



Nature Preserves and Programs Annual Report – FY 2024



Raleigh
Parks

Program Director's Note

Each year, our Nature Preserves and Programs team develops team-level goals that help us advance our mission with intention in the most collaborative, consistent, and efficient way possible. While we made huge strides across each of our goals, I would like to highlight the collective advancement of our goal to increase access and inclusion of our spaces and programs by evaluating, planning, and implementing opportunities for our spaces to be more gender and culturally inclusive. A few of the many accomplishments to support this goal were:

- **The translation of strategically selected interpretive, promotional materials, and educational resources into non-English languages.** Examples include translated Neighborhood Ecology Corps applications, facility rental guides at Walnut Creek, and scavenger hunts. We also developed "Welcome" signs that have been translated into multiple languages and reflect prominent languages spoken throughout the City.
- **We hosted events that helped amplify the voices, stories, and histories of underrepresented communities,** such as the Norman Builds a Park Live Storytelling and Commencement Ceremony, a grand opening event celebrating the installation of a large, person-sized version of the book Norman Builds a Park, which tells the history of Walnut Creek Wetland Park and Partners for Environmental Justice. WCWP also hosted a panel discussion called Indigenous Women Making Traditional Culture Relevant.
- **We cultivated and maintained partnerships and relationships with organizations and individuals representing the field, our participants, and the community to develop and deliver more diverse, inclusive, and welcoming programming.** One example is Walnut Creek Wetland Park's partnership with Wake Audubon and Field Inclusive. This partnership developed a beginning birder program centered on safe birding practices while working with Outdoor Afro and the Raleigh LGBTQIA+ Center to identify opportunities for increased inclusivity. This program will be expanded to our other preserves and nature parks.

We are very proud of our accomplishments this year, which would not have been possible without the support of our part-time staff, partners, and volunteers. We want to thank you.

We look forward to continuing this important work to help develop a city where everyone understands and experiences the interrelatedness of people and ecosystems and where all community members have equitable access to high-quality environmental education and natural spaces.

"If we are to use our tools in the service of fitting in on Earth, our basic relationship to nature – even the story we tell ourselves about who we are in the universe – has to change."

- Janine M. Benyus

Our Mission

The Nature Preserves and Programs Team is part of the Natural Resources Unit, whose **mission** is to connect people and nature through experiences, education, and conservation. Our **vision** is to create strong, healthy, sustainable communities and the environment.

Why We Connect People and Nature through Education, Conservation, and Experiences

Connecting people and nature builds stronger, healthier, and more environmentally sustainable communities. The development of meaningful connections to nature builds stronger communities by creating resilience, promoting social connection, strengthening family bonds, and empowering individuals through building self-confidence while fostering the development of problem-solving skills. Furthermore, spending time in nature has been proven to promote physical and emotional health and well-being.

Early and repeated exposure to the natural world through education and hands-on **experience** is one of the best means of fostering a sense of stewardship. Increasing awareness and knowledge of the natural world's interconnectedness and human role, combined with meaningful experiences, can inspire change and informed decision-making, ultimately moving individuals toward becoming better stewards of the Earth.

Conservation of natural ecosystems and the preservation of green space offer a broad range of benefits, including improved water quality, flood control, improved soil health, and preservation of biodiversity. Preserving forests reduces local air pollution that impacts our community's health. Forest preservation is also one of the most effective and cost-efficient nature-based climate solutions to help curb the negative impacts of global climate change.



Our Impact at a Glance

Education and Interpretion

We served more than **31,500 PEOPLE** through more than **1,400 PROGRAMS** that served families, youth, adults, seniors, school children, and teachers.

Management and Protection

We managed and protected more than **600 ACRES** of forest, lakes, rivers, and wetlands that provide a home to many rare and endangered plants and animals.

Access and Enjoyment

We provided access and enjoyment to nearly **233,000 VISITORS** on our **4 SITES**.



Mud Day at Walnut Creek Wetland Park

WE EDUCATE AND INTERPRET



Children work together during summer camp at Wilkerson Nature Preserve.

Our vision is to develop a city where everyone understands and experiences the interrelatedness of people and ecosystems, where all community members have equitable access to high-quality environmental education, and where they have the awareness, knowledge, ability, and motivation to promote health and well-being for themselves, their communities, and the planet.

Programs are delivered by our Environmental Education Programs and Services Office (EEPS, formally known as the Nature Program Office), as well by each site: Annie Louise Wilkerson MD Nature Preserve (ALW), Durant Nature Preserve (DNP), Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve (HSF), and Walnut Creek Wetland Park (WCWP).

