

**Nature Preserves Task Force
Report to City Council**

Adopted by the Parks, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board: May 19, 2011
Adopted by City Council:

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Nature Preserve Task Force was formed in early 2010 in response to City Council's October 7, 2009 resolution directing the Parks and Recreation staff to:

- A. Develop criteria for determining which City of Raleigh parks should be classified as "Nature Parks and Preserves" and
- B. Provide a list of parks that meet the criteria and are recommended for reclassification.

An initial meeting with Department Administration, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Parks, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board (PRGAB) and representatives of the WakeNature Preserves Partnership developed a strategy to address the Council charge. Discussion by City Council also included amending the initial time frame (first proposed at approximately 4 months) and including opportunities for public involvement. The group agreed that an ad hoc Task Force, supported by appropriate subject matter experts as resources, would be the best approach. The six member group consisted of two PRGAB members, two citizen members of the WakeNature Preserves Partnership, and two staff members from the Parks & Recreation Department. The PRGAB is the citizen advisory board to City Council on parks, recreation and greenway issues. The WakeNature Preserve Partnership is a non-profit organization of conservation, land management, and natural resource professionals working to identify high quality natural resources on public lands and build capacity to manage them. Eleven monthly meetings were held between February 2010 and February 2011. The Nature Preserve Task Force's mission was to come up with a scientific foundation tempered against professional judgment to create criteria to categorize Raleigh's existing parks into a new classification entitled "Nature Preserve".

After a year of iterative discussions, the group has prepared this report and unanimous recommendations for consideration by the PRGAB, the public, and City Council. The group recommends:

1. The new formal park classification be called "Nature Preserve" rather than Nature Parks and Preserves and be defined as, *"entire park units that contain examples of high quality plant or animal populations, natural communities, landscapes or ecosystems, documented by subject matter experts through local or state programs that contribute to biodiversity and environmental health. The size of a Nature Preserve should be sufficient to buffer, conserve and protect the target element or area. Efforts should be made to protect and manage significant natural resources in these areas through stewardship and best-practice management that do not degrade the resources present. Opportunities for the public enjoyment of natural resource based recreation and environmental education may be provided that are compatible with the protection and enhancement of the Nature Preserve and the nature experience"*;
2. An overlay designation called "Protected Natural Area" be adopted and added to the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Protected Natural Area overlay designation is defined as, *"portions of park units that contain examples of high quality plant or animal populations, natural communities, landscapes or ecosystems, documented by subject matter experts through*

local or state programs that contribute to biodiversity and environmental health. In the case of existing parks, Protected Natural Areas should be identified as part of an inventory process based on the natural resources, buffers, educational opportunities, and consistency with adopted master plans. Efforts should be made to protect and manage significant natural resources in these areas through stewardship and best-practice management that do not degrade the resources present. The designation of a Protected Natural Area should be differentiated from areas reserved for future development,";

3. A set of 13 criteria be used to evaluate current and future park sites to determine if they should be (re)classified under the "Nature Preserve" park classification or designated under the "Protected Natural Area" overlay designation.
4. Park (re)classification should be a function of individual site planning (System Integration Plan and Master Planning processes).
5. The following parks should be reclassified as Nature Preserves (from their current classification in parenthesis):
 - a. Annie Louise Wilkerson, M.D. Nature Preserve Park (Special)
 - b. Horseshoe Farm Park (Special)
 - c. Durant Nature Park (Metro)
 - d. Lake Johnson Park- southern portion (Metro)
6. The following park should be designated as containing Protected Natural Areas:
 - a. Anderson Point Park (Community)
7. Parks and Recreation staff should continue to evaluate additional properties according to criteria established in this Report.
8. Actions called for in this report are the responsibility of City of Raleigh staff, utilizing partnerships and other innovative approaches, as outlined in the Action statements of the 2030 Raleigh Comprehensive Plan. These statements and time frames are included in Section VII. Managing Expectations of this Report.

