

CURRENTS



The Newsletter of SOUND RIVERS
THE VOICE FOR THE NEUSE & TAR-PAMLICO RIVERS



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The Quarterly Newsletter of Sound Rivers

SUMMER 2020

SOUND RIVERS ANNUAL STATE OF YOUR RIVERS

At Sound Rivers, we believe that everyone deserves fishable, swimmable and drinkable waters. Our work is rooted in the firm belief that access to clean water is a basic human right, the natural world should be accessible for all, and people should have a voice in decisions that affect their environment and health. We believe in finding creative solutions to today's difficult environmental challenges. And we believe in providing accurate and reliable information so that individuals and families can make informed choices.

2019 Successes

- Clean Water Act Defense**- ~1,000 Sound Rivers supporters took action, now NC is fighting back against weakening Clean Water Act protections.
- Groundbreaking Settlement with NCDOT** - Settlement over the 540 expansion project in Wake County = less damage to the environment & provides a blueprint for future highway projects across the state.
- Coal Ash**- Wide-reaching settlement with Duke Energy ensured toxic coal ash sitting on the banks of the Neuse River in Goldsboro will be excavated and recycled.
- Swim Guide**- 34 locations across the region monitored for water quality from Memorial to Labor day.
- Water Trail** - The Tar-Pamlico Water Trail expanded to 14 camping platforms, increasing access to the river.
- Campus Stormwater Program** - Expanded to include 21 school partners across 9 counties and installation of 13 green infrastructure projects from created wetlands to rainwater cisterns.

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State of Sound Rivers

Challenges

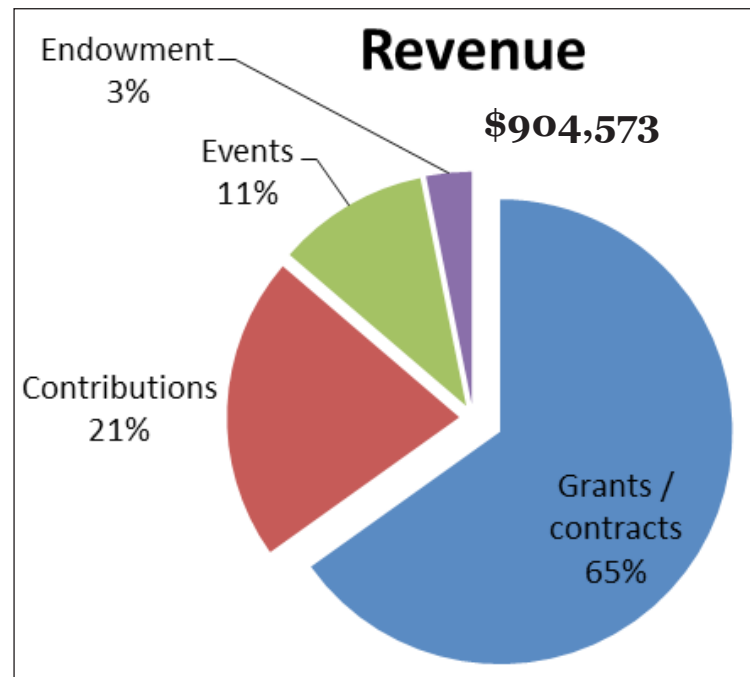
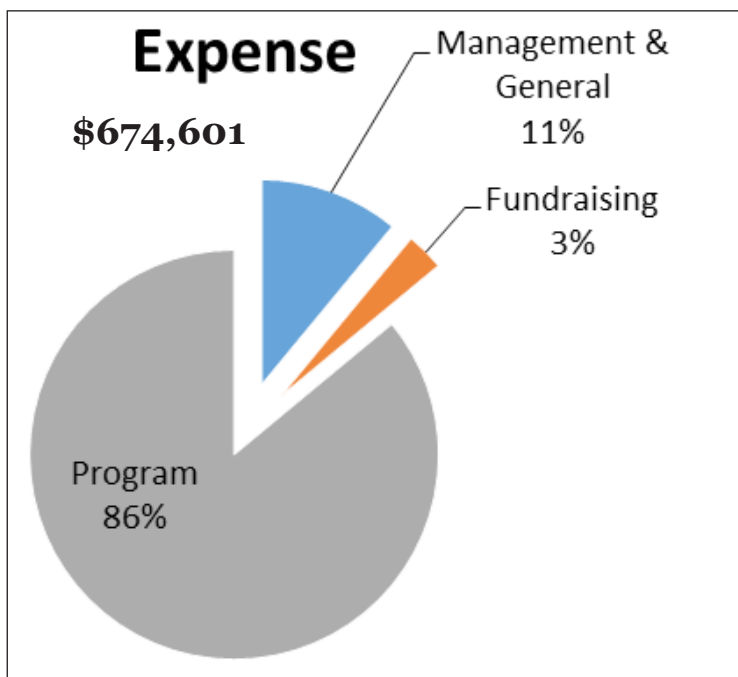
We continue to face grave challenges in 2020, including efforts to roll back state and federal clean water protections, ongoing threats from extreme storms and flooding in vulnerable communities and a severely underfunded NC Dept of Environmental Quality.

