

# Soil & Water e-Sources



vol. I, December 2006

## Stateside Statewide

by Manly Wilder, Director



As I complete my first year as director, I appreciate your support, cooperation and enthusiasm as we tackled new ideas, projects and initiatives. By working together, we have generated support for our programs and established new partnerships. I look forward to the challenges and opportunities during the coming year. Through teamwork with our conservation partners, we have an opportunity to make a difference in conservation.

Development of the 2007 division budget was completed in October and DENR has now submitted the priorities to the governor's office. The division received support for the following:

Extend CREP to Addt'l. Watersheds	2 positions	\$ 711,610
Expand Division Engineering Staff	3 positions	317,390
Community Conservation Program	1 position	245,037
ACSP-TA		85,000
ACSP-FA		300,000
	6 positions	\$ 1,659,037

Fall area meetings went well with good attendance and discussion. Districts were updated on a number of issues, including budget, legislation and district technician job approval authority. Printed fall updates were distributed at the area meetings.

With regard to community conservation, we are now placing emphasis on moving beyond the new legislation to developing rules and regulations, program policy and operating guidelines.

District technician job approval authority continues to be an issue. It was discussed in detail at the recent business meetings and a report was presented to the N.C. Environmental Review Commission on Nov. 15.

Division and district staff were active and supportive at the state fair exhibits, including the DENR and Farmland Preservation stops in the “Our Land–Our Legacy” tent and the soil and water exhibit. Thanks to all who helped.

In early October, Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources Richard Rogers held a planning session for all divisions under his leadership at the Trinity Center in Pine Knoll Shores. This provided an opportunity to learn more about other divisions and to study how programs can work together and focus on meeting the resource issues of working lands. The development of a strategic plan for our state’s natural resources is underway and I believe Richard’s leadership and experience will be a valuable asset in taking working lands conservation to a higher level.

On Oct. 17, I represented DENR Secretary Bill Ross at a steering committee meeting to create a strategic plan for biofuels development in North Carolina. This initiative resulted from an act passed by the last session of the legislature that requires a plan be developed by Jan. 15, 2007. Dean Johnny Wynn, N.C. State University, Steve Burke, N.C. Biotechnology Center, Billy Ray Hall, N.C. Rural Economic Development Center and N.C. Secretary of Revenue Norris Tolson are leading the steering committee.

On Oct. 20, I accompanied DENR Deputy Secretary Dempsey Benton, staff from NRCS and Cecil Settle on a tour of several wetland restoration projects in Hyde County. DENR is providing technical assistance dollars to NRCS to help accelerate the wetland restoration program.

The division has also been contacted by EPA in Atlanta regarding their interest in coming to North Carolina this winter to conduct training for swine farmers. There are meetings planned in the next several weeks and I will keep you informed if these activities move beyond the discussion and planning phase.

The partnership business meetings were held in Morganton on Oct. 24, Burlington on Oct. 25 and Greenville on Nov. 1. All the meetings were well attended with 65 districts being represented. Richard Rogers attended the Morganton and Greenville meetings.

The meetings focused on legislative, budget and NRCS management and staffing updates, ACSP and technical quality, and the rescission of district technician job approval authority. They were conducted in an informal atmosphere, with much discussion and feedback. Communication was positive which permitted Mary Combs and I to get into greater detail on issues of interest to district chairmen. Overall, those attending expressed appreciation for the meetings.

The meetings brought home one central issue: We can never communicate too frequently or in too much detail with districts and district employees. We all need to keep districts informed and involved in actions that affect them. The earlier districts are brought into the communication process, the better the chance our future plans have of succeeding.

I understand this series of partnership business meetings was a first for North Carolina districts. The gatherings met and exceeded my expectations. We should consider this type meeting in future years, both as a general update for districts and as an effective way to address new and specific issues of interest to staff.

## Districtly Speaking

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by Lynn Sprague, District Operations



Soil and water conservation districts are being re-discovered as one of the few delivery systems that have a working relationship with landowners. Having this relationship with landowners, districts can get conservation on the ground through hard work. You have a proven track record.

