

The Morningside Nature Preserve

Master Plan

Prepared by the
Morningside Nature Preserve Steering Committee



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A. Executive Summary

The Wildwood Urban Forest Committee, a dedicated group of neighborhood residents, worked for three years to stop the destruction of 30 acres of mature forest located in northeast Atlanta. The funding to purchase the property included donations by neighbors, a private foundation and both city and state greenspace funds. The Nature Conservancy negotiated with the developer and finalized the sale of the land. The parcel known as the Wildwood Urban Forest was transferred to the City of Atlanta after the City Council unanimously passed a resolution to purchase the parcel in 2001. It was renamed The Morningside Nature Preserve in February 2006.

The vision of the community includes the protection of a section of riparian corridor critical to the water quality of the Chattahoochee River, maintenance of wildlife habitat, provision of environmental education to children and adults and access to recreation, nature trails and open space.

The purpose of this Master Plan, which is described in detail in Section G, is to determine how the neighbors, the surrounding community, and the city want to use and manage the Morningside Nature Preserve in the future. The methodology for achieving that purpose included community participation and consultation with the city staff from the Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs, the department with management responsibility since the land is classified as a city nature preserve. The Department of Watershed Management and the Bureau of Planning were also included in the city consultation process. This document provides a clear guideline for the future development and management of the Nature Preserve. It also identifies the general locations of the trails, site facilities and amenities, and discusses issues associated with management, resource protection, safety, maintenance, partnerships, and connections to other greenspaces in the region.

1. The Steering Committee

After the City of Atlanta purchased the 30.5 acres of the Wildwood Urban Forest, a new neighborhood group was established that included some of the original members of the Wildwood Urban Forest Group. This group is known as the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee includes members with various technical expertise so that the planning and design for the Nature Preserve can move forward. The Steering Committee consists of both neighborhood residents living adjacent to the Nature Preserve and others that are interested in the project.

The Steering Committee developed goals and objectives based on input from the community. The goals and objectives describe how the Steering Committee and the community want to manage the Nature Preserve. The goals focus on specific issue areas such as environment, uses, management, governmental coordination, and community awareness. Using the goals and

objectives as a guide, the Steering Committee worked with neighborhood groups and city representatives to create the Master Plan.

2. Alternatives

The Steering Committee developed four alternative concepts regarding the uses and level of development in the Nature Preserve. The alternatives reflect the variety of input from the community workshops.

Alternative 1: No Action

This alternative presumes that the Morningside Nature Preserve will stay the same with no development, no management of vegetation or habitat and no attempt to interpret or conserve the resources. The results of this benign negligence would not benefit the community interest. There would be no comfortable public access to a greenspace offering opportunity for enjoyment of a natural environment in the middle of a city. The exotic plant materials would continue to populate and overwhelm the native species and no connections would be made with other city greenspaces and trails.

Alternative 2: Nature Trails and Preservation

This alternative offers pedestrian use of the dirt trail and habitat protection and management options for vegetation, riparian systems and wetlands. The PATH hard surface trail would be a multi-use trail to connect the Nature Preserve to city greenspaces from North DeKalb Mall to the Lindbergh MARTA station and shopping area. One or two bridges would be needed for the PATH trail to cross South Fork Peachtree Creek and the smaller tributary at Wellbourne Road. Public access from Wellbourne Road will probably require a ramped boardwalk down to the site to due to the steep slope near the street. The vegetation management programs proposed in this alternative would address the large amount of exotic and invasive plants in the Nature Preserve that are overwhelming the native plants. The riparian buffers and adjacent wetlands along the creek would be managed to reduce stormwater impacts on this section of the South Fork Peachtree Creek. Habitat would be evaluated and options considered for improving conditions for both plant and animal populations. Given current urban conditions, this would be considered an ecological benefit to some plant and animal populations and would have negligible benefits to others.

Alternative 3: Balance of Preservation and Multi-Use Trail

This alternative allows biking on the dirt trails and adds two simple structures, yet it still maintains the focus on preservation and management of the natural resources. One or two

bridges would be needed for the PATH trail to cross South Fork Peachtree Creek and the smaller tributary at Wellbourne Road. Two or three simple, open structures would provide spaces in the Nature Preserve for observing the environment, teaching school children environmental education, or protecting visitors from rain. The teaching circle would be a small area near the top of the hill to gather for group discussions or to break into small groups for teaching or discussion. The shelter /teaching structure (Thunderhouse) and an observation tower would be built in appropriate locations that are compatible with site conditions. Public access from Wellbourne Road will probably require a ramped boardwalk down to the site due to the steep slope near the street. Directional and interpretive signs would be placed on site as necessary along with rustic benches in appropriate locations. The habitat protection, vegetation management and riparian management would remain consistent with Alternative Two.

Alternative 4: Preservation & Facilities

This alternative increases the improvements to the site by adding a nature/interpretive center, an amphitheater and restrooms. Roads and vehicles would also be added and parking would be allowed on site and adjacent parcels if they are available. Recreation trails would all be hard surface and multi-use. The habitat protection, vegetation management and riparian management would remain consistent with Alternatives Two and Three.

3. Selected Alternative

Alternative Two was selected by the residents that live closest to the property at a community meeting on March 7, 2005 that included approximately 30 attendees. At subsequent meetings that included the larger community (the neighborhood association and the Neighborhood Planning Unit), the attendees selected Alternative Three.

4. Recommendations

The Steering Committee recommends that the city adopt this Master Plan and implement the components of Alternative Two as the first two phases of site improvements. The additional components of Alternative Three (which consist mainly of some simple structures) should be added in a future phase as funding is available. This approach is most compatible with the wishes of the community and requirements of the city. Under this scenario, bicycles will be allowed on both the east and west side trail segments unless restricted due to sensitive site considerations. No motorized vehicles will be allowed except for maintenance and emergency purposes. The Steering Committee also recommends that the city use landscape architects and trail designers to design and implement the Plan.

5. Implementation

The Master Plan identifies several phasing alternatives that suggest the best and most practical opportunities for implementing the Preferred Alternative, given the limitations of cost and time.

Three phases are identified and each phase defines appropriate elements for implementation. The city and Steering Committee should coordinate discussions each fiscal year regarding the budget and the most appropriate elements to implement. The Steering Committee intends that this document be used by city staff, and any necessary consultants, to design and implement the components of the Preferred Alternative. Decisions regarding implementation should include city staff, the Steering Committee and consultants that may be part of the design team.

B. Community Vision and Goals

1. An Opportunity for Atlanta

The Morningside Nature Preserve is 30.5 acres of woods and floodplain in northeast Atlanta. The South Fork Peachtree Creek enters the eastern side of the property and meanders to the northern boundary, leaving approximately two-thirds on the southwest side of the Creek and one-third on the northeast side. The creek then passes under the CSX railroad and Cheshire Bridge Road. This natural area will be protected from development thanks to the hard work of a committed group of volunteers and neighbors who organized in 1998 to save what was then called the Wildwood Urban Forest. Maps 4 shows the location of the site in relation to northeast Atlanta and Map 5 is an aerial view of the site and the surrounding neighborhood.

The funding to purchase the property included donations by citizens, private foundations, and city and state greenspace funds. On January 31st, 2001, the City of Atlanta's Finance/Executive Committee unanimously approved an agreement to purchase the land from the Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy had successfully negotiated with the developer to purchase the land thereby removing the potential for single family housing in the wetlands and forest of the Nature Preserve. The City Council subsequently approved the plan put forward by its own Finance Committee and Council President Cathy Woolard that \$1,336,125 of city park impact funds be used for the purchase. The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, in a key show of early support for open space in Atlanta, contributed \$150,000 to the purchase of Wildwood. Another source of public funds was the Georgia Greenspace Fund that added \$300,000. In addition, the community raised \$150,000 from approximately 600 households to preserve this property.

The green network of natural areas, streams, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and riparian zones is Atlanta's natural life support system. Often called Green Infrastructure, since it is similar in importance to the gray infrastructure of roads and utilities, it is a network of lands with conservation value that support native species, maintain natural ecological processes, sustain air and water resources and contribute to the health and quality of life for Atlanta's neighborhoods and communities. It should be strategically planned and managed to encompass as many contiguous tracts of natural open space, conservation corridors, greenbelts and trail corridors as possible.

2. Vision and Goals

The vision for the Nature Preserve summarizes its special qualities while also indicating what the future of the Nature Preserve should be. The vision characterizes a plan that would protect water quality and natural resources while providing the community with open space and recreation trails.

The Morningside Nature Preserve lives on because of community effort and shall be managed to conserve the natural and historic resources, interpret the ecosystems and demonstrate their benefits.

The mission and goals for a project take the meaning of the vision and turn it into specific, detectable, realistic results that will be accomplished. For the Nature Preserve, the mission was separated into five major types of efforts that will take place to implement the Morningside Nature Preserve Master Plan. Goals were developed for each component of the mission.

Mission:

To maintain the community involvement with the Morningside Nature Preserve
To conserve the natural and historic resources
To interpret the ecosystems
To demonstrate the benefits of the ecosystems
To use sustainable design and management practices
To manage for the long-term realization of the Vision

The following goals and objectives are meant to implement the vision and mission; they are the guidance for the management and future development of the Morningside Nature Preserve.

Goals:

a. To maintain the community involvement with the Morningside Nature Preserve

- i. Establish partnerships
- ii. Create methods of communicating about the Nature Preserve to the community
- iii. Identify the constituents and stakeholders to be involved.
- iv. Create opportunities for passive recreation.
- v. Create special events for community participation within and for the Nature Preserve.

b. To conserve the natural and historic resources

- i. Complete a site inventory of natural and historic resources

- ii. Compile all data in most appropriate format such as maps or database.
- iii. Create conservation and restoration strategies based on data from the inventory process.
- iv. Prepare materials that interpret the natural and historic resources and the proposed strategies for conservation and restoration
- v. Evaluate all potential uses for the Nature Preserve in terms of the impacts to the resources

c. To interpret the ecosystems

- i. Identify the ecosystems for interpretation
- ii. Work with partners to create interpretive material for each ecosystem
- iii. Use signage on site to identify and discuss the different ecosystem boundaries, relationships and functions

d. To demonstrate the benefits of the ecosystems

- i. Identify the benefits to demonstrate for each selected ecosystem
- ii. Determine appropriate and effective means to demonstrate and inform partners, stakeholders and the community about the benefits

e. To use sustainable design and management practices

- i. Use materials and resources that are rapidly renewable and/or contain recycled contents.
- ii. Utilize, where feasible, renewable energy sources.
- iii. Use design, construction and management practices that promote re-use and recycling.
- iv. Use design and management practices that will minimize impacts to water quality and quantity.
- v. Promote site access that uses alternative modes of transportation and minimizes the impacts of vehicles on site.

f. To manage the Morningside Nature Preserve for the long-term realization of the Vision

- i. Acquire funds for implementation of the Master Plan and other projects
- ii. Acquire funds to purchase properties vital to the long-term benefit of the Nature Preserve Vision
- iii. Establish a citizen advisory committee to work with the City of Atlanta for the purpose of implementing the Master Plan and managing the Nature Preserve.
- iv. Create a community participation process for the management plan implementation.
- v. Determine the feasibility of a separate non-profit group.

C. Existing Conditions

The Steering Committee gathered several kinds of information as part of the planning process. Existing maps and references were used to gather information about the Nature Preserve. GeoSurvey, Ltd. completed a boundary and topographic survey in January 2004. The survey located the trees over 18 inches in diameter, utilities, 100-year floodplain and property boundaries. The remaining information included on the analysis maps came from existing maps provided by GA Tech, the city, and Trees Atlanta. The survey is an appropriate base map for construction documents. The other maps are for planning and analysis only, and are not appropriate for design. The “Cheshire Bridge Road Study” (1999) was a main source of information for this section of the Master Plan.

1. Property Location & Description

The parcel is located in northeast Atlanta (see Map 4). Cheshire Bridge Road is to the north; Wildwood Road is to the south; Lenox Road is to the east; and Wellbourne Road is to the west. It is 30.5 acres in size based on the survey by GeoSurvey, Ltd. This survey indicates a disputed property line on the east side of the parcel. Resolution of this issue is the responsibility of the City of Atlanta. All calculations in this text are based on the larger area unless otherwise noted.