Next steps include:

- Three public neighborhood meetings;
 - Northeast CAC
 - North CAC
 - West CAC
- Presentation and public comment at April 28, 2011, PRGAB meeting;
- Public comment taken until May 5th.
- The Nature Preserves Task Force will review all comments, public and PRGAB, by email and will incorporate those comments into the Report by May 13th. Public Comment received will be incorporated under Appendix C.
- Updated Report will be provided to PRGAB for review before its May 19th meeting PRGAB will discuss NPTF Report at its May 19th meeting and provide a recommendation to City Council.

- PRGAB Recommendation to City Council;
- Formal Presentation and Report will go to City Council at its June 21st meeting
- Adoption by City Council;
- Amending the 2030 Comprehensive Plan to incorporate these changes; and
- Interim management opportunities will be evaluated and implemented until site specific management plans can be created.
- Continued evaluation of City of Raleigh park properties against the adopted criteria by appropriate internal staff and external experts including NCSU, WakeNature Preserves Partnership, NC Natural Heritage Program, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Wake Audubon, NC Museum of Natural Sciences, for exceptional natural areas worthy of park reclassification.
- Site specific management plans will be created that include and consider input from the Recreation and Parks Divisions, Neighbors, External Experts, citizens, and the Adopted Master Plan.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Raleigh Parks Plan and the Comprehensive Plan

The 2030 Raleigh Comprehensive Plan was adopted by City Council in October 2009. Prior to this action the "Park Plan" document was the Parks and Open Space Element of the City's current Comprehensive Plan. As the 2030 Comprehensive Plan developed, a separate element titled "Parks and Open Space" addressed most major issues related to the parks and greenway system. Many items in the 2004 Park Plan were incorporated in various elements of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan including Environmental Protection, Arts and Culture, for instance. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan makes clear that a separate, more detailed Park Plan is appropriate to address the level of detail necessary in acquiring, developing, operating and maintaining a major metropolitan parks, recreation and greenway system.

The level of detail in the Park Plan includes examination of the classification of parks and their attributes (size, typical elements, service radius, and level of service). The Park Plan receives overall guidance from the Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, if Park Plan updates suggest changes in the Comprehensive Plan are appropriate, this can follow a specified process for review and inclusion in the City's Comprehensive Plan.

B. City Council Charge "Nature Parks and Preserves"

As part of the public review of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan the suggestion was made to include a formal park land classification called *Nature Parks and Preserves*. During a special City Council work session held on August 31, 2009 Councilor Russell Stephenson requested clarification on several park planning issues, and formally requested that Nature Parks and Preserves be added as a park classification. At the City Council meeting on September 15, 2009 Councilor Roger Koopman formally introduced a specific resolution to this effect. A copy of the minutes from September 15, 2009 that includes language of the resolution and related discussion is included in the Appendix. The definition, adopted by Council on August 31, 2009 is as follows:

Nature Parks and Preserves are intended to be used for environmental education, scientific research, and public enjoyment in ways that do not degrade the natural resources on site. Nature Preserves contain and highlight examples of high quality plant and animal populations, natural communities, landscapes or ecosystems that contribute to biodiversity and environmental health. Efforts are made to protect and manage significant natural resources in these areas through best practice management and stewardship. Opportunities for passive, natural resource based recreation may be provided that are compatible with the protection and enhancement of the natural area and the nature experience.

Discussion by the City Council, Mayor and City Manager concerning the September 15th resolution suggested additional public input, including the involvement of the Parks, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board. As originally suggested in Councilor Koopman's resolution the criteria were to be determined and a list of parks suggested by the end of the

calendar year (2.5 months). Discussion further established that a different time frame was necessary to fully develop the concept, incorporate public input and bring a recommendation forward.

