

CURRENTS



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



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The Quarterly Newsletter of Sound Rivers

Winter 2020

LOOKING BACK ON 2020, FORWARD TO 2021



Dear Friends,

The end of 2020 is almost here, and with all the struggles and changes of this year, I'm sure many of you are as happy as I am to ring in 2021. I want

to commend the Sound Rivers staff for everything they have done this year — despite all the challenges, they didn't stop adapting, knowing that your clean water was at stake.

In 2021, Sound Rivers will celebrate an important milestone: our 40th anniversary of working to protect your waterways. Sound Rivers was created out of the merger of two of the oldest grassroots advocacy organizations in North Carolina, and we are excited to share with you our 40th anniversary plans in 2021.

You are a key reason we are able to celebrate a 40th anniversary — your support of our work and your commitment to clean water have kept us going for four decades. Your voice has lifted up the threats facing your waterways, making change possible and showing many others how they, too, can help their waterways.

As you'll see throughout this edition of Currents, Sound Rivers is welcoming new faces, celebrating victories and preparing for new fights against pollution. It's because of you that your riv-

ers have a voice, and I thank you for all you do.

I hope that, if you haven't yet made a gift to Sound Rivers in 2020, you'll consider giving before year-end. Your gifts support clean water for all, and we are so grateful for your generosity.

Happy New Year, and hope to see you in 2021!

Sincerely,

Heather Deek



CLAY BARBER,
ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

"2020 started with completing our latest round of camping platforms, increasing the amenities found along the Tar-Pamlico River Water Trail, which we tested first-hand on an amazing 10-day paddle from Oxford to Washington.

"We had great success with our Campus Stormwater program: two stormwater wetlands, at Havelock High School and Beaufort County Community College, and a rainwater harvester at West Craven High School, and secured grant funding for future projects. This program keeps us busy treating polluted runoff while creating scholastic partnerships, educational opportunities and connections with students and staff. It feels great to do this work, and to have the support of the community we work for. Looking forward to 2021!"

KATY HUNT, LOWER NEUSE RIVERKEEPER



"I feel like we really haven't missed a beat in 2020. I've been able to continue doing field-work, we've remained a resource to the community and we've been able to stay on the big issues, like the Neuse fish kill and getting it the attention it deserved."

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Sound Rivers welcomes new team members

We are pleased to welcome our newest board member, Walker Knox. Walker Knox is the managing partner of MidAtlantic Fabrication and Finishing located in Knightdale. Walker hails from Rock Hill, South Carolina (just south of Charlotte), and is an avid fisherman who has a love for the outdoors. He is an N.C. State University graduate who spent a number of years in Minneapolis and returned to North Carolina in 2015. Walker is a business development leader with 25 years of experience in sales and marketing management.



WALKER KNOX

“I am very excited about the opportunity to effect change in the North Carolina river systems, where I spend significant time taking advantage of the incredible natural resources we are blessed with in central and eastern North Carolina,” Knox said.

We are also pleased to announce the addition of Vail Rumley to the Sound Rivers staff as our new communications director. Vail comes to Sound Rivers after a nine-year career as a reporter and editor at the Washington Daily News. Over the years, Vail has written numerous stories about issues affecting our waterways, including our years-long battle with Martin Marietta Materials over the potential destruction of the Blounts Creek ecosystem through the limestone mining process.



VAIL RUMLEY

Vail’s passion for Sound Rivers’ mission started at a young age when she spent many childhood summers on the Pamlico River at Hawkins Beach with her family; now she can be seen leading a paddleboard yoga class on the river each week.

“We are so thrilled to have Vail join the Sound Rivers team this year,” said Heather Deck, executive director. “Her passion for clean water coupled with her vast communication skills and experience makes her the

JILL HOWELL, PAMLICO-TAR RIVERKEEPER

“The defining thing of 2020 was the cancellation of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. The cancellation was a huge a win, like a win you don’t see as environmentalist, that work has already started and then the whole project is canceled. But there were so many people working on it, in North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia, I feel I played a much larger role in Vance County. There were huge wins like the ACP, and smaller ones just as impactful to residents, like the landfill in Vance County.”



MATTHEW STARR, UPPER NEUSE RIVERKEEPER



“Some of the most critical work we accomplished this year was achieved in the spring. Thanks to our efforts with our partners and wonderful participation by our members and supporters, we were able to gain an ally in our legal fight against the devastating roll-backs to the Clean Water Act when Attorney General Josh Stein and the NC Department of Environmental Quality also filed a lawsuit. The Clean Water Act is the state and nation’s most important and fundamental law protecting our waterways. The recent changes to the law will allow for greater destruction of our state’s wetlands and waters that will only lead to more pollution and cause greater flooding to our communities and neighbors — something North Carolina cannot afford.”

perfect addition.”

