

Executive Summary

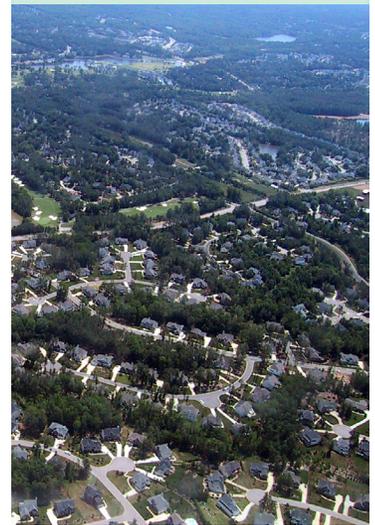
The purpose of the Wake County Consolidated Open Space Plan is to protect and conserve county land and water for current residents and future generations. Open space is defined as **protected** lands and waters that are owned and managed by the County, its public sector partners, the municipal governments of Wake County, State of North Carolina, the United States government, and the County's private sector partners, including non-profit land trusts. Open space consists of any parcel or area of land and water that is devoted to 1) the preservation of natural resources and habitat; 2) the managed production of resources (forest and farm land); 3) outdoor recreation; 4) preservation of historic and cultural property; 5) protection of scenic landscapes; and 6) protection of public health, safety and welfare.

This Open Space Plan, a "greenprint" for the future, was one of several tools developed by County government. Simultaneously, the County prepared a Watershed Management Plan, Growth Management Plan, Groundwater Study, Transportation Plan and a Unified Development Ordinance. Additionally, the County updated its Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Together, these plans establish a foundation for future growth and development that is both sustainable and economically viable.

Wake County has an estimated 55,719 acres of protected open space as of May 30, 2006, or roughly ten percent of the total county land mass. The majority of these lands are protected by federal and state agencies. Less than half of this total is land that local governments have protected and conserved as open space.

Currently, more than 27 acres of land is being converted each day from its natural state to a built condition throughout Wake County. More than 45 percent of the county has already been developed. Given the current rate of growth and development, if the County does not begin to emphasize land conservation policies and programs, an estimated 78 percent of the county land area will be developed by the year 2020. (Source: Triangle Land Conservancy) It is imperative that the County take action, as defined within this plan, to conserve and protect open space resources.

Purpose



Key Recommendations

This Open Space Plan is a set of recommended strategies required to achieve balanced and sustainable growth. The Plan is a workbook with guidelines, policy recommendations, and tools that can be utilized by the County and its partners to conserve valued open space resources before they are converted to developed uses.

The future Wake County Open Space system is envisioned as a series of natural, interconnected landscapes that protect environmental resources that are critical to the well-being of county residents, most importantly the creeks, streams and lakes that supply fresh water. The Plan establishes four important and interrelated activities for open space conservation:

- 1) Identify key parcels of land and corridors that should be acquired and protected as open space;
- 2) Recommend new regulatory programs that improve the protection of resources that safeguard public health, safety and welfare;
- 3) Establish a new program of land stewardship to manage open space resources;
- 4) Define recurring sources of revenue that support open space conservation.

One goal of the Plan is to eventually protect a minimum of 30 percent of the county's land area, or roughly 165,000 acres. To accomplish this goal, the County partnered in 2002 and 2003 with each of its 12 municipal governments to support open space planning. The County awarded monetary grants and asked that each municipal government devise and adopt a local open space plan. The County used these municipal plans as the basis for a consolidated county-wide open space plan, knitting together the recommendations of each to form an interconnected greenprint.

Each of the municipal governments prepared and adopted individual open space plans. The municipal open space plans focused on protecting water resources, improving access to open space, park and greenway lands and linking municipal open space and greenway systems together. Approximately 90 targeted open space areas have been identified through the municipal plans as future priority open space acquisitions. Additionally, many towns defined the location of greenway corridors, and the need to protect scenic landscapes along key roadway corridors.

Through this multi-objective planning process, the County engaged citizens in a variety of public forums to discuss and define the future of sustainable growth. From this discussion a list of community issues emerged that applies to open space planning and other county-sponsored planning efforts.

Implementing the recommendations within this Plan will require leadership, new government sponsored programs, private sector collaboration and input, recurring sources of funding and a broad partnership that is committed to establishing a greenprint for Wake County.



One conservation strategy that is introduced by the Plan is prioritizing land for targeted acquisition. Utilizing the County's Geographic Information System (GIS) data base, a process of decision making has been devised to select the most highly desired open space lands in the county. The selection of these properties has been made on the basis of lands that protect water supply, limit exposure to flooding, support water contact recreation, improve access to outdoor resources, protect wetlands and unique species of plants and animals native to the county. Using this data, properties are queried from the remaining supply of undeveloped land for possible future protection and conservation. From this strategy, an estimated 27,000 acres of land is identified for targeted acquisition.

Another conservation strategy is to protect land that is already subject to flooding from rainstorm events. To accomplish this, the County GIS system was used to calculate the amount of land that is currently regulated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This Plan recommends that the County and municipal governments prohibit future development and building within these flood prone lands. This would effectively conserve an estimated 60,000 acres of land as protected open space.

