



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Release: Immediate
Date: Dec. 21, 2007

Contact: Jamie Kritzer
Phone: (919) 715-7357

2007 – A BANNER YEAR FOR NORTH CAROLINA'S ENVIRONMENT

***Editors and reporters:** If you're seeking holiday stories, let the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources help. As we normally do, the department has put together a year-end roundup of the programs, projects and accomplishments the agency has been involved with in 2007. This year has been a good one for the department, which is the state's lead stewardship agency for the preservation and protection of the environment. For more information, please contact Diana Kees or Jamie Kritzer, staff in the department's Office of Public Affairs, at (919) 715-4112 or (919) 715-7357.*

Protecting Public Health and Safety

- ∞ With Gov. Mike Easley leading the way, our agency and others responded to the record-breaking drought with a comprehensive effort to track the drought as well as educating people, communities and businesses on water conservation and assisting communities whose water supplies were most at risk. Several DENR divisions and other groups hosted three half-day regional drought meetings for local governments and major water users this fall. The main DENR agencies involved in this effort are the divisions of Water Resources, Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, Water Quality, Environmental Health and Forest Resources.

This year's drought efforts have resulted in an online system to enable public water supply systems to report weekly water use data as well as improved tracking and public availability of statewide water conservation efforts. Agencies throughout DENR have led the governor's state-required water conservation efforts. The aquariums, for instance, captured more rainwater for irrigation, repaired leaks, published a water-saving bulletin on the division's Web site and provided visitors with information resources for water conservation practices.

- ∞ The state Division of Waste Management announced in October that Environmental Quality North Carolina will relinquish its hazardous waste facility permit and not restart operations of its hazardous waste facility in Apex, the site of an October 2006 fire that forced the evacuation of thousands of residents and prompted weeks of environmental cleanup. Through a settlement agreement between EQ and the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, EQ also agreed to pay more than \$400,000 in penalties, fees and reimbursements to the state. In the course of investigating the fire, the Division of Waste Management discovered previous incidents that had not been reported to the state as required. Subsequent penalties, as well as a proposed permit termination, were tied to violations of the hazardous waste management practices alleged by the division.

In response to the circumstances of the fire at the EQ Apex facility, Gov. Easley appointed a Hazardous Materials Task Force to study related issues and to facilitate the strengthening of rules governing commercial hazardous waste facilities. The recommendations of the task force led to the passage of House Bill 36 – Hazardous Materials Task Force Recommendations – many aspects of which became effective Oct. 1. The major components of the bill include enhanced financial requirements, strengthened information-sharing requirements and enhanced regulations.

- ∞ The Division of Environmental Health worked with state and local agencies to locate and remove canned food products manufactured by Castleberry's Food Company due to possible botulism contamination. More than 90 different food products and 35,000 cans of food were removed from store shelves, thanks to these nationally-recognized efforts.