*This year, we served nearly **31,500 PEOPLE** through more than **1,400 PROGRAMS** that reached families, children, adults, seniors, school children, and teachers. This is **a 10% increase in the number of people we served** and nearly **17% increase in the number of programs delivered** from last year.*

Group Field Trip Programs

Nature Instructors provide hands-on experiences for students that correlate to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study's grade-level science curricula and early childhood standards for the preschool curricula. Programs integrate literacy, math, and/or social studies elements, when possible, based on the grade level standards.

Our team delivered more than 1,080 school field trips and other group programs this year, serving more than 25,000 students!



Students gather in the field before their their adventure at Wilkerson.

"I was just going to reach out to share how much we enjoyed Ms. Laurie! She is truly amazing!!! The kids respond so well to her and the teachers always share wonderful feedback with me. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine that teaches at Herbert Akins Rd. Elementary Pre-K just reached out last night to tell me she just recently had Ms. Laurie too and how wonderful she is. Thank you so much for providing our children with awesome experience!"

~Ashley Shaffer, Director, Saint Francis UMC Preschool



School students from Pearisontown Elementary in Durham enjoy an Aquatics program during their field trip to Laurel Hills Park.

Developing, Sustaining, and Strengthening Relationships

The Environmental Education Programs & Support Office has developed strong relationships with schools that have expanded their connection to our programs and natural spaces. In the 2023-2024 school year, each class at Brassfield Road Elementary received grade-level nature programming that reinforced and enriched their classroom life science learning. Additionally, every Abbott's Creek Elementary student—pre-kindergarten through 5th grade—walked to Durant Nature Preserve for another year of programming for all classes.

As students at these schools progress through their elementary school years, they have the opportunity to deepen their connection with the natural world around them through these programs.



Students observe a mother Marbled Salamander guarding her eggs during a program at Wilkerson Nature Preserve.

Public Programs and Events

Our team supports a wide range of educational programs and events that help participants of all ages and abilities connect with and understand our natural world more deeply.

Our team delivered 229 public programs this year, serving 3,900 participants!

Norman Builds a Park Live Storytelling and Commencement Ceremony



Norman Builds a Park is a children’s story that retells Dr. Norman Camp’s childhood and how his passion for the outdoors inspired the establishment of Walnut Creek Wetland Park. Written by previous Park Manager, Stacie Hagwood and partially funded by long-time partners, Partners for Environmental Justice (PEJ), an interactive rendition of the book was installed to inspire future generations, increase awareness of the history of environmental justice in southeast Raleigh, and to honor the story of Dr. Norman Camp. To further uphold his legacy, it was important to us that we introduce the public to the book

installation with a ceremony featuring friends, family, food, and a live storytelling event.

“Out” In Nature

Walnut Creek Wetland Center hosted a series of free environmental education programs aimed at the LGBTQ+ community in the triangle area. The “Out” in Nature series was inspired by the passion of staff at the Center to make it a space of belonging for those historically marginalized from the outdoors and careers in the environmental field. A variety of intersectional programming was offered for families, teens, adults, and developing professionals.

Seasonal Self-Guided Tree Trails

Durant’s Assistant Manager Tracy Feldman developed summer and winter tree trail guides with 12 marked trees and a guide to identify those trees using a dichotomous key. Both guides are available at the Durant office for a self-guided adventure and can be accessed from Durant’s webpage.





Assistant Environmental Education Manager, Donna Shinn, leads a public program at Carolina Pines Park featuring ducks and other feathered friends.

Teacher Professional Development

Staff at Wilkerson and Walnut Creek led multiple days of Professional Development Workshops for Environmental Educators in 2023-2024, including "Methods of Teaching Environmental Education" (required for all persons seeking NC Environmental Education Certification) and "Flying WILD" (an elective Criteria I). These workshops were filled to capacity with educators from around the state, including City of Raleigh staff pursuing their own NCEE Certifications.



"Such informative and interactive programs for all of my students! Please continue this excellent work because it is so valuable to young children."

~ Katherine Weisner, Preschool Title 1 Teacher, York Elementary

"Huge impact on the kid. Three days later he stopped dead in his tracks to yell, 'Isn't that dog fennel?!' It was and Ms. Heather taught him that. Amazing the impact these programs and educators have on the participants."

~ Wilkerson Participant Parent

Earth Day @ Dix Park

In partnership with colleagues throughout the City, the Nature Preserves and Programs team helped support the planning for and participation in Earth Day 2024.



Celia Lechtman supports the Nature Preserves and Programs and Neighborhood Ecology Corps tables.



Sheryl McGlory, EEPS Manager, delivers the Indigenous Land Acknowledgement.

“Working at Walnut Creek Wetland Center has allowed me to build connections with community members and my personal connection to nature. From introducing visitors to our ambassador animals to trash clean ups, the connections to our natural world seem infinite here and I love it.”

