

Stillhouse Bottom Natural Area—Fact Sheet

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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 or plowed, 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 Purks 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 Botanical Garden Foundation (the Foundation) when they sold the remaining 11 acres to Alan and Sharon Snook for a home site.
- In approximately 1983, at the long-time urging of Jean Stewart, 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 to 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.
- Julia Ivey (widow of William Ivey and owner) and Lentz Ivey (son) were contacted by the Garden in 1999 in order to establish a relationship with the Ivey property owners and to request that the Foundation be given first offer of refusal if they ever intend to sell.
- The Iveys contacted the Foundation in 2007 and informed us of their intention to sell the 5.6-acre tract for \$400,000. We entered into an Option to Purchase (Option) on 18 April 2007 for \$10,000. The Option was extended another 12 months in October 2008 for another \$10,000. The extended Option expired in October 2009 and was not renewed. The property was not listed for sale by the Ivey family after the Option expired.
- Since April 2007 the Foundation held two fundraising events (one at the Botanical Garden featuring the Stillhouse Bottom Band and one at the home of Heidi Sawyer-Clark and Kevin Clark). Approximately \$18,000 in private donations resulted from these events. The Foundation received \$34,000 from the Town of Chapel Hill and \$100,000 from the Orange County Lands Legacy Program (both the result of petitions to each government entity).
- In November 2010, subsequent to the Foundation's annual fall Board meeting, Board members David Joslin (Conservation Committee chair) and Nell Joslin, approached their parents, William and Mary Joslin – both former board members and long-time garden supporters, and Bill was a former Foundation president – regarding the importance of Ivey property conservation. The result of these discussions led to the contribution of \$200,000 from Bill and Mary, and \$10,000 each from both David and Nell. These contributions led to a renewed effort to purchase the Ivey property. The Ivey family was contacted, a new contract was drawn up, and we requested contributions from the Stillhouse Bottom neighbors who had pledged to contribute. The Foundation received \$17,000 from these neighbors and thus was able to raise the required \$400,000 asking price and closed on the property on December 22, 2010.
- We have the opportunity to now create a 100-acre nature preserve with a combination of land purchases and conservation easement donations. And to that end we have already received pledges of conservation easements and land gifts.
- For information on how you can contribute to the conservation of this pristine natural area in the heart of Chapel Hill, please contact Johnny Randall or Charlotte Jones-Roe at the North Carolina Botanical Garden: 919-962-0522.