Plans for the annual meeting to be held Jan. 7-9 in Wilmington are well underway. Based on the number of hotel rooms reserved, we are looking at one of the

largest annual meetings ever. If you have not reserved your hotel room, district offices have been given information on additional available hotels or you can contact Donna Stearns at the division office. We will go out of our way to help you get settled and participating at this important meeting.

One special note on the annual meeting: New Hanover Soil and Water Conservation District is offering a bus tour of community conservation sites that will include downtown Wilmington, Preservation Park and historical Airlie Gardens. The tour departs at 2:00 pm on Sunday, Jan. 8 from the Hilton Wilmington Riverside and will return by 5:00 pm. There is no charge for the tour, but we ask interested participants to RSVP to Donna Stearns at (919) 733-2302, or [Donna.Stearns@ncmail.net](mailto:Donna.Stearns@ncmail.net).

### ***Workshops on Voluntary Ag Districts***

Former area coordinator Jerry Dorsett has been working with DENR's One NC Naturally program for more than a year. Jerry is responsible for working lands conservation and private lands stewardship. Through his efforts, many districts are now considering creating voluntary agriculture districts and conservation easements.

Jerry recently organized regional workshops for district employees to learn more about working with land trusts and land protection tools. They were held on Dec. 12 in Greensboro and Dec. 13 in Swannanoa. If you were unable to attend, contact Jerry at (336) 771-5000 to obtain a copy of the material given out at these sessions.

### ***NCASWCD Looks Ahead***

The N.C. Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts has been taking major steps to increase capabilities. Last spring's Conservation Awareness Day was very successful in raising public awareness about the important work and programs of districts. Next year's Conservation Awareness Day is planned for March 21, 2007, and we are hoping for even greater results. In addition, the association's strategic planning committee is considering ways to better utilize the officer positions, the hiring of an administrative assistant by next fall and how to secure long-term finances. To a degree, the business sessions this fall showed the conservation partnership in somewhat of a

transition. However, being proactive as changes occur can actually strengthen the partnership.

## ***Supervisor Training***

Soil and Water Conservation Commission policy requires that re-appointed supervisors attend training at the Institute of Government at UNC-Chapel Hill. Elected officials are also urged to attend. The next two-day training is scheduled for Feb. 13-14, 2007. Registration materials are being developed and will be distributed soon.

## **BMPs and Beyond**

*by David Williams, NPS Programs*



### ***Agriculture Cost Share Program (ACSP)***

The Division is working with a subcommittee of the Technical Review committee to conduct an overall performance assessment of the ACSP. The objectives of the assessment are to:

- 1) Assess the efficiency and effectiveness of program implementation at the state and local level.
- 2) Assess the degree to which the program is meeting the needs of working lands conservation and water quality protection.
- 3) Assess the extent to which the installed practices cost effectively address the resource problems on individual farms. The committee will solicit feedback from districts and recent cost share participants in the winter of 2007 and will also assess a sampling of BMP implementation sites from a technical quality standpoint. Completion of the assessment is expected by May 2007.

The division has nearly completed the process for hiring a computer programmer to assist with the ACSP database upgrade project. When completed, this new web-based database will enable districts to develop and submit cost share contracts over the Internet and division staff will be able to review and approve contracts electronically. The project is expected to be ready for evaluation by districts by the summer of 2007.

## ***Poultry Mortality Gasification Demonstration Project***

The General Assembly appropriated \$200,000 to the division to implement a demonstration project for innovative poultry mortality gasification, a promising system that offers potential advantages in odor, air quality and fuel costs. Eight districts requested \$407,813 to fund 14 applications. At its November meeting, the Soil and Water Conservation Commission allocated funds to seven districts. The commission also approved an increase in the actual cost cap for the gasification systems. The chart below shows the type and size of poultry operation and the size of the gasification unit for each of the seven districts receiving an allocation.