~ Sarah Brim, Nature Instructor and Recreation Leader

Woodcock Walks with Wake Audubon Society

Woodcock Walks were held at Horseshoe Farm for participants to view the “sky dance” and learn about their natural history.



Partnership Programs

To better serve our community and increase our impact, our team collaborates with internal and external partners to deliver diverse programs.

This year, we served 220 participants through 10 program partnerships.



Schoolhouse of Wonder at Brookhaven Nature Park

This summer, we initiated a new partnership with Schoolhouse of Wonder, which ran four weeks of summer camp at Brookhaven Nature Park for preschool-aged students. These youth spent the entire day in nature, exploring the woods and splashing in the creeks, getting dirty, and going home happy.

Artist in Residency Program

A collaboration between Raleigh Arts and Nature Preserves and Programs, this one-year Artist Residency focuses on the City of Raleigh’s nature preserves and supports artistic exploration that enhances the natural beauty of these spaces while promoting the mission of preserving wild flora and fauna through education, experiences, and conservation.

Artist in Residence Scott Hazard engages with ecologically focused art forms, including but not limited to environmental art, land art, environmental stewardship, and the use of natural materials and sustainable practices. While his work with us will continue into FY 25, Scott has organized programs connecting art, nature, and culture across our preserves to help increase the community's landscape literacy.



Photo Credit, Juli Leonard

Landscape Literacy - Indigenous Plants and their Cultural Significance

This program offered a demonstration of indigenous uses of native plants and trees with Mr. Malery Oxendine – Laurinburg, North Carolina-based craftsman, hunter, and fisherman (Lumbee). Participants learned about native plants and their uses to indigenous tribes in the Southeastern U.S. and were offered a demonstration of hand-crafted tools such as River Cane blowgun and darts, bow and arrow, and atlatl.

Landscape Literacy - Poetry Workshop

This workshop was a two-day poetry workshop series at Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve with North Carolina-based poets Chris Tonelli and Lauren Hunter. With a focus on the notion of 'landscape literacy' and gaining new understandings of the nature found at the Preserve, Lauren, and Chris led participants in walking and observation sessions, discussions, and writing exercises, with an optional poetry/short form writing reading on the second day of the workshop.

Exploring a Nature Preserve: *Natural Pigments and Mono-prints*

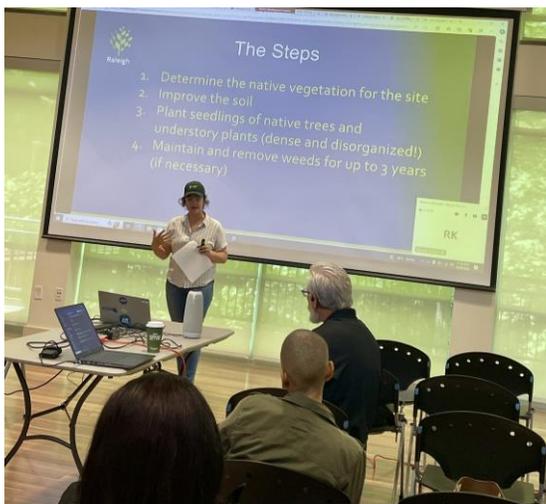
This program, led by local Artist Natalia Torres del Valle, artist-in-residence Scott Hazard, and Wilkerson Manager Bryan England, provided participants with the opportunity to learn about soils, minerals, and native and invasive plants and how they can be transformed into beautiful pigments for watercolors and inks for drawing and printing. Participants also had the opportunity to create their own mono-prints using natural materials such as leaves, mushrooms, or moss.



Photo Credit, Juli Leonard

Internal Programs to Support Professional Development

Durant Assistant Manager Tracy Feldman provided a leaf-mining and gall-making insects workshop for city staff (including PRCIP interns) as part of a larger Park and Natural Resources professional development effort, the Natural Resources College.



Celia Lechtman educated her colleagues on high-density forest restoration as part of the Raleigh Parks Shares initiative.

Support Programs

*Our Nature Preserves and Programs Team supports the PRCR Department by providing programs and instruction and sharing subject matter expertise. This year, our team provided **70 support programs**, reaching nearly **1,500 participants!***

Teens in Nature

To broaden program delivery, the Nature Preserves and Programs Team partnered with City Recreation Teen Zones to provide group nature programming for after-school teens. Walnut Creek Wetland Park delivered two program themes: the first offering an opportunity for teens to build skills in outdoor safety and the second increasing outdoor comfort through several weeks of creek and wetland exploration.



