

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015

Wake Soil & Water Conservation District



Mission: *To protect the natural resources of Wake County through voluntary technical, educational and funding assistance to citizens, businesses, communities, municipalities and partners.*



2015 Year in Review

Wake County



Highlights

2,205

Farmland acres protected by Conservation Management Plans

1 New Initiative

Cover Crops Program launched with Wake County farmers representing 6,800 acres of cropland

74

Educators trained in conservation education

\$63,689

Federal and state funds to landowners installing conservation practices

34

Cost Share contracts

645

Acres of BMPs installed

1,801

Volunteers engaged in environmental stewardship

Beginning Again

Well we did it! We survived our 49th year by returning to our roots... literally and historically! The 2014 – 2015 fiscal year was recorded with many benchmarks:

- ⌚ During the Fall of 2014, we launched a new “old” initiative by encouraging the increased use of cover crops for soil health and water quality protection. The *new* twist adds a diversity of cover crop varieties and recommendations for new residue management. Although this *new* cover crop practice uses modern technology and new data, the “keep-it-covered” dialogue takes us back to our core roots in soil conservation.
- ⌚ In the Winter, our very own John Y. Phelps Jr. received the 2015 Hall of Fame Award from NCASWCD. Only one other Wake Supervisor has ever received this prestigious award.
- ⌚ The Spring of 2015 kicked off with record attendance at the 10th Annual Keeping the Farm Workshop.
- ⌚ After 30 years of service in the Wake District, Teresa Hice retired from Wake County Government. Rebecca Wescott was hired as the new Conservationist on the block.
- ⌚ The Wake District joined the world in celebrating 2015 as the International Year of Soils.
- ⌚ And, we promoted and supported *DigIt! The Secrets of Soils* Smithsonian Exhibit, bringing thousands to Wake County.

We exhausted our allocation of state funds into contracts for BMPs and we maintained consistent implementation of conservation practices that protect water quality and soil health.

With all the added tasks, our focus never strayed from our main mission: to assist farm and forest landowners who reach out to the Wake District for our services and technical assistance. This report provides a summary of our accomplishments for FY15.

The staff continues to work as efficiently as possible and to seek help for our landowners from our partnering conservation organizations in addressing all natural resource concerns. Wake District will do our best to meet the needs of Wake County’s farmers and to achieve the goals of Wake County Board of Commissioners.

We look forward to continued success while celebrating our 50th year as North Carolina’s capital Soil and Water Conservation District.

Thomas R. Dean, Board of Supervisors Chairman
Wake Soil and Water Conservation District

Wake County's Conservation Team – Staff and Leaders

Wake County Soil and Water Conservation Department

County Staff

Teresa Furr, Natural Resources Conservationist
Sheila Jones, Environmental Educator
Dale Threatt-Taylor, District Director
Josh Vetter, Natural Resources Conservationist
Vonnie Wescott, Natural Resources Conservationist

AmeriCorps Staff

Sam Stokes, Service Member

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Raleigh Field Office Staff

Matthew Kinane, District Conservationist
Themis Stone, Soil Conservationist

Special Soils Project

Larry Sink, Soil Scientist

Elected and appointed officials

Wake Soil and Water Conservation District

Board of Supervisors

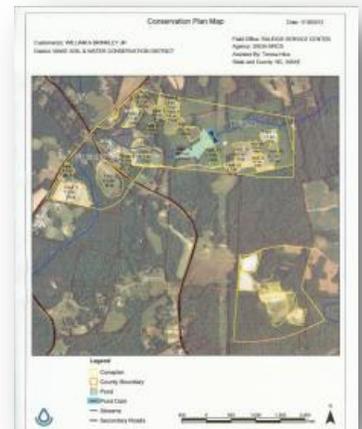
Thomas Dean, Chair
William Cole, Vice-Chair
Patrick Johnson, Secretary – Treasurer
Matt Overby
Jennifer Wadsworth

Associate Board of Supervisors

David Adams	Quincy Adams	Marilyn Grolitzer
Robin Hammond	Sam Laurie	Larry Perry
John Phelps	John Rogers	Carlyle Teague
Matthew Whitfield	Donnie Woodlief	

Voluntary Agricultural District Advisory Committee

Patrick Johnson, Chair



Natural Resource Conservationist Teresa Hice with former Soil Conservationist Lawrence Matheson at the Annual Conservation Awards Celebration.

