop and implement

strategies for protecting and enhancing the resource; this is management and stewardship. Both inventory and management of resources are critical to environmental stewardship.

In addition to the benefits outlined above, we need to be better stewards of our local natural heritage to ensure the enjoyment and use of these properties by future generations; to maintain the quality of our finest natural communities and heritage; and to protect the public's experience and enjoyment of nature in quickly urbanizing Wake County.

What is the WakeNature Preserves Partnership and why did it form?

The WakeNature Preserves Partnership is a collaborative working group of professionals from local and state organizations that formed in 2007 to assist with identification, branding marketing, and environmental stewardship of the most valuable natural resource areas within the parks systems of Wake County. The Partnership comprises representatives of local governments, universities, state agencies, and nonprofit organizations. A current membership list can be found on our wiki (wakenature.wikispaces.com)

What is WakeNature's mission?

The mission of the WakeNature Preserves Partnership 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.

Is there any cost associated with becoming a *WakeNature Preserve*?

Yes, although there are no membership fees and no fee to apply for designation as a *WakeNature Preserve*. As with any other park, there are costs associated with developing and managing nature preserves. These include conducting inventories, developing a management plan, and carrying out stewardship and programming activities. The incremental cost of doing these things in a *WakeNature Preserve* will depend upon your current staffing levels and capabilities, and the level of stewardship and programming you wish to carry out in the Preserve. Partnership members have access to diverse expertise and resources and work collaboratively to keep costs as low as possible.

What is the benefit to a local government of designating land as a *WakeNature Preserve*?

- **Environmental stewardship and management:** Property owners will receive support to ensure that high quality natural resources in their ownership are being cared for appropriately. This will retain and protect local native biodiversity and natural heritage.
- **Volunteer labor:** Local governments can benefit by receiving the volunteer labor and expertise of trained professionals or students assisting with inventory or stewardship activities. The Partnership can help facilitate pro bono technical assistance.
- **Meeting demand and interest:** Surveys of both city (2001) and county (2006) residents indicated a high degree of demand, need, and appreciation for facilities and activities related

to nature study, wildlife viewing, and similar pursuits. Demand for high quality natural areas is high both for recreational and environmental education purposes. Preserving our County's best quality natural areas is consistently a popular and well supported endeavor, and local governments want to show that they are responding to this interest and demand for better environmental stewardship and nature experiences. Providing high quality environments for educational programs enriches the experience for the participant. Designation of lands as *WakeNature Preserves* demonstrates strong commitment to meeting this demand.

- **Awareness and appreciation:** Designation of *WakeNature Preserves* will help taxpayers be more aware of and appreciate their local natural heritage, as well as see in person that public funds are being spent in a positive way for public enjoyment and environmental health. This may in turn help support future open space and parks bond referenda.
- **Economic benefits** include enhanced tax revenues through the promotion of eco-tourism venues and opportunities. In other cities that have measured the economic impact of nature preserves, the benefits of designation and stewardship far outweigh the costs.
- **Social and health benefits** to the public include opportunities for all ages to receive the health benefits of recreating in the outdoors and learning about nature. Designation as a *WakeNature Preserve* will help maintain a high quality nature experience for visitors, which enhances local quality of life.

What are the public benefits of designating land as a *WakeNature Preserve*?

The public will benefit from designation of a property as a *WakeNature Preserve* in many of the same ways:

- Public recreational interests and demands are met and addressed.
- *WakeNature Preserve* status will help the public be more aware of and appreciative of their local natural heritage.
- The public will have more assurance that important biodiversity and natural heritage are being protected and managed well.
- The public benefits from enhanced tax revenues due to eco-tourism.
- Designation as a *WakeNature Preserve* will help maintain a high quality nature experience for visitors, which enhances local quality of life.
- Greater health and well being associated with recreation in nature.

What is the benefit to the Partnership of designating land as a *WakeNature Preserve*?

Partnership members benefit mutually in a variety of ways from the designation of *WakeNature Preserves*. Some examples: NC State University benefits from the learning and research opportunities that this program affords its students; the NC Museum of Natural Sciences benefits from having high quality natural areas in which to operate programs; Partnership principles further the NC Wildlife Resources Commission's goals and State Action Plan; the Natural Heritage Program is able to document significant natural heritage in a more detailed way; and local governments receive the benefits outlined above.

Will the public have access to *WakeNature Preserves*?

That decision lies with the entity that owns and manages the preserve. One of the goals of the Partnership is to create more public awareness and appreciation of our highest quality natural areas in Wake County. WakeNature therefore encourages as much public access as is appropriate for the resource and a high quality nature experience.

How many *WakeNature Preserves* are there?

As of this writing, there is one *WakeNature Preserve*, the Turnispeed Preserved owned and managed by Wake County Parks, Recreation, & Open Space. The Preserve was dedicated in 2011 and the County is working toward opening it to the public within the next 2-3 years; it currently lacks parking facilities and access will soon be disrupted by a road-widening project. Triangle Land Conservancy's Swift Creek Bluffs is currently being evaluated for designation as a *WakeNature Preserve*.

What else are you doing now?

We are working with the City of Raleigh to develop management plans for some of the parks they recently classified as nature preserves and protected natural areas. We are developing workshops on inventory and stewardship subjects for county and municipal parks departments, and other partners. We are developing strategies to identify and publicize high quality natural areas in public ownership within Wake County, even if they are not yet *WakeNature Preserves*. And we have assisted some landowners and managers with resource management activities on natural areas, such as invasive exotic species control.

How does a property become a *WakeNature Preserve*?

A property owner or manager can apply to WakeNature for this status. Application materials are available at www.WakeNature.org or by contacting WakeNature. WakeNature Preserves Partnership representatives will visit the property and review application materials, as well as provide technical assistance if necessary. If the application is approved, the applicant will be notified and arrangements will be made to provide signage for the property indicating its status as a *WakeNature Preserve*. The Partnership will also provide marketing materials to help promote public awareness and appreciation for this special designation.

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.
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