C. Natural Areas and Conservation Lands in Raleigh Park System

The new definition for Nature Preserve does not add new park units to the City of Raleigh park system. Instead it changes the park unit's classification and management. One Special Park recommended for reclassification existed as a "nature preserve" due to the deed request of the former owner of the property (Dr. Annie Louise Wilkerson, MD). Two of the units classified as Metro Parks were described as "nature parks" by virtue of their wooded character and their adopted master plans (Durant and Lake Johnson). Horseshoe Farm was originally classified as a Community Park, and was reclassified as part of the master plan adoption to a Special Park.

The parks recommended for reclassification were evaluated against *Objective Criteria*, including the presence of Significant Natural Heritage Area(s) and/or Natural Heritage Element Occurrences. These criteria are established by the NC Natural Heritage Program, and further field verification has occurred as part of this Task Force process. In addition to *Objective Criteria*, *Additional Criteria* have been assembled for resource evaluation. All criteria are listed in Appendix D of this Report and were developed by consensus by the Task Force.

Many other parks contain significant portions that are outstanding natural resource areas and are not always recognized as such. For instance nearly one third of Buffalo Road Athletic Park (50 of 165 acres) is quality wetland with trail access and/or steep slopes. The vast majority of the Capital Area Greenway system, 3,700 acres, is protected as conservation land and located primarily in the floodplains. Most parks have smaller undisturbed areas that play an important role and function as buffers, either for streams, differing uses within the park, or around their borders with adjoining uses. At the time of this Report insufficient resources exist to allow for a full investigation of all park lands. As staff resources allow, these areas will be assessed for the presence of high quality elements.

III. TASK FORCE

An initial meeting with Department Administration, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Parks, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board (PRGAB) and representatives of the WakeNature Preserves Partnership was held in January 2010 to develop a strategy to address the Council charge. The attendees agreed that the Task Force would be comprised of six individuals: two from each of the following groups.

- A. **WakeNature Preserve Partnership** - WakeNature's mission is to organize and provide resources to identify ecologically valuable, publicly owned open spaces within Wake County, NC, and to build capacity for appropriate management and long-term stewardship of those areas. The group consists of professionals and students who work and perform research in the fields of conservation, natural resource management and recreation.
 - Dr. Toddi Steelman, WakeNature Preserves Partnership, NCSU Professor of Forestry and Environmental Resources
 - Dr. George Hess, WakeNature Preserves Partnership, NCSU Associate Professor of Forestry and Environmental Resources
- B. **Parks Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board** – The PRGAB serves as the official citizen advisory board to the City Council on issues of policy, funding, planning, and new park acquisition related to Raleigh's parks, recreation and greenway system. The group is made up of 15 citizens appointed by City Council who have professional experience or personal interest in parks and recreation issues.
 - Shoshana Serxner
 - Rebecca Oxholm
- C. **Parks and Recreation Staff**
 - Dick Bailey, Administrator, Design Development Division
 - David Shouse, Senior Planner, Design Development Division

Additional resources are non-voting (decision making) participants who were invited to share their expertise and participate in discussions.

- D. **Additional Resources**
 - Scott Pohlman, Director of Conservation Incentives, NC Natural Heritage Program
 - Jacqueline Wallace, Urban Biologist, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
 - Melissa Salter, Land Stewardship Coordinator, Raleigh Parks & Recreation
 - Jeff Dawson, GIS Specialist, Raleigh Parks & Recreation
 - Andrew Hayes, GIS Technician, Raleigh Parks & Recreation
 - Janice Spadorcia, Administrative Assistant, Raleigh Parks & Recreation
 - Emily Ander, Planner I, Raleigh Parks & Recreation

The Task Force agreed to meet once a month. The group began meeting in February 2010 and met 11 times.

E. Summary of Task Force Work

During the first few meetings the Task Force extended invitations to local natural resource experts from the State Natural Heritage Program and the Wildlife Resources Commission to explain their programs and share their knowledge of significant natural communities in Raleigh. This information was incorporated into the group's discussions and assisted the Task Force in comparing and debating definitions and criteria currently used by the WakeNature Preserve Partnership, the City of Raleigh, Durham County and various land trusts, locally and nationally. These discussions led to definitions and criteria applicable to Raleigh's Park System.

