



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Release: Immediate
Date: Feb. 11, 2009

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STATE ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY NAMES LEADERSHIP TEAM

RALEIGH – N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Dee Freeman today announced his selection of a new chief deputy/chief operating officer and new assistant secretary for natural resources, and the reorganization of the department's information systems function, effective March 2, 2009.

Freeman promoted Manly Wilder, currently DENR's assistant secretary for Natural Resources, as the department's new chief deputy/chief operating officer. Responsibilities of the department's chief deputy secretary include coordinating the agency's budget and management functions with its programmatic activities. Wilder replaces Chief Deputy Secretary Bill Laxton, who has served in that role since April 2007. Laxton has decided that his principal focus at this point in his life will be to spend time with his family; therefore, he will be leaving the department in order to enjoy his grandchildren and the opportunity to travel with his wife.

Wilder, who has a bachelor's degree from N.C. State University and a master's degree from George Washington University, began his work with DENR as the director of the Division of Soil and Water Conservation. Prior to working at DENR, he served in a variety of key roles – including deputy chief for strategic planning and budget analysis – during a 35-year career with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Filling the assistant secretary for Natural Resources role will be David W. Knight, the current director of government relations for The Nature Conservancy. In his new role, Knight will provide supervision to the following divisions and work groups within the department: Soil and Water Conservation, Forest Resources, Marine Fisheries, Parks and Recreation, the Ecosystem Enhancement Program and Natural Resources Planning and Conservation.

Knight has a bachelor's degree in political science from UNC-Chapel Hill and a law degree from Wake Forest University. Prior to working with The Nature Conservancy, he worked as an attorney, lobbyist and consultant before the General Assembly for such clients as the state chapter of the Sierra Club, the Trust for Public Land, N.C. Wildlife Federation and N.C. Public Transportation Association. A native North Carolinian, Knight lives with his wife Avery in Raleigh.

The department's information system technology function will be reorganized by combining two senior management positions. Mary Penny Thompson, the department's general counsel, will serve a dual role by also becoming the assistant secretary of Information Technology. In this new position, she will oversee and manage the department's information systems and legal functions.

Assistant Secretary for the Environment Robin W. Smith of Chapel Hill will continue in that role, providing oversight of the department's regulatory function of environmental protection. She also will be charged with looking for ways to improve efficiencies and streamline the regulatory process. Elizabeth Biser will continue as the department's director of legislative and intergovernmental affairs, and Diana Kees will remain as the department's communications director.

“Looking ahead to the next four years and the issues facing North Carolina and the department, I feel this leadership team brings a wealth of knowledge, vision and enthusiasm to bear as we balance our mission of environmental protection with the needs of an ever-growing and diverse state,” said Freeman. “I appreciate my team's willingness to take on the responsibility of public service.”

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