<b>Allocation of Poultry Mortality Gasification Project Funds</b>				
<b>District</b>	<b>Type of Operation</b>	<b>Size of Operation</b>	<b>Size of Unit</b>	<b>Total Allocation</b>
Edgecombe	Broilers	52,000	250	\$21,984
Martin	Broilers	83,200	250	\$21,984
Chatham	Breeder	55,000	500	\$27,670
Harnett	Broilers	96,000	500	\$27,670
Onslow	Broilers	132,000	500	\$27,670
Pender	Turkey	22,000	500	\$27,670
Wilkes	Broilers	145,000	1,200	\$45,350
				<b>\$200,000</b>

Since this technology has been approved for cost share and EQIP, districts are encouraged to work with their poultry growers to take advantage of these demonstrations to help increase awareness of the new technology.

Growers who are considering this as an alternative to incineration may want to explore opportunities to apply for the USDA 9006 Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements Program. For more information on this grant/loan program, contact Rossie Bullock with USDA Rural Development at (910) 739-3349, or [Rossie.Bullock@nc.usda.gov](mailto:Rossie.Bullock@nc.usda.gov).

## ***Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)***

The Clean Water Management Trust Fund has awarded CREP an additional \$6.5 million grant to continue acquiring and stewarding 30-year and permanent easements. The grant also includes funds to reimburse districts for their assistance in the long-term, bi-annual monitoring of CREP easements, beginning in the sixteenth year of each easement. CREP staff is continuing to work with landowners and district staff to convert existing CREP contracts to permanent easements. This process has piqued interest from many landowners and we are excited to offer this opportunity. The deadline for applications is Dec. 29.

CREP was also awarded a \$7,100 grant from the Division of Water Quality-Coastal Nonpoint Source Section to conduct a targeted outreach effort for nine coastal counties. The division will use geographic information system technology to analyze pertinent data layers to identify specific locations on farmland where buffers are needed. The information will then be used to target marketing and outreach efforts to specific landowners to focus CREP enrollment in areas of environmental concern. The counties included in the project are Beaufort, Bertie, Chowan, Craven, Gates, Hertford, Hyde, Pamlico and Washington.

## ***Neuse and Tar-Pamlico River Basins***

The Basin Oversight Committee (BOC) for the Neuse River Basin reported to the Environmental Management Commission that agriculture had achieved further reductions in nitrogen loss in 2005, bringing the total reduction to 44 percent in the Neuse relative to the 1991-95 baseline. The Tar-Pamlico BOC reported that nitrogen loss reductions had improved to 49 percent relative to the 1991 baseline and that the goal of no net increase in phosphorus loss had been achieved. The commission acknowledged the significant progress that the agricultural sector has made.

The Division of Soil and Water Conservation and the Division of Water Quality have scheduled two meetings to solicit district input on the initial draft of the Neuse Basinwide Plan. The meetings are scheduled for Dec. 11 in Kinston and Dec. 14 in Raleigh. Districts are encouraged to attend one or both of the meetings to learn about

areas of specific water quality concern and to provide information about local resource needs.

### ***Impaired/Impacted Streams Initiative (IISI)***

The division will soon be distributing impaired and impacted streams surveys to districts. The IISI is an association initiative through which districts will conduct a detailed needs and opportunity assessment for impaired and impacted streams in their district. The voluntary surveys, which are due in February, will be used to guide allocation of the Impaired/Impacted Streams Earmark of ACSP funds for streams impacted by agriculture and to guide priorities for future grant proposals. For more information, contact Jill Slankas at (919) 715-6110, or [Jill.Slankas@ncmail.net](mailto:Jill.Slankas@ncmail.net).

### ***High Rock Lake Watershed***

The division has received Resource Assessment Survey results from most of the High Rock Lake Watershed districts. The results are being compiled into a Watershed Resource Assessment Summary and will be distributed to participating districts for review in December. Those districts will then hold stakeholder meetings to identify more local concerns and opportunities for water quality improvement.

## **Technicalities**

*by Vernon Cox, Technical Services*



### ***Community Conservation Assistance Program***

The TRC workgroup for the Community Conservation Assistance Program has identified about a dozen practices to be included in the initial phase of the program. We plan to submit these to the full TRC this month. We are also finalizing an agreement with Dr. Bill Hunt of NCSU in support of the CCAP.