Meeting discussions encompassed the following topics:

- *Nature Preserve vs. Nature Park*
 - These terms are not synonymous, should they be one classification with two separate definitions or two separate classifications?
 - What are the similarities and differences between the two – allowed uses, management implications, size, and quality of natural resources?
- *Working with the Public*
 - Citizens may perceive nature preserves as being off limits to the public. How do we educate them about what a nature preserve is?
 - If parks are reclassified, how will this change be conveyed to the public?
- *Traditional, Active Recreation vs. Environmental Education & Protection*
 - How should Raleigh protect its special natural resources without limiting traditional, sports-oriented recreation?
 - What is the right balance between the two types of recreation?
 - We reviewed Charlotte-Mecklenburg's model to see if it would work for Raleigh.
- *Criteria*
 - Should the criteria be weighted to rank parks based on their natural resource value?
 - Criteria were evaluated and refined by assessing Raleigh parks based on their natural resource value.
 - There is subjectivity in GIS data.
 - NC Natural Heritage Program's GIS data for Raleigh is incomplete because they have not visited and evaluated all of Raleigh's parks.
 - Additional criteria that leverage professional judgment and knowledge should be allowed.
- *Nature Preserve vs. Natural Area*
 - What is the difference between a nature preserve and a natural area? Size? Natural resource quality?

- Does a nature preserve have to be an entire park unit? Does it have to meet an acreage threshold?
- How should small, special areas be managed within larger park units particularly parks that are already developed?
- What are the management implications of park classification versus an overlay designation?
- What activities and elements are appropriate within Nature Preserves?
- Can a portion of a park unit be a nature preserve?
- Should Nature Preserves have an associated Level of Service?
- Should the City own and manage Nature Preserves?

- *Classification Process*
 - Will new parkland be acquired to satisfy the Nature Preserve classification?
 - Will the criteria apply only to current parks?
 - Will new parks be evaluated against the criteria?
 - Will undeveloped parks be evaluated differently than already established parks?
 - If parks are reclassified how will it affect the Level of Service for other park classifications?
 - Will reclassified parks need to be renamed or get new tract id signs?

- *Approved Master Plans:*
 - How would a park reclassification affect its Master Plan?
 - Would Master Plans need to be amended to reflect that athletic fields are not appropriate uses within a Nature Preserve?

IV. CRITERIA

The initial City Council charge called for the development of criteria by which existing parks could be judged suitable for reclassification as *Nature [Parks and] Preserves*. The Task Force drew on criteria already established for evaluating land in Durham County and land trusts, locally and nationally. The discussion also included how criteria might complement existing park classifications in Raleigh's Comprehensive Plan (Metro, Community, Neighborhood, Special, Open Space and Greenway). Wording was carefully considered and the resulting *Objective Criteria* provided the opportunity for an initial evaluation of land. Preliminary use of Geographic Information System (GIS) data such as the National Wetland Inventory enabled the group to look at the entire Raleigh park system. Use of overlay data from the NC Natural Heritage Program was incorporated as well. Data from the NC Wildlife Action Plan (NC WAP) existed at the statewide level and will evolve as their resources allow. The Task Force acknowledged that as detailed data were developed for the Raleigh park system (such as field confirmation of natural resource inventories) it should be in a format that could be shared with and contribute to the NC WAP database. The group acknowledged that additional data were needed as well.

A. Objective Criteria

The *Objective Criteria* identify properties that might be Nature Preserves. The presence of features from the list of *Objective Criteria* does not automatically qualify a park as a Nature Preserve or a Protected Natural Area. They assist in identifying parks that should be considered further and evaluated against the *Additional Criteria* for possible designation as a Nature Preserve or Protected Natural Area.