Summer Camp Experiences

Nature Discovery Camp

The EEPS Office delivered one week of Nature Discovery Camp, a summer day camp for 6-11-year-olds at Lake Johnson's Magnolia Cottage. The camp provided a week of activities designed to explore the woods, learn about wildlife, and try new things—like canoeing at Durant Nature Preserve! This year, Raleigh Parks' Give Play program reserved five spaces for financial aid campers in this session.



Young Naturalist Camp, Natural Science Camp, and Nature Art Camps

Wilkerson delivered three weeks of Young Naturalists, Natural Science, and Art and Nature Summer Camps for youth and teens. One-quarter of all Wilkerson camper spaces were reserved for campers participating in Raleigh Parks' Give Play program, providing 12 spaces within Wilkerson Camps.



Neighborhood Ecology Corps Program



FY24 marked the year the City's Neighborhood Ecology Corps (NEC) program ran its entire three cohorts program simultaneously after transition and post-pandemic rebuilding.

The NEC program was started nearly a decade ago by a local nonprofit, the Center for Human-Earth Restoration, and focused on providing in-depth outdoor experiences and environmental learning to youth in Southeast Raleigh. After years of partnership with the City of Raleigh, the program transitioned to Raleigh Parks to operate out of the Environmental Education Programs & Support office in the fall of 2021.

Today, the NEC is a three-year environmental literacy program serving youth in grades 6-10. With a continued focus on reaching the Southeast Raleigh communities, the program is based out of Walnut Creek Wetland Park, where each cohort of participants meets weekly during the school year – exploring environmental topics, the wetland ecosystem surrounding them, and their communities through hands-on experiences. Weekly meetings may include visits from professionals in related fields, observations and data collection, service projects, games, and opportunities to build friendships while increasing comfort in – and knowledge of – the natural world. Participants apply to the program, which is provided at no cost to families. Each year of the program builds upon the last, with core skills and concepts woven through all three years.

Year One: Learning About Communities

The first year of NEC focuses on helping participants gain comfort in the outdoors, develop friendships, and learn about the natural world on an introductory level. The program kicks off with a summer day camp in August, where participants meet their cohort and staff and experience a variety of activities they'll have more opportunities to dive into during the year: creek explorations, birding, tree identification, nature hikes, wildlife tracking, canoeing, and more.





Year Two: Investigating Communities

Year two builds upon the learning and comfort of the first year, inviting students to take a deeper scientific look at the natural world to identify connections to their communities. Participants engage in community science, service projects, data collection, and more – all while strengthening connections and friendships.

Year Three: Impacting Communities

The third year of NEC focuses on exploring ways to create positive change in our communities. Students may observe public meetings, identify community needs, develop writing and public speaking skills, and engage in service projects. Year Three participants identify, develop, and implement projects that meet their interests and connect with the learning of the past two years. These participants are often the faces and voices of the NEC – presenting and speaking to the public at community engagement events throughout the year.

Field Trips: Exploring beyond Walnut Creek Wetland Park

The NEC program utilizes days off within the school calendar as opportunities to take field trips to locations beyond Walnut Creek Wetland Park. Highlights from the past three years include:

- **Kayaking:** Participants have had multiple opportunities to expand their paddling skills. NEC has partnered with Forest Ridge Park to kayak on Falls Lake and learn the basics of whitewater kayaking with a day in Optimist Pool!
- **Sarah and Bailey Williamson Preserve:** A field trip to this Triangle Land Conservancy preserve has included guided hikes and plenty of unique nature observations following a morning of invasive species removal.
- **Overnight at Durant Nature Preserve:** This spring was the second camping trip experience for NEC at Durant Nature Preserve. What better way to end a year of the program than by setting up tents, cooking dinner over a fire, enjoying the sunset from a canoe, and sharing stories over breakfast before a morning hike?

With three active cohorts, NEC participant numbers are growing. In the 2023-2024 school year, 30 youth participated in the program. In the span of a year, each of those participants spends roughly 100-150 hours engaged in NEC activities. Over three years, this adds up to over 350 hours with the program developing skills to be involved, environmentally literate citizens!

WE MANAGE AND PROTECT

Our sites contain examples of high-quality plant and animal populations, natural communities, and ecosystems contributing to biodiversity and environmental health. We manage and protect our natural areas using best management practices to sustainably balance the protection and enhancement of the natural areas while providing access to explore them.

*We manage and protect more than **600 ACRES of forest, lakes, rivers, and wetlands** that provide a home to many rare and endangered plants and animals.*

Management

*We use best management practices and strategies, such as **prescribed burning, non-native invasive plant removal, and habitat restoration**, to enhance the biological diversity and health of the habitats on our sites.*

Prescribed Burning

“Why is reburning an area important?”