This contract includes a design manual and a series of training sessions for design and maintenance of practices. Training will begin in April 2007.

### ***SB 1598***

The report regarding animal waste technical specialists and district technician job approval authority has been submitted to the Environmental Review Commission of

the General Assembly. This report is intended to let the general assembly know of the issues resulting from the recent decisions of the Professional Engineers Board. Actions and recommendations to the commission range from the short-term solution of district technicians continuing to provide technical services (while relying on the job approval authority of NRCS employees) up to and including possible legislative remedies. We will keep you informed as this issue develops.

### ***New Hire***

Nick Hong has been hired as the new environmental engineer in the Fayetteville region. Nick recently received his professional engineers license in environmental engineering. He will be training with Pete Crawford in the Pittsboro Technical Services Office. After he completes his training period, Nick will be located in the Fayetteville Regional Office. Nick can be reached at (919) 542-2244, ext. 115 or, [Nick.Hong@ncmail.net](mailto:Nick.Hong@ncmail.net).

### ***Staff Vacancies***

The division has vacant soil scientist positions in Guilford and Wake counties. An environmental engineering position remains open in the Wilmington region. We will be interviewing for these positions later this month and would like to fill them by the end of the year.

## **More SWC News and Updates**

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### ***Soil & Water Districts Celebrate 70 Years of Conservation***



The coming year will mark the 70th anniversary of North Carolina's first conservation district, also considered the first conservation district in the nation. Thanks to the hard

work of Hugh Hammond Bennett, the Brown Creek District was founded in Anson County on Aug. 4, 1937.

A native of Wadesboro, Hammond Bennett led the early soil conservation movement in the United States convincing government leaders that soil erosion was a problem that deserved national attention. He is largely credited with the modern conservation partnership structure that includes federal, state and local governments working together with local districts to support natural resource conservation programs on private lands.

Throughout 2007, the division and districts will celebrate this milestone through special events and educational outreach. One such event is Conservation Awareness Day scheduled for March 21.

### ***Conservation BMPs at Work***

As part of the NCASWCD annual meeting, a Community Conservation Tour of Wilmington's historic Airlie Gardens will be offered on Sunday, Jan. 7. Besides downtown Wilmington, the tour will feature historic Airlie Gardens and Preservation Park, sites selected especially for their extensive use of best management practices, or BMPs.

Airlie Gardens, established in 1901, is a valuable cultural and ecological component of North Carolina. The 67-acre garden was purchased by New Hanover County in 1999 with funding from the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Airlie is known for its formal gardens, historic structures, wildlife, view of Bradley Creek and commitment to preservation and environmental education.

Airlie tour highlights will include stormwater management practices such as use of pervious materials, rain gardens, constructed wetlands and riparian buffers. Participants also will hear about Airlie's history, visit the newly installed oyster reef, and explore the extensive flora and fauna of the gardens. Native species found there include herons, egrets, swans, ospreys and Venus fly traps.

The Preservation Park subdivision received the 2005 Lower Cape Fear Stewardship Development Award for Significant Achievement. The award recognizes developments in Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties that protect water quality, preserve wildlife habitat and open space, use innovative stormwater management and more. Preservation Park is a clustered development where, to preserve natural areas, nine single-family lots are located within one acre of the entire three-acre tract. Other features include nature trails, community garden space, constructed wetlands and green building techniques.

### ***SWC Environmental Educators Honored***

Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue joined DSWC Director Manly Wilder and DENR's Office of Environmental Education on Nov. 17 in honoring 257 educators who have completed a comprehensive certification program designed to enhance science-based environmental education in North Carolina schools.

The nationally recognized N.C. Environmental Education Program is the first program of its kind in the country and has been used as a model by other states. Program participants complete 200 hours of professional development, including instructional workshops, and 50 hours of outdoor experiences, knowledge of environmental education resources and facilities, a teaching component and a community environmental stewardship effort.

"The environmental education certification program provides educators with the skills needed to engage children and adults in learning about the environment," said Bill Ross, secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. "This program is adding educators around the state who can inspire our children in the areas of math and science while building a generation of adults who are capable of addressing our most pressing environmental challenges."