-MORE-

-2-

- ∞ Officials in the Division of Environmental Health recently issued the agency's first license of its kind for the removal of radium and uranium in groundwater. The license was issued to Water Remediation Technology for the removal, storage and handling of natural radium and uranium from the state's drinking water.
- ∞ The N.C. Division of Forest Resources sent 257 people out-of-state this year to help fight wildfires throughout the country. The state agency regularly sends crews to other states as part of a wildfire fighting agreement between states and to give North Carolina firefighters valuable experience.
- ∞ Two experts with the Division of Environmental Health were selected to go to Kansas to help environment officials there conduct an assessment of mosquitoes and mosquito-borne viruses in a flooded area of the state.
- ∞ In addition, one of Environmental Health's mosquito experts sent to Kansas, Dr. Bruce Harrison, had a species of mosquito named in his honor. The *Anopheles harrisoni* was named for Harrison because of his many important contributions to the knowledge of Anopheles mosquitoes in the Oriental Region. This makes four species and one genus of mosquitoes and one species of chigger named in Harrison's honor.
- ∞ Five North Carolina communities earned recognition in 2007 for their efforts to better protect their homes from wildfires. Rich Mountain Acres in Alleghany County, Camp E-Tik-Etu in Bladen County, Pisgah Forest Farms/Estates in Transylvania County, Currituck Club in Currituck County and Laurelmor in Watauga and Wilkes counties joined the state's seven other communities that are now part of the North Carolina Firewise Communities USA. Firewise is a national program administered in N.C. by the Division of Forest Resources that empowers communities with landscaping, construction techniques and other tools for protecting homes from wildfires.
- ∞ The Division of Soil and Water Conservation received its first appropriated funding from the General Assembly for the development of a new conservation program. The Community Conservation Assistance Program is the first state program of its kind that enables local soil and water conservation districts to provide cost sharing funds and technical assistance to homeowners, civic groups, municipalities and others for projects that protect water quality. More than a dozen types of projects are eligible, including rain gardens, backyard wetlands and stream bank restoration.
- ∞ More was accomplished in 2007 to protect people in the mountains from landslides. The General Assembly provided funding to create a permanent Landslide Hazard Mapping Program within the N.C. Geological Survey. The existing three-year program was created through the Hurricane Recovery Act of 2005 and funding expires in fiscal 2008-09. In this year's budget, the state legislature appropriated \$184,911 in both fiscal 2007 and 2008 to fund two geologists and a computer consultant for the program. This program came about to enable communities to evaluate and reduce the risks of building homes and other structures in landslide-prone areas of the North Carolina mountains.

Contaminated sites and solid waste

- ∞ The General Assembly passed the Solid Waste Management Act of 2007, which creates more oversight and financial responsibility regarding large landfills. Among the bill's significant provisions are more stringent permitting requirements and oversight for new landfills, as well as the establishment of a permit fee schedule for solid waste facilities. Money raised from this surcharge will go toward cleaning up hazardous waste sites and abandoned landfills.
- ∞ In 2007, the state's Rules Review Commission approved rules that call for risk-based cleanup of solvents from dry cleaners. The rules enable the Division of Waste Management, which oversees the dry cleaner program, to assess the risks of contamination by dry-cleaning solvents based on each site's characteristics. The new rules will guide cleanup of highest priority contaminated dry cleaning facilities so that they can move forward under state contracts.
- ∞ The Division of Waste Management put in place new rules to better protect against pollution from underground storage tanks. These secondary containment rules were adopted to ensure that underground storage tanks don't release contaminants into the environment.

-MORE-

-3-

The federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 requires states that accept underground storage tank grants of Leaking

Underground Storage Tank cooperative agreements to adopt secondary containment rules or establish financial responsibility requirements for tank manufacturers and installers. North Carolina, like most other states, chose the secondary containment rule.

Land and forest conservation, environmental sustainability, stewardship and preservation

- ∞ Working from the One North Carolina Naturally list of priorities, the General Assembly authorized the use of \$120 million to fund conservation acquisitions and projects to expand the state parks system, conserve ecologically diverse Natural Heritage lands and enhance waterfront access.
- ∞ The Green Square project moved closer to reality with the approval of funding needed for the design, demolition and the first year of construction. The project will enable DENR to house most Raleigh area employees under two roofs and better serve the public. The project also enables the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences to expand its facilities with the Nature Research Center, designed to help meet the state's science education needs. The entire facility will be designed in accordance with principles of green design and sustainability.
- ∞ The state parks system brought 8,042 acres of land into conservation with support from the Parks and Recreation, Clean Water Management and Natural Heritage trust funds. A partnership between the trust funds, the General Assembly, land conservancies and local communities resulted in the acquisition of the 996-acre, private nature attraction Chimney Rock Park. The attraction will be integrated into Chimney Rock State Park, which is now under development.

