



“Seeding Resilience in Princeville II: Community-driven Adaptation to Climate” Implemented by Conservation Trust for North Carolina (CTNC)

“Through this funding opportunity, we developed formal partnerships [...]; we were able to continue capacity investments by offering multiple years of AmeriCorps and Conservation Corps youth and young adult job placements; and we laid the groundwork to better engage residents in environmental education, conservation solutions, and stormwater management best practices.”

- Chris Canfield, Executive Director

Project Summary - Part I. Description

Background or problem statement (why was the project carried out?)

This project is part of an ongoing, multi-faceted resilience engagement with and for the Town of Princeville, NC, the nation’s first town chartered by African Americans following emancipation. Princeville has been subject to repeated devastating floods. In this phase, project partners built on their history of learning and cooperation with the residents of Princeville to follow community-driven decision-making; move decisively from planning to implementation; build local knowledge and economic opportunity; and develop replicable strategies that address community environmental, economic, and social needs.

Participating organizations and geographic location(s) of the project

- Town of Princeville, NC
- Edgecombe County, NC
- NC State University, Coastal Dynamics Design Lab
- Conetoe Family Life Center
- Conservation Legacy/Conservation Corps NC
- AmeriCorps
- Temboo (New York)
- East Carolina University

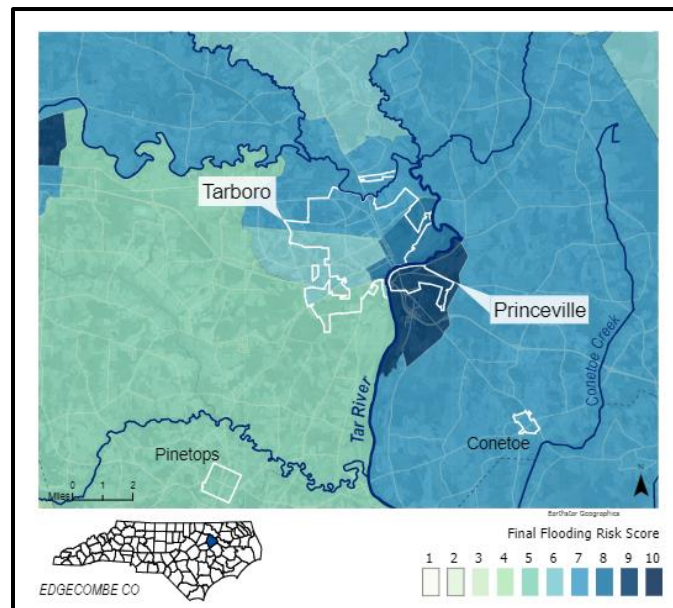


Figure 1: Edgecombe_FloodingRisk



General description of the project (what was done?)

The Seeding Resilience project team sought to expand successful stormwater management and community engagement models to the heart of Main Street. Complementing the newly re-opened Town Hall and Senior Center, tree plantings along Main Street now absorb excess stormwater, trap carbon emissions, and provide shade for pedestrians. Vacant, town-owned properties have been converted to managed wetlands that create a park-like amenity that captures standing water after flood events. At Heritage Park, a trail was installed adjacent to the newly constructed farmers' market (figure 2). Local youth were employed to build this section of trail that thematically connects the river to local produce. Lastly, to support a growing interest in locally-sourced produce (the town currently has no source of fresh vegetables), a community garden was constructed and developed through a community-led volunteer management approach.



Figure 2: Example of heritage walking trail and trees planted.



Figure 3: Crew members building a rain garden for stormwater capture.

Outcomes (what did the project achieve?).

The project achieved a goal that has been adopted by the residents of Princeville, Conservation Trust, and our network of partners – to model resilience from repeated flooding by implementing conservation solutions. Together, we galvanized residents to plan and implement a diverse range of conservation solutions from stormwater management (figure 3) to urban greening efforts to establishing a local food economy – all through creative land-use strategies.

With their proximity to the Tar River and placement in a historic floodplain, the residents of Princeville may experience flooding again; however, they are gaining a newfound appreciation for land and how it can provide safety and solace as the community rebuilds and maintains connections within its networks of people and place.



Project Summary - Part II. Analysis

Successes achieved

The most significant success resulting from the project has been the authentic partnerships that were established with local and regional stakeholders ranging from community planners, elected officials, business owners, residents, universities, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations. We were all brought together under the umbrella of implementing the deliverables of this grant opportunity; however, the relationships and ongoing commitment to sustaining Princeville's resilience will last long into the future. Without the collaborative nature of this group, the implementation of our conservation plan may have been achieved, but the buy-in and long-lasting investment from the community residents and partners will ensure a long-term successful future for the ideas and innovations that were seeded.

Challenges encountered

CTNC continues to strive to work at the speed of community throughout every aspect of our engagement with the Town of Princeville. During this Phase II engagement, we faced local capacity challenges that delayed the timeline of the project at every stage. Within the Town of Princeville, contractors, partners, service members, and volunteers continue to deal with challenges related to COVID-19, lack of access to materials, competing priorities and commitments, and a need to inspire and engage residents. CTNC and our partners worked together to manage these challenges and are grateful for the investment of funders like the Commission who understand that deadlines must shift to make space for local community involvement. By removing restrictive deliverables and deadlines, CTNC and Princeville were able to focus on funding vendors within Princeville and Edgecombe County as much as possible. We were able to be responsive to individual and community needs rather than feeling forced to make a difficult decision to shift funds to outside contracts to meet strict deadlines.

Lessons Learned

One of our greatest lessons learned happened when we expanded our reach and perspective beyond Princeville. In recent years, Town leaders and CTNC staff have partnered to share their project and experiences with stakeholders across the state and country through speaking engagements. What we hadn't done until recently was determine where we could learn from others. As the project shifted focus toward community agriculture, gardening, and food production, CTNC and Princeville staff began visiting like-organizations with expertise in public-private agriculture partnerships in service to communities.

We visited three community gardens and beginning farmer incubators being run by local governments and school districts and staffed in part by AmeriCorps or Conservation Corps members. They held discussions with their colleagues to learn how their operations started, what challenges they were met with, what lessons they learned, and how Princeville could model their successes for the betterment of their own residents. Organizing field trips to expand Princeville's expert networks and opportunities to learn new skill sets related to conservation, climate change, community agriculture, and community engagement will now be a regular part of our partnership together. We will still invest in capacity building, job creation, and funding implementation of projects – but we have a newfound appreciation for bringing knowledge in rather than just sending it out. A greater focus on soliciting lessons from like-

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organizations could have made the project more effective earlier in the life cycle of the grant. It is a commitment that we will replicate moving forward.

What next? Future impact and next steps

CTNC will continue to strive to work at the speed of community throughout every aspect of our engagement with the Town of Princeville. We will also continue to be a champion for an equitable approach to community engagement where nonprofits, elected leaders, grassroots organizations, and other key stakeholders can build effective partnerships to achieve common goals. The impacts of climate change will continue to threaten the health and well-being of communities across the state, country, and world. However, with a commitment to openness, inclusivity, collaboration, and power-sharing, we can find effective ways of working together to achieve resilience for those communities that need it most. Whether undertaking a conservation project or any other type of engagement, operating as an effective partner alongside communities begins with an understanding that relationships require trust, appreciation, expertise, and flexibility, to be successful.

For more information about the project, please visit/contact:

<https://ctnc.org/>

@: info@ctnc.org