2. Demographics

The Morningside Nature Preserve is located within the City of Atlanta's Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) F. The NPU boundaries are defined on the north by I-85, the south by Ponce de Leon Avenue, the east by DeKalb County and the west by a major rail line. Within a one-mile radius of the Nature Preserve are neighborhoods of high income (Morningside/ Lenox Park), middle income (Woodland Hills, Lindridge/Martin Manor) and low income (East Lindberg, predominantly Hispanic.)

The 2000 population of the NPU was 20,882, a 21% increase over that of 1980. During this same period, the number of Blacks, Asians and Hispanic or Latino, as a percentage of the total, increased significantly suggesting a growing diversity within the community.

There are 50 schools within a 5-mile radius, which serve pre-kindergarten through high school students. These schools enroll approximately 20,000 young people. Morningside Elementary School is within one mile of the nature area and can easily take advantage of this resource. At the college level, five universities or state colleges are within 10 miles of the Nature Preserve.

3. Land Use

Maps 5 and 6 show that on the south and west boundaries the land use adjacent to the Nature Preserve is single family residential. On the east side it is both single family and multi-family

residential. To the north are commercial uses. The Bears and Salem Communications parcels contain radio towers. The Georgia Department of Transportation owns a maintenance facility on Cheshire Bridge Road and the southern boundary of that parcel abuts the Nature Preserve. Next to the east side of the DOT facility is the Hayes parcel with restaurants on Cheshire Bridge Road and a car storage facility in the interior of the parcel. The southern boundary of this parcel also abuts the Nature Preserve. The aerial photograph (Map 5) more clearly shows these land uses in relation to the Nature Preserve.

4. Housing

The majority of housing adjacent to the Nature Preserve is single family detached. Adjacent to a portion of the east boundary are the Morningside Place Townhomes. The Nature Preserve is sometimes used by homeless people for temporary housing.

5. Transportation and Access

a. Public Transportation: Lenox Road: MARTA bus route along Lenox Road.

Cheshire Bridge: MARTA bus route which serves from Woodland to Piedmont Road. A stop on Cheshire Bridge near Wellbourne provides access south on Wellbourne to the entrance to the Nature Preserve.

Wildwood Road: there is not a MARTA bus route on this road.

Wellbourne Drive: there is not a MARTA bus route on Wellbourne.

b. Pedestrian/Bicycle:

Lenox Road: A sidewalk exists on one or both sides of the road from Highland/Johnson Roads north to the CSX railroad crossing. There is no sidewalk north of the railroad. A bike lane is located on the west side of the road from Highland/Johnson north to Wildwood road.

Wildwood Road: This roadway has a sidewalk on the south side from Lenox Road to just east of the Georgia Power right-of-way. A similar sidewalk on the north side extends to within one property of Lenox Road.

Wellbourne Drive: there are no sidewalks or bike lanes. Pedestrians and cyclists typically use the street.

Cheshire Bridge: Poor sidewalk conditions discourage pedestrian use and the unkempt appearance of the corridor also discourages pedestrian activity. However, even the poorly maintained sidewalks do provide some measure of safe pedestrian access to Wellbourne Drive for people interested in walking to the Nature Preserve.

Piedmont Road: Although this does not border the Nature Preserve, it does provide for access to Cheshire Bridge Road. Currently there are sidewalks and MARTA routes along Piedmont that would provide for access to the Nature Preserve. Bicycle lanes are proposed on Piedmont Road in the city Bike Plan.

c. Vehicular: The main transportation access roads to the Nature Preserve are from Cheshire Bridge to Wellbourne Drive and also from Lenox Road to Wildwood Road to Wellbourne. Parking is on road.

d. Entrance locations: There are three existing locations for public pedestrian access to the Nature Preserve. The most suitable site for development as public access is the parcel on Wellbourne labeled 'Wellbourne Access' (Map 8). This parcel was purchased on behalf of the city by The Conservation Fund using grant money from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation. This grant was awarded to the Atlanta Development Authority in 2004 to improve access and create trail linkages between the Nature Preserve and other regional greenspace systems. The parcel was transferred to the city on February 28, 2005. This parcel offers the best opportunity to develop public access.

A second parcel (1.24 acres) purchased with the grant from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation is located adjacent to Lenox Road and Robin Lane (Map 8). It also offers the opportunity for pedestrian access. However, negotiations with the Morningside Place Homeowners Association, Inc. must be finalized before planning can be initiated for a trail connection from Lenox Road to the Nature Preserve.

The other available publicly owned access is at the end of Woodcliff Terrace on the southern boundary of the Nature Preserve. This location offers an undesirable point of access into the Nature Preserve due to very steep topography and the fact that Woodcliff Terrace is a short dead end street. Significant engineering and construction would be required for access into the Nature Preserve. Street parking by visitors to the Nature Preserve might conflict with the adjacent homeowners due to limited parking spaces on the short length of the street. Currently this location is used by some neighbors for access but it requires that they trespass on adjacent privately owned residential lots. This situation is not encouraged by the city or the Steering Committee and needs resolution by developing the other access location on Wellbourne Road and restricting access at this location.

The Steering Committee made a considerable effort to determine the status of the Gaither Circle right-of-way which is shown on most city parcel maps depicting the area of the Nature Preserve. Gaither Circle right-of-way is at the northwest corner of the parcel and connects to Cheshire Bridge and Wellbourne Road. The right of way has one segment from Cheshire that loops behind existing single family homes on Wellbourne, it then connects to the other segment which is an east-west segment from Wellbourne to the Nature Preserve. According to the Dept. of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs (DPRCA), the staff of the Atlanta Development Authority did confirm that Gaither Circle had been abandoned by the city (9/13/04 email). In order to make use of it as access to the Nature Preserve, the residents along the right-of-way would have

to first be offered the opportunity for purchase. The city determined it did not seem feasible or necessary to take possession of the right-of-way since the parcel on Wellbourne Road had been successfully purchased for access.

6. Environment

a. Hydrology

The South Fork Peachtree Creek traverses the Nature Preserve from the east side to the northern boundary (Map 7). This map demonstrates that about 70% of the total area of the Nature Preserve is in the 100 year flood zone. This is equal to approximately 21 acres, which includes the stream itself.

The South Fork Peachtree Creek is a tributary of Peachtree Creek which flows into the Chattahoochee River, making the Nature Preserve part of the watershed of the Chattahoochee River. The Chattahoochee River is a water supply watershed for the City of Atlanta, as well as the counties of Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton and Gwinnett and many downstream communities.

The following preliminary assessment was made by Leslie Edwards, Ph.D, Georgia Native Plant Society: “The creek appears to be attempting to find equilibrium in the face of very intense past and present human impact. Many feet of alluvium (perhaps 6-12 feet) were likely deposited on the creek bed in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s when cotton farming denuded the land. The creek began incising through the alluvium by the 1920’s as farming decreased and erosion practices were put into place. The creek has probably not yet incised down to its pre-agriculture level since there is no evidence of floodplain top soils in the exposed cut banks.

Intense urbanization of the watershed has followed the intense agriculture, and this stretch of South Fork Peachtree Creek is widening dramatically as a result, adjusting to the large discharges caused by surface run-off from impervious surfaces upstream. The creek is markedly wider here than at the South Peachtree Creek Nature Preserve, presumably from the large discharges from Emory University (Peavine Creek) and, to a lesser extent, the suburban development between the two locations. In places the widening is being affected by steep cut banks, where the creek is cutting into the old agricultural alluvium; concomitantly extensive, fairly high point bars are being deposited across from the cut banks. These point bars make up a significant portion of the floodplain. There is little evidence of regular over-bank flow. Rather, it appears incision has created a terrace from the former floodplain that is now rarely flooded; the most regular flood events appear to run about a foot below the terrace. However, paving continues upstream on the Emory campus and along North Decatur Road. This could potentially raise discharge levels and so raise the average annual flood level. One difficulty the Steering Committee may face is finding a “reference” ecosystem undergoing the intensity of fluvial activity of the Nature Preserve.

Sedimentation is heavy on the creek bed. The sources of the sediment are upstream stretches where the creek is cutting into the old agricultural alluvium, as well as sediment delivered to the stream through poor erosion control practices on construction sites. Waves of sediment will travel down to the Nature Preserve section of the creek as a result of these processes; the riffles that probably once characterized the stream are long buried” (Edwards, 2002).

More recently, Trees Atlanta has been engaged in a program to remove invasive exotic plant species from the floodplain near the creek. According to Brighton West, the crew leader for Trees Atlanta, there is evidence that the terrace floods at least twice a year, if not more often. During the hurricanes of 2004, there was significant erosion of the banks and several more trees were lost because of the flooding. Two downed trees are currently changing the stream flow and causing excessive erosion of the south bank just west of the Georgia Power right-of-way.

Both the North and South Forks of Peachtree Creek have a Pollutant Loads Rating of 'Poor', according to the Metropolitan Atlanta Urban Watershed Initiative. They are not safe for swimming, fishing or any activity that provides for water contact (“Cheshire Bridge Road Study”, 1999, p.6:5). The South Fork is in an urbanized drainage basin and is polluted by a variety of sources common to urban conditions. Sewer overflows have been a major source of pollution in the creek. Stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces is also a large source of pollution. Many of the surface streets direct stormwater directly to the Creek. With no intermediate filtration before entering the creek, the pollutant load to the creek has a significant impact on the water quality. Also of concern is illegal dumping that occurs in some sections of the creek drainage area or at storm drains.

Two wetlands occur on site. One is approximately 1/3 of an acre and is located in the northwest corner of the site. The second is approximately 3000 square feet and located in the floodplain west of the power easement and south of the creek. Neither wetland is considered high quality (Map 7).

Two tributaries of the South Fork Peachtree Creek cross the Nature Preserve. One crosses the southeast corner of the parcel, entering the Creek east of the Nature Preserve property line. The second tributary, also unnamed, flows into the Creek from the west, just south of the northern boundary of the parcel. Neither tributary is a blue line stream on the USGS Northeast Atlanta, GA quad sheet. In addition, an intermittent stream flows from the west into the Creek, just south of the wooded knoll overlooking the Creek.

As seen on the soils map, (Map 14) the channel of the creek has shifted significantly since 1949, reflecting the impacts of urbanization.

b. Vegetation

Map 9 shows the major Vegetation Zones of the Nature Preserve. It is an example of the Piedmont upland hardwood forest dominated by oaks and hickories. It has been impacted by various activities that probably included agricultural practices and some timbering.

The current canopy (Map 10) has approximately 2,352 trees over 8 inches in diameter. There are 1,124 trees between 8 and 12 inches in diameter; 547 trees between 13 and 17 inches in diameter; 681 trees greater than 18 inches in diameter.

“The main tree species observed along the creek were hackberry and box elder — mesic rather than hydric species. One hickory seedling was observed under some privet. It seems likely that when all the privet is cleared, the hackberry and box elder, being prolific seeders and fast growing, would become the dominant species on the floodplain for the short term, with perhaps some poplar successfully establishing. English Ivy, Japanese honeysuckle, and sweet autumn clematis all appear under the privet, and being evergreen and fast growing, would probably out-compete other vines and herbaceous species on the terrace. Since the terrace is moist and probably quite nutrient-rich from alluvium received when it was floodplain, it has the potential for being a rich forest after the hackberry and box elder are overtopped by larger trees, if the invasives are kept under control. Invasive control would probably be a big job, however, once the privet is removed: the rather thin canopy, warm winters allowing photosynthesis by these evergreens, and moist soils will encourage fast growth” (Edwards, 2002).

c. Topography and Soils

An analysis of the soil types on the Nature Preserve was taken from the Fulton County Soils Survey (1949, No.7) shown on Map 14:

Sandy loam, eroded hilly phase (Ck); 10-15% slope:

Runoff: rapid. Erosion hazard: high.

Sandy loam, eroded rolling phase (Cg); 6-10% slope:

Runoff: med-rapid; Erosion hazard: mod-high

Congaree fine sandy loam (Cp); 0-2%:

Well drained and sometimes flooded. Runoff: slow - very slow; Erosion hazard: none.

Wickham fine sandy loam

Eroded undulating phase (Wd); 2-6%:

Runoff: medium. Erosion hazard: slight - moderate.

The Nature Preserve has a low point, elevation 803', in the streambed close to the northern boundary of the parcel. The high point, elevation 884', is on the top of the wooded knoll in the northwestern quadrant of the parcel.