Vail will be working out of the Washington office and can be reached by email: vail@soundrivers.org.

January also brings some changes to our Board of Directors. The board terms of directors Lorrie Basnight (Greenville), Jim Kellenberger (Oriental/Raleigh) and Bill Hunneke

(Greenville) are coming to a close. On behalf of the board of directors and staff, we would like to thank them for their outstanding service and commitment to our clean water mission. If you would like to send them a note of thanks, please email info@soundrivers.org, and we will be happy to send them your message.

2021 Pure Farms, Pure Waters Legislative Priorities

The North Carolina legislature is set to convene in January. While the ongoing pandemic and state budget disputes are likely to dominate their attention, there is always the opportunity for environmental bills to move. This year, a collaboration of North Carolina Riverkeepers, as part of Waterkeepers Carolina, put together a strong package of legislative priorities. With your support, we can turn the corner and make some much needed and long-overdue changes to support clean water. Urge your representative and senator today to support the following priorities.

Funding to Support Farmers

Increase Funding for Soil and Water Cost-Share Programs — The Agricultural Cost Share Program typically receives as much as \$20 million in requests for \$4 million in annual funding statewide.

Livestock exclusion from waterways — We suggest establishing a fund of \$1 million recurring annually to help farmers install livestock exclusion fencing and alternative water sources.

Managing Impacts from CAFOs

Funding for the Swine Farm Buyout Program — The swine farm buyout is a voluntary program that was established in the wake of Hurricane Floyd to remove swine farms from the 100-year floodplain.

Oversight of the Poultry Industry — The poultry industry in North Carolina has little regulation, which leads to unchecked amounts of nutrients and bacteria from these facilities polluting our state’s waterways. We request these actions:

- Poultry Siting Act — to prevent new construction of growing facilities within the 500-year flood plain.
- Poultry Buyout Program — to remove facilities within the 100-year flood plain.
- Nutrient Waste Utilization Plans — to be submitted to the state for approval and prohibit land application of poultry waste within 100 feet of surface waters.

Addressing Impacts from Nutrient Pollution

Phosphorous — Implement agronomic land application rates for permitted confined animal feeding operations, including poultry operations and dry-litter disposal permitted by the state.

Harmful Algal Blooms — Appoint an interagency task

Swine Farm Buyout

What is the Buyout?
After Hurricanes Floyd, Dennis and Irene devastated North Carolina, the voluntary swine buyout program was launched in 1999. The program purchases industrialized hog farms in the 100-year floodplain – lagoons are closed, farms decommissioned, and conservation easements are established in their place.

\$5M in funding was added as part of a \$280M disaster relief package in 2019

5-8 more farms can be bought out with these federal and state funds

32 active swine farms remain in the 100-year floodplain

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FUND
the buyout program to decommission additional farms

ADVOCATE
for greater transparency and regulation of farms

RESTRICT
new construction in the 100-year floodplain

– WE NEED TO –

Poultry CAFOs

Industrial poultry farms and their impacts to your waters

PROBLEM 1
Waste from Poultry CAFOs impacts water quality

PROBLEM 2
Lack of regulation of a growing industry

– WE NEED TO –

STUDY
poultry farms to identify pollution impacts

ENFORCE
current regulations requiring litter piles to be covered

RESTRICT
new construction in the 100-year floodplain

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force to develop recommendations on defining, monitoring and responding to harmful algal blooms.

Confronting Environmental Justice Issues

Urge the state to act on its existing authority to deny a permit if its cumulative effect, coupled with existing environmental or health concerns, would cause a disproportionate, adverse impact on a community protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



Derek Hunter, Wayne Community College vice president of operations, surveys an area where a Sound Rivers' stormwater project is planned.

Grant seals Sound Rivers, college stormwater partnership

Ponding during heavy rains and untreated stormwater runoff will get a fix at Wayne Community College in 2021, thanks to a partnership with Sound Rivers and a \$196,700 award from the state's Environmental Enhancement Grant program.

The grant — a 2000 agreement between the N.C. Attorney General's Office and Smithfield Food — was announced in late October. Sound Rivers was one of 22 grantees awarded a total of nearly \$3 million.

"Thanks to this project, students will be able to learn about science and protecting the environment firsthand," Attorney General Josh Stein said. "At the same time, they — along with future Wayne Community College students — will benefit from improved water quality in the area."

According to Derek Hunter, WCC vice president of operations, the project is a welcome opportunity for the college to address the health of local streams and rivers, as well as a way to improve aesthetics on a campus with new construction.

"The major benefit seen by the college in this partnership is the opportunity to process our local stormwater runoff for improvement of water quality in our local Neuse River," Hunter said. "Improving river conditions, while at the same time improv-

ing our campus, is a win-win."

