Schafale and Weakley (1990); however, it will be included in an upcoming revision (Mike Schafale, pers. comm.). Several of these communities occur in the county as marginal-quality examples or represent uncertain identification. This is a respectable number of communities for a county the size of Wake, in part because the county lies along the Fall Line and thus contains a few Coastal Plain communities along with the bulk of the communities normally found in the lower Piedmont.

The following is a brief overview of the natural communities found in Wake County. Detailed descriptions of the vegetation typical for a given community can be found in Schafale and Weakley (1990), as well as in the individual site descriptions. This summary highlights the general geographic location, topographic position, and relative abundance of each community in the county, along with comments on related communities. The communities are arranged by moisture content and by soil pH, with terrestrial sites listed before palustrine (wetland) ones, and acidic soil communities listed before basic soil ones.

Terrestrial Communities

Granitic Flatrock. This is a rather rare natural community across its range, limited to scattered sites in the Piedmont from extreme southern Virginia into Alabama. Georgia has the bulk of flatrocks, but in North Carolina the majority are restricted to the Rolesville Pluton area of northeastern Wake County and Franklin County. Thus, this is arguably the most important natural community, on a global perspective, that Wake County has to offer. These sites, usually under an acre in size, typically consist of flat or relatively flat exposures of granite. Plant succession on the rock is very slow, with zoned mats of lichens, mosses, and other herbaceous plants. Some seepage across the rocks is often present. Woody vegetation grows around the perimeter of these herbaceous zones and may form “islands” within the flatrock. Species generally restricted to flatrocks include Appalachian sandwort (*Minuartia glabra*), fameflower (*Talinum teretifolium*), elf orpine (*Diamorpha smallii*), and the rare Small’s portulaca (*Portulaca smallii*).

Piedmont/Coastal Plain Acidic Cliff. This is a rare natural community in the state, and examples are normally small in size (well under an acre). They typically are found along streams or rivers, especially on north-facing slopes where the stream or river has migrated southward over time and undercut or eroded into the slope. Ziegle’s Rock in the Great Bend of the Neuse Natural Area was formerly an excellent example, but the lower half of the cliffs were flooded by Falls Lake. Perhaps the only good example in Wake County is at Hemlock Bluffs State Natural Area, where there are near vertical exposures of rock and soil mostly free of trees and shrubs. A scattering of the locally rare Canada hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) grows on the cliffs.

Piedmont/Coastal Plain Heath Bluff. As with the Acidic Cliff, this community is found primarily on steep, north-facing slopes and bluffs. Wake County has a modest number (probably several dozen) of heath bluffs, scattered over the county, from Falls Lake in the north to Middle Creek in the south. Unlike the Acidic Cliff, this community contains a dense shrub zone, with or without a canopy, on the slopes. Most heath bluffs are dominated by the evergreen mountain