Slopes range from less than 1% in the floodplain to almost perpendicular on the west bank of the creek (Map 13).

d. Wildlife

A recent study by CH2M Hill, under the Metro Atlanta Urban Watershed Initiative, revealed that the aquatic habitat for South Fork Peachtree Creek has a Habitat Index Rating of 'Fair-Good'. This means that aquatic life can still live there, but there may be periods of severe degradation. These conditions are due primarily to the alteration of the physical habitat as a result of erosion and silt deposits in the streambeds, and water quality degradation ("Cheshire Bridge Road Study", 1999, p. 6:13).

A survey of bird and wildlife was conducted by the Steering Committee, with help from one of its partner groups, Atlanta Audubon. The survey covered 65 acres of the Nature Preserve ecosystem, both the 30.5 acres already owned by the City and the nearly 35 acres adjacent to the north of the Nature Preserve that is undeveloped except for radio towers. Because birds, mammals and reptiles move freely between-and beyond-the two parcels, the survey covered both areas of land.

Three site inventories to identify birds and bird habitat have been done since 2000. Georgann Schmalz, Ornithologist and Life Science Instructor at Fernbank Science Center, did the first one in the spring of 2000. Ms. Schmalz found that the habitat - of the original 30.5 acres - is very similar to that of Fernbank Forest. Though her visit was in the spring, she was able to project bird species found there during the other seasons by referencing the bird list that was compiled for Fernbank Forest.

The next site visit took place in the spring of 2001 and was conducted by Giff Beaton, a highly respected, local expert on bird life in Georgia. His book, *Birding Georgia*, was published in 2000 by Falcon Publishing, Inc. and has since become the most widely referenced guide to the best birding areas in the state.

Mr. Beaton surveyed the Nature Preserve in 2001 as part of an assignment to write the section on Atlanta for a book that was published in January 2002 by the American Birding Association, *A Birder's Guide to Metropolitan Areas of North America*. At the time of his survey, the name for

what we now call the Morningside Nature Preserve had not yet been determined so in the book the 65 acres are referred to generically as "New City of Atlanta Park."

The Nature Preserve property was one of only eleven spots in the entire greater Atlanta metropolitan area that Mr. Beaton included on his list. That list includes sites from Brasstown Bald Mountain in the north to Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge in the south. After giving directions to the "New City of Atlanta Park," Mr. Beaton writes: "There are over 50 acres of great floodplain forest here on the South Fork of Peachtree Creek, with trails to check for migrants and breeding species; there is some upland habitat as well...." The old and new Nature Preserve, both sections, are listed in the American Birding Association's national guidebook as prime areas for bird habitat and bird watching.

The third site visit took place on March 16, 2002, when Georgann Schmalz, now President of Atlanta Audubon (recently retired from Fernbank) and Lynn Hennelly, Conservation Director of Atlanta Audubon (and member of the Steering Committee) walked the 35 acres of adjacent parcels, which is mainly floodplain and wetlands habitat. They observed Canada geese, hooded merganser and mallard ducks, greater yellow-legs (sandpiper), and a great blue heron on the Salem Communications tract's wetland pond. From this visit, Ms. Schmalz was able to predict the likely presence of many other birds that frequent similar wetland areas.

Neighbors have confirmed sightings of otter, beaver, fox, raccoon, box turtle, rabbit, snapping turtle, and various snakes. Carol Lambert, Conservation Specialist at the Newman Wetlands Center in Clayton County and Atlanta Audubon board member, is very knowledgeable about wildlife in such habitats and predicts the following could very well be found in the wetlands areas of the Nature Preserve property, including: beaver, muskrat, otter, mink, opossum, weasel, raccoon, fox, rabbit, reptiles (snakes: banded water snakes, black rat, king, black racers, garter, brown, ringneck, copperhead), rodents (mice, rats, chipmunks, voles, etc.), turtles (box, painted, pond sliders, musk, etc.), frogs (tree, bull, chorus, spring peepers, etc.), several types of butterflies and dragonflies and possibly even coyote. Residents of Morningside Place Townhomes, on the east side of the Nature Preserve and adjacent to the South Fork of Peachtree Creek, report that they think a coyote has been seen several times in the open spaces around the residences. Upstream from this area, between Lenox Road and Johnson Road, residents living on the South Fork Peachtree Creek floodplain have also reported possible coyote sightings.

7. Infrastructure and Facilities

The City of Atlanta maintains two different easements for sanitary sewer lines that cross the Wildwood (Map 8). The City's Department of Watershed Management will consider allowing trails within the easements but not on the sewer line. The Department of Watershed Management will not provide funds to repair an existing trail due to sewer line construction or

repairs. The Department of Watershed Management prefers that trails be located outside the sewer easements, wherever possible, and only use the easements as necessary to make the layout of the trail system accessible and compatible with the design criteria.

Also shown on Map 8 is the Georgia Power Corporation (GPC) easement for a transmission line right-of-way that is 150 feet in width and contains a 115 kv line and a 230 kv line. It passes through the southeast corner of the Nature Preserve parcel. GPC has agreed to consider trail access within the right-of-way. In order to review the feasibility of a trail in the right-of-way, the following information must be provided to Mr. Glenn Brooks, at Georgia Power (1450 Atlanta Road, Marietta, GA 30060):

- A site plan or survey identifying the location of all trails in the easement(s)
- A detail or section of the trail that calls out the material(s) it will be built with, trail width, etc.
- A letter of request with contact information

(9/10/04 email from Seth Hendler, Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, to the Steering Committee).

City water lines are located on all the adjacent streets surrounding the Nature Preserve. City of Atlanta Police Department Zone 6 patrols the area. Fire Station #29 located on Monroe Drive, adjacent to I-85 and the Buford Highway access ramp, provides fire protection.

8. Urban Design and Historic Resources

This historical overview was prepared by Fred Crudder, a member of the Steering Committee, in October 2004. "By the early 1820s land ceded by the Creek and Cherokee included that which would become the City of Atlanta. A census in 1820 Gwinnett County reveals names that would be among the prominent families in Atlanta such as Chandler, Collier, and Plaster. Within a few years these names were associated with development in the Atlanta area including new roads from the Chattahoochee. Meredith Collier (1782-1863) was one of the original settlers on Peachtree Creek. Another early settler was Solomon Goodwin, who had come in search of gold, but became a successful farmer with land on both sides of Peachtree Road. One of his daughters married Capt. Hezekiah Cheshire, a veteran of the War of 1812, and another pioneer of the Atlanta area. The couple resided on North Highland and had nine children, descendants of whom still live in the area. It is the family from which the road north of the Nature Preserve gets its name, Cheshire Bridge. Capt. Cheshire is buried in the Benjamin Plaster family cemetery near Peachtree Creek. Benjamin Plaster also served in the War of 1812, and came to DeKalb County about the time it was created, becoming a planter. His lands became extensive. His will of 1836, the oldest in the county, lists 1316 acres extending from Peachtree and Brighton Roads to the east, north, and south encompassing land from East Wesley Road to the north and to south of the Seaboard Railroad, including Rock Springs area and both sides of Piedmont Road, which

was known previously as Plaster's Bridge Road. His home was on Lindbergh Drive. Upon his death the land was divided among his wife and sons. A grandson, Daniel, was prominent in the Rock Spring Church neighborhood near Piedmont and Cheshire Bridge. The family has continued to hold property in the area through recent years, including part of what is now the Nature Preserve.

The Civil War brought activity besides farming to these lands. During the Atlanta Campaign of 1864, the outer defenses of Atlanta extended along North Highland near Zimmer and Rock Springs. It was resolved to control all the heights of the Peachtree Creek drainage. A series of redoubts, breastworks, and rifle pits were built of earth and logs for miles. Engagements were fought along Highland and Briarcliff. Sherman had temporary headquarters at Briarcliff and North Decatur, later near Highland.

Along the southeasterly face of the main upland of the Nature Preserve are apparent terraces in the forest. The construction appears to be entirely earthen cut and fill. The appearance in the woods is that of four abandoned one lane cart paths one above another creating a four tier terrace. The height of each is approximately five feet. The lengths vary from over 200 feet at the lower level to about 100 feet for the uppermost terrace. In the late 1990s during neighborhood efforts to preserve the site from development, initial interpretation of these terraces was as possible agricultural disturbances to the natural topography. Long term residents recalled the area being used for some livestock grazing, at least in the lowland area. As discussion among residents of the neighborhood increased another possibility became apparent. A Civil War artillery emplacement had been identified in the backyard of a home on Robin Lane above the South Fork Peachtree Creek. Additionally, neighbors on Wildwood Road and Berkshire reported finding many Civil War artifacts such as buttons and miniballs in the valley woods between those streets in which a small creek leads northerly to the South Fork Peachtree Creek. The valley could likely have been used as a brief bivouac with its easy access to the high ground and floodplain. No evidence has been found to confirm that the terraces were constructed for artillery but apparently many defense locations were hastily built and just as quickly abandoned, so the possibility exists but needs more research”.

9. Parks, Greenspace and Public Lands

Upstream from the Nature Preserve on the west side of Lenox Road, the city holds a conservation easement of 1.24 acres on the south side of the creek. City funds from the Greenway Acquisition Project and funds from an Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation grant were used for the purchase. Across Lenox Road is the Tedoff parcel (4.6 acres) that was purchased by Watershed Management with Greenway Acquisition Project funds. About 1/4 mile upstream from Tedoff is the 13-acre greenspace parcel on Zonolite owned by DeKalb County. This parcel has no public access developed at this time. Another 1/4 mile upstream at Johnson Road is the

Herbert Taylor Park owned by the City of Atlanta and managed by the Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs. This park buffers approximately ½ mile of Rock Creek, a small stream with its drainage basin in the Morningside/Virginia Highlands neighborhoods. The Daniel Johnson Nature Preserve is adjacent to Herbert Taylor and also buffers Rock Creek and is owned by the city. Combined, they provide approximately 32 acres of city greenspace with a primary purpose to protect the water quality of Rock Creek, which is a tributary of the South Fork Peachtree Creek. Both parcels have walking trails and public access.

D. Planning Methodology

The methodology used for this document included analysis of existing conditions, public participation and consideration of alternative solutions for development that support the community vision and goals. The iterative process included a Steering Committee selected from the neighborhood that met for over 4 years to consider the wide range of issues regarding development and conservation of the Nature Preserve resources. The Steering Committee consulted with staff from three different departments within the City of Atlanta: the Department of Watershed Management, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, and the Planning Department. Each department has various interests related to the Nature Preserve, but the overall responsibility for the Morningside Nature Preserve will belong to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs.

The Steering Committee also maintained discussions with neighborhood groups such as the Morningside Lenox Park Association, the Rock Creek Watershed Alliance, and the Neighborhood Planning Unit-F.

The Committee was responsible for the various activities required to analyze and document the information required to make the Master Plan. This involved acquiring a new survey of the property, collecting inventory data, and preparing all maps to illustrate the inventory data and alternatives. In order to make decisions for the Master Plan, the Steering Committee evaluated significant elements in and around the Nature Preserve. The evaluation included natural conditions (e.g., floodplains, wetlands, streams, and vegetation), facilities (e.g., schools, roads, utility rights-of-way), destination points (e.g., Cheshire Bridge business district, nearby parks, & adjacent residential areas) and connections with other greenspaces and trails in the city and metro area.

In addition to the direct activities required to prepare the Master Plan, the Steering Committee was also consistently involved with various groups or city departments on many issues related to the future Master Plan for the Nature Preserve. Typical activities included several grant applications, coordination with the city consultants and Army Corps of Engineers during sewer improvements, and coordination with Trees Atlanta for the removal of invasive species. The

Steering Committee coordinated with the Atlanta Development Authority (ADA) and the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation on the ADA's successful application to acquire additional parcels for access to the Nature Preserve. This also required coordination with The Conservation Fund as the agent for the ADA to negotiate the acquisitions.

1. City of Atlanta Requirements

The fact that the City of Atlanta owns the property and defines it as a regional greenspace and nature preserve requires certain considerations about uses and management. The city's standard design guidelines will be applied to the Nature Preserve, as appropriate. Active recreation is not required or appropriate for a nature preserve, but inclusion of trails will be consistent with the city's goal to "...develop a system of multi-use recreational trails within the open space and greenways system for use by all ages" ("Parks, Open Space and Greenways Plan", 1993, p.16).