Environmental & Open Space Features

1. Parcel/Park Unit contains species or natural communities that are endangered, threatened or rare as identified by the NC Natural Heritage Program as Natural Heritage Element Occurrences (NHEO).
2. Parcel/Park Unit contains existing areas or species identified by the NC Natural Heritage Program as Significant Natural Heritage Areas (SNHA).
3. Parcel/Park Unit is in close proximity to or provides connection between other properties that are currently protected.
4. Parcel/Park Unit contains appreciable water features in the landscape, such as wetlands, lakes, ponds, perennial stream systems, or floodplains.
5. Parcel/Park Unit contains hydric soils which may be indicative of wetlands and floodplains.
6. Parcel/Park Unit contains slopes near streams or rivers.

B. Additional Criteria

The use of *Additional Criteria* are recommended to offer a larger scale, park system-wide approach to the Nature Preserve classification and Protected Natural Area designation. Planners and subject matter experts are able to contribute additional information with knowledge of adjoining or proximal property and neighborhoods. In this respect planners are also able to consider sites that may have lost significant elements but may have restoration potential.

Environmental & Open Space Features

7. Parcel/Park Unit contains species that are uncommon within the Raleigh parks system as identified and mapped by staff.
8. Parcel/Park Unit contains outstanding geologic characteristics, such as a cave, waterfall, cliff, granite outcrop, etc. as identified and mapped by staff.

Stewardship & Management

9. Expense of stewarding the Parcel/Park Unit due to location, maintenance of structures, resource management (invasives), liability, multiple owners, trespassing concerns, irreparable contamination, cost-prohibitive cleanup, or other factors outweighs the balance of benefits between designation as a Nature Preserve versus another park classification.
10. Parcel/Park Unit is of sufficient size and shape that its conservation resources are likely to remain intact, even if adjacent properties are developed; or sufficient neighboring property is either already protected or to be included as to achieve the same result.
11. The ability to buffer or separate uses in order to allow access and/or infrastructure.
12. Compatibility of existing use or condition, in whole or part, is conducive to being a Nature Preserve.
13. The Nature Preserve designation for new properties should be considered within the larger context of system-wide park planning as outlined in the Raleigh Comprehensive Plan. Designation of Protected Natural Areas should be a function of individual site planning (System Integration and Master Planning processes).

C. Process

Over the course of the last six months the Task Force has used the *Objective Criteria* to broadly review the 205 parks within Raleigh's parks system. Of those that met the *Objective Criteria*, only ten parks had enough data and staff knowledge to evaluate against the *Additional Criteria*. Ten park sites were fully vetted using both the *Objective* and *Additional Criteria*. Only five of these parks sufficiently met the criteria, qualifying them to be recommended by the Task Force as Nature Preserves or found to contain recommended Protected Natural Areas.

The Nature Preserve evaluation process should be on-going as resources allow. The remainder

of the park sites that meet the *Objective Criteria* but have insufficient data to be evaluated with *Additional Criteria* will continue under established management approaches as additional data is collected. A list of sites evaluated to date is included in the Appendix E; this list will be updated and maintained by staff. Recommendations will be considered and offered as the Comprehensive Plan is reviewed and updated.

D. Table of Nature Preserve and Protected Natural Area Criteria

NATURE PRESERVE AND PROTECTED NATURAL AREA CRITERIA

This table should be used to evaluate park units and parcels acquired for future parks. Each park unit/parcel should be evaluated in the larger context to the quality of the property's natural resources. Each park unit/parcel should be considered within the context of all 13 criteria.

