

Stillhouse Bottom Natural Area—Fact Sheet

Compiled by Johnny Randall, Director of Conservation

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- The conservation of the overall Stillhouse Bottom area is a priority of both the county and state, as it lies within the Jordan Lake Macrosite (a large area of biodiversity importance) and supports over 100 plant species (some of which are disjunct from the mountains) and provides the deep forest habitat necessary for many migratory birds. Stillhouse Bottom is part of the greater Morgan Creek Bluffs Natural Area recognized in **Inventory of Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats of Orange County** (Sather and Hall 1988, Sorrie and Shaw 2004) as one of the most important natural areas in the county.
- Many of the trees that occur on the dry and rocky south- and west-facing slopes might not be as large as ones found in richer woods on deep soils, and are estimated to be between 250 and 300 years old. These slopes have never been clear-cut, which means that the site has been continuously forested since before European settlement.
- The Stillhouse Bottom area was originally owned by the Merritt family, who according to Dr. Kenneth Sugioka, used the land for some farming, select tree cutting, and “moonshining.” In the early 1960s the land was purchased by the Morgan Creek Land Company—whose partners included William Ivey, James Eder, Kenneth Sugioka, and others.
- As early as 1965, Dr. C. Ritchie Bell, then Director of the Botanical Garden, wrote to Mr. William Ivey: “Although the Bottom itself and the steep slope to the west of the Bottom are of primary importance and interest, enough of the area to the east of the Bottom, which is not quite so steep, should be included to ensure the protection of the character of the area and to furnish an access to the land now held by Duke Power Company should, through some miracle, this ever be made available as a whole or in part to the Garden.”
- Duke Power Company acquired the 18-acre holding from James Parks and Paul Reid in 1961 with the intention of running a high tension power transmission line across the area. Because of landowner opposition, the transmission line plan was abandoned, and in 1967 Richie Bell inquired about purchasing the tract. Duke Power declined to sell, but in 1985 offered to donate 7 acres to the North Carolina Botanical Garden Foundation, Inc. (Foundation) when they sold the remaining 11 acres to Alan and Sharon Snook for a home site. (The Foundation is the 501(c)3 non-profit land trust and support organization of the university affiliated North Carolina Botanical Garden.)
- In approximately 1983, James Eder (the ultimate sole owner of the Morgan Creek Land Company) donated 10 acres to the Foundation, adjacent to the Duke Power land gift, as open space compensation for lots he sold for development along Morgan Creek.
- The Duke Power and Eder land gifts helped create the 17-acre Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve, which became a state dedicated nature preserve in 2001. As such, Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve has the highest protection afforded natural areas in the state, but public access is limited to guided hikes sponsored by the Garden.

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- Five acres of conservation easements adjacent to the Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve were deeded to the Foundation by A.C. and Mary Bushnell and Arnie and Audie Schechter in the early 1980s.
- In 1993, Carol Ann McCormick, conducted a botanical survey of Stillhouse Bottom as one of the Garden's Conservation Projects. See: Carol Ann McCormick and P S White. 1993. **Conservation Project: the Nature Trail area, Coker Pinetum, and Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve: final report.** North Carolina Botanical Garden, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Garden staff renewed efforts in 1999 to contact various landowners within the greater Stillhouse Bottom area, where there is the potential to create a 100-acre nature preserve through a combination of land donations and purchases, and conservation easement donations. For example, the Ivey family were contacted by the Garden in order to establish a relationship and request that the Foundation be given first offer of refusal if they ever intend to sell their 5.6-acre lot within Stillhouse Bottom.
- The Iveys contacted the Foundation in 2007 about their intention to sell their lot, and a two-year Option to Purchase was established. The Option was extended another 12 months in October 2008. The extended Option expired in October 2009 and was not renewed because private fundraising was not successful (despite a well-attended event at the Botanical Garden featuring the Stillhouse Bottom Band).
- In early 2010, in a renewed effort to purchase the Ivey property, the Foundation held a fundraising event hosted by the Clark/Sawyer-Clarks. Private donations resulted from this event added to previous donation in addition to receiving public funding from the Town of Chapel Hill and the Orange County Lands Legacy Program.
- In November 2010, members of the Joslin family (all current or former Foundation board members and long-time Garden supporters) recognized the importance of Ivey property conservation, pooled their resources for the necessary purchase price. The Ivey family was contacted, a new contract was created, and the property was purchased on December 22, 2010.
- In honor of the Joslin family, who contributed to all areas of the Garden and beyond, the Ivey property was named the "Joslin Slope" at the post-purchase celebration. It is worth noting that Bill Joslin, who was largely responsible for many North Carolina environmental protection laws and initiatives, made Ivey property purchase his last conservation effort before his death in January, 2011.
- Efforts continue toward the creation of a 100-acre Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve. For information on how you can contribute to the conservation of this unspoiled Chapel Hill natural area, please contact Johnny Randall at the North Carolina Botanical Garden: jrandall@unc.edu or 919-923-0100.