



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve Budget Ordinance Amendment No. 26BCC001 recognizing \$20,000 in grant revenue from the Burt's Bees Foundation to support a natural area inventory in east and north Durham County.

NC's Natural Heritage Program has identified natural areas in Durham County that are important for biodiversity. Many are in east and north Durham County where there have been significant recent land use changes. This project will document, map, and update State-designated natural areas to support environmental and conservation planning. Natural areas are sites recommended for conservation due to the presence of rare species, unique natural communities, important animal groups, or other ecological features of special significance for biodiversity.

Burt's Bees' corporate headquarters is located in downtown Durham. This is the fifth award Durham County has received from the Burt's Bees Foundation to support Open Space work. This project will commence in August 2025 and will be completed by October 2026. Durham County, through Open Space and Real Estate Division funds, is contributing \$25,000 for a total project cost of \$45,000.

Background/Justification

The last comprehensive inventory of rare species in Durham dates to 1999, which was completed by the State of North Carolina's Natural Heritage Program with financial support from Durham County. This work will include landowner outreach, fieldwork, data compilation, and reporting - all of which will be completed by [North Carolina Natural Heritage Program](#) (NC NHP), a program of the Division of Land and Water Stewardship within the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

With Durham's current Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) update and the upcoming County-wide open space plan, these biological surveys will provide meaningful environmental data for conservation of wildlife habitats. With this funding and in partnership with the State's Natural Heritage Program we will gather much needed current ecological and environmental data for conservation planning, management, and community education.

Policy Impact

This grant and environmental inventory aligns with Strategic Plan Focus Area: Sustainable Infrastructure and Environment, Objective SI 3: Preserve and restore the natural and built environment, and SI 3d: Protect and restore natural resources, land, recreational, historical, and rural spaces.

Additionally, Durham's adopted [Comprehensive Plan](#) includes goals and policies that include understanding and protecting Durham's significant natural areas, ecosystems, habitats, and wildlife corridors:

Protecting Sensitive Land (page 145)

Policy 78 Ensure that a minimum of 30% of the land area of Durham County is placed in permanent conservation by 2050. Encourage permanent conservation of land, especially publicly owned land, that is most suitable for permanent protection, such as natural heritage areas, forested tracts, and bottomlands.

Policy 79 Protect Durham's most ecologically sensitive natural areas (including floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitats, unique plant communities, hillsides, drinking water sources, critical watersheds, and natural heritage areas) from the impacts of development.

Policy 83 Existing habitat areas and wildlife movement corridors should be left largely undisturbed to remain in their natural, vegetated state and to avoid fragmentation and disruption. These areas include



Wildlife Habitat Areas or Natural Corridors in adopted open space plans or identified NC Natural Heritage Areas. Some disturbance may be allowed for road crossings, utilities, and stormwater infrastructure, if minimized. Staff will recommend against proposed structures or parking in these areas.

Policy 84 Discourage development that contributes to a loss of biodiversity, particularly through disruptive clear-cutting and mass grading. Mass grading should be discouraged for new residential projects. When mass grading of new development sites is proposed, it should occur in phases rather than across the entire area at once, to reduce on-site stormwater runoff and erosion, and to retain tree cover between the phases of construction.

Biodiversity (page 147)

Policy 98 Encourage the creation and preservation of natural wildlife habitat and natural plant communities, particularly for pollinators and birds, on both public and private land.

Policy 100 Support ecological restoration of existing green spaces to improve their function and quality.

The Comprehensive Plan's [Place Type Map](#) includes Recreation and Open Spaces (ROS) that are “areas that will remain free from development, with the exception of minimal buildings or structures to support recreational and cultural activities where desired and appropriate. Open Spaces not suitable for recreation, which includes areas like floodways, wetlands, and land around drinking water sources, should have no development and be permanently protected. Where appropriate, supportive development like trails, restrooms, resting places, and places for learning may be included to provide nearby residents with access to recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities through parks, trails, preserves, and cemeteries. These facilities should be accessible to all who want to walk, bike, or take a bus, and should discourage extensive car access. Open Space may be under private ownership, such as land set aside by homeowners’ associations as part of a residential development. Care should be taken to intentionally add or preserve open spaces in places that do not currently have as much.”

Procurement (Acquisition) Background

n/a

Fiscal Impact

Durham County, through Open Space and Real Estate Division FY 2025 funds, has contributed \$25,000 for a total project cost of \$45,000.

County Manager’s Recommendation: The County Manager recommends that the Board approve Budget Ordinance Amendment No. 26BCC001 recognizing \$20,000 in grant revenue from the Burt’s Bees Foundation to support a natural area inventory in east and north Durham County.