



Chris Canfield and Jamilla Hawkins of the Conservation Trust for North Carolina.

MARY ALICE HOLLEY

Building Resilient,

Just Communities

During the summer, staff of the accredited Conservation Trust for North Carolina visited the small town of Princeville that has been repeatedly devastated by floodwaters. In 1999, Hurricane Floyd caused the Tar River to rise and the town was submerged. In 2016, Hurricane Matthew brought heavy flooding again. Princeville has yet to recover from either catastrophe.

This story is similar to the plight of many towns in North Carolina and across the country. Princeville is unique, though, in being the oldest town incorporated by African Americans in the nation. They were given few options for land on which to settle after emancipation. Since 1885, the people of Princeville have weathered many storms, and not just meteorological ones. Their resilience is deep, yet its limits are strained.

The town lies at the intersection of three issues that have been growing in urgency for CTNC: climate, community and equity.

Every piece of land we hope to protect is being affected by a more volatile climate. Not just hurricanes, as in Princeville, but also droughts, fires, infestations and other extremes. We have

already incorporated climate resilience models into our planning. We must go further. Land conservation can help with the rising climate crisis by storing carbon to reduce long-term effects and by providing increased natural resilience to inevitable changes.

We are inspired by the many land trusts who already make innovative connections between community needs and conservation. We commit ourselves to leading with questions before answers, and to working alongside neighbors often given no voice in decisions affecting them. The process of building trust will take years of work and lots of humility.

Humility also requires us to admit the limitations of conservation. Our system of land ownership and use has too often excluded and disregarded entire communities of people. Again, Princeville is symbolic. Our work must honor the stories of black, indigenous and other people of color who have felt the loss of access to productive land for living, farming and for preserving their heritage. Land is at the core of racial and other inequities. We must ensure that we don't worsen those realities and ultimately help change the system for the better.

Our staff and board embrace this new strategic vision. It builds on CTNC's history of bringing together uncommon alliances. Our goal is to conserve land in ways that inspire and enable people to build resilient, just communities. Led by our values, we will continuously learn, share, admit and care.

Many of our plans are new and yet to be verified. So we've entered our experiment mindful that it will often be more about *how* we work than *what* we do.

History dictated that Princeville be in the floodplain of a river. We can't change history. But, using the power of community and conservation together, we can change the future. 🌱

CHRIS CANFIELD IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CONSERVATION TRUST FOR NORTH CAROLINA. **JAMILLA HAWKINS** IS THE VICE CHAIR OF CTNC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

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