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LAND *for* TOMORROW  
CONSERVATION  
YEARBOOK  
2017

# GOAT ISLAND PARK

Cramerton, North Carolina, has found unprecedented economic stability thanks to a 30-acre island in the middle of the South Fork River. Goat Island Park, first opened in 2012, provides a sanctuary of green space in the middle of Cramerton’s historic downtown area. The Park is connected to the Carolina Thread Trail by way of its Greenway.

“Perhaps the biggest advantage of the island is the economic development it has provided,” said Eric Smallwood, parks and recreation director for the Town of Cramerton. “The west bank of the river is right in the middle of our historic downtown.”

The park features walking trails, playgrounds, and an 18-hole disc golf course that are popular among residents and tourists alike. After spending time on the island, many of the hundreds of daily visitors head



*Festival at Goat Island Park.* PHOTO COURTESY OF TOWN OF CRAMERTON

to the shops and restaurants along the river.

“Before the connection was made, all those businesses were a revolving door,” said Smallwood.

“And since that time, they have been very stable and

are flourishing. They all use the island and park as part of their marketing material.”

The park also connects one of Cramerton’s largest neighborhoods on the east bank to the downtown area on the west bank of the river. Residents had to drive downtown before the park was built, but now many make the walk over instead. Smallwood said that this has had a noticeable impact on the town’s overall health.

An impressive collaboration of state funding and partnerships with PSNC Energy, Caramont Health, and Duke Energy paid for Goat Island Park, and its future looks bright. Cramerton hopes to give the space an educational component as well, with plans for river walks and guided paddle tours underway.

## GOAT ISLAND PARK

### PHASE 1

Parks and Rec Trust Fund (PARTF)	\$500,000
NC Recreation Trails Grant	\$75,000
Carolina Thread Trail Grant	\$100,000
The Glenn Foundation	\$7,000
PSNC Picnic Shelter Grant	\$13,000

### PHASE 2

Parks and Rec Trust Fund (PARTF)	\$500,000
NC Recreation Trails Grant	\$50,000
Carolina Thread Trail Grant	\$5,000
The Glenn Foundation	\$20,000
Caramont Health Exercise Grant	\$50,000
Community Foundation Grant	\$25,000
Individual Contributions	\$6,400

## MILL AND DAM CREEK

Flying squirrels, rare butterflies, and colorful songbirds can all be found in the hardwood forests along Dam Creek. Purchased last year by the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust, the addition of the creek-side land outside New Bern completed conservation of the entire Neuse River tributary.

The elusive squirrels aren't the only flying things reaping the benefits of the completed Dam Creek Preserve. The neighboring Marine Corps Air Station at Cherry Point had a significant interest in keeping the area free of development, contributing \$500,000 of the project's \$1 million cost.

On the opposite side of the air station, the military and the NC Coastal Land Trust teamed up again to purchase 302 acres along Mill Creek. Part of an ongoing partnership, the Mill Creek purchase marked

the 20th joint project between the land trust and the military since 2006.

With planes constantly flying over the Mill Creek tract, it is important to the Marines that the area remain undeveloped.

"As they fly into Cherry Point from the east," said Janice Allen, NC Coastal Land Trust's deputy director, "It's right underneath a runway holding pattern."

For the Marines, the Mill and Dam Creek purchases secure vital airspace from development. For the NC Coastal Land Trust, the ecological benefits are abundant.

The Dam Creek Preserve includes an area of sedge wetlands, the preferred habitat of the rare Duke's skipper butterfly. Allen said that these wetlands host the largest known population of the butterfly in the world.

Dam Creek's sedge wetlands and hardwood forest are complemented by an expansive range of longleaf pine in the Mill Creek tract. Additionally, Mill Creek itself is a state-designated shellfish habitat.