Establishing regularly recurring fire through reburning is essential for the health of fire-dependent plants and habitats by reducing and maintaining the density of leaf litter, which allows the germination and establishment of desirable plants and, in the case of fields, helps prevent the growth of woody tree species that would shade out the sun-loving grasses, wildflowers, and other herbaceous plants.



Prescribed fire was used for the first time in Wilkerson’s “Blackjack” oak-pine savannah restoration area north of Wilkerson’s overflow parking.

Annual Prescribed Burning at Wilkerson

This year, Wilkerson expanded its use of Prescribed Fire, burning six priority habitat areas, including 3 new areas burned for the first time and re-burning 3 areas in past years. These areas are fully protected from deer and support fire-associated plant species.



Post Burn - Rare Species Emerge

One month following the “Blackjack” prescribed burn, new wildflowers never seen in Wake County began to bloom within the burned area. These flowers have been confirmed as *Hypoxis sessilis* – the Glossy-Seed Stargrass – a species tracked on the NC Natural Heritage Program's Rare Plant "Watch List". This rare species is dependent on fire to trigger flowering. In the early 1900s, Glossy-Seed Star-Grass grew north of southern Virginia but has not been seen in Virginia in over 90 years. The Wilkerson population is now the northern-most Glossy-Seed Star-Grass population known to exist anywhere on Earth.

Non-Native Invasive Plant Management

Invasive plants are not native to the preserves and were introduced in various ways. Invasive plants quickly establish themselves and become a threat to the ecological well-being of the preserves by outcompeting native plants and changing the environment for wildlife.

Partnership Raleigh Conservation Interns remove bamboo at Horseshoe Farm.



Stream Bank Habitat Enhancement Project at WCWP

Walnut Creek began Phase 1 of clearing and replanting a portion of the bank of Walnut Creek along the Gateway Trail. Work completed with staff and volunteers included cutting 1000 square feet of invasive privet and vines from the bank, raking the area to bare ground, and heavily mulching to suppress weed growth. The area was treated with herbicides to suppress invasive plants. Phase 2, which includes densely planting a diverse range of native species, is planned for fiscal year 25.



The Privet Warriors! NC State Env 101 class supports the effort to clear out privet along the bank.



Among the many acres of invasives treated last year at Durant, an island of invasive plants between the Training Lodge and the parking lot was cleared, improving sight lines and habitat. The cuttings were turned into brush piles to serve as habitat for rabbits and meadow voles.

Converting turf grass into productive habitat

Two turf grass areas were converted to pollinator gardens using a local and native seed mix at Durant. In addition to decreasing the amount of turf that needs to be mowed, these areas increase the preserve's biodiversity and create a more productive habitat.

Parks crew supports the removal of turf grass in front of the Training Lodge.



Protection of Species and Restoration of Habitat

Ash Tree Conservation at WCWP and Wilkerson

In coordination with the Land Stewardship Program, a contractor was hired to survey the entire Walnut Creek property and inventory their remaining Green Ash trees. The contractors created a map of all the remaining trees and a detailed health assessment. It's now thought that WCWP may have the most significant remaining green ash trees in the City of Raleigh. There are plans to inoculate approximately 115 of the 300 remaining trees against the Emerald Ash Borer to manage them for long life and regeneration.



Partnership Raleigh Conservation interns use GIS mapping to tag and measure over 100 Ash Trees in Wilkerson's forest.



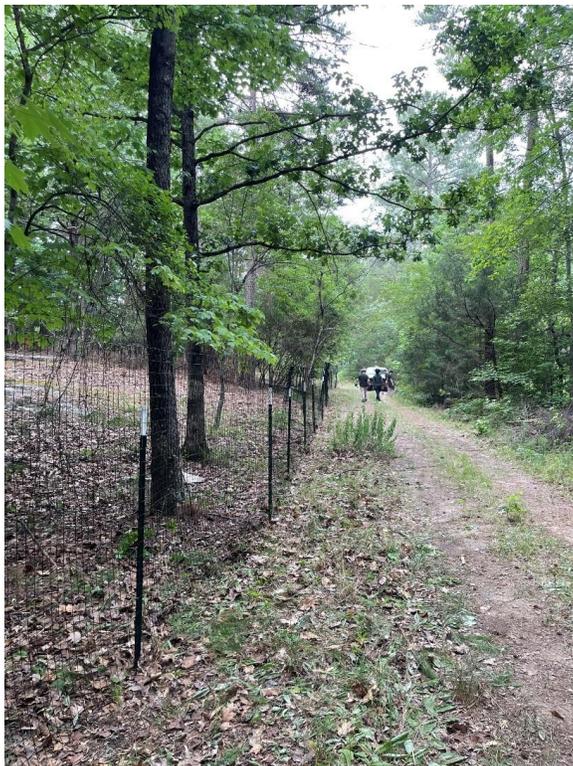
Atamasco lily

Species Protection and Rescues

In collaboration with the NC Native Plant Society, Durant planted 6 Atamasco Lilies (*Zephyranthes atamasca*) and 20 Yellow Stargrass (*Hypoxis hirsuta*) plants obtained from plant rescues elsewhere in the state to restart populations in the preserve.