OBJECTIVE CRITERIA

Step 1: GIS Evaluation

	CRITERIA	CONSIDERATIONS	SOURCE
Environmental and Open Space Features			
1	Parcel/Park Unit contains species or natural communities that are endangered, threatened or rare, identified by the NC Natural Heritage Program as Natural Heritage Element Occurrences (NHEO).	Natural Heritage Element Occurrences (NHEO) that have a status of Extant and a Priority of Medium or Higher.	Natural Heritage Element Occurrences (NHEO) - NC Natural Heritage Program
2	Parcel/Park Unit contains existing areas or species identified by the NC Natural Heritage Program as Significant Natural Heritage Areas (SNHA).	All significance levels (National, State, Regional, Local Significance)	Significant Natural Heritage Areas (SNHA) - NC Natural Heritage Program
3	Parcel/Park Unit is in close proximity to or provides connection between other properties that are currently protected.	The property adjoins already protected open space or greenway corridor. Property includes land owned by City of Raleigh, Wake County, Army Corp, State, and non-profit organizations.	NCCGIA - State level data for lands managed for conservation and open space
4	Parcel/Park Unit contains appreciable water features in the landscape, such as wetlands, lakes, ponds, perennial stream systems, or floodplains.	Water resources, particularly bluelines, must be field verified	NWI, FEMA, planimetric hydrology data
5	Parcel/Park Unit contains hydric soils which may be indicative of wetlands and floodplains.	Wake County Hydric Soils: AfB, AuA, CmA, CnA, CoA, CpA, EnB, EnB2, GoA, HeB, HeB2, LyA, MeA, NoA, NoB, NoB2, OrB2, OrC2, PsA, RaA, RoA, WaA, WaB, WhA, WnA, WoA, WyA, WpA.	USDA NRCS Soils Map; NRCS Hydric Soils listing (http://soils.usda.gov/use/hydric/)

6 Parcel/Park Unit contains slopes near streams or river.

>8% slope

Parks & Recreation GIS-based Neighborhood Park Suitability Analysis model

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA

Step 2: Site Visit

	CRITERIA	CONSIDERATIONS	SOURCE
<u>Environmental & Open Space Features</u>			
7	Parcel/Park Unit contains species that are uncommon as identified and mapped by staff.		internally collected data or data from cooperative agencies
8	Parcel/Park Unit contains outstanding geologic characteristics, such as cave, waterfall, cliffs, granite outcrop etc. as identified and mapped by staff.		internally collected data or data from cooperative agencies
<u>Stewardship & Management</u>			
9	Expense of stewarding the Parcel/Park Unit due to location, maintenance of structures, resource management (invasives), liability, multiple owners, trespassing concerns, irreparable contamination, cost-prohibitive cleanup, or other factors outweighs the balance of benefits between designation as a Nature Preserve versus another park classification.	Percentage of parcel covered in invasives, Number of neighbors, Adjacent activities	orthophotographs; internally collected data; maintenance budget data
10	Parcel/Park Unit is of sufficient size and shape that its conservation resources are likely to remain intact, even if adjacent properties are developed; or sufficient neighboring property is either already protected or to be included as to achieve the same result.	Large blocks are preferred to long, linear tracts or tracts with lots of edges Appropriate size and shape are determined by species habitat requirements.	parcel data; aerial photographs
11	The area can be sufficiently buffered.	Size of habitat and distribution of resource	
12	Compatibility of existing use or condition, in whole or part, is conducive to being a Nature Preserve		

13 The Nature Preserve classification for new properties should be considered within the larger context of system-wide park planning as outlined in the Raleigh Comprehensive Plan. Designation of Protected Natural Areas should be a function of individual site planning (System Integration and Master Planning processes).

Comprehensive Plan,
Park Plan, Citywide
Strategic Plans,
Individual Site Planning

V. PARK CLASSIFICATION

A. Current Classification in the Comprehensive Plan

The new Nature Preserve classification could affect the Level of Service (LOS: acres per thousand population) when used as a planning tool because there are no LOS requirements for Nature Preserves or other natural resource-based parkland (including greenway land and trails). For instance, changing Durant Nature Park from “Metro” to “Nature Preserve” will reduce the current acres of Metro Parks in the Raleigh park system by 241 acres. Nature Preserves will meet the definition and intent of the Metro Parks park classification by virtue of their size and character or theme. For this reason the Parks and Recreation staff recommends that Nature Preserves be included in the LOS for Metro Parks. (The LOS for Metro Parks is 4.2 acres per thousand people at this time.)