The requirements of the Consent Decree are also applicable to the design and management decisions for the property (Appendix II). In 1998 the Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper settled a lawsuit against the City of Atlanta's continued pollution of the river from its failing sewerage system. The consent order required strict deadlines for construction improvements, a \$2.5 million fine, and a \$30 million supplemental environmental project that required the removal of trash from urban streams and the purchase of greenways as riparian buffers for priority streams in the Chattahoochee watershed.

The city prepared the Greenway Acquisition Plan (GAP), a \$25 million program to acquire and protect properties adjacent to selected rivers and creeks within the watersheds of the Chattahoochee and South Rivers. EPA and EPD approved it on March 29, 2001. The Plan identified priority stream segments that could be purchased to create protective greenways with buffers along the designated stream segments. The stream segment beginning immediately downstream of Lenox Road and ending immediately upstream of Cheshire Bridge Road is a Priority One segment in the Greenway Acquisition Plan and is within the Morningside Nature Preserve. Priority One segments are the first to be considered for acquisition if there is a willing seller. Section G.2 of this document lists the status of the acquisition of properties along this segment.

Within the 30.5 acres of the total Nature Preserve acreage, approximately 3 acres (Map 6) were purchased for the Greenway Acquisition Project by the Department of Watershed Management. The use of these funds restricts recreational development on this parcel to a maximum of 10% of the total acreage and makes water quality protection for the South Fork Peachtree Creek a primary purpose. Public access should be designed to reduce 'incidental incursions' into the stream buffer (i.e. try to prevent footpaths made by people cutting through the buffer to the stream bank because they can cause erosion). Any work on this section requires communication

either verbal or written, depending on the nature of the project, with staff in the Dept. of Watershed Management who will then coordinate with EPD and EPA. Before any development activity or public access is initiated, the city must have approval from EPD and EPA.

Also within the 3 acre parcel is a mitigation site authorized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District and assigned # 200209660 (Map 6). As a commitment to this permit, the City of Atlanta is required to restore 135 linear feet x 50 feet (0.15 acres) of riparian buffer adjacent to the South Fork Peachtree Creek. This mitigation was the result of the construction of a sewer line project of approximately 2.2 miles along the Creek. The city is required to monitor and report annually on this mitigation site for a 5 year period until 2009. The goal is to monitor how the site is prospering from natural re-vegetation and the substantial root seedling growth planted on the site. The location of the site is at the northern most portion of the Greenway property adjacent to the south side of the South Fork of Peachtree Creek. Coordinates for the site are latitude 33 degrees 48' 35" north and longitude 84 degrees 21' 15" west as stated in the official documents. The Department of Watershed Management will inspect the property every six months to ensure that there is no erosion or any activity that is harming water quality.

The remainder of the property has a "nature preserve" classification that limits development to 15% of the total acreage and requires coordination with the Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs. Georgia Greenspace funds were used by the City for this portion of the property as part of the final funding package that purchased the entire parcel.

E. Public Participation

After the property was purchased by the City and designated a nature preserve, the Steering Committee was formed to prepare the Master Plan, a document that would serve as a management guide. Several of the neighborhood people responsible for the campaign to save the Wildwood Urban Forest agreed to serve on the Steering Committee. New members were added from the surrounding neighborhood and other organizations to expand the technical expertise of the Committee.

As the representatives of the neighborhood, the Steering Committee met for monthly meetings starting in 2001 and continued to meet until the successful approval of this plan by the City Council.

Appendix I lists the results of the various community meetings hosted by the Steering Committee. These meetings provided opportunities for the Steering Committee and neighborhood community to interact and develop this Master Plan. The Steering Committee conducted a survey in November 2001 to ask if neighbors used parks, what they liked about

them and the types of activities they typically enjoyed in parks. A community workshop was held on June 23, 2003 to gather input from the community as to their preferences for the uses of the Nature Preserve. The lists were compiled and used to develop the vision/mission/goals for the project. They were also used to prepare the alternatives that were presented at the next workshop. At the time, the property was called The Wildwood and these documents reflect that name.

A community workshop took place on March 7, 2005 to present four different alternatives for activities and management in the Nature Preserve. For this meeting, flyers were distributed to all adjacent residences. Email notices were also sent out by the Morningside Lenox Park Association which is the neighborhood association that encompasses the Nature Preserve. At this meeting, there were 17 comment sheets returned. Ten votes were for Alternative 2; four votes for Alternative 3; and three votes were for either Alternatives 2 or 3. On March 14, 2005, the four alternatives were presented to the Morningside Lenox Park Association (MLPA) at the monthly business meeting of the Board. At this meeting, approximately 25 neighbors and board members were present. No official vote was taken but the consensus from a straw vote was for Alternative 3 with a strong showing for Alternative 2.

On March 21, 2005, at the NPU-F meeting, approximately 20 people were present and a vote was taken to select the preferred alternative. Alternative 3 was selected and voted for approval by an official vote of 16 in favor; 2 opposed; and 1 abstaining. On April 25, 2005 at the annual meeting of the Morningside Lenox Park Association, the Master Plan Alternatives were discussed and a straw poll was taken. Alternative 3 received 33 votes and Alternative 2 received 12 votes.

F. Recommendations

Four alternatives were prepared by the Steering Committee and presented to the public for review and comment. Each alternative offers a scenario for what might occur in the Morningside Nature Preserve to implement the vision, mission and goals. The alternatives differ in their amount of development and the types of activities. All of the alternatives maintain conservation and resource protection as primary purposes.

#1 Alternative-No Action

1. The site remains undeveloped.
2. No public access for community using cleared, maintained trails.
3. No management of vegetation, streambank, wetlands.
4. No environmental education uses for community schools.

This alternative presumes that the Nature Preserve will stay the same with no development, no management of vegetation or habitat and no attempt to interpret or conserve the resources. The results of this benign negligence would not benefit the community interest. There would be no comfortable public access to a greenspace offering opportunity for enjoyment of a natural environment in the middle of a city. The exotic plant materials would continue to populate and overwhelm the native species and no connections would be made with other city greenspaces and trails.

#2 Alternative-- *Nature Trails & Preservation*

1. West side of creek: dirt trails for pedestrians only, no bicycles. Approximate length of 1.2 miles.
2. East side of creek: multi-use hard surface trail that connects to PATH trail & citywide system. Allows for pedestrians, bicycles, rollerblades, and strollers. This trail will stay on the eastern and northern boundaries of the Nature Preserve and will not traverse the upland wooded area. Approximate length of 0.3 miles.
3. Teaching circle near the top of the hill.
4. No motorized vehicles except wheelchairs.
5. Trail heads with signage only; no site furniture.
6. No parking on site.
7. Bridge over S. Fork Peachtree Creek.
8. Habitat protection; vegetation management; riparian management; wetland restoration.
9. Dogs on leash and with dispensing stations for doggie bags.

This alternative offers pedestrian use of the dirt trail and habitat protection and management options for vegetation, riparian systems and wetlands. The PATH hard surface trail would be a multi-use trail to connect the Nature Preserve to city greenspaces from North DeKalb Mall to the Lindbergh MARTA station and shopping area. One or two bridges would be needed for the PATH trail to cross South Fork Peachtree Creek and the smaller tributary at Wellbourne Road. Public access from Wellbourne Road will probably require a ramped boardwalk down to the site to due to the steep slope near the street. The vegetation management programs proposed in this alternative would address the large amount of exotic and invasive plants in the Nature Preserve that are overwhelming the native plants. The riparian buffers and adjacent wetlands along the creek would be managed to reduce stormwater impacts on this section of the South Fork Peachtree Creek. Habitat would be evaluated and options considered for improving conditions for both plant and animal populations. Given current urban conditions, this would be considered an ecological benefit to some plant and animal populations and would have negligible benefits to others.

#3 Alternative--*Balance of Preservation & Multi-Use Trail*

1. West side of creek: Multi-use dirt trails for pedestrians and bicycles. Approximate length of 1.2 miles.
2. East side of creek: multi-use hard surface trail that connects to PATH trail & citywide system. Allows for pedestrians, bicycles, rollerblades, and strollers. This trail will stay on the eastern and northern boundaries of the Nature Preserve and will not traverse the upland wooded area. Approximate length of 0.3 miles.
3. No motorized vehicles except wheelchairs.
4. Trails heads with signage, rustic benches.
5. Environmental education area with open shelter structure -Thunderhouse.
6. Observation tower-not on highpoint, but down slope in mid-low canopy with visibility to the creek.
7. Teaching circle near the top of the hill.
8. Bridge over S. Fork Peachtree Creek.
9. Evaluate parking on adjacent parcels if feasible.
10. Habitat protection; vegetation management; riparian management.
11. Dogs on leash and with dispensing stations for doggie bags.

This alternative allows biking on the dirt trails and adds two simple structures, yet it still maintains the focus on preservation and management of the natural resources. One or two bridges would be needed for the PATH trail to cross South Fork Peachtree Creek and the smaller tributary at Wellbourne Road. Two or three simple, open structures would provide spaces in the Nature Preserve for observing the environment, teaching school children environmental education, or protecting visitors from rain. The teaching circle would be a small area near the top of the hill to gather for group discussions or to break into small groups for teaching or discussion. The shelter /teaching structure (Thunderhouse) and an observation tower would be built in appropriate locations that are compatible with site conditions. Public access from Wellbourne Road will probably require a ramped boardwalk down to the site due to the steep slope near the street. Directional and interpretive signs would be placed on site as necessary along with rustic benches in appropriate locations. The habitat protection, vegetation management and riparian management would remain consistent with Alternative Two.

Concerns were raised during the community meetings regarding potential conflicts between pedestrians and bikers using the dirt trails on the west side. These concerns are valid and can be addressed with appropriate design solutions that will reduce the speed of bikers and maintain safe sight lines for pedestrians and bikers. By designing open and flowing trails that do not have tight downhill turns, the safety concerns of the community can be addressed. The trail will not be designed to attract aggressive styles of mountain biking. The vision and goals do not support that type of trail course and use.

Another concern was the degradation of the dirt trail by the bikers and the resulting erosion and resource impacts. Several points can be made regarding these issues. First, the trail will be designed and constructed to fit along the contour lines of the site. The criteria for maintaining proper slope and cross-slope will be followed. This greatly reduces the impact of water runoff which causes erosion. Instead of using techniques such as water bars, which actually promote trail degradation, designing with proper slope and contour alignment will reduce the potential for trail degradation. Secondly, hikers also impact the trail and actually contact more trail surface area than bikers. The combination of walkers, adventure runners and bicycles will require that the dirt trail system's design and construction be consistent with the principles outlined in "Trail Design & Layout; Phase One of the Crew Leader Certification Program" (Mike Riter, 2003). Consistent maintenance will further reduce any serious impact from erosion.

#4 Alternative-- *Facilities & Preservation*

1. Multi-use hard surface trails for pedestrian, bicycles, rollerblades, strollers.
2. Connection to PATH multi-use trail/city greenspace network.
3. Vehicular access through the site & parking on-site.
4. Use DOT parcel for parking and access with pedestrian suspension bridge to the Nature Preserve and other recreation activities.
5. Trailheads with signage; rustic benches, picnic tables.
6. Restrooms on site.
7. Water fountains at trail heads with nearby water line.
8. 2 bridges over S. Fork Peachtree Creek to connect trails on either side of creek.
9. Habitat protection; vegetation management; riparian management.
10. Educational center, viewing tower, dock, butterfly gardens.
11. Dogs on leash with dispensing stations for doggie bags; dog park.

This alternative increases the improvements to the site by adding a nature/interpretive center, an amphitheater and restrooms. The nature/interpretive center is an actual building and not an open structure as are the structures in Alternative 3. The amphitheater for environmental education and classes would be an open-air structure that might include seating as well as a stage/performance area with support utilities. Roads and vehicles would also be added and parking would be allowed on site and adjacent parcels if they are available. Recreation trails would all be hard surface and multi-use. The vegetation management and riparian management goals of Alternatives Two and Three would be less effective in this alternative, given the increase in amount of development. The amount of habitat protected would also be reduced by the increase in developed areas. There is concern regarding possible habitat fragmentation even at this small a scale due to the roads, parking and maintained areas.

In all design solutions regarding built structures and installation of infrastructure, the expectation is that the final designs will attempt to minimize impacts to the land and water resources of the Nature Preserve. Creating permeable surfaces for parking lots, using Low Impact Development techniques for structures, roads and parking, will reduce the negative impacts to the site that result from traditional construction techniques. However, the overall impacts to the natural functions of the site will be significant if this Alternative is implemented.