The General Assembly authorized the Deep River State Trail as a network of conservation and recreation lands stretching through five counties along the river corridor. Also, the Division of Parks and Recreation with help from The Nature Conservancy established the Mountain Bogs and Sandy Run Savannahs state natural areas with acquisitions of 91 acres and 2,357 acres respectively.

More than 200 active acquisition projects resulted in the expansion of Medoc Mountain State Park with 1,507 acres of land formerly owned by International Paper Corp. as well as the addition of 301 acres to the developing Mayo River State Park. Also, the state acquired 249 acres in an important watershed and added it Lake Norman State Park. That became the largest acquisition since the park's creation in 1962.

- ∞ All bars and restaurants with Alcoholic Beverage Control permits will be required to begin recycling beverage containers by Jan. 1, 2008. In anticipation of the new state law, the Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance in 2007 conducted or participated in more than 20 statewide workshops, produced educational materials and assisted local governments, private recycling companies and ABC permit-holders. The division also conducted a grant cycle to help local governments and recyclers prepare to provide collection services for ABC permit-holders. In total, 14 separate proposals were funded for a total of more than \$190,000 in grant awards, resulting in increased collection capacity statewide.
- ∞ In November, experts with the N.C. Division of Forest Resources hosted a workshop in central North Carolina for more than 325 landowners on managing forestland. Foresters and others used the "Forest Summit: Forestry 101 Being Healthy, Wealthy and Wise" at the Cabarrus Arena and Events Center to educate landowners about how landowners can manage their forests and earn money from the land through options such as conservation easements, tax credits and having land assessed and taxed for its present use value to save money, and to promote proper forest management.
- ∞ Additional North Carolina businesses, industries, government agencies and schools are working to minimize their impact on the environment. In 2006, seven facilities became new members of the state's Environmental Stewardship Initiative. The initiative, managed by the Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, recognizes members that put in place programs that prevent pollution or take innovative approaches to meet or exceed regulatory requirements.

-MORE-

-4-

The program seeks to reduce the impact on the environment beyond measures required by any permit or rule, producing a better environment, conserving natural resources and resulting in long-term economic benefits.

The ESI has had significant impact on the state's efforts to prevent or reduce pollution. In 2006, the initiative's 58 members reduced: air emissions by 232 tons; water usage by 591 million gallons; energy usage by 169 million British thermal units; the amount of waste placed in landfills by 59,441 tons and the amount of biosolids by 2.7 million gallons. Members also recycled 12,594 tons and saved \$10.3 million due to their efforts to protect the environment.

- ∞ As part of the One North Carolina Naturally program, DENR is producing a conservation planning tool to identify and prioritize the state's most ecologically significant lands and waters for conservation. This tool will provide consolidated maps that focus on biodiversity, water, agriculture and forestry, and marine and estuarine ecosystems. This approach enables cost-effective investment of tax dollars towards our most precious and vulnerable remaining lands. Several of these tools will be available for use by planners and decision makers in early 2008.
- ∞ With a few weeks still left in 2007, crews with the state Division of Forest Resources already have helped fight more wildfires than they battle during an average year. The state agency reports that state and local fire crews have battled more than 6,400 wildfires statewide this year. Those fires have burned some 35,000 acres. The state agency helps fight about 5,000 wildfires that burn 20,000 acres each year. In 2007, the state agency reports that crews have protected 6,272 fire threatened structures, including homes, but 284 structures, including 27 homes, have been destroyed.
- ∞ The Division of Forest Resources released a compilation of updated and expanded forestry recommendations known as best management practices, summarized in the new "North Carolina Forestry Best Management Practices Manual to Protect Water Quality." The publication is the product of more than four years of cooperative effort.