B. Classification in the Park Search and Acquisition Process

As sites are identified and recommended for acquisition to satisfy a particular Search Area need they are identified as meeting a need for neighborhood, community or other classification. Some sites present an opportunity (gift, partnerships, etc.) and are accepted for acquisition irrespective of a Search Area. In any case a site should be evaluated against the criteria contained here before they are designated as a Nature Preserve. Other options include the Special park classification with stipulations for maintaining vegetative cover, for instance.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nature Preserve Task Force recommendations go beyond the initial request by City Council to create a list of criteria and recommend parks for reclassification to encompass renaming and defining the new park classification, adding and defining an overlay designation, incorporating new terms in the 2030 Comprehensive Plan glossary and suggesting parks for inclusion of Protected Natural Areas.

A. New Park & Overlay Classification Definitions

“Nature Preserve” park classification

Nature Preserves are entire park units that contain examples of high quality plant or animal populations, natural communities, landscapes or ecosystems, documented by subject matter experts through local or state programs that contribute to biodiversity and environmental health. The size of a Nature Preserve should be sufficient to buffer, conserve and protect the target element or area. Efforts should be made to protect and manage significant natural resources in these areas through stewardship and best-practice management that do not degrade the resources present. Opportunities for the public enjoyment of natural resource based recreation and environmental education may be provided that are compatible with the protection and enhancement of the Nature Preserve and the nature experience.

“Protected Natural Area” overlay designation

Protected Natural Areas are portions of park units that contain examples of high quality plant or animal populations, natural communities, landscapes or ecosystems, documented by subject matter experts through local or state programs that contribute to biodiversity and environmental health. In the case of existing parks, Protected Natural Areas should be identified as part of an inventory process based on the natural resources, buffers, educational opportunities, and consistency with adopted master plans. Efforts should be made to protect and manage significant natural resources in these areas through stewardship and best-practice management that do not degrade the resources present. The designation of a Protected Natural Area should be differentiated from areas reserved for future development.

The major difference between the two definitions is that Nature Preserve encompasses the entire park unit while Protected Natural Area is limited to a portion of the larger park unit. There is no distinction between the amount and quality of management given to a Protected Natural Area versus a Nature Preserve.

B. Raleigh Nature Preserve Park Classification

The Nature Preserves Task Force recommends the following Raleigh parks be reclassified from their current park classification to the new ‘Nature Preserves’ classification.

- Horseshoe Farm Park (Special)
- Annie Louise Wilkerson, MD Nature Preserve Park (Special)
- Durant Nature Park (Metro)
- Lake Johnson Park – southern portion (Metro)

The list above is not comprehensive. Most parks within Raleigh's Parks System have not been evaluated in detail by internal staff or subject-matter external experts to know if they meet the Criteria. As these assessments take place staff will recommend parks that do meet the Criteria for classification as Nature Preserves and the decision-making process will follow as described in Section IV. New parks will be classified via the System Integration Plan (SIP) process.

C. Raleigh Parks Designated Protected Natural Area Overlays

The Nature Preserves Task Force recommends the following Raleigh park worthy of a Protected Natural Area Overlay designation.

- Anderson Point Park (Community)

The size of natural area overlays will be dictated by the range and location of the special community which merits the designation.

VII. MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

The Task Force suggests that realistic expectations should be agreed upon with the implementation of these recommendations. This includes changes that might be expected, when they might be expected, and at what cost should be realistic and manageable. For instance drafting, reviewing and implementing management plans will need to take into account numerous factors like organization, education and training of Parks and Recreation Division staff, reprioritization of staff workplan action items, the resources available, and opportunities for partnership.

