



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve Budget Ordinance Amendment No 21BCC000031 recognizing \$16,000 in grant revenue from the Burt's Bees Foundation and supporting the expenditure for an ecological modeling study in Durham County's Neuse River basin area.

Background/Justification

This study will be based on a previous study completed in 2019 for the Eno–New Hope corridor watersheds in Durham and Orange Counties involving a consortium of land trusts, local governments, non-profits, and Duke University. This previous study, [A Landscape Plan for Wildlife Habitat Connectivity in the Eno and New Hope Watersheds](#), was funded with support from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, and only covered about 1/3 of Durham County. The Burt's Bees grant will allow the completion of a similar study in the remainder of Durham County that was not included in the initial Eno-New Hope Landscape Connectivity Analysis. (see attached project flyer)

The project will be guided by an advisory committee including Durham County Open Space staff, and technical advisors from the previous study. The project will also be shared with a broader stakeholder group including Durham's Environmental Affairs Board, Durham Open Space and Trails Commission (DOST), local land trusts, and City/County Planning staff. The study will get underway this fall, with results anticipated in late spring 2021. The study will be conducted using a GIS modeling analysis that uses current wildlife and land use data and current ecological principles to identify significant habitat and their connecting corridors.

The study findings are important for long-term environmental health in Durham because as development increases, existing undeveloped lands are disconnected from other natural habitats by roads, development, and other causes of habitat fragmentation. The loss of biological diversity – across all plant and animal groups – is primarily caused by both habitat loss and the fragmentation and isolation of the remaining protected habitats. Connecting wildlife habitat also secures benefits for water quality, native plants, the local economy (including working farms and forests), and public health.

Policy Impact

Durham County has a long history of supporting the identification and protection of significant ecological areas. This past work included financial support for the [Durham County Inventory of Natural Areas and Rare Species](#), completed in 1996. The proposed habitat corridor study will build on these past analyses and include findings from other studies over the past 20+ years.

The study is anticipated to yield current ecological recommendations that may be helpful for the Durham Comprehensive Plan update which is now underway. Planning staff have indicated the completion of the study will work well within the timeframe for production of the draft Comprehensive Plan recommendations. The findings will also help to prioritize key open space protection efforts in the upper Neuse River basin to ensure long term ecological health in Durham.



This grant-funded study supports the Strategic Plan Goal 4, Objective 4.1: Natural Resource Stewardship and Protection – Protect and steward natural resources through comprehensive compliance and educational programs.

Procurement Background

N/A

Fiscal Impact

No fiscal impact; the \$16,000 grant has been awarded from the Burt's Bees Greater Good Foundation to support an ecological habitat modeling study in the upper Neuse River watershed

Recommendation

The County Manager recommends that the Board approve Budget Ordinance Amendment No 21BCC000031 recognizing \$16,000 in grant revenue from the Burt's Bees Foundation to support an ecological modeling study for the portion of Durham County in the Neuse River basin.