The issue is inadequate draining in some places and untreated stormwater runoff in others — water that runs directly into storm drains and on to the Neuse. One solution will be multiple bio-retention cells.

"There's three or four places for bio-retention cells, or rain gardens — places that catch a lot of runoff," said Clay Barber, Sound Rivers' environmental projects coordinator. "First and foremost, they're going to filter stormwater that runs off of roof tops and parking lots, and any other impervious surface. They're kind of like sponges — if you situate them the correct way, they kind of soak up the water, spread it out and let it sink down."

Barber said Sound Rivers' funding will provide the construction and training: caretakers knowing the rain gardens' purpose and maintaining them appropriately is the key to their success.

"This is basically like 'landscaping with a purpose,'" Barber said. "They'll be cleaning stormwater, and we'll be teaching people about it while we do it. We're doing that because it's important work to clean water, but we're also doing it from a sustainable standpoint — in the future, it's going to be required."



Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Hunt samples local waterways for plastics.

Sound Rivers to monitor for plastic pollution

For the first time in North Carolina, streams and rivers across the state will be monitored for plastic pollution thanks to a \$188,000 grant from the N.C. Environmental Enhancement Grant Program. Sound Rivers' three Riverkeepers will join Riverkeepers across the state to determine the presence and amount of plastic pollution in 30 streams and rivers.

Plastic pollution that ends up in our rivers and local waters can have an immediate effect on local wildlife, but it also has a long-term effect on people too. Plastics break down even further, into microplastics, which later make their way into the food we eat and into our drinking water. The project is in partnership with UNC, Duke Law and Policy Clinic and the Plastic Ocean Project. (This project is part of Waterkeepers Carolina, an alliance of 15 Waterkeeper organizations across North Carolina working to identify pollution sources and promote water quality in each of our individual river basins through research, education, and advocacy.)

WORKING FOR YOUR WATER

PAMLICO-TAR RIVER

Asphalt, cement plant plan at a standstill, for now

The company petitioning to expand a sand mine on the banks of the Tar River into an asphalt and cement plant pulled its application to rezone the land.

Wade Moore Equipment, based out of Maryland, retracted an application to rezone nearly 190 acres from Light Industrial/Conservation District to Heavy Industrial after a public hearing at a Franklin County Board of Commissioners meeting brought out plenty of opposition.

“Public comments went on for at least an hour, and all the folks who spoke were against it, and they were all people who lived close by or farmed the land around there,” said Jill Howell, Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper.

A sand mine has operated on the waterfront property since 1968; the rezoning application covered its expansion to an asphalt and cement plant, rock quarry and mulch yard. The land, however, is surrounded by residential neighborhoods, one of which is a historic African-American community predating the original sand mine.

At the hearing, Howell spoke about the potential environmental impacts; others aired concerns ranging from roads unable to handle increased truck traffic and the dangers that poses to the community’s residents, to plummeting property values and potential air pollution and the community’s health.

“They were all very adamant that they did not want this around them,” Howell said.

The company retracted its application after the hearing. Howell said she believes the company may resubmit another bid and encourages continuing community participation: “What this means, for now, is this is a win, and this is what happens when people show up and speak out. . . . So many decisions about industry and development that can impact the local community are made at the county level. Once these things get up to the state, they’re super-hard to fight. If people can find out about it on the county level, there’s an opportunity for a much better outcome.”

Residents organize to prevent landfill rezoning

Residents of Kittrell, a small community in Vance County, await the local Board of Adjustment’s decision to issue a conditional use permit for a proposed landfill.

On Dec. 10, after two hearings that ran more than three hours long, the BOA will hear closing arguments and decide whether it will issue a conditional-use permit that would pave the way for an LCID — land clearing inert debris — landfill on 83 rural, residential acres.

According to Jill Howell, Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper, adjacent property owners received a 10-day notice of the hearing in August.

“They want to put a landfill on a property with a creek running through it — there was a scramble to figure out what that meant,” Howell said. “Just imagine getting a letter saying that in 10 days this board is going to have a quasi-judicial hearing that will decide whether you have a landfill in your backyard for the rest of your life.”

Long’s Creek, which empties into Tabb’s Creek — a tributary of the Tar River, runs through the land.

The initial BOA hearing was postponed, which gave residents the opportunity to mobilize. Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Hunt gave prepared remarks about the environmental impact of an LCID landfill, which accepts construction and land-clearing debris — dirt, trees, bricks, blocks and bricks. Representatives for property owner Kenneth Harrison III testified the LCID landfill would have little impact on health, the environment and property values.

During a second hearing, Howell and an attorney representing adjacent property owners were well-prepared for a rebuttal.

“It’s one thing for me, as environmentalist to speak at a hearing like this about impact; it’s another to have a wildlife biologist there to talk about endangered mussels in the waterways, and the neighboring tree farmer concerned about debris and introduction of pests,” Howell said.