Both now enjoy retirement after having served more than 70 combined years of service!

Technical Services

Water Quality Protection

Best Management Practice and Conservation on the Land

Wake County Board of Commissioners' Goal: Community Partnership and Economic Development

Objective: Work with Wake County's farm and agribusiness communities to facilitate their efforts for farmland preservation and economic viability.

The Wake Soil and Water Conservation District is at the forefront of natural resources work and water quality protection. The District strategically focuses its projects on priority watersheds, impaired streams, and state- and federal- targeted funding areas for water quality improvements. The priority areas are Falls Lake, Little River, Swift Creek and Jordan Lake... all drinking water supply watersheds. Priority is then directed to rural areas that have EPA 303(d) impaired streams and working lands active in farm, forest, and local food production. Work is directed to match the resource concerns. The District responds to all natural resources concerns with collaborative funding projects to address stormwater erosion issues, but state funds are limited. Landowners and farmers pay a shared cost amount towards each project.



Natural Resource Conservationist Josh Vetter works with USDA NRCS Engineer Pete Crawford to design the best practices available to improve water quality in watersheds across Wake County.

Both new handheld GPS units and traditional survey equipment are used to evaluate slope, soil loss and collect other data.

Conservation plans and practices are implemented to correct problems and eliminate nutrient runoff to streams and water supply sources. Protecting soil health is critical in protecting water quality.



Accomplishments

- ★ **2,205.2 acres** of comprehensive **Conservation Management Plans** were written to protect natural resources on forest and farmland.
- ★ **645 acres** of **Conservation Best Management Practices** were installed to protect and improve water quality.
- ★ **1,542.5 tons** of **Sediment** was prevented from reaching streams and rivers by completed conservation practices.
- ★ **426 site visits** were made by District staff to **Wake County farms**.
- ★ **6,150 pounds** of Nitrogen was reduced with installed Best Management Practices, protecting watersheds in Wake County.
- ★ **2,795 pounds** of Phosphorus was reduced with installed Best Management Practices.

Our Conservationists recommend that cotton grown in eastern Wake County be planted using No-till to add organic matter and reduce soil erosion.

Wake County Board of Commissioners' Goal: Community Partnership and Economic Development

Objective: Continue collaborative efforts with all economic development partners to attract new jobs, retain jobs, and provide training to individuals in transition.

To assist landowners with conservation actions, the Wake District matches projects with outside funding sources, including federal and state conservation programs. The North Carolina



Agricultural Cost Share program funds water quality and conservation projects that require a 25% match on a set rate for area counties. Wake County's cost is, on average, higher; therefore the landowner's share typically exceeds 25%. Essentially all public and private lands are eligible for the programs. Eligible participants include landowners, businesses, schools, community groups and local government.

Accomplishments

- ★ **\$1,338,600** EEP funds encumbered for easement and stream restoration mitigation work.
- ★ **34 cost share contracts** were written to address natural resource problems and improve water quality.
- ★ **\$220,058 funds** were **encumbered** from Federal and State sources to implement conservation practices with completed designs per USDA NRCS Engineering Technical Specifications/Guide.
- ★ **\$63,689 funds** in reimbursements were **paid to Wake County landowners** from federal and state funds for completed contracts on conservation practices installed.

Follow the ECONOMIC IMPACT of just **ONE** conservation practice being installed to repair and prevent erosion on one average day – for example, an Engineered Grassed Waterway.

Immediate impacts:

The project employs a construction firm with a dozer or heavy-equipment driver, a tractor driver, and farm labor.

Local wholesalers and retail suppliers receive revenues from the purchases of diesel fuel, seed, fertilizer, construction netting, and straw or excelsior.

Branch Bank or Farm Credit provides capital to farm landowners to invest in the conservation project.

Long-term impacts:

Municipalities have a reduced cost of water treatment in drinking water supply watersheds due to less sediment.