Box Turtle Rehabilitation

Since 2015, Wilkerson Nature Preserve has partnered with the NCSU Veterinary School Turtle Team to rehabilitate many injured Box Turtles and support their return to the wild. "Moon Jelly" was one of several turtles rehabilitated at Wilkerson in the summer of 2023.



Sensitive Habitat Protection

The preserves use fencing to protect sensitive areas and species from deer. This year, Durant installed approximately 650 feet of fence around a sensitive flatrock habitat with the assistance of Partnership Raleigh Conservation Interns. This fencing will limit deer from browsing the plant communities. In addition, brush and small trees were cut to provide more sunlight.

RESEARCH

We partner with local universities and organizations, work with volunteers, and mentor students to conduct research that helps us make the best management decisions for our preserves and parks and the species that live there.



Atamasco lily *Rhopobota* species (a moth in the leaf-tier moth family, Tortricidae), on American Holly (*Ilex opaca*).

Leaf Miners at Durant Nature Preserve

As part of a larger wildlife inventory project at Durant, Assistant Manager Tracy Feldman continues cataloging leaf-mining insects in collaboration with Charley Eiseman, a freelance naturalist and expert in Massachusetts. To date, he has implemented a sampling protocol to quantify the diversity and abundance of leaf-mining insects at Durant Nature Preserve, established seven permanent monitoring plots for leaf-mining insects, and found 175 leaf-mining insect species.

The other growing lists of species found within the preserve include 578 vascular plant species (200 species not previously recorded in the preserve), 47 bryophyte species, 72 lichen species, 157 bird species, 65 Hemiptera species, and 330 Lepidoptera species.

Box Turtle Connection Program

The Box Turtle Connection is a long-term study on Eastern Box Turtles (*Terrapene carolina carolina*) in North Carolina. The program's purpose is to learn more about the status and trends in Box Turtle populations, identify threats, and develop strategies for long-term conservation of the species. Trained site staff permanently mark and measure each turtle found, and data is entered into a database managed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission.

PRCIP interns collect measurements on a box turtle for the Box Turtle Connection Project.



Data Collected

The data below represents the total number of turtles captured and cataloged across all Nature Preserve sites. “Captured” refers to new turtles captured, named, and cataloged for the first time. “Recaptured” refers to turtles that have been caught more than once but did not get cataloged. Recaptured turtles are not cataloged a second time. “Total” refers to the number of “captured” plus “recaptured” turtles in a particular year.

	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	Total
Captured	36	56	93	76	261
Recaptured	5	21	45	44	115
Total	41	77	141	120	376

Note: Durant, Horseshoe Farm, and Walnut Creek joined the Box Turtle Connection Program in 2021 and Wilkerson joined in 2022.



Tracking Turtles through Radio Telemetry

Box Turtle monitoring took a step forward this year with the addition of radio telemetry. Four turtles were provided radio transmitters and staff locate them every 2 weeks to GPS their location. The data shows home range size and movement patterns

Community Science

The Natural Resources section is increasing community science opportunities to connect people to nature, engage the public in the scientific process, and obtain natural resource inventory data to assist us in developing our management plans.



NestWatch and Project FeederWatch

NestWatch is a nationwide nest-monitoring program designed to track bird reproductive biology status and trends. Project FeederWatch is a November-April survey of birds visiting backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. Wilkerson, Durant, and Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserves participate annually in the programs, contributing to the nationwide data.

**Note: Project NestWatch is primarily about public education and outreach. Birds such as Chickadees and Eastern Bluebirds are abundant species that nest in*

natural cavities throughout our Preserves. These numbers are not the total populations of these species within the Preserves.

** The NCWRC lists brown-headed Nuthatches in the latest NC Wildlife Action Plan as a "Species of Greatest Conservation Need."*

Species	Total # nesting attempts	Total # fledglings
Carolina Chickadee	6	32
Brown-headed Nuthatch	2	9
House Wren (Northern)	5	19
Eastern Bluebird	25	103
Tree Swallow	1	0
Total	39	163

Planning

We have initiated the development of land management plans for our preserves and nature parks to help allocate resources, provide a strategy for managing and protecting resources while providing access to them, and establish systems to monitor and evaluate the health of resources and the effectiveness of management practices over time.