Perdue said that environmental education is essential across the school curriculum. "Studies have shown that outdoor hands-on learning is strongly correlated with increased academic performance and can have a positive effect on some of our most troubling threats to childhood health, including obesity and Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder. We are extremely proud that North Carolina is leading the nation in the number of certified environmental educators.”

The Division of Soil and Water Conservation is especially proud of the 15 division and district staff members who were honored at the event. They include Charlie Bass, Steve Bennett, Kay Bullard, Mamie Caison, Carolyn Garris, Sue Glover, Valerie Harris, Drucilla Harrison, Pamela Hawkins, Gail Heathman, Kelly Ibrahim, Ralston James, Jr., Shelly Miller, Leanna Staton and Sandra Weitzel.



***L-R: Manly Wilder, Carolyn Garris, Sue Glover, Kelly Ibrahim, Beverly Purdue, Pamela Hawkins, Charles Bass, Gail Heathman and Leanna Staton following the Nov. 17 EEC awards ceremony.***

### ***Thanks to Fair Volunteers***

Many thanks to all who volunteered to help with the soil and water conservation booth at the N.C. State Fair in October. During the week of the fair, volunteers worked more than 250 hours. That does not include the time and hard work that went into designing and creating exhibit materials in the weeks leading up to the fair. Your enthusiasm and initiative in promoting the work of conservation districts is truly appreciated.

### ***Distinguished Service Award***

Envirothon Coordinator Steve Bennett received the Distinguished Service to Science Education Award at the recent N.C. Science Teachers Association conference in Greensboro. The awards program recognizes educators who exhibit excellence in their area of science education and have made significant contributions to science education beyond their local area.

## ***DEA Needs YOU***

Membership in the North Carolina District Employee Association is open to all full and part-time employees of N.C. Soil and Water Conservation Districts, district supervisors, federal and/or state employees and other affiliates who work closely with districts. The DEA strives to:

- Strengthen the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts of North Carolina.
- Provide assistance and information to the local boards of supervisors, and to the employees of the districts to resolve problems related to renewable natural resource conservation.
- Assist any agency, organization, municipality, group or individual who supports the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of North Carolina in the spirit of cooperation, sound conservation practice and proper land use.
- Promote, create, and improve efficiency in the operations of the district offices of the counties of the state.
- Provide a vehicle for personal development of district employees and to assist them to better fulfill their responsibilities.
- Promote membership within the association.
- Enhance the positions of district employees to make our positions more professional, educate the public of our duties and responsibilities and to have an opportunity to give and receive information on state committees.
- Work for certification to augment employees' education and increase their general knowledge.

If you are not currently a DEA member, please visit their Web site to learn more about the organization: <http://nc.ncdea.org/>.

## ***NCASWCD Annual Meeting in Wilmington Jan. 7-9***

The N.C. Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' annual meeting will be held Jan. 7-9, 2007 at the Hilton Riverside in Wilmington. This year's meeting theme is "Private Lands – Public Benefits: Meeting the needs of society and the environment." For information on registration and a meeting agenda, contact Donna Stearns at (919) 715-6094, or visit <http://www.ncaswcd.org/>.

## **Conservation Awareness Day: March 21, 2007**

North Carolina's Conservation Awareness Day, an outreach event sponsored by the N.C. Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, is planned for March 21 on Halifax Mall across from the general assembly building. The annual event helps familiarize lawmakers with the work and outreach of the state's 96 soil and water conservation districts. Activities planned for the day include exhibits, musical entertainment and a fish fry.

## **New Look for [www.NCASWCD.org](http://www.NCASWCD.org)**

If you haven't checked out the state association Web site lately, be sure to soon. We have revised, updated, edited, reorganized and more. As always, suggestions and comments are welcome. Let us know what you would like to see on that site or what you think needs revising by contacting Bridget Munger, public information officer with the division, at (919) 715-6680, or [Bridget.Munger@ncmail.net](mailto:Bridget.Munger@ncmail.net).



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