A third strategy of the Plan is to protect valued open space during the land development process. The plan recommends the adoption of Conservation Subdivision Design (CSD) as one preferred method for future land subdivision and development. Utilizing the principles of CSD, natural landscapes would be identified and protected, while homes and buildings would be arranged in a more compact form to conserve as much open space as possible. Utilizing CSD, and other innovative methods for subdividing and developing land, it may be possible to conserve as much as 22,000 acres of land in future years.

Future Wake County System of Protected Open Space		(Minimum)
Category of Open Space	(Minimum) Goal in Acres	Percent of Total Open Space
Existing Protected Open Space	55,719	10.00%
Conserved Floodplain Lands (future)	60,000	11.00%
Protected Open Space through land development process (future)	22,000	4.00%
Future Open Space Acquisitions	27,281	5.00%
Total Protected Open Space	165,000	30.00%
Total Land Area of Wake County	550,000	

Prioritize Open Space

Promote Sustainable Development



Establish a Stewardship Program



With potentially thousands of acres of new open space land being acquired and protected, Wake County will need to increase its land management operations and programs, as well as partner with municipalities and private sector interests, to keep pace with conservation efforts. A land stewardship program should be established by Wake County in collaboration with the Soil and Water Conservation District, municipalities, state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations.

An "ecosystem approach" should be used to manage open space land in a natural and low-cost manner. An urban forestry program should also be established to catalog and manage the declining forest canopy of the county. These programs will be supported by partnerships with the private sector and through coordinated efforts with municipal, state and federal programs.

The goal of the stewardship program will be to connect the people of Wake County to the natural resources that are so important to their quality of life. This can be accomplished through many different avenues including the County's environmental education programs.

Funding the Open Space Program



A Blue Ribbon Committee convened by Wake County in 2005 identified \$300 million in open space conservation need in the coming years. In order for Wake County to implement the recommendations of this Consolidated Open Space Plan, it will require a combination of funding sources that include local, state, federal, and private money. Of the many funding options that are possible, the following strategies were identified by the Blue Ribbon Committee as recommended options for Wake County:

- 1) Apply for matching funds from federal, state and local municipal governments.
- 2) Request matching funds from corporate and private donors.
- 3) Conduct fund raising in partnership with philanthropic organizations.
- 4) Use tools, such as Bargain Sale, to obtain open space at less than fair market value.
- 5) Work with Wake County Schools to partner on school and open space projects, maximizing the return on public dollars invested.
- 6) Provide more economic incentives for developers to conserve open space, thereby reducing the demand on public funds.
- 7) Work with farmers and working lands owners to conserve open space.

The implementation of this Open Space Plan is an ambitious endeavor which can be accomplished through a partnership effort between Wake County, its municipal, state, federal and private sector partners. The goals of this plan can not be accomplished by the County acting alone. The County will lead these efforts, and will depend on the support of its partners to carry out the objectives outlined by this Plan.

When the Wake County Open Space program becomes fully operational, it will become a model for other communities throughout North Carolina and the nation. This report represents the beginning of a process that is likely to take 25 to 30 years to implement. The ultimate goal is to provide Wake County and its residents with the tools necessary to protect open space. This will happen when open space is thought of as an integral and valued element of the developed landscape.

Leadership from Wake County is required to ensure that the proper steps are taken to define a greenprint for the future; and to oversee the successful implementation of this Open Space Plan -- for the health and well-being of future generations.

In the year 2103, Wake County, North Carolina is nationally and internationally regarded as one of the best places to live, work and raise a family. With a population of more than 2 million residents, the county enjoys a robust blend of new age businesses, sustainable land uses and a landscape character that promotes quality living. Twelve municipalities within the County offer a distinctive choice in lifestyle ranging from the “big city” to the “rural village.” The majority of residents live in close proximity to greenspace, providing easy access to outdoor resources such as parks, greenways and nature preserves. Children can ride their bikes to school and their friend’s homes along an interconnected system of trails, just as their great-grandparents did in the late 20th Century. Commuters can choose from several modes of speedy and efficient transportation to and from work. Local schools are among the nation’s finest, offering interactive indoor and outdoor teaching laboratories, and sharing resources with highly acclaimed local universities and colleges. The water and wastewater systems are some of the most advanced in the world. Water supply supports the burgeoning population and wastewater is recycled for a variety of community uses. Aquatic and terrestrial wildlife flourishes throughout the county, especially along creeks, streams, rivers and lakes, which support generous corridors of native vegetation. Agriculture continues to be a viable business in Wake County as local farmers engage in innovative practices pioneered in the early part of the 21st Century. Wake County’s population is healthy and diverse, supporting cultures and lifestyles from around the world.

Summary



Wake County 2103: A 100- year Vision

Much of the success that Wake County enjoys in 2103 can be directly traced to series of important actions that began at the beginning of the 21st Century. Four cornerstone and landmark elements of the County's comprehensive Growth Management Plan were completed in 2003. First, the County established a progressive greenprint for growth, a Consolidated Open Space Plan that defined critical green infrastructure resources for protection and conservation. Second, the County developed a comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, which determined best management practices for water resources throughout the County. Third, the County completed a Growth Management Plan, which depicted sustainable land use development strategies. Fourth, the County implemented one of the nation's most progressive transportation programs, which served to reduce the County's reliance on automobile travel and implemented a diverse multi-modal transportation program. Each of these four programs that began in 2003 played an important role in keeping Wake County a unique and beautiful place to live..