Management Plan Status

Horseshoe Farm's management plan has been completed and received Department approval. It will be the second approved management plan for the Nature Preserves; Wilkerson received the first approved plan from our team.

Durant Nature Preserve's management plan is well underway and expected to be completed by the end of FY 25.



Neighborhood Ecology Corps student learns about radiotelemetry and helps Durant track and monitor one of it's turtles.

Michaux's Sumac in North Raleigh

Wilkerson's population of the federally endangered species Michaux's Sumac began in 2016 with 5 plants rescued from the nearby construction path of I-540. This small shrub, also called "Dwarf Sumac", once grew in many locations around Raleigh, but today the only Michaux's Sumac plants remaining in the North Raleigh area are the plants within Wilkerson Nature Preserve, which are all descended from the I-540 rescue plants.



By the fall of 2023, the original 5 stems had multiplied at Wilkerson into over 150. Prescribed burns in the "Sumac" restoration area within Wilkerson Nature Preserve conducted in March 2023 and March 2024 have encouraged the growth of this fire-dependent species, and protective fencing preserves their tender stems from hungry deer, which readily eat unprotected plants (unlike the distantly related Poison Sumac, Michaux's Sumac is not poisonous).

By June 2024, Michaux's Sumac population had increased further to 224 living stems—a population increase of over 4,000% in 8 years.

Wilkerson's Natural Resource Specialist Jenny Gough shares the stem count of new Michaux's Sumac stems (marked with green and yellow flags) inside the fenced "Sumac" restoration area at Wilkerson Nature Preserve.



WE PROVIDE ACCESS AND ENJOYMENT

We provide diverse opportunities for the community to experience and connect with nature by offering recreational opportunities, space for family and community gatherings, life events, and business meetings with a natural backdrop, and quiet spaces for contemplation and nature appreciation to meet the needs and comfort of ALL.

*This year, we provided access and enjoyment to more than 233,000 VISITORS on our **4 SITES**, which include **nearly 9 MILES OF TRAIL**, educational nature centers, indoor classrooms, and lab space, as well as rentable shelters, event venues, and meeting space. Additionally, we provide access to other green spaces throughout the city through public and school-based programming.*

Accessibility



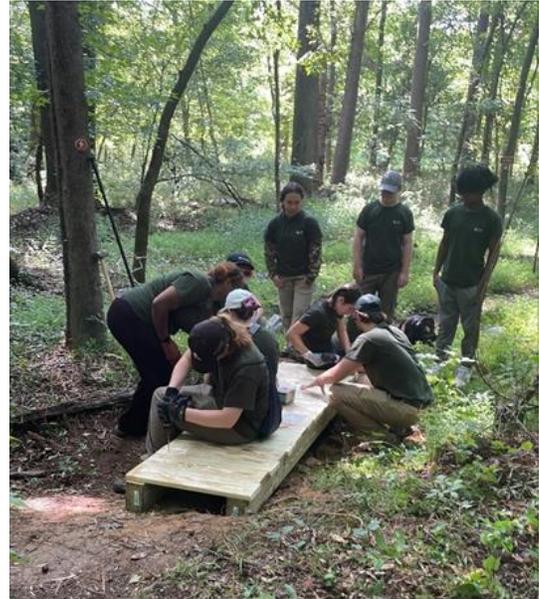
A new midway point resting bench was installed on the Hidden Rocks Trail at Wilkerson to increase accessibility.



A wheelchair-accessible picnic table was added to the Sassafra Shelter at Durant.

Trail Enhancements

Partnership Raleigh Conservation Interns assisted with constructing two small footbridges at Durant to replace the crossing boards that were previously present. They also assisted with clearing and providing better access to a trail formally treated as a social trail. The trail, used by many, is now safely navigable.



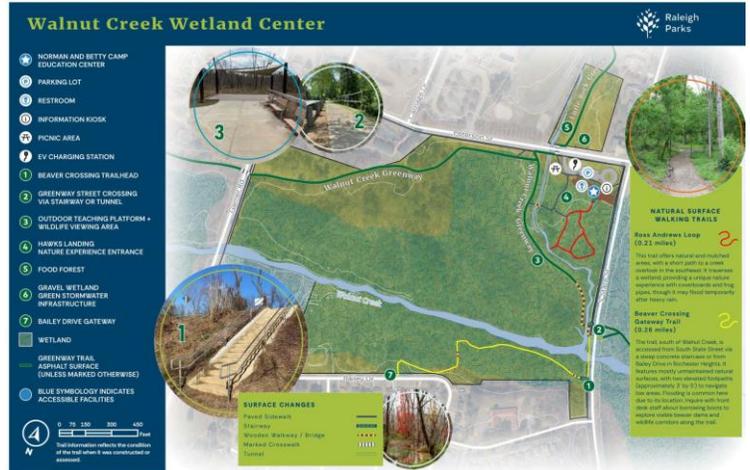
Bailey Dr. Gateway (Southside) Trail Enhancements

In early 2022, a natural surface Gateway trail connecting the neighborhood of Rochester Heights was built through the wetland at Walnut Creek. This year, the site made enhancements that increase year-round walkability. These included new signage, high-density reforestation projects along the creek bank, invasive removals to restore wildlife food supplies, and an upgrade to surfaces in high flood areas. The new substrate has been highly successful in one of the high flood-prone areas and is a method that will continue to be used in the future.