Improving and protecting water quality, wetlands and water resources

- ∞ The General Assembly in July placed a permanent ban on new hog farms using the lagoon system to treat waste. After careful study and consideration, the legislature also allocated \$2 million to help finance hog operations that switch from hog lagoons to waste treatment technology that is more environmentally friendly. Lagoons store animal waste until the liquid portion is pumped and sprayed onto agricultural fields as fertilizer. However, too much rain can force the waste into streams and harm water quality. The state Division of Soil and Water Conservation will manage these initiatives.
- ∞ The Clean Water Management Trust Fund funded 168 grant requests totaling \$114.6 million to protect and preserve water quality in North Carolina. In addition, the program funded 58 land acquisition projects designed to protect streams, creeks and rivers from pollution by purchasing property for conservation. The fund also awarded grants for 40 restoration and stormwater management projects and 65 wastewater projects, most of which were in economically depressed counties. In 2007, the trust fund helped pay for the continuation of the floodplain swine lagoon buyout program and land formerly owned by International Paper in Brunswick County and on the Tar and Roanoke rivers.
- ∞ An emergency drinking water fund that protects private well users from drinking contaminated water was enhanced through significant additional funding and renamed the Bernard Allen Memorial Drinking Water Fund.
- ∞ The Division of Water Resources updated a model and water use projections on water supply needs for communities served by the Cape Fear River Basin. All water users were invited to update projections for their needs over the next 50 years. The division has functioning models for the Catawba and Roanoke basins, and is developing river basin water supply plans for each basin to provide local governments and others with a reliable way to plan for future needs.
- ∞ To protect against pollution from development, the General Assembly in 2007 approved a fee increase for erosion and sedimentation plan approvals. The fee increase is expected to fund seven additional regional office positions to inspect and enforce the Sedimentation Pollution Control Act and work with local erosion and sedimentation control programs.

-MORE-

-5-

In addition, four additional local sedimentation programs were delegated this year in Henderson, Caldwell, Lincoln and

Iredell counties. Well administered, local sedimentation programs help protect against erosion from development because those programs can inspect sites more often than the state's program and are closer to the people they serve. The division also received General Assembly approval in 2007 to increase fees for mining permit review and approval. Those fee increases are expected to fund five additional regional office positions for inspection and enforcement.

- ∞ The Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance completed its work with six pilot pork-producing farms to evaluate the effectiveness of an environmental management system in maintaining compliance with regulations. Data confirmed that by using the system the pork producing farms saw improvement in their regulatory compliance.
- ∞ The Center for Geographic Information and Analysis has completed the first phase of a stream mapping project that improves digital mapping of surface waters in 19 western North Carolina counties. The project improves the accuracy and completeness of surface water mapping compared to what is shown on U.S. Geological Survey's topographic maps.
- ∞ DENR entered into an agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to collect aerial imagery for the coast and southeastern Virginia Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program region. A large-format, mapping quality digital camera was used to collect imagery to use in detecting submerged aquatic vegetation habitats. The project is part of an effort to establish long-term monitoring of this vegetation, which can be an important indicator of estuarine ecosystem health because of its sensitivity to degraded water quality.
- ∞ The N.C. Ecosystem Enhancement Program received state and national recognition as it continued its mission of restoring, enhancing and protecting the state's wetlands and waterways. This year, EEP earned the state natural resources agency of the year designation in the Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards. Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government also named EEP as one of the top 50 new governmental initiatives in the nation in its Innovation in American Government Awards. EEP comes from a multi-agency initiative to improve watershed functions through the development of specific plans and projects in advance of environmental impacts from transportation and economic development improvements.
- ∞ The Division of Water Quality released in June an updated version of the Stormwater Best Management Practices Manual, which provides the most effective ways to limit stormwater pollution. All new development requiring stormwater permits must now conform to the design requirements for control devices in the revised edition. The manual can be found online at http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/su/bmp_updates.htm.
- ∞ The Ecosystem Enhancement Program in 2007 continued its perfect record of providing mitigation for transportation-infrastructure improvements statewide. Since 2003, EEP has helped to facilitate more than \$3.7 billion in road building without a single project delay because of a lack of mitigation. The initiative has more than 700 stream- and wetland-restoration, enhancement and conservation projects statewide in some stage of development.
- ∞ The Division of Water Resources continued to work as DENR's lead agency for the relicensing of several large hydroelectric projects by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. DENR was a signatory to two settlement agreements for large hydroelectric projects located on the Yadkin-Pee Dee River: the relicensing settlement agreement for the four dams comprising Alcoa Power Generating Inc.'s Yadkin Hydroelectric Project and the comprehensive settlement agreement for the two dams comprising Progress Energy's Yadkin-Pee Dee River Hydroelectric Project.