G. Master Plan

The Steering Committee recommends that the city adopt this Master Plan and implement the components of Alternative Two as the first phases of site improvements. The additional components of Alternative Three (which consist mainly of some simple structures) should be added in a future phase as funding is available. This approach is most compatible with the wishes of the community and requirements of the city. Under this scenario, bicycles will be allowed on both the east and west side trail segments unless restricted due to sensitive site considerations. No motorized vehicles will be allowed except for maintenance and emergency uses. The Steering Committee also recommends that the city use landscape architects and trail designers to design and implement the Plan.

Alternative 2 provides for access into the Nature Preserve. The significant distinction for Alternative 3 is that it allows for access, environmental education and biking activity but does not leave much of a footprint on the site as would Alternative 4. In Alternative 4, the community saw too much structural development, especially the roads and vehicular access, which were not compatible with the vision for the Nature Preserve. Alternative 1 was not supported because the community felt that the Nature Preserve should be available for environmental education and recreation access. It should also be managed in such a way that the natural systems in the forest and riparian zones of the creek would be protected from the impacts of the surrounding urban environment.

The most apparent consensus from the community is that the Nature Preserve should be protected and maintained as a natural area. Structural development within the Nature Preserve is limited to simple shelters and an observation tower that are compatible with the natural character of the terrestrial and aquatic systems. Activities in the Nature Preserve should be low impact, and support environmental awareness and education & resource protection.

1. Relationship to Neighborhood

“In a city, a public space can be an asset or a liability. A main street or a park can be a symbol of a neighborhood’s vitality and character, or an emblem of its disorganization and poverty of spirit. When it is an asset, it takes on the neighborhood’s identity,

becoming its star attraction and raising the quality of life, and property values, for residents”

Project for Public Spaces, Charlotte, NC

The Nature Preserve is an integral part of the neighborhood in which it is located. It is important for the adjacent neighbors to maintain their privacy while allowing public access to the Nature Preserve desired by city residents.

The Master Plan supports many of the recommendations of the “Cheshire Bridge Road Study” (1999). Most significantly, it provides adjacent, accessible public greenspace and recreation for the Cheshire Bridge community. Pedestrian, bicycle and trail access is available from the Cheshire Bridge/Wellbourne Road intersection. South of this intersection, approximately 1/10 mile, is the location of the future trailhead on Wellbourne Road. This trailhead will provide access to the dirt trail for cyclists and pedestrians and eventually to the hard surface, multi-use PATH system. The PATH system will connect to the west to Lindbergh MARTA station, and the Lindbergh shopping area. To the east it will connect to the Zonolite shopping district, Sage Hill shopping area, Emory University and a Dekalb County trail that extends to Medlock Park and North DeKalb Mall.

2. Future Connections & Access

There are several opportunities for additional access that have not been finalized as of the preparation of this Master Plan (Map 8).

The parcel north of the Nature Preserve and adjacent to the eastern boundary of the DOT parcel is owned by Mr. Craig Hayes. Mr. Hayes is interested in providing access to the Nature Preserve on this parcel. Mr. Hayes is discussing various options with the Steering Committee and the city. A trail located on this parcel could provide a connection directly between the Nature Preserve and Cheshire Bridge Road. Further site evaluation and engineering analysis need to take place.

The Georgia Power right-of-way is also a potential access point from Wildwood Road. Two parcels on Wildwood Road have small portions of their property in the Georgia Power easement. The city and the property owners are currently discussing various options for these properties with regard to the easements needed across their properties for access along the Georgia Power right-of-way. The city must also coordinate with Georgia Power. This would create access from the southern boundary of the Nature Preserve.

The Georgia Power Corporation owns the house at 2020 Lenox Road. Georgia Power purchased this house when working with the CDC at Emory to provide power sources to their expansion

plans. The CDC cancelled their off-site substation portion of the project. According to conversations between the Steering Committee and Georgia Power representatives, the 2020 Lenox Road location is still being considered as a future substation site to improve power distribution to the neighborhood. The NPU-F and Morningside Lenox Park Association both voted against use of the site for a substation. The Steering Committee has proposed several options to Georgia Power to use the 2020 Lenox Road location for access and environmental education. Georgia Power could donate the house to the city for use as a trailhead and environmental education center for the Nature Preserve. Georgia Power could negotiate an easement with the owners of the Bearsse parcel to construct a trail in the Georgia Power right-of-way on the Bearsse parcel and then at the southern boundary of this parcel to allow for trail construction to the west to the Salem Communications parcel. Salem Communications is negotiating with the city for a conservation easement using Greenway Acquisition Project funds to protect the riparian corridor.

The Morningside Place Homeowners' Association, Inc. is currently in negotiations with the city to grant a recreational access easement in addition to the conservation easement already agreed upon. The easements would allow for a trail to make the connection to the east side of the Nature Preserve along the existing cleared sewer right-of-way adjacent to the creek on the southern boundary of their property. No decisions regarding the design (especially surface material) or types of users for the trail (whether it will be pedestrian only or allow for other kinds of use) have been made. According to a 1/19/05 email from the Environmental Compliance Manager, Greenway Acquisition Project, Department of Watershed Management, the trail will not be built unless the following conditions exist:

- EPA/EPD (the plaintiffs in the Consent Decree) approve the trail
- Another entity besides Dept. of Watershed Management (DWM) (i.e., Parks Dept., Planning Dept., neighborhood group, PATH) expresses interest in constructing and maintaining a trail
- DWM maintains sole discretion to access the sewer line, even if it means tearing up the trail
- DWM will be held harmless in any damage to the trail incurred during sewer repair/construction, i.e., will not be responsible for paying for repairs/replacement.

The Lindbergh MARTA Station on Piedmont Road is a rapidly developing, high-density mixed-use, mixed income area in central Atlanta. The Lindbergh City project is building a live/work community at the MARTA Station that includes commercial and residential uses. The Lindbergh Plaza redevelopment plan, underway across Piedmont Road from the MARTA Lindbergh station, is building another mixed-use community with direct access to public transportation and the greenway system.

Consideration must also be given to the BeltLine that is currently under study by the City of Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, the Atlanta Development Authority, and MARTA. As shown on Map 15, there is close proximity between the northeast quadrant of the proposed BeltLine corridor and the Nature Preserve. As previously mentioned, one of the goals for the Nature Preserve is to connect the city and regional trail networks and the BeltLine would be a significant contribution to that goal.

3. Green Connections

The northeast quadrant of the city has the potential to create a connected green corridor to enhance habitat protection and water quality along the South Fork Peachtree Creek with the designation of the Morningside Nature Preserve (Map15). Implementation of the Master Plan will consolidate several opportunities in the NE quadrant of the city to make linkages between existing greenspaces. The multi-use PATH trail system in the Nature Preserve will be approximately 0.3 miles when completed, and will connect to a larger regional system that will link the North DeKalb Mall area, via the South Fork Peachtree Creek Trail, to the Lindbergh MARTA Station on Piedmont Road. It will connect several parks to the Nature Preserve including those mentioned above, as well as Mason Mill Park, Medlock Park, and South Peachtree Creek Nature Preserve, all of which are in DeKalb County. It will probably be routed along the edge of the Emory University campus with a spur planned to connect to the CDC complex. Several commercial areas and numerous neighborhoods will be connected by the PATH trail. It is important for the Steering Committee, the Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs and the Department of Watershed Management to coordinate with the PATH Foundation and Atlanta Development Authority to obtain the necessary parcels for the extension of the PATH into the Nature Preserve.

The 1999 *Cheshire Bridge Road Study* noted that the Cheshire Bridge corridor lacks access to public lands, parks, greenspace and recreational opportunities. The acquisition and development of the Morningside Nature Preserve for public access supports the goals for the improvement of the Cheshire Bridge corridor by making safe, accessible open space available.

4. Implementation Strategy and Phasing Plan

The proposed Master Plan is a long-range and on-going project that will last many years. The city will fund the costs for implementation as the budget allows. The Steering Committee or advisory group that takes responsibility for working with the city to manage the Nature Preserve will need to be involved in fundraising activities. This will necessitate the building of partnerships in order to use all available sources to fund the implementation and maintenance costs. A phasing plan is recommended to ease the financial burdens and to respond to the

community desire to have some of the improvements available within five years. The overall implementation decisions should be the decision of the Steering Committee and the city.

The availability of funds may not be the only trigger for the phasing plan. The level of use may also be an important consideration. The city and Steering Committee will need to determine when it is appropriate to implement future phases. Map 16 illustrates the following proposed phases:

a. Phase I

- Build the trailhead on Wellbourne Road.
- Build the section of multi-use dirt trail on the west side that starts at the Wellbourne entrance, goes around the hill and to the point where the floodplain section starts.
- Install signs for entrance location to include identity, interpretive and educational information.
- Install dispensing stations for doggie bags.
- Evaluate the need for privacy fencing or vegetation for adjacent landowners as necessary.
- Continue & finalize acquisitions for conservation easements and trailheads.

b. Phase II

- Build the floodplain section of multi-use dirt trail on the west side of the creek.
- Develop and install educational and interpretive signs for the trail.
- Continue and finalize acquisition conservation easements and trailheads.
- Build final section of trail from hill/floodplain section to Wildwood Road trailhead.

c. Future Phases

- Finalize acquisition of parcels for PATH access to the Nature Preserve.
- Build PATH section on east side of creek and include bridge across creek.
- Build structures discussed in Alternative 3, the Thunderhouse and observation tower.

5. Impacts

a. Water Quality

Protection and enhancement of the water quality of the South Fork Peachtree Creek is a primary part of the Nature Preserve mission. The implementation of this Master Plan will provide opportunities for management activities that will enhance water quality along the section of the creek that flows through the Nature Preserve. Primary activities include streambank restoration plans and management plans for upstream activities that increase water volume and pollutant loadings in the creek.

b. Wildlife

The habitat of the Nature Preserve is appropriate for a wide variety of wildlife. It is the intent of this Master Plan and future management strategies and activities to maintain or enhance the habitat in the Nature Preserve for wildlife. Even though it is located in a very urbanized area, it is likely a significant terrestrial and aquatic connection for many species while also providing habitat for avian species. The riparian corridor of the creek provides a major habitat linkage to the Chattahoochee River which is then a primary connection to habitats along the river corridor. The proposed activities for this Master Plan are not expected to adversely impact existing habitats. Primary activities include further research with wildlife biologists evaluating conditions at the Nature Preserve.

c. Vegetation

Implementation of the Master Plan will continue the work of removing exotic and invasive vegetation that currently reduces the quality of vegetative habitats in the Nature Preserve. Current activities by Trees Atlanta will be continued and additional partners may be included.

d. Safety & Security

The current conditions on the Nature Preserve promote some activities that are not agreeable to the adjacent landowners, the neighborhood or the occasional users who try to walk some of the areas on the property. Homeless camps have been discovered on site and garbage and burned cars have also been problems. As the Master Plan trail system is implemented the safety and security on the site will improve as more people use the trails. The increase in use will discourage the inappropriate activities that often are focused on land that appears abandoned or underused. The city will need to consider various safety options and their applicability to the Nature Preserve.

e. Traffic and parking

It is expected that there will be some increase in vehicular traffic on Wellbourne when the trailhead is built and the first section of trail is completed. There is no parcel currently available adjacent to the Nature Preserve that could provide for off street parking. The Wellbourne site is most appropriate for pedestrian access only. However, it is also likely that many neighborhood residents will walk or ride bicycles to the trailhead and will therefore not cause undesirable increases in vehicular traffic in the neighborhood. There are some parcels that may have future potential for parking and the Steering Committee and the city are exploring these options.

H. Design Guidelines

These guidelines are provided to assist in the planning and design of facilities that will be developed for the Nature Preserve. These design guidelines are intended to articulate the character of both the natural and built parts of the Nature Preserve. They are intended to protect the natural systems and to provide the community with a greenspace that is enjoyable, usable,

safe and aesthetically pleasing. The criteria presented in these standards are not intended to take precedence over any rules, regulations, or requirements of any regulatory agency having jurisdiction over any of this property.