Website and Map Accessibility

Our Nature Preserves and Programs team believes accessibility starts before you arrive at our spaces. With that in mind, we want patrons to know as much as possible about our spaces before deciding to spend their day with us. This includes updating our websites with trail maps that include language about trail surfaces, places of rest, facility accessibility, and additional amenities. Websites are being updated to include clear information about rental processes, public and private program offerings, and unique features of our sites.



Bird-ability Assessment

Walnut Creek partnered with Wake Audubon Society to participate in and complete a Birdability assessment. Birdability is an assessment/checklist process that works to ensure the birding community and the outdoors are welcoming, inclusive, safe, and accessible for everybody - with a focus on people with mobility challenges, blindness or low vision, chronic illness, intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental illness, and those who are neurodivergent, deaf or hard of hearing or who have other health concerns. In addition to current birders, the assessment strives to introduce birding to people with disabilities and other health concerns who are not yet birders so they, too, can experience the joys of birding.

Sustainability



Native Landscapes for Habitat and Aesthetics

Partnership Raleigh Conservation interns installed a rock garden habitat beside the Wilkerson office. The native low-maintenance landscape serves as a model of functional, sustainable, and aesthetically pleasing landscaping practices.

Inclusion

Our team initiated the translation of interpretive signs, promotional materials, and educational resources into non-English languages. To kick the initiative off, our team worked with PRCR Marketing to develop new multi-language "Welcome" signs that reflect prominent languages spoken throughout the city.

These new interpretive signs can be found within Walnut Creek's new Food Forest – text is in both English and Spanish.



Volunteers and Partnerships

Volunteers, collaboration, and strategic partnerships are fundamental to who we are, what we do, and how we do it. We would like to take a moment to thank our 2023-2024 partners and volunteers—without whom we would not have been able to achieve our goals.

Nature Preserves Volunteers (July 2023 – June 2024)

	Number of volunteers	Number of Volunteer Hours
Numbers of General Volunteers	1446	3657
Number of Work-Study Volunteers	2	200
Total	1448	3857

Eagle Scouts

Eagle Scouts complete many projects each year, which directly aid in the Preserves' management and protection efforts.

Eagle Scout Project volunteers install bollards protecting front entrance flower field at Wilkerson.



Year-round Engagement of Volunteers

Celebrating Earth Day with a Day of Service

Earth Day Volunteers celebrate the removal of invasive ornamental plants at Wilkerson.



Education Garden at Wilkerson

Highschool volunteers plant milkweed seedlings and other pollinator plants in Wilkerson's education garden in May of 2024

First Annual Great MLK Day Family Stiltgrass Pull

WCWP hosted our first annual Great MLK Day Family Stiltgrass Pull to begin a concerted, sustained effort to manage Japanese Stiltgrass in five visible areas around our paved trail. 31 volunteers of all ages attended and were able to clear and rake the areas to bare ground, allowing staff to reseed with native grasses and wildflowers. The dead grass was bagged and brought to the Yard Waste center to be disposed of appropriately.



Food Forest Installation



Walnut Creek Wetland Park completed the second installation of its public orchard, also known as a food forest, in Spring 2024. Roughly 25 volunteers and staff worked to install blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and muscadine grapes along the Little Rock Greenway in addition to existing apple and fig trees. Supporting Greenway crews installed interpretive signage to help educate greenway users about food deserts in the City of Raleigh and sustainable maintenance practices that can be replicated at home. Efforts to enhance the space along the greenway will continue.

Litter Removal

This year, each site across our team weighed and logged most of the garbage collected during public and privately organized garbage clean-ups. Throughout the year, volunteers removed over 11,000 pounds of refuse from park and preserve properties and surrounding areas. Along with dozens and dozens of tires, some notable finds included numerous baby doll parts, a bag of clothing security tags, antique bottles dating back to the late 1800s at WCWP, piles of rugs, and over 1,000 pounds of old-farm garbage and debris at Wilkerson.



Walnut Creek Staff catches a baby bunny while helping with the food forest.