

Backyard Briefs

A weekly column

By Judy Jessop, A Nature Conservancy Volunteer

A Tool For Planning

One of the goals of The Nature Conservancy is to identify and conserve important places within each of the many different types of habitats that exist along the rivers of the Albemarle. There are at least 16 different types of natural communities in the lower Roanoke River basin alone; each has differences in soil and vegetation, which in turn attracts different types of wildlife. As we move toward the sound and the Outer Banks the number of communities continues to increase, and it is this diversity of habitat that results in the unusual wealth of wildlife that harbor here. Some of these natural communities are already protected. The Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge for example, protects important bottomland hardwood forests with mixed oak/ash/hickory communities while the Plum Creek Conservation Land protects broad expanses of cypress/tupelo forest. There are however, many other types of wild places that could be lost as our region develops. With limited resources the Conservancy must carefully make the right choices about which wild places to include for future conservation.

With the development of their computerized mapping library and such folks as Mark Mobius, a graduate student with the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University, the Conservancy is making great strides to design a very useful tool for making such difficult choices. Mark has started by mapping, in a very special way, the lower Roanoke River basin. This map will show exactly where different types of natural communities (such as cypress/tupelo forests) are located. He then includes roads, railroads, community boundaries and the boundaries of wildlife refuges, parks and other preserves; elevation (or topography) of the land will also be depicted along with flooding patterns. One can see, for instance, not just where oak/hickory hardwood forests are situated, but also what roads run through them or nearby, how often they are flooded, or if they are within a park or preserve.

With such a map one can see where different types of habitats are located and if they are well suited for conservation. If you are curious about the map, come and take a look. Call The Nature Conservancy office in Windsor at 794-1818. If this mapping project works well it will be used in other areas as a valuable tool, in planning a future for our growing region, to preserve its unique and diverse character.