The corridor for the proposed trail system is defined by the landforms and vegetation. The trail centerline will be finalized on the site by the trail design consultant in order to minimize grading and destruction of native vegetation. The structures identified in Alternative 3 will be located to conform to the site conditions and visual considerations for each structure and to minimize site disturbance for construction. Additional reference for design guidelines should be made to the Greenway Acquisition Plan prepared by the city which includes Standard Operating Procedures (see Appendix II) and the “Chattahoochee River: Greenway Planning and Implementation Handbook” (March 2001; Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, GA DNR, & Jordan, Jones & Goulding, Inc.).

1. Descriptive Elements

Listed below are brief descriptions of elements common to all the Alternatives, except for the No Action Alternative.

a. Trail Improvements

- *Trail* - the main trail system located on the west side of the creek. Dirt surface with an average width of 3-4 feet.
- *PATH trail* – located on the east side of the creek. Hard surface and multi-use. Connects to other parts of the city and regional trail system and is typically 10-12 feet wide. Sections may be of concrete on the ground or a boardwalk (constructed of wood or recycled materials) built over wet areas.

b. Pedestrian & Vehicular Access

- *Pedestrian/bicycle access points* - located at the trailheads.
- *Vehicular parking* - located near trailheads but not within the Nature Preserve.
Bridges - crossings over South Fork of Peachtree Creek. Required for the PATH trail and possibly the dirt trails.

c. Structures

- *Shelter/Thunderhouse* - covered shelter with open sides that could be used for picnics or outdoor classroom or protection from rain.
- *Observation tower* - a tall structure from which to view the Nature Preserve. Located to provide views of the creek and woods.

d. Furnishings & Fixtures

- *Drinking fountain* - 1 at each trailhead.

- *Bench* - rustic design; at trailheads, the Thunderhouse and tower, and intersections and viewpoints of trail.
- *Picnic table* - located at the Thunderhouse, number depends on shelter size.
- *Trash receptacles* - located at each trailhead.
- *Bike racks* - located at connection between PATH trail and trail on west side; also at each trailhead.
- *Bollards* - located at entrances to prevent any vehicular access.

e. *Signage*

- *Way-finding* - identification, directional; at trailheads and as needed.
- *Informative* - historical, environmental, educational; located as needed.
- *Regulatory* - trail etiquette; at each trailhead.
- *Mile marker* – at trail intersections.

2. Location Considerations

When locating the trails or site improvements, the following issues must be considered:

a. *Trail Design*

- Locate the trails so as to create the least impact to surrounding resources.
- Locate trails with regard to slope and soil constraints (see Riter, 2003)
- Establish trail setbacks from streams per city requirements.
- Limit trails in sensitive areas. Use boardwalks, overlooks or other means of access control when locating a trail in a sensitive area. Post signs that convey information about the resource being protected.
- Direct runoff from hard surfaced trail sections into buffers or detention areas prior to overflow into the creek.
- Maintain sheetflow of runoff rather than channeling it, where feasible.
- Wherever possible use bio-engineered methods e.g., carrying and retaining water runoff; stabilizing cut slopes.
- Recycled materials should be used whenever possible for site or trail improvements.
- Porous or pervious materials should be evaluated for use on those trail sections designated for hard surface.

b. *Vegetation & Landscaping*

- Protect all trees over 6" dbh from construction impacts.
- Set construction limits so that impacts to the surrounding vegetation and soils are minimized.
- Use siltation and tree protection barriers and all best management practices during construction.

- Use only native species for new vegetation.
- c. Site Amenities*
- Maintain consistent use of materials and design style throughout the Nature Preserve. Wherever possible include the logo of the Nature Preserve.
 - Use recycled materials whenever possible.
 - All amenities should be designed to blend in with the natural surroundings and constructed to discourage vandalism.
 - Design amenities to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act as required by City Code.
 - At all trailheads, place signage that identifies such things as the trail name, distances to next node of activity, amenities available, and difficulty of trail segment. All signage should be consistent throughout the trail system in regard to color, size, materials, text style, and logo.
- d. Adjacent Private Property*
- Consult with adjacent property owners at trailheads regarding issues of privacy and security.

I. Management & Maintenance Guidelines

1. Management Entity

The Morningside Nature Preserve is a component of the City of Atlanta's Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs. As stated earlier, the Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs and the Department of Watershed Management are required to have oversight of the implementation of the Master Plan. In addition to these two city departments, other organizations should be included for the long term success of the Nature Preserve such as Trees Atlanta, Park Pride and the PATH Foundation. After the approval of this Master Plan, the Steering Committee and staff from the Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs and the Department of Watershed Management should create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines the roles and responsibilities for both the city and the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee may remain or be restructured as an Advisory Committee. These management and maintenance guidelines are to be used by the city, in coordination with the Steering Committee, for the management of the Nature Preserve to achieve the goals as listed in this Master Plan. After the first five years the guidelines should be re-evaluated based on analysis of the results on site.

The Steering Committee will also register with Park Pride to be the official sponsors of the Nature Preserve, as requested by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. This formal agreement with Park Pride allows the city to maintain a coordinated data base of the

greenspaces throughout the city that have volunteer groups as representatives of the community. Park Pride will continue in the role of the non-profit fiscal partner for the Steering Committee as it does for many other volunteer groups in Atlanta. Park Pride can receive any contributions from the Steering Committee fund raising activities.

Currently, the city has funds designated for the Nature Preserve in the Quality of Life Bond account. The Steering Committee communicates with the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs regarding the status of these funds. The funds have been used for the invasive species removal and will be used to implement the other elements of the Master Plan. Additional sources of funding from the private sector in the form of corporate donations or in-kind services will help with future management and maintenance needs.

2. Maintenance

The term “management” and “maintenance” are often use interchangeably in landscape discussions, but in actuality they are two different concepts. Maintenance refers to activities intended to retain a certain set of conditions, while management implies a more comprehensive set of activities that recognize changing conditions over a period of time. Maintenance needs are one aspect of management. Maintenance activities include trash removal, and the repair and upkeep of trails, structures, and other facilities. During the design process, it is important to address maintenance issues, such as making access available for maintenance tasks. Most maintenance activities are conducted on a regular schedule and are fairly predictable. There are different maintenance requirements for natural areas like the Nature Preserve as opposed to other city parks that typically have lawn areas, landscape areas, and recreation uses like tennis and basketball courts. The city will be responsible for the maintenance of the Nature Preserve. However, partners such as Trees Atlanta should be used for specific maintenance tasks such as privet removal and native plantings. Trail groups should be used for trail maintenance.

The most desirable location to use for access, especially if equipment or vehicles are involved, is the transmission line right-of-way on Wildwood Road. The pedestrian access from Wellbourne Road can be used for teams and volunteer groups but not for vehicles. The city should continue negotiations to gain access along the right-of-way.

Guidelines:

- Maintenance tasks shall be consistent with vegetation management plans, stream restoration plans or other specific plans developed for the Nature Preserve.
- Natural debris will be left in place. This includes fallen tree limbs, and deposits of bed load (sand, gravel, leaves, limbs) from the creek during flood events. These materials should be removed only when they interfere with uses in the approved Master Plan.

- Use volunteer groups such as SORBA (Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association) to provide regular maintenance for the trail system.
- Organize regular maintenance work days with neighbors and partner groups, coordinated with the City of Atlanta. These should include the uplands as well as floodplain and the creek.
- Signage and other educational tools should be used to educate visitors about the maintenance issues of the Nature Preserve.
- Educate adjacent landowners about common household activities that might be detrimental to the Nature Preserve such as dumping yard clippings, fertilizer and pesticide runoff, and poison bait systems that might endanger wildlife.
- Develop volunteer groups to monitor activities in the Nature Preserve and provide input to the city and Steering Committee.

3. Visitor Activities

Each greenspace and park in Atlanta has similar issues related to visitor activities as well as unique considerations special to that particular site. The issues include people who use the greenspace and the people living adjacent to the area. As the paths are built in the Nature Preserve and more people use them, there will be a greater need for management decisions regarding visitors. The existing city management plans or Standard Operating Procedures should be applied to the Nature Preserve. The city and the Steering Committee will need to evaluate the need for any additional plans for visitor activities after Phase 2 is built.

For the Nature Preserve, residential neighborhoods border three sides of the parcel. The trailheads for the trail system in the Nature Preserve will be located near private residences. It is important for the city and the Steering Committee to consider the impacts on the adjacent landowners as the Master Plan is implemented. Privacy, noise, and property security are some of the major considerations. Effectively involving the community will help avoid many problems.

Until the trails described in this plan are constructed, a temporary series of paths will be used so that volunteer workers and visitors can walk the Nature Preserve without damaging the ecosystem, getting lost, or wandering off the property. This temporary system is a simple loop that uses existing paths, the Georgia Power right-of-way, and a new trail across the most ecologically valuable slope in vegetation management zones 1 and 2. This trail should not be mulched, but erosion is not an issue. The temporary trails will be discontinued as the permanent trail system is developed.

Actions:

- Post the activities which are approved for the Nature Preserve at each trailhead and on brochures, websites and other educational materials.

- Post signs around the perimeter of the property to delineate the boundary.
- Provide visitors with suggestions as to what actions they can take if they observe inappropriate activities in the Nature Preserve.
- As each trailhead is designed, consult with each adjacent landowner on issues of privacy, noise, and property security.
- Refer to existing city management plans applicable to the Nature Preserve and develop new ones as necessary.

4. Safety and Risk Management

Risk management involves the prevention and elimination of hazards (in a timely manner) so that the trail system is a reasonably safe facility and accidents can be prevented. Several items that need to be addressed include:

Actions:

- Develop procedures for periodic inspection and maintenance of trails and facilities. This is especially needed after storms.
- Identify access for emergency vehicles.

Currently, the most desirable access location for emergency vehicles is the transmission right-of-way on Wildwood Road. It provides access directly into the site and then connects to the sewer easements which also provide good vehicular access further into the site. Emergency vehicles will not be able to enter the site from Welbourne Road. The city should continue negotiations to gain access along the Georgia Power right-of-way.

5. Wildlife

The Nature Preserve is home to a diverse animal population and protecting that population is a high priority. There are two major objectives for managing wildlife in a greenspace: to control undesirable species and to attract desirable species. It is easy for many people to appreciate animals that are appealing and non-threatening, but these characteristics exclude much of our native fauna. Animal species are considered undesirable if they cause damage to other elements in the greenspace or if they present health or safety hazards to humans. Many of the public's fears and concerns about wildlife are often a matter of perception. Educational programs for the Nature Preserve should address these types of misconceptions and community concerns. Some animals may pose direct threats to the health or safety of visitors such as feral dogs and rabid animals. The city and the Steering Committee must work with the local animal control agency if these problems develop. It is essential that wildlife problems be carefully assessed with the technical assistance from wildlife professionals before any control measures are taken.

Wildlife populations in the Nature Preserve should be managed for balance and diversity through a vegetation management program that promotes diversity of habitats and food sources for wildlife species. The Steering Committee and the city will need to monitor for possible overpopulation of some opportunistic species that might create management problems. For instance, when present in high populations, deer, gray squirrels, and beavers may negatively impact the landscape because of its small acreage, even though in smaller populations on larger tracts of land, they might be beneficial. Management strategies will be developed, as needed, to address any future wildlife issues.

Control of stinging and biting insects such as fire ants may be necessary if they are present in high use areas such as the trailheads. These problems should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis once the Master Plan is implemented. Localized problems can be treated with appropriate insecticides if there are no other alternatives. Because of concerns about mosquito-borne disease, community members are often anxious to eliminate every potential mosquito habitat. However, large-scale insecticide spraying is not a viable option, because it would kill beneficial insects as well as pose health risks to wildlife species. This is not consistent with the goal of managing for a functioning ecosystem. Managing for diversity is more likely to promote a greater number of species such as certain birds, bats and dragonflies that will feed on problem insects. Consistent litter removal will ensure that such things as containers, tires and other refuse that collects water will be removed from the Nature Preserve. Removal of such debris will remove many of the protected breeding pools for mosquitoes. However, it is a function of this type of landscape that most visitors to the Nature Preserve will need to use insect repellent.

Domesticated animals also pose a management challenge for the Nature Preserve. Dogs off-leash can damage the fragile ground vegetation layer in the Nature Preserve. The majority of fragile plants are currently located on the slopes and not in the floodplain. However, the large floodplain area will be managed to reintroduce and revitalize these plants. Dog waste is both an environmental and bio-hazard because it can spread disease and also negatively impact water quality. Dogs can also hunt and kill or injure wildlife and destroy nests and habitats. Domesticated cats that are allowed to access the Nature Preserve may kill many of the smaller songbirds. Although domesticated, dogs and cats need to be included in the wildlife guidelines.