But, together we can fight to protect the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico Rivers.

In 2019 we had a number of positive successes, thanks to our supporters' commitment to protecting the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico Rivers and the communities that depend on them. We, and your rivers, also still face many challenges in the second half of 2020. Your commitment to clean water means I know we can face those challenges together.

Heather Beck

Sound Rivers 2019 Audited Financials



Commitment to Environmental Justice

"We are being called to renew and intensify our work to combat environmental and social injustice."

Heather Deck, Executive Director



The protests and unrest this summer have made clear to us at Sound Rivers that we must reflect more deeply on our work and our communities.

Our hearts are heavy for the suffering that black and brown people continue to endure in this country. The horrific deaths that have set the country to protest cannot be undone. To heal, we must all confront the systemic racism that has blighted our country for far too long. Together, we must work for change, work for justice and create an equitable society that truly allows everyone to participate freely and fully.

At Sound Rivers, our work is rooted in the firm belief that access to clean water is a basic human right, the natural world should be accessible for all, and people should have a voice in decisions that affect their environment and health. No group of people should disproportionately bear the burden of pollution; unfortunately, for people of color in our country, and specifically our region, this is still the unjust reality.

An even more painful unjust reality is the undue burden a biased society places on our communities of color. The killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor focus our attention on the extreme social injustice that is precipitating demonstrations occurring across the country. We are being called to renew and intensify our work to combat environmental and social injustice.

As Bob Irvine from American Rivers stated so well, "we cannot fight for the environment without also fighting for justice."

Our staff, as white individuals, must listen to members of communities of color. We must continue to grapple with our own explicit and implicit biases. We must define concrete and specific actions that are guided and informed by people of color. We must, with renewed energy and focus, continue the hard work of remediating social and environmental injustice.

The Sound Rivers family recognizes that there is much, much, more work to be done. Injustice remains when so many do not have equal access to clean water and are negatively impacted every day by pollution. We recognize the undeniable obstacle that social, racial, economic, and environmental injustice presents to our vision for a clean water future for all – for any equitable future.

Real change is needed to bring communities together. We believe compassion will show us the way forward. We know we must continue to listen, learn more, and work harder to understand the depth of systemic racism, not only in relation to environmental justice, but in all aspects of life. We must not only say we work for all – we must specifically use our platforms to work towards equity for people of color. As Maya Angelou said, "When you know better, do better." Our organization will endeavor to know better, and do better.

I welcome anyone who would like to have a personal conversation to email me at heather@soundrivers.org.

– Heather Deck, Executive Director and Joseth Bocook, President, Board of Directors

We would like to thank the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and the Eddie and Jo Allison Smith Family Foundation for their continued support of Sound Rivers and our mission to protect the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico Rivers.

Spotlight On The Tar-Pamlico

The Tar-Pamlico River is the fourth longest river in North Carolina with more than 470,000 people who reside in the river basin and rely on its drinking water. The river continues to suffer from nutrient, sediment and bacteria pollution along with losses of critical habitat, such as wetlands. While some incremental progress has been made since the 1990's, the estuary from Washington to the Pamlico Sound remains degraded today and experiences frequent algal blooms and fish kills, particularly in the summer months. Over the past five years, policy changes, protection rollbacks and the impact of climate change have resulted in concerning water quality trends for the river and estuary.



Pamlico River from the air/Photo by Forrest English



Is Not Meeting
Phosphorus
Reduction Goal



Is Not Meeting
Nitrogen Reduction
Goal

Success: Tar-Pamlico Water Trail

Last fall, three new camping platforms were constructed on the Tar-Pamlico River Water Trail to create a network of 14 sites available to the public from Franklin to Beaufort County.

One of the newest platforms is located at the Franklinton Center at Bricks, a non-profit Social Justice Conference and Retreat Center housed along Fishing Creek in Whitakers. Pictured below are the staff for the Franklinton Center at the platform location. Their 244-acre property was the sight of a former plantation, the Franklinton Christian College founded in 1871, and the Congregationalist Bricks School in 1895. Sound Rivers and the Center staff are working together to increase access to the forested lands and Fishing Creek through the creation of nature trails for the surrounding community to enjoy nature.