Improving and preserving air quality

- ∞ The Division of Air Quality coordinated the Climate Action Plan Advisory Group, which has been analyzing specific ways to reduce and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions in North Carolina, and studying the costs and economic benefits of reducing those emissions. Its recommendations were submitted to the General Assembly this year, with a final report expected by the end of December. The department and DAQ are also working with the new Legislative Commission on Global Climate Change on broader issues such as whether the state should set a cap for greenhouse gas emissions.

-MORE-

-6-

- ∞ A state program became operational in 2007 that requires the removal of mercury-containing lighting switches from end-of-life vehicles before they are scrapped, shredded and recycled, in order to reduce mercury air emissions from secondary steel mills. The Division of Waste Management runs the Mercury Switch Removal Program, which provides a \$5 reimbursement to vehicle recyclers for each switch removed.
- ∞ The Division of Air Quality and the department awarded \$793,398 in grants for projects to reduce air pollution from motor vehicles. This year's grants, awarded through the Mobile Source Emissions Reduction Grants program, included 14 projects from 11 counties, and focused on projects for retrofitting school buses with controls to curb diesel emissions and building facilities for producing or distributing biodiesel fuel.

Educational outreach

- ∞ The three North Carolina aquariums saw a total attendance for 2007 of 1.27 million, which includes 76,950 children. The three North Carolina aquariums at Roanoke Island, Pine Knoll Shores and Fort Fisher were ranked the state's 8th most popular field trip destinations in a survey conducted by N.C. Field Trip Magazine.
- ∞ The Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance helped Fayetteville – the largest city in North Carolina without curbside recycling – to put in place a plan for such a program. The Fayetteville City Council voted to implement curbside recycling after a city task force worked with DPPEA and partners to develop the program.

Coastal protection, planning and improved waterfront access

- ∞ North Carolina this year adopted the most comprehensive set of rules for beach nourishment of any coastal state. The Technical Standards for Beach Fill Projects outlines new sediment criteria rules for beach nourishment projects, which involve the placement of compatible material on the ocean beach to mitigate the impacts of erosion from storms and sea level rise. The rules went into effect Feb. 1.
- ∞ The Division of Marine Fisheries established a spending plan for a \$20 million Waterfront Access and Marine Industry Fund created by the General Assembly. The agency received 159 informal proposals, which will be pared down to 21 projects this month. Plans call for an announcement of funding decisions in the spring.
- ∞ The aquariums began designing the reconstruction of Jennette's Pier in Nags Head after the pier was donated to the state. It is the first state-owned educational ocean fishing pier.
- ∞ Using a federal grant, the Division of Environmental Health is developing an online map that will show sources of pollution in waters that could impact shellfish.
- ∞ The Division of Coastal Management enhanced public access to beaches and coastal waters through \$2.9 million in grants for 23 projects in 19 local communities. The grants help pay for projects such as walkways, dune crossovers, restrooms, parking areas and piers. Funds also may be used for land acquisition or urban waterfront revitalization.
- ∞ The Division of Marine Fisheries sold about 500,000 N.C. Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses and raised approximately \$7 million in gross revenues from license sales in the license's first year of existence. The first projects to be approved using funds from the license sales included \$200,000 for an engineering study for a Chowan River Bridge pier, \$100,000 for a Coastal Angler's Guide and \$105,000 for a senior stock assessment scientist. The license is required to recreationally take finfish in the state's coastal fishing waters, which include sounds, coastal rivers and their tributaries extending to three miles in the ocean.

###