Actions:

- Identify specific wildlife management plans necessary for the Nature Preserve. Consult with biologists from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
- Establish monitoring teams to record wildlife sightings based on procedures from DNR.
- Manage for diverse and balanced wildlife populations that do not endanger human lives or negatively impact the visitor experience.

- Coordinate the vegetation management guidelines with wildlife management guidelines for appropriate habitat development.
- Reduce negative impacts of dogs by installing signs referring to and enforcing existing city ordinances regarding leash laws and waste removal.
- Provide dispensing stations for waste removal bags at appropriate locations in and around the Nature Preserve.
- Reduce negative impacts on the bird and small mammal populations from domesticated cats through education of adjacent landowners.

6. Water Resources

The water resources of the Nature Preserve include the South Fork Peachtree Creek, its riparian zone and the extensive floodplain. Several management and restoration plans will be necessary. One plan should address the restoration needs of the riparian zone and stream bank. The removal of exotic and invasive plants and reintroduction of native plant materials in the flood plain is essential to habitat improvement and should be part of the vegetation management. Also, the city must determine how to address the maintenance/management issue of fallen trees that cross the creek and create significant changes to the location of the creek channel. Additionally, the city and Steering Committee need to work with partners upstream to develop a management plan for the creek's drainage basin. Any improvements in the drainage basin that reduce storm water runoff, sediment, and organics such as fertilizers and pesticides, will have positive impacts on the creek condition. Storm water runoff is one of the main sources of degradation to the creek. Increased volumes of storm water also do great damage to the creek and its riparian zone. Techniques to reduce the intensity rate and volume of water during storm events will also benefit the creek, stream bank and riparian zones. Implementation of any activities listed in the Master Plan must address the secondary impacts to the creek water quality, flood plain, and riparian zone.

Actions:

- Consult with professionals to address requirements for stream bank restoration and riparian zone improvements.
- Include the floodplain in vegetation management and restoration plans.
- Prepare restoration plans for the wetland sites.
- Identify techniques for use in the drainage basin that would improve conditions in the creek. Include DeKalb County and City of Atlanta and other upstream stakeholders.
- Reference for management plans: "Chattahoochee River Greenway Planning and Implementation Handbook" (The Trust for Public Land; The Nature Conservancy, Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources, and Jordan, Jones & Goulding, Inc; March 2001).
- Monitor activities and conditions in the Nature Preserve for any negative impacts to the creek water quality, floodplain, and riparian zone.

7. Vegetation

A common misconception about urban and suburban greenspaces is that these natural areas are totally self-sustaining. In reality, many of these areas are in a degraded condition and the on-going pressures from adjacent urban activities result in landscapes that require some human interference in order to promote and sustain a healthy functioning ecosystem. Besides stream restoration, the management of vegetation is likely to be the costliest, most time-consuming, and most challenging aspect of management in the Nature Preserve.

The Steering Committee consulted with the Georgia Native Plant Society regarding a habitat restoration program for the Nature Preserve. The following program was developed and, as indicated, some portions have been completed or are underway. Other components of the restoration program remain to be implemented. The program was developed by the Georgia Native Plant Society at a January 16, 2002 meeting of society members involved with the Nature Preserve. A future task for the Steering Committee is to initiate work on the tasks which are incomplete or unfinished.

a. Restoration Program

Identify location and boundaries of project.

- *Completed*-- Survey January 2004.

Identify Ownership.

- *Completed* -- City of Atlanta

Identify the goals of the restoration.

- *Completed*--See goals of Master Plan
- To repair the damaged ecosystems; arguably, in the case of the bottomland hardwood forest (the terrace) creation of a replacement ecosystem.

Identify the kind of habitat to be restored. *Partially completed*

- Piedmont northeast and east facing mixed hardwood forest slopes; oak-hickory ridge top forest.
- Piedmont terrace: bottomland hardwood forest
- Piedmont floodplain
- Piedmont wetland (depressional or backswamp)

Identify a reference Ecosystem for the project. *Not completed*

- Reference ecosystem for the slopes: Sweetwater Creek. No known reference ecosystem for the terrace. This will represent pioneer work in passive regeneration on highly impacted Piedmont streams. Note: the reference ecosystem has not been assessed.

Conduct a Site Assessment. *Partially Completed*

- Info on topography, hydrology, soils, site history, existing plant and animal species (composition, abundance), structure of component communities, autecology and significant features.

Identify site conditions in need of repair/change. *Partially completed*

- Removal of invasive exotic species in all habitats
- Possible stream restoration, particularly at eroding cut banks
- Sewage control issues
- Note: the extent of needed stream restoration efforts has not been determined.
- Native species augmentation to be minimal at first; emphasize a ‘passive’ approach that encourages the establishment and survival of native vegetation through natural propagation.

Identify actions/interventions that are needed. *Partially completed*

- Removal of exotic species. Extensive problem on bottomland terrace; with some problem areas on slope and floodplain. Problem species include English ivy and perhaps Japanese honeysuckle on slope; on terrace-- Chinese privet, Johnson grass, Japanese honeysuckle English ivy, and sweet autumn clematis.
- Creation of trail system with viewing points
- Access points must be determined
- Creation of directional and educational signage
- Possible stream bank restoration/wetland restoration and enhancement
- Acquisition of adjacent land parcels
- Archaeological elements preserved
- Connections to greenways established
- Sewage control issues

Note: Completion of the Master Plan and discussions with Southeast Streams are needed before this step can be completed

Identify any special needs of the habitat. *Completed*

Identify labor, materials, and equipment needs. *Partially completed*

Describe any maintenance, management. *Partially completed*

Define a plan to demonstrate success of the project. *Not completed*

Estimate costs and identify funding sources. *Partially completed*

Identify legal restrictions. *Completed*

Identify project time line. *Partially completed*

Build a project network. *Partially completed*

Publicize the project. *Ongoing*

b. Invasive Species

Trees Atlanta has started implementing the removal of invasive exotic species on the Nature Preserve and other greenspaces in the city. The city and Trees Atlanta have agreed that

herbicides can be used in the Nature Preserve and Beecher Hills as test cases. Therefore, the following discussion does include management techniques that include herbicide use. Any activities using herbicides will adhere to all required protocols and permits for use of these products. Map 11 identifies the locations of the invasive species on site. This is used as one of the references for the management decisions outlined below.

The Nature Preserve has been divided into seven vegetation zones for the discussion of management issues (see Map 12). The following topics have been used to prioritize the process:

- Threat of Invasion
- Protection of Desirable Species
- Relationship to Master Plan

The overall cost of invasive removal in the Nature Preserve is estimated to be approximately \$97,000 or 13,000 volunteer hours. The overall annual maintenance cost will be approximately \$3,600 or 1700 volunteer hours. Tables 1 and 2 document these costs as prepared by Trees Atlanta in 2004.

ID	Species / Level	Acres	Cost/Acre	Cost	Vol. Hour/ Acre	Vol. Hours
	Euonymous L3	0.056	\$500	\$28	290	16
	Honeysuckle L1	6.537	\$125	\$817	50	327
	Honeysuckle L3	0.098	\$500	\$49	290	28
	Ivy L1	0.117	\$125	\$15	50	6
	Ivy L2	0.029	\$375	\$11	140	4
	Ivy L3	0.506	\$500	\$253	290	147
	Ivy L4	1.152	\$750	\$864	380	438
	Ivy L5	0.855	\$1,200	\$1,026	480	410
	Kudzu L5	0.076	\$1,200	\$91	480	36
	Privet L1	1.804	\$100	\$180	48	87
	Privet L2	3.033	\$500	\$1,517	144	437
	Privet L3	1.253	\$3,000	\$3,759	288	361
	Privet L4	3.352	\$3,500	\$11,732	480	1609
	Privet L5	15.395137	\$5,000	<u>\$76,976</u>	600	<u>9237</u>
				\$97,317		13143
	<u>Annual Maintenance</u>					
	Maint. Multistem	24.837137	\$100	\$2,484	50	1242
	Maint. Vine	9.426	\$125	<u>\$1,178</u>	50	<u>471</u>
				\$3,662		1713

Table 1

ID	Species / Level	IPC Acres	Cost/Acre	Cost	Vol Acres	Vol. Hour/Acre	Vol. Hours
	Honeysuckle L1	6.508	\$125	\$814	0	50	0
	Honeysuckle L3	0.098	\$500	\$49	0	290	0
	Ivy L1	0.117	\$125	\$15	0	50	0
	Ivy L2	0.029	\$375	\$11	0	140	0
	Ivy L3	0.419	\$500	\$210	0	290	0
	Ivy L4	1.078	\$750	\$809	0	380	0
	Ivy L5	0.833	\$1,200	\$1,000	0.1666	480	80
	Privet L1	0	\$100	\$0	0.049	48	2
	Privet L2	0	\$500	\$0	2.5	144	360
	Privet L4	0.356	\$3,500	\$1,246	0.455	480	218
	Privet L5	0.4591368	\$5,000	<u>\$2,296</u>	0	600	<u>0</u>
				\$6,538			661
	<u>Annual Maintenance</u>						
	Maint. Multistem	0.8151368	\$100	\$82		50	41
	Maint. Vine	9.158	\$125	<u>\$1,145</u>		50	<u>458</u>
				\$1,226			499

Table 2

Zone 1 Activities

- English Ivy is growing on the ground plane and in the trees. The immediate need is to kill the English Ivy growing in the trees. This will relieve the stress on the trees, and stop the spread by seeds (which are only produced when Ivy grows on a vertical surface). Pull the ivy by hand starting on the western edge of this zone. This is the area where the Ivy is least thick and the native plants occur most frequently. However, this area is also home to a population of Poison Ivy.
- The remaining English Ivy on the ground plane will be sprayed with herbicide in the winter months to prevent overspray onto native plants. Winter spraying will be done when the temperature exceeds 60 degrees.
- The second invasive is Chinese Privet. The Privet closest to the base of the slope is large and will need to be hand cut and treated with herbicide. Further upslope, the privet is small enough for volunteers to hand pull, or pull using a weed wrench or shovel. Privet should not be cut if it can be pulled.
- Removed privet should be piled with roots not touching the ground. These piles will break down into organic matter over a couple of years.
- The last invasive problem in zone one is kudzu. There is a small patch near the top of the hill. This area will be sprayed with herbicide.

Zone 2 Activities

- The Chinese Privet should be hand pulled or stump cut and treated, starting in the upslope areas. After the privet is removed, there will be easy access to remove the English Ivy and Honeysuckle vines. Removed privet should be piled with roots not touching the ground. These piles will break down into organic matter over a couple of years.
- The patches of English Ivy can be easily sprayed with herbicide, which is more cost / time effective than hand pulling in these small areas.
- The Honeysuckle vines will be sprayed with herbicide during the winter months to prevent overspray onto native plants.
- The southwest end of Zone two will be started in year one of the program. This is the area with the most native plants. Depending on the status of the master plan, the north east corner may be done in year three, or a different area may be prioritized.

Zone 3 Activities

Zone Three has the least amount of invasives in the Nature Preserve.

- Chinese Privet small enough to hand pull – remove in winter of year one to prevent it from growing any larger. It is easiest to find the individual privet plants in winter.
- Hand pull or stump cut and treat larger Chinese Privet. Make piles so that roots do not touch the ground and leave piles to break down into organic matter over a couple of years.
- Spray the small English Ivy patches and the Honeysuckle growing on the ground plane with herbicide.

Zones 4, 5, 6 and 7 Activities.

- These zones are mainly Chinese Privet which has reached maturity. For this reason, these areas are not an immediate priority. However, the Privet will need to be removed over time because it provides seeds which spread to the other management zones.
- There are small patches of English Ivy mixed in with the Privet. Zone 5 has the largest areas of English Ivy, with much of it growing in the trees. The English Ivy in the trees should be removed early on in the process to prevent the spread by seed and reduce the stress on the trees.
- Along the stream, there are areas of *Microstegium*. This annual grass is hard to control, and seeds spread from upstream. At this point, there is no plan to attempt to control *Microstegium*.