Challenge: Atlantic Coast Pipeline

In the low lying coastal plain of eastern North Carolina, climate change impacts continue to devastate communities. The region is seeing more frequent, wetter hurricanes which cause flooding that damage properties and displace people, cause overflows from wastewater treatment plants, and significantly impact water quality in our rivers and streams. We cannot afford to further contribute to climate change, and instead must pursue a future powered by clean, renewable energy.

Construction and operation of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, a 600 mile natural gas pipeline from VA to NC, will have lasting, devastating impacts to our waterways, our communities, and the climate. The pipeline will fragment some of the most intact, forested landscapes in the southeast and will run under and through rivers, streams, and wetlands. The proposed locations for compressor stations and pipeline route will disproportionately impact low income communities and communities of color.

If construction resumes, Sound Rivers will continue to engage with local community members via the NC Pipeline watch to watchdog ACP construction activities to minimize environmental damage. We are also educating local leaders to build support for clean energy proposals that combat the growing climate change problem, reduce the burden on ratepayers, and build lasting systemic change by improving state and federal policies.

Spotlight On The Neuse

The Neuse River is the third longest river in North Carolina with more than 2 million people who reside in the river basin and rely on its drinking water. The river basin has exploded in population, and development pressures continue to cause declines in water quality, particularly in the Raleigh-Durham area. Coupled with a large expansion of the poultry and swine industry from Wayne to Craven counties, the river continues to fail to meet water quality goals. The Neuse river estuary, starting in New Bern, remains impaired today and experiences frequent algal blooms and fish kills that may be harmful to public health.



Sunset on the Neuse River/Photo by Mary Davidson



Success: Year of Partnerships

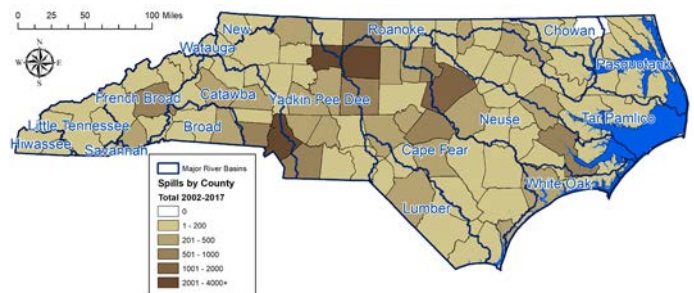
In 2019, Sound Rivers worked to expand key partnerships to further our advocacy mission of protecting the 6,000 square mile Neuse River basin. Two exciting, yet very different partnerships were made through our work to build a sustainable agricultural vision for our region; one that does not harm our waterways. First, we partnered with Mr. Tom Butler, a farmer and owner of a large swine operation, who has gone above and beyond in his efforts to lessen his impact on the environment and surrounding community. Sound Rivers, in partnership with researchers from NC State and East Carolina University, began research to measure the potential environmental impacts. With this information, we will create a plan with Mr. Butler to reduce any sources of pollution found at his facility.

In Wake County, a budding partnership with the Triangle Land Conservancy at their Williamson Preserve will transform the site to an operational regenerative farm. This type of farming is key to protecting our waterways, building our soil health, and providing a profitable alternative to the industrialized model of agriculture.

Challenge: Wastewater Infrastructure

Untreated wastewater entering our rivers and streams is a major problem affecting human and environmental health. In 2018, Sound Rivers reported that almost 1 billion gallons of untreated sewage was spilled into North Carolina waterways from 2002-2017. One local, egregious example is the City of Havelock, who has reported more than 20 spills since 2015, resulting in pollution entering Slocum Creek; a creek frequented by recreational boaters. Thankfully for individuals in Havelock, the state finally stepped in and placed the City under an order to repair the long-standing issue.

Unfortunately, when these spills occur, the public is not notified of the event until typically days after, if they even hear of it at all. This lack of notification prevents people from being able to take proper precautions to protect themselves. Riverkeepers across the state are pushing for a better notification system. Visit soundrivers.org to take action today.



Program Update

Swim Guide Summer Going Strong!

Sound Rivers is thrilled that summer is here, and with it the third year of our successful Swim Guide program. With the help of our volunteers and three interns, we will continue to monitor for fecal bacteria levels at 35 locations within the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse River basins and report our findings each Friday. This program gives swimmers and boaters up-to-date, accurate information on the safety of many of their favorite spots for recreation.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, Sound Rivers has developed protocols to ensure our volunteers can safely sample this summer. **Our results will be available each Friday afternoon and can be located at <https://soundrivers.org/swimguide>, through our text notifications (text SWIM to 33222 or NADAR a 33222 para español), or by accessing video reports on our social media forums.** Each sampling location is marked with an easy to understand icon so you know when the water at your favorite location meets water quality guidelines and is safe to recreate in.

