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ENO-NEW HOPE LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION GROUP AWARDED CATALYST GRANT TO CATAPULT WILDLIFE CORRIDOR CONSERVATION

This innovative collaboration among local governments, conservation groups, universities, and ecologists provides an actionable plan to ensure wildlife habitat connectivity across the landscape for the area's most sensitive species.

The Eno River Association was awarded the highly competitive Catalyst Fund grant from The Network for Landscape Conservation to further coordinate the efforts of the Eno-New Hope Landscape Conservation Group. From more than 100 applicants nationwide, 13 were awarded catalyst grants and the Association was the only North Carolina group to receive funding.

The Eno-New Hope Landscape Conservation Group is a network of land trusts, conservation groups, educational institutions, local governments, and ecologists who have aligned to conserve the natural habitats and the connections between them in the Eno River and New Hope Creek watersheds to protect biodiversity and natural resources for current and future generations. Funding will be used to hire a coordinator and to solidify group governance structures. The funding will also enable the group to develop a strategic action plan to guide implementation of its existing landscape conservation plan. By leveraging the momentum generated by the completion of the plan, this new support will build critical capacity within the group to advance collective action around its vision to conserve landscape connectivity within the Eno-New Hope landscape.

The Eno River and New Hope Creek watersheds span portions of Durham, Orange, Chatham, and Wake counties within the rapidly developing Triangle region of North Carolina. These watersheds contain ecologically significant and biodiverse habitats and provide drinking water for nearly one million people. Although important lands have been conserved within this landscape, little effort has been made to ensure connectivity across these lands. In the face of the rapid development within the region, ecosystem function and climate resilience are threatened.

“We know it is critical to the health of our environment that we ensure connectivity between natural open spaces in and between the Eno River and New Hope Creek watersheds,” says Jessica Sheffield, Executive Director at the Eno River Association. “New developments and highway improvements are being proposed regularly; a coordinated effort and action plan will help protect the necessary wildlife corridors to ensure species can thrive and promote climate resilience.”



The landscape conservation plan, completed in 2019, is the guiding document for this group and provides mapped results demonstrating the importance of lands protected by land trusts, governments, educational institutions, water supply utilities, and private landowners as anchors of habitat within the network, and it highlights critical connections between them that are in need of protection. The project participants collaborated across the four counties to identify priority corridors that connect a network of critical wildlife habitats within and between the Eno River and New Hope Creek watersheds. Without these corridors, wildlife populations will decline, and other societal benefits received from the existing natural network—such as water quality—will be diminished.

The landscape conservation plan also recognizes the crucial need for coordination across jurisdictions to preserve a connected, healthy, and diverse natural landscape for the benefit of both wildlife and people. The Catalyst Fund monies will allow the group to strategically coordinate efforts to bring the landscape conservation plan to decision makers with the ultimate goal of seeing it become a formal guidance document for towns and counties.

Funding from The Network for Landscape Conservation with matching funds and/or in-kind services from Duke University, North Carolina Botanical Garden, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Durham County, City of Raleigh, Triangle Land Conservancy, and Eno River Association will help accelerate progress toward protecting these landscape corridors. The Association website will be updated with more information and links to the *Landscape Plan for Wildlife Habitat Connectivity in the Eno River and New Hope Creek Watersheds, North Carolina*: enoriver.org. Individuals who want to learn more about this partnership and the conservation plan can visit, <https://ncbg.unc.edu/research/eno-new-hope-plan/> or contact Kim Livingston, Director of Conservation and Stewardship, at kim@enoriver.org.

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About the Eno River Association:

The Eno River Association is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization founded in 1966 with a mission to protect the natural, cultural and historic resources of the Eno River basin in northern Durham and Orange counties. The Association has protected over 7,000 acres of natural and working lands and has helped create five local, state, and regional nature parks, including Eno River State Park, Oconeechee Mountain State Natural Area, West Point on the Eno City Park, Penny’s Bend Nature Preserve, and Little River Regional Park. The Association continues to acquire land and secure easements, as well as provide stewardship, education programs, advocacy, and the annual Festival on the Eno to inspire others to prioritize our local, natural resources. More information is available at www.enoriver.org

