

The 2025 Bessie Boccock Carter Conservation Award Finalists

The Elizabeth River Garden Club: Eco-Landscape the Wilderness at Hoffler Creek Wildlife Preserve

The Elizabeth River Garden Club has partnered with Hoffler Creek Wildlife Foundation for 25 years to conserve a unique 142-acre urban wildlife preserve in the city of Portsmouth. Myriad native wildlife is supported by this natural oasis. Outdoor enthusiasts, birders, nature photographers, students, researchers, and even those leery of wild spaces have free access to walking trails and scenic views six days per week, year-round.

In recent years, ERGC funded a pollinator garden of native shrubs and perennials at the gates to the preserve. The garden beautifies the entrance and provides food for pollinators. Butterflies flutter amongst the flowers, bees buzz about, and birds feast on seeds. However, the entrance to the trail system, an old road, regularly floods and its openness undermines the surrounding natural habitat.

The Bessie Boccock Carter Conservation Award will fund the planting of native trees and shrubs to absorb rainwater, naturalize the area, and enhance wildlife habitat. Benches and plant identification signs will provide an immersive and educational experience for all visitors, especially those with disabilities, or unable to navigate the trails. This eco-landscape garden will create a sanctuary accessible to the public in the heart of the metropolis of Hampton Roads.

Hillside Garden Club: Access to Nature and Outdoor Learning on the Cosby Trail

Camp Kum-Ba-Yah Nature Center began as a summer day camp in 1950 where generations of children from all city neighborhoods have attended over the last 70-plus years. In 2021, the 42-acre property was placed in a conservation easement and the camp became the only nature center in the city expanding its mission to provide year-round natural space and environmental education for the entire community.

The 1.2-mile Cosby Trail is newly opened to the public and circumnavigates the property with accessibility to local neighborhoods from three entrances. The trail lacks a comprehensive marking system and identification of flora and fauna that would be of interest to hikers of this urban forest. Way-markers will encourage community visitors and school groups (including an adjacent 500-student elementary school) unfamiliar with hiking in the woods and invite currently hesitant residents to use the trail.

The Bessie Boccock Carter Conservation Award will fund interpretative signs identifying trees, plants, and habitat to promote familiarity and appreciation for wooded, natural areas and conservation in a city with limited and dwindling outdoor space. KBY is the location of Lynchburg's Historic Garden Week Tour "marketplace" and children's activities so the Way-marker project will be featured to HGW visitors.