Downstream estuaries have healthier breeding grounds for North Carolina's profitable fishing industry due to reduced amount nutrients.

The farm is profitable due to the increase in crop yields and the reduction in expenses from fertilizers and other nutrient inputs.

Environmental Education, Volunteer, and Outreach Services

Educated and Engaged Citizens

Wake County Board of Commissioners' Goal: Community Health and Vitality

Objective: Work with leaders in private and public sectors to organize and implement the healthiest Capital County Initiative in order to build opportunities for healthy lifestyles and better health outcomes for all Wake County residents.

Wake District engages citizens of all ages in learning the science and importance of natural resources, watersheds, and community conservation through best education, management and stewardship practices. Wake District leads in implementing adult workshops and trainings. Trained educators can then teach many more students, maximizing Wake District's outreach. Through Wake District's experiential youth programs, Wake County students achieved top honors, receiving scholarships, cash prizes, and public recognition.

By organizing volunteer projects, Wake District provides students with a chance to earn community service hours and people of all ages with the opportunity to practice environmental stewardship first-hand. Each fall and spring volunteers actively participate in Wake County Big Sweep, coordinated by the Soil and Water Conservation Department.



Wake County Envirothon teams dive into aquatic ecology to prepare for regional and statewide competition.



Our Conservationists teach high school students the importance of soils, topography, and best management practices in protecting water quality at the Resource Conservation Workshop.

- ★ **3,428 citizens** were assisted with **environmental information** to increase landowner and homeowner understanding of erosion and nutrient loading problems.
- ★ **74 Educators** trained in **Environmental Education** to maximize potential outreach to **27,008** learners.
- ★ **251 hours** donated to Wake County Soil and Water Conservation Department by **USDA Earth Team volunteers** to provide administrative support for office operations.

Wake County's Leadership Provides Environmental Education and Farm Landowner Training



Fifth grade Conservation Poster Contest winners, from across Wake County, are honored at Wake Soil and Water Conservation District's 49th Annual Conservation Awards Celebration in December.

Wake County Board of Commissioner Sig Hutchinson and Elizabeth Gardner from WRAL TV-5 presented the awards to the top ten students and the 1st place winner.



- ★ **732 business professionals, consultants and community partners collaborated** with staff to leverage resources for conservation efforts in Wake County.
- ★ **188 Wake County landowners** attended the 10th Annual Keeping the Farm Workshop in January.
- ★ **Farmers from Apex to Zebulon** attend a special **Cover Crops** meeting with the Wake District to discuss their interest in the increasing the use of cover crops in Wake County.



At the 10th Annual Keeping the Farm Workshop, Wake County landowners pack the Commons building to learn about important updates that impact their farm operations. The annual workshop is a group effort between the Soil and Water Conservation Department, private organizations, forestry and agricultural conservation groups, educational institutions and federal, state, and local governmental agencies.

Wake County Big Sweep Program Provides Volunteer Opportunities



- ★ **1,801 Volunteers** collected **17,594 lbs. of litter** for cleaner streams, lakes and wetlands through coordination of the **Wake County Big Sweep program.**
- ★ **7,949 lbs.** of recyclable materials diverted from Wake County landfill
- ★ **4,760 hours** of donated **volunteer services** saved Wake County **\$103,712.** (Estimated value by *Independent Sector*)

Wake County Big Sweep volunteers clean up upper Crabtree Creek by canoe and kayak.

Additional FY15 Accomplishments

- Hosted a farmer discussion for the Local Work Group Session to gather their input on the District's work goals for the upcoming year.
- Natural Resource Conservationist Josh Vetter received intense cover crop training to launch new initiative in Wake County.
- Worked with Wake County Agribusiness Council to host spring tour at turf grass facility at NCSU.
- Associate Board Member John Y. Phelps, Jr. received the 2015 NCASWCD Hall of Fame award.
- Department Director selected as President of the Soil and Water Conservation Society North Carolina (Hugh Hammond Bennett) Chapter.
- AmeriCorps selected Wake County Soil and Water Conservation Department as a host site for AmeriCorps member to work on new Dry Hydrant project.



For more information about this report please contact:
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