North Carolina's public conservation trust funds have leveraged millions of dollars from the Department of Defense. That's resulted in the protection of more than 50,000 acres around Camp Lejeune, 16 miles of baseline around Fort Bragg, and vital airways. Preventing development around the bases has allowed the military to continue its vital work and help ensure that North Carolina's military presence hasn't been downsized. That's important to North Carolina's economy. The North Carolina Department of Commerce estimates that the military supports a 10th of the state's economy – 540,000 jobs, \$30 billion in state personal income, and \$48 billion in gross state product.

*Mill Creek Preserve.* PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA COASTAL LAND TRUST



## MILL AND DAM CREEK FUNDING

### **DAM CREEK PRESERVE: \$1 MILLION**

\$500,000 from the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Funds (U.S. Department of Defense)

\$410,000 from the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund

\$90,000 in Private donor funding

### **MILL CREEK PRESERVE: \$880,000**

\$440,000 from the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Funds (U.S. Department of Defense)

\$440,000 from the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund

# THE BLACK RIVER

Travel a little over an hour south of Raleigh and you'll find one of North Carolina's unique treasures. The Black River has its headwaters in Sampson County, and a swampy forest along its edge known as the Three Sisters is home to some of the oldest trees in the world. Venture into the thick woods and you may stumble upon one of the many bald cypress trees that date back to Roman times, the oldest on the East Coast.

Canoe down the river and you'll see astounding sights. Not only will you run into the ancient bald cypress trees, but the river's water itself has its own unique story. The Black River is the most intact "blackwater" system in North Carolina. Since its headwaters lie in coastal swampland, the river is rich in decayed plant matter, giving the water its characteristic dark, black color.

"People love it. They love to get on the river, back to



Visiting the East Coast's oldest trees. PHOTO © KATE MOSER/TNC

their heritage," said Friends of Sampson County Waterways founder Ralph Hamilton. "I take scout troops and church groups down the river all the time."

For locals, conservation areas can serve as an inexpensive, local getaway. Close-to-home outings are a great opportunity in counties like Sampson

County, where 25 percent of all residents live below the poverty line. Public conservation funding, which has created parks and other recreational areas across the state, is crucial to providing these opportunities.

People also travel to Sampson County specifically to see the Black River. Tourism has the potential in communities along the river to be a useful economic driver.

Outdoor recreation is a big economic driver in North Carolina. Per the Outdoor Industry Association, it accounts for \$19.2 billion in consumer spending, 192,000 jobs, \$5.6 billion in wages and salaries, and \$1.3 billion in state and local tax returns. The state's conservation trust funds are vital to that industry - funding projects in all 100 counties that attract people to the outdoors.

## THE BLACK RIVER, BY THE NUMBERS

### CONSERVATION

16,640 acres conserved through easements or purchase of lands

11,600 of conserved acreage made up of floodplains and/or wetlands

Over 150 miles protected along the river and its tributaries

### PARTNERS

NC Wildlife Resources Commission

NC Plant Conservation Program

NC Division of Mitigation Services

NC Coastal Land Trust

### FUNDING

\$2.3 million from NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund

\$6.25 million from other state-funded sources

\$2.65 million from private donations

# HICKORY NUT GORGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH RESERVE

Nuns from Cincinnati, devoted to helping working mothers in the inner city, played a vital role in helping conserve nearly 400 acres of land deep in Bat Cave, North Carolina. Taking a step beyond traditional conservation, and following in the Sisters' vision, their land today is used to teach.

The land that makes up the Hickory Nut Gorge Teaching and Research Reserve was originally purchased as a retreat for the Community of the Transfiguration, an Episcopalian community for women. After working with the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy (CMLC), the Sisters placed the property into a permanent conservation easement in 2015.

Colleges use the reserve for programs like alternative spring breaks, where students spend their week off from school learning to identify and remove invasive species.

Tom Fanslow, land protection director at CMLC, helped coordinate the deal with the Community of the Transfiguration. He said that the Sisters worked closely with the conservancy to make sure the land would not only be protected, but would also be used for the benefit of others.