After removal of the dominant invasive species, the existing natives should be augmented with additional plantings to promote quicker coverage of the site.

c. Floodplain

A dense stand of privet covers the majority of the floodplain. In this area, privet is the only plant present in the shrub layer and it is critical bird habitat. The privet must be removed in stages to allow the birds to move from the privet to the new native shrub layer in adjacent areas. Re-introduce native shrubs in this area immediately after invasive removal to jump-start the revitalization so that the bird habitat will be restored quickly. Also, it may be necessary to immediately replant when removing invasives near streams. This will be evaluated in the field.

d. Poison Ivy

This is a real problem in the Nature Preserve. There are thick stands of Poison Ivy growing on the ground in management zones 1 and 2. Even though Poison Ivy is a native plant and provides food for birds, it is hazardous to park visitors and to volunteers. Poison Ivy on the ground will be sprayed with an herbicide such as Garlon 3A in the summer months taking care not to affect desirable native species. It must be sprayed at least 2-3 weeks before volunteers enter the area. Although not all the Poison Ivy will be killed, the areas will be accessible to volunteers performing management tasks. Poison Ivy should be sprayed in areas within 10 feet of the trails to prevent visitors from coming into contact with its leaves.

Action Items:

- Use professionals to remove privet in Zone 6
- Use volunteers to clear privet and ivy from trees in Zone 2.
- Use volunteers to clear Privet that remains after professional control in Zones 4.
- Use native species for any new plantings. Use rescued plants when possible.
- Remove privet only during times when birds are not nesting.
- Cut and stump treat vegetation along streambanks instead of pulling out the plants. Use only chemicals approved for use over water.

8. Monitoring Plan / Record Keeping

A monitoring plan requires recording baseline information before implementing any management or planting. After implementation, the monitoring is performed on a regular schedule to record the results of the activity. A monitoring program will provide you with solid data about what has worked, what has failed, any unexpected results, and will help you identify any additional management needs. A monitoring plan is a powerful tool and is essential to evaluate your program. A record of volunteer hours will be helpful when applying for future funding.

Action Items:

- Photograph before and after images of management activities.
- Record all management activities.

J. Appendices

Appendix I: Community Workshop Results

The WildWood

Community Workshop, June 23, 2003

Haygood Methodist Church

***Highlighted** entries are priorities of that list.

*If no highlights, then there was agreement to consider all entries as equal in priority.

*These lists are to be used in conjunction with the results from other surveys (as handed out at the workshop)

* Approximately 35 people attended.

Access/Traffic

Wishes

Pedestrian access only on Woodcliff Terrace

Multiple sites for access

Use Cheshire Bridge

RR tracks at Lenox as alternate to C. Bridge

Vehicular and bus parking

Parking in Georgia Power Easement

ADA access

Concerns

- Limit access through residential areas
- DOT parking allows too many people

Facilities

Wishes

Bike racks at entrances--7

Toilets--4

Parking on site--6

Classroom space (covered area) -3

Low impact trails—8

Bridge—5

Boardwalk over wetlands—3

- **Seating (natural)—6**

Concerns

- No toilets
- No parking on Woodcliff Terrace
- No structures in WildWood
- Limited boardwalk for education
- Management

Resources

Wishes

- Protect animals & birds
- Volunteers/docents
- Good watershed management

Concerns

- Free range cats
- Damage to stream bank
- Sedimentation

Uses

Wishes

- **Plant & tree ID/environmental education/information signs—7**
- **Gathering places—3**
- Place for party—0
- Separate trails for bikes & walkers—2
- **Evaluate hours of operation—3**
- **Access over stream—4**
- **No off trail use--4**
- Dogs—2
- **No smoking/littering—6**
- **Guided educational program—4**
- Age-appropriate activities—0
- Sign in/out--0

Concerns

- **No bicycles—8**
- **No places for parties—7**
- **No large groups of bikers—6**
- **No dogs—4**
- **Tree climbing—4**
- No dog poop—2
- **Safety issues –people related (e.g., loitering, anti-social behaviors) –6**

Other Ideas

- Community needs a meeting to learn about sites and facilities that are similar to the Wildwood.
- “Urban Forest” is a preserve that means very limited uses and development on the site.

Wildwood Forest Steering Committee
 Public Meeting March 7, 2005 on the Four proposed Alternatives for the Master Plan.
 Morningside Presbyterian Church

Approximately 30 people attended
Public comments recorded at meeting:

1. What effects on animals? Has it been analyzed? How much more impact from the bikes in #2 and #3?
2. Maybe this is similar to old Yellow River dirt path. YR has 6 miles of trails.
3. Consider directional trails to reduce conflicts.
4. Safety and sustainability design are important.
5. How many bridges for #2 vs. #3?
6. Question of security when people out on trails.
7. Has fishing been considered? Are there fish in the creek?
8. Have any studies been done on the # of visitors and especially the # that would park on Wellbourne at the proposed trailhead?
9. Is there a phasing plan?
10. Is there a mechanism to have funds for sustainability? How? An endowment, grants, other?
11. What is the timing of the project?
12. What is the management entity?
13. Houston Mill Park –maybe this is similar to Wildwood and could be studied by steering committee and city.
14. Stay 50’ away from property line on eastern boundary (see survey and this line is marked). There is still contested ownership along this boundary.

March 7, 2005—Community Meeting

Comment Sheet/Voting Tally Report Wildwood Forest Alternatives for the Master Plan

March 7, 2005 Public Meeting
Morningside Presbyterian Church
Comments and tally from residents adjacent to the Wildwood. Residents received flyers regarding meeting.

Total Comment Sheets Returned: 17

Alternative 2 Selected (checked): 10

Alternative 3 Selected: 4

Alternative 2 and 3 selected: 3

Additional comments provided by those that checked Alternative 2:

Comment #1

- Alt. 1 – Needs well done trails
- Alt. 2 – Very much like the bike vs. people clear separation. Alt. 3 introduces too many maintenance/reality issues. Think #2 keeps more to the overall natural forest theme
- Alt. 3 - Too soon to consider some of these elements
- Alt. 4 – Definitely no!

Comment #2

- Alt. 2 - No bikes

Comment #3

- Alt. 2 – No bikes

Comment #4

- Alt. 2 – No bike trails

Comment #5

- Alt. 1 – No
- Alt. 2 – Phase 1 of development. Multi use trail can be problematic. Need to address limited off street parking
- Alt 3 – Would be willing to see multi use @ later date. Priority 1) Add structure, storm refuge 2) small benches 3) education 4) biking
- Alt 4 – No

Comment #6

- Alt. 2 – Would like to see catch & release fishing; please no bicycles west of the creek!

Comment #7

- Alt. 2 – Worry about impact of parking on st. esp. buses in the long term – also maintenance at street level. Also, prefer non-bicycle use

Comment #8

- Alt. 2 – Without parking & ____ (?) points, I am concerned about too much pressure on the property. I would opt for low maintenance, low intrusion, most wild as possible. Bikes are fine but I would prefer no shelters.

Comment #9

- Alt. 2 - Don't want bikes – too much impact

Comment #10

- Alt. 2 –Some concern with “PATH” trails location to Morningside Places community.

Additional comments provided by those that checked Alternative 3:

Comment #1

- Alt 3 – It seems it would be fair to share the forest with all who wish to gain from exposure. Realistically the more developed the more need for parking (ie. (more impact) Primary concern should be on wild species, aquatic aviary and small mammals.

Comment #2

- Alt. 3 – I really like the idea of a few structures, especially a nature lecture amphitheater.

Comment #3

- Alt. 3 – No hardscapes, no enclosed structures, directional trail

Comment #4

- Alt. 3 – No hardscape (ruined Arabia); No bathrooms (creepy); Directional

Additional comments provided by those that checked Alternatives 2 and 3

Comment #1

- Alt. 2 – I like the idea of either one – thank you.

Comment #2

- Alt. 1 – OK
- Alt. 2 - OK; concern @ disturbing animals
- Alt. 3 – OK – concern @ disturbing animals
- Alt. 4 - No

March 14, 2005 — Morningside Lenox Park Association (MLPA)

Approximately 40 attendees.

Alternative 1 — No Action:

written: 0 hand vote: 0

Alternative 2 — Nature Trails & Preservation

Written: 4 (plus 1 that also voted for #3) hand vote: 8

Alternative 3 — Balance of Preservation & Recreation

Written: 5 (includes 1 for #3) hand vote: 10

Alternative 4 — Preservation & Facilities

Written: 0 hand vote: 0

Additional comments:

1. Likes #4 except for hard surface trails. Likes tower, amphitheater, restrooms, education center and bridges.
2. #3 is best option; #4 is not acceptable; would picket against it.
3. #3 has great possibilities; amenities could be added later if desired. #4 is too expensive and ambitious.
4. #3 is great balance—what about security? #4 is too much development.
5. #2 makes area accessible but maintains wild feel of place. #3 seems unwise to mix baby strollers, walkers, and bikes on 3 foot trail. Hates #4.
6. For #2 consider something other than concrete for PATH section. Keep bicycles and pedestrians separated. #4 is over developed.
7. #2 is most practical immediate solution. Intensive streambank restoration is needed. Bikes are not appropriate for the natural area—should remain on multi-use path only—keep separate from pedestrians. After security issues resolved, may add structures in #3. #4 is perhaps much later phase after much further study; emphasis on natural rather than hardscapes.

March 21, 2005 — NPU-F

Vote on 4 alternatives to identify preferred alternative:

#1: 0 votes

#2: 7 votes

#3: 13 votes

#4: 5 votes

Motion to support Alternative #3: 16 in favor 2 against 1 abstention

Appendix II: Consent Decree Requirements

Provided in email communication December 13, 2004

To: Seth Hendler, Dept. of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs, City of Atlanta

From: William C. Brigham, A.S.L.A., Principal Landscape Architect, Dept. of Watershed Management, City of Atlanta.

The Consent decree states that no more than 10% of the area may be developed for public access or use, such as bicycle and hiking paths.

Development within the greenway property is very limited. All development shall be designed and constructed with non-point source pollution prevention as a primary consideration. Location and construction of facilities shall be subject to the approval of the EPA/EPD. As a "general" rule, placement of facilities within the riparian zone (25' from stream) is considered practically inviolate.

Inner zone (25'-50') should be kept free from built facilities. Soft surface paths developed in accordance with the design standards would be permitted in this area.

The middle zone (50'-100') represents an area with greater environmental stability. Facilities could be developed with a greater range of surfaces. This area is associated with multi-use trails with a variety of surfaces. This is where a PATH type trail could be allowed in a greenway.

The Outer zone is the "buffer to the buffer". Parking lot, rest room facilities, trail head, etc are allowed here. Note that "multi-use trails which are listed in the city's CDP and 4' wide unpaved footpaths are considered exempt under the city's 75' stream buffer variance ("Riparian Buffer Requirements"- Chapter 74, Article VII) as stated in Sec. 74-205 of the code. No trail has exemptions in greenway properties and all have to comply with the SOP's per the consent decree.

The Greenway SOP's, Appendix M and N of the Greenway Plan, are posted on the City website at: http://greenway.usigis.com/CleanWaterAtlanta/Documents/Greenway_Acquisition_Plan.pdf

Appendix III: Steering Committee Members

Current: Mary Chapman (Landscape Architect), Clayton Dunn (Architect), Audrey Friedman (Morningside Place Townhomes), Charlotte Gillis (Landscape Architect), Rochelle Routman (Environmental Analyst), Stephen Rowell (adjacent landowner), Thomas Tomaka (Business Development), Brighton West (Trees Atlanta representative).

2004

Leslie Edwards (Georgia Native Plant Society), Jon Carlsten (Architect), Mary Chapman (Landscape Architect), Pete Cornish, Fred Crudder, Clayton Dunn (Architect), John Finck (Journalist), Charlotte Gillis (Landscape Architect), Rochelle Routman (Environmental Analyst), Stephen Rowell (adjacent landowner), Thomas Tomaka (Business Development), Brighton West (Trees Atlanta).

2002-2003

J. Walter Bland (Georgia Native Plant Society), Jon Carlsten (Architect), Mary Chapman (Landscape Architect), Pete Cornish, Fred Crudder, Clayton Dunn (Architect), John Finck (Journalist), Charlotte Gillis (Landscape Architect), Abby Goldsmith, Lynn Hennelly (Atlanta Audubon Rep.), Wriston Jones (Marketing research Analyst), Walter Kellar, Susan Robinson (Communication Analyst), Rochelle Routman (Environmental Analyst), Stephen Rowell (adjacent landowner), Thomas Tomaka (Business Development), Sherry Wheat (Landscape Architect)—chair person.

Appendix IV: Maps