Sound Rivers is pleased to welcome three outstanding interns this summer who will be directing the Swim Guide program and assisting our Riverkeepers on other important projects.



Nicole was raised in Aurora, Ohio, where she developed a love for the outdoors and conservation. She will start her fourth year at North Carolina State University this fall studying Fisheries, Wildlife, and

Conservation Biology. Nicole is very excited to join the Sound Rivers team as a water quality intern and assist in preserving the Upper Neuse river basin this summer.



Amelia is a North Carolina native who grew up loving the natural world. She attends UNC-Chapel Hill and is pursuing a B.A. in Environmental Studies with a double minor in GIS and Geography. She will begin her senior

year in the fall. This summer, she will be stationed at the Washington, NC office in the Tar-Pamlico basin

where she will engage in water quality sampling and other environmentally-based projects.



Cait is originally from Northeastern Pennsylvania where she grew up near the Appalachian mountains. She is currently a third year DrPH student at East Carolina University and her main research interest is in water quality with regard to public

health. She looks forward to serving as the Lower Neuse intern this summer and contributing to Sound Rivers' strong advocacy for the protection of your waterways.

Thank you to our 2020 Swim Guide Sponsors!



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Melinda Vann & David Silberstein



UNC Pavel Molchanov Scholars



Edward Teach Youth Sailing Association



SRI Awarded \$100k for Program at Nash Community College

Sound Rivers was recently awarded \$100,000 from the Environmental Enhancement Grant program to complete a green stormwater project on the campus of Nash Community College (NCC). NCC is part of our Campus Stormwater Program, where we partner with schools and colleges in our river basins to help manage and treat stormwater runoff before it flows into local waterways. These stormwater management projects also serve as outdoor educational spaces, showcasing innovative practices in sustainable development by treating and re-using stormwater. After construction, we work with educators and facility managers to ensure long-term care and use of these projects.

Advocacy Update

Federal Building Dumps Raw Sewage Knowingly for Years into Walnut Creek

In early June, a bombshell report by the News and Observer found that the Terry Sanford Federal Building, located in downtown Raleigh, has been discharging raw sewage into a local stormwater system that flows to Walnut Creek for decades. The news report noted that an inspector general found that federal authorities knew of the problem from at least 2012 and did nothing to report or correct the issue. The problem began when the building was constructed in 1969 when pipes were cross-connected, which causes the discharge of raw sewage where stormwater should flow out. Sewage instead *should* be directed to the wastewater treatment plant, where it can be treated.

Matthew Starr, Upper Neuse Riverkeeper, conducted bacteria testing in a small stream that receives stormwater from the building in the days following the report and found bacteria level at three times the standard to protect public health. Sound Rivers is following this issue closely to ensure those responsible are held accountable. Please visit soundrivers.org for updates.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline Facing More Hurdles

Construction on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) has now been stalled for nearly a year and a half due to vacated permits and ongoing legal challenges. While we anticipate that construction could restart in North Carolina in our river basins this summer and are preparing for this, recent court rulings may offer one more burdensome challenge to not only the ACP, but all future oil and gas pipelines across the country. A court ruled this spring that the Army Corps of Engineers violated the Endangered Species Act (ESA) when it issued the Nationwide 12 permit for the Keystone XL pipeline, and vacated the permit. The Nationwide permit 12, is a key water crossing permit for large scale projects like pipelines. A federal court reaffirmed not only that the Army Corps cannot use the permit to approve the construction of Keystone XL, but also any other oil and gas pipelines, until it conducts a new analysis of the permit that complies with the ESA. The Corps suspended the permit for the ACP in November 2018 in response to a legal challenge.

Blounts Creek Update



In early June, the NC Court of Appeals released its long awaited decision regarding the discharge permit issued to Martin Marietta Materials by the NC Department of Environmental Quality. The company is proposing a new limestone mine in Beaufort County, located within the Blounts Creek watershed. The permit would allow a discharge up to 12 million gallons per day into the headwaters of the creek. Sound Rivers and the NC Coastal Federation, with representation by the Southern Environmental Law Center, challenged the permit in 2013. In 2017, the Superior Court overturned a lower court decision and vacated the permit.

Unfortunately, the NC Court of Appeals reversed the decision on a 2:1 vote. Since the decision was split, Sound Rivers and our members have the right to appeal to the NC Supreme Court and we have chosen to do so.

This has been an up and down battle with numerous legal wins and setbacks. We look forward to the opportunity to present the facts to the Supreme Court and continue our efforts to protect Blounts Creek.

THANK YOU!

Thanks to your generous support, our **Spring Matching Campaign** raised:

\$51,639

Including a generous \$20,000 match!

Your generosity in April & May means your Riverkeepers can keep fighting for your waterways in the coming months - you are doing amazing things for your rivers!

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