"Most of the Sisters had served as teachers in their order," said Fanslow. "They knew they wanted it to

support their mission."

Given the wishes of the Sisters, CMLC went a step beyond traditional conservation and designated most of the tract of land as a teaching and research reserve. They also set aside a small portion as a memorial to local volunteer firefighters.

"Students love that place in particular," said Dr.

Community of the Transfiguration Sisters and CMLC staff celebrating the conservation easement. Photo Courtesy of CMLC



## HICKORY NUT GORGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH RESERVE

**Total Cost: \$1.83 Million**

### CONSERVATION

410-acre tract of land  
Contains 14,265 linear feet of vital stream habitat  
Rare and Watch List species include Eastern hemlock, Carolina hemlock and the green salamander

### PARTNERS

Clean Water Management Trust Fund  
Mountain Revolving Loan Fund  
Private donors

J.J. Apodaca, a professor at Warren Wilson College. "It's night and day versus a classroom."

Apodaca is among the teachers who use the reserve to expand their classrooms. With his students, he studies endangered green salamanders in Hickory Nut Gorge.

Along with Warren Wilson, other colleges use the reserve for programs like alternative spring breaks, where students spend their week off from school learning to identify and remove invasive species. According to Fanslow, there are also plans to make the reserve accessible to elementary, middle, and high schools.

Along with the teaching reserve, the Sisters of the Community of the Transfiguration decided to set aside a small portion of their land along the road as a memorial to local volunteer firefighters.

The plot of land they chose had previously been used as an illegal dump. After cleaning it up, the Sisters, along with CMLC, wanted to give the community a reason to care for it. It took some deliberation, but they eventually settled on recognizing the area's volunteer firefighters.

"It's like they're guardians there," said Fanslow, "silently guarding the site."



*Community of the Transfiguration Sisters receive CMLC's Annual Conservation Award – the Lela McBride Award.*

# LINDALE FARM

The Lindley family has operated their 182-acre dairy farm in Chatham County since the late 1800s. Neill Lindley, the fifth generation of farmers in the family, still owns and runs the farm today.

Lindley took over his family’s farm with his wife Cori in 1982 after graduating from NC State University. In 2009, along with help from his father Darryle and son Neill Jr., the Lindleys began to transition away from traditional practices, making their farm organic and sustainable.

Part of that process involved signing their land into a conservation easement with the Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC). The easement allows the Lindleys to continue farming, and it protects their land from future development.

“We definitely try to work with landowners that use sustainable practices,” said Leigh



TLC’s Leigh Ann Hammerbacher (second from right) presents members of the Lindley family – Neill II, Neill, and Cori – with an official conservation easement sign to display on their organic dairy farm.

Ann Hammerbacher, the associate director of conservation and stewardship at TLC.

TLC holds conservation easements on nearly 700 acres of farmland in the Silk Hope area of Chatham County. The American Farmland Trust estimates that 40 acres of the nation’s farmland is lost to development every hour. In Durham, Orange and Wake counties, on average one of every five acres of farmland has been lost to development over the past 20 years. These easements play an important role in protecting farmland from that development, and they are also important in

helping provide farmers with much-needed funding.

Hammerbacher said the Lindley family invested the funding they received back into the Lindale Farm, aiding in the transition to more sustainable practices. Now that the farm is fully organic, she said the Lindleys are doing very well.

“This farm is one of the most successful farms in the area,” said Hammerbacher. “And they definitely believe that switching to the organic market, particularly in the dairy industry, has brought them more stability.”

The Lindale Farm is a part of Organic Valley, the nation’s largest organic farmer cooperative. Farmers sell their products locally in all 50 states, and even export to 25 countries worldwide.

## THE LINDALE FARM

### BASICS

182-acre, family-owned, organic dairy farm

Located in the Silk Hope area of Chatham County

Part of 700 total acres TLC has helped protect in the Silk Hope area

### FUNDING

\$383,000 from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

\$219,731 from the Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Trust fund (ADFP)