A. Public Access

Nature Preserves and Protected Natural Areas are intended for public use and enjoyment. Access should be managed, and in some cases, some degree of restriction of activities that are inappropriate to either the resource or the use of the resource may be necessary. This should be clearly outlined in individual management plans and should address both facility development and use. For instance, trail surfaces, widths and use of the trails should be included in the management plan in such a manner that agency and visitors are clear about what is deemed appropriate.

B. Time Frame for Implementation

Reclassifying existing parks may bring immediate expectations of change, either in physical form, "on the ground", or in rules and regulations. In the short term little or no change may be obvious since resource inventory is not complete on the subject park units. Development of management plans will take time and may consider changes in both the physical elements of a site, such as relocating trails, as well as changing user behavior, such as limiting access to a sensitive area. Development of management plans will take time with limited staff and technical resources, as will making changes in current or new management practices. Opportunities for partnerships exist with the WakeNature Preserve Partnership, North Carolina State University, the NC Museum of Natural Sciences, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, and the NC Natural Heritage Program and should be explored.

C. Departmental Organization and Funding

Raleigh Parks and Recreation will need to consider potential impacts on current organization of personnel and equipment resources. Undeveloped park sites have no on-site staff presence; the timing for additional new staff or reorganized responsibilities will be a budget consideration. Most on-site maintenance activities such as vegetation management currently are under the responsibility of the Parks Division. The Department does little in the form of wildlife management at the current time. Environmental Education is almost entirely the responsibility of the Nature Program in the Recreation Division. A strategic approach to funding for staff, natural resource management training and equipment resources is recommended over a period of the next several years.

D. Comprehensive Plan Correlation

Public input associated with the development of the 2030 Raleigh Comprehensive Plan clearly supported a conservation approach to some public lands. A number of policy statements in Element C: Environmental Protection and Element H: Parks, Recreation and Open Space generated specific Action statements. The work of the Nature Preserve Task Force addresses, in some fashion, parts of the following Actions:

1. Element H: Parks, Recreation and Open Space

PR 5.4 Identifying Conservation Lands – Identify lands that can be conserved and managed for their outstanding natural features, landscapes and assets, and cultural heritage values as part of a system of open spaces and green infrastructure. (mid-term 3-5 years)

PR 6.3 System Integration Plan Implementation – Implement System Integration Plans for all newly-acquired properties and for undeveloped park sites and key areas of underdeveloped sites as staff and agency resources allow. (on-going)

PR 6.5 Awareness of Natural Resource Areas – Implement strategies through traditional methods and emerging technologies to increase public awareness of natural resource areas within the Raleigh Parks system and adjoining communities. (on-going)

PR 6.6 Stewardship Capacity – Provide an assessment of additional staffing and related resources necessary to provide for the appropriate level of management and stewardship of the City's growing inventory of parks and open spaces. Incorporate this assessment into the budget process. (mid-term)

2. Element C: Environmental Protection

EP 2.1 Green Infrastructure Plan – Complete a ...Plan that includes a natural heritage inventory, to define a program for protecting, conserving and stewarding Raleigh's natural resources, wetlands, water bodies, urban forests, landscapes, priority wildlife habitats, and important natural features....Work with the Environmental Advisory Board and similar citizen committees as appropriate. Incorporate the spatial principles of landscape ecology in the planning effort. (mid-term)

EP 5.2 Urban Forestry Plan – Work with local arboricultural institutions and agencies to prepare a detailed Urban Forest Plan that outlines how to implement treescape improvements and enhancements throughout the community....(mid-term)

EP 6.1 Habitat Study Plan – Formulate a ...plan to define, map, protect, and restore Raleigh's native and priority habitats, particularly those identified in the NC Wildlife Action Plan. The Plan should establish a program of action for protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats and preserving biodiversity through a range of strategies including land acquisition, park and greenway conservation and interpretation,...(long-term 6-10 years)

EP 6.3 Invasive Species Control – Develop a program to increase awareness of, contain, and possibly eradicate the problem of invasive plants and insects. (long-term)