



Andrew Lester
Senior Planner
Durham City-County Planning Department
101 City Hall Plaza
Durham, NC 27701

July 11, 2024

Dear Mr. Lester,

The Triangle Connectivity Collaborative (TCC) is a partnership formed by conservation and natural resources professionals and organizations that are interested in using science-based information to identify and prioritize critical habitat networks within the Triangle region. The mission of the group is: *To conserve and restore landscape habitat connectivity that ensures long term protection and resilience of biodiversity and natural resources.* As part of that mission, this group can provide information and technical assistance to local governments on connectivity conservation, including where appropriate considerations should be incorporated into development review and design.

Through funding from Burt's Bees, Durham County, Orange County, and the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, a landscape-scale habitat analysis was conducted to identify priority wildlife habitat patches and corridors for sensitive wildlife species in the Upper Neuse and New Hope Creek watersheds. The data from this analysis are available via request from the Durham County Open Space Program. Methods for the analysis are detailed in [this report](#). The lands surrounding New Hope Creek are critical, highly ranked habitat patches and corridors that form a functional ecological network between the protected lands along the Eno River to those around Jordan Lake.

In a review of the parcels for the Mount Moriah Ridge development, the habitat network analysis shows that the Durham-side parcels (dark green in map) for this project have been identified as part of a highest priority habitat patch. This means the protection of this patch of habitat is critical for maintaining connectivity of the larger habitat network. Additionally, these parcels are part of the Dry Creek/Mount Moriah Bottomland Natural Heritage Natural Area (NHNA). It is the TCC's recommendation that sensitive wildlife habitats like this be permanently conserved and be buffered from development by encouraging adjacent lands to remain in a rural land use. The Chapel Hill-side of the project is also part of the habitat network and has habitat patches that are 'high' and 'higher' priority for protection within it. These areas are connected to the Dry Creek/Mount Moriah Bottomland NHNA, especially with the streams that are occurring on the parcel. Because this piece of the project is also adjacent to the NHNA, we recommend buffering the NHNA from developed land uses by a minimum of 300' to reduce the impacts of edge effects on natural areas (i.e., invasive species, lighting, noise, litter, run-off, etc.). If this project is to go forward, there may be indirect impacts on the rest of the habitat network, as increased traffic on Erwin Road may increase pressure for road widening, which would result in increased fragmentation of Duke Forest, which is also a critical part of the habitat network. If development does occur on these

Legend

Streams

Mt. Moriah Ridge Proposal

Natural Areas

Exceptional

Very High

High

Moderate

General

Unranked

Habitat Patches

Connectivity Priority

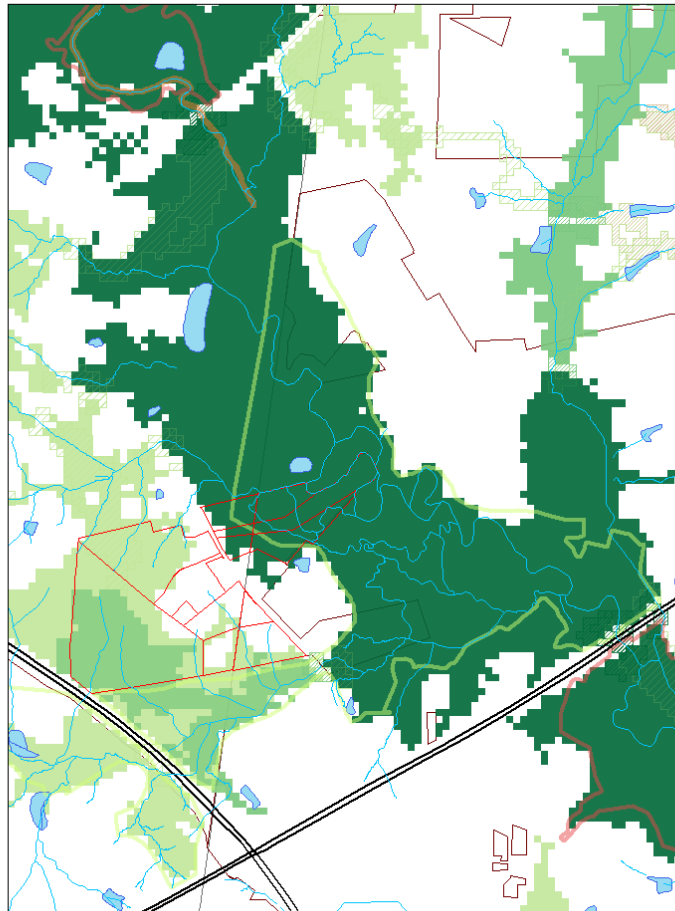
1-Highest

2-Higher

3-High

4-Moderate

5-Unranked



properties, TCC recommends clustering the buildings around existing infrastructure, and minimizing clearing of the site to retain the maximum amount of buffer between developed land uses and natural areas.¹

Connectivity conservation is important for the most sensitive wildlife and plant species, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation in general. Protection of areas that connect our most critical and sensitive natural areas will support the health of our ecosystems and provide innumerable benefits to our communities now and into the future. These recommendations are non-regulatory and are provided in support of Durham's efforts to conserve biodiversity and keep

¹Recommendations provided in this letter are based on the NC Wildlife Resources Commission's Green Growth Toolbox, a scientifically-vetted conservation planning guidance handbook: [Download the Green Growth Handbook \(ncwildlife.org\)](https://www.ncwildlife.org/growth-toolbox).

natural areas connected for wildlife. We hope that it is useful in guiding discussions with developers in this significant natural area.

Although I am very happy to speak with you about this matter, please don't hesitate to call or email the TCC Coordinator, Brooke Massa, brooke.massa@ncwildlife.org, 919-630-3086 with any questions.

Thank you for your time,



Johnny Randall, PhD

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