“This is the level where the county can say, ‘No, we don’t want this,’ and that’s kind of the last stop for that,” Howell said.

NEUSE RIVER

Fish kills drum up action on the Neuse

At the end of September, the first reports of fish kills on the Neuse River started coming in. Over the next month, they didn’t let up: from Fairfield Harbor to Kennel Beach; from Carolina Pines down to the mouth of Slocum Creek. The sight of dead and dying menhaden floating in local waters for such a long period of time put Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Langley Hunt in the spotlight when the New Bern Board of Aldermen invited her to give a presentation about the cause of the ongoing fish kills.

“Unfortunately, it’s just such a common occurrence to have a fish kill on the Neuse, it’s just a fact of life here, now. That we were able to rely on the media a lot and highlight that ‘This has been a month — every day for a month — of dead fish,’ I think that really caught people’s attention,” Hunt said.

At the Nov. 10 presentation, Hunt explained why and how fish kills happen: nutrients washed into the river over-fertilize algae, causing it to bloom. When the algae dies off, it leaches oxygen from the water, essentially suffocating the fish. That the phenomena kept up for more than a month caught everyone’s attention, from fishermen to people strolling the waterfront. When the calls to the mayor’s office started, the board sought out Hunt’s advice.

“The board was very receptive and concerned, and they have plans to send a resolution up to Raleigh to get the state to get involved in this problem,” Hunt said, adding that it’s going to take better regulation to

resolve the issue

“We need better regulations to keep nutrients out of our waterways, and we have to have proper funding for our regulatory agencies so they can enforce them,” Hunt said. “At the same time, local cities and towns can also be doing things like investing in and maintaining their sewer and wastewater systems; investing in stormwater systems like retention ponds and rain gardens, which are not only useful, but they look cool.”

Hunt stressed that it was people speaking up that got local lawmakers talking about the causes of fish kills and possible solutions, and taking action.

“People don’t really know how powerful their voices actually are. That all happened because several people called the office. If we have more and more people call or email their elected officials — the power of those voices, they will be heard and action will be taken,” she said.

The New Bern Board of Aldermen has invited Hunt to return for a more in-depth presentation in the future.

Havelock spills remain on Riverkeeper’s radar

Since 2015, the City of Havelock has struggled with heavy rain and its results: sewage spills.

In 2019, the city entered into a Special Order by Consent agreement with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, and now has deadlines for a list of infrastructure issues that must be

Continued on page 6

RIFFLES & RUNS

40-40-40 Ride for Your Rivers

Cyclists took the back roads of Beaufort County on Oct. 3 to celebrate clean water. The inaugural ride, offering a 14, 24 and 40-mile routes, gained 40 new Sound Rivers members. (Photo by Tom Whelan)



Swine Waste Biogas — a false choice for North Carolina

With the dire news we hear weekly regarding climate change, many of us are apt to support any progress to capture harmful methane and carbon dioxide emissions; both gasses that are contributing to our warming climate that fuel extreme storms, sea level rise, and flooding rainfalls. Capturing harmful gases sounds like a win for the environment. But on the issue of biogas produced from animal waste there is more to this story.

Since the 1990's there has been a vast expansion of industrial swine and poultry operations in North Carolina, much of it concentrated in eastern part of the state. The 8.7 million hogs in North Carolina generate 9.2 billion gallons of waste each year. These facilities concen-

trate a tremendous amount of waste that has been proven to negatively impact our air, water and community health. Swine waste, which is stored in open aired waste pits called lagoons and sprayed onto adjacent fields, impacts our environment through the emission of gases, leaking of waste into groundwater and the runoff of waste to our creeks and rivers. More than 20 years ago, after a series of devastating hog lagoon failures in floodplains across Eastern North Carolina, Smithfield Foods, the state's largest pork producer, promised to abandon the harmful lagoon and sprayfield system and develop and implement cleaner, more sustainable technologies to manage waste at industrial hog operations. But instead of in-

stalling cleaner waste management technology that is able to reduce harmful air emissions, reduce water contamination and better protect public health, the company has decided to install directed biogas technology- by covering the existing, unlined waste lagoons, capturing the gas and transporting it through a maze of new pipeline infrastructure. This effort will not only turn a profit for the industry, but further cement the outdated lagoon and sprayfield system.

Biogas technology coupled with a proper waste management system would be a win-win for the environment and the neighbors of these facilities. Anything short is a partial solution to a problem that shouldn't exist at all.

NEUSE RIVER: Havelock spills *continued from page 5*

addressed. Until then, the spills had been attributed to unusually heavy rain.

"Heavy rain is not an excuse for untreated human waste entering our waterways," Lower Neuse Riverkeeper Katy Hunt said. "Stormwater and wastewater are two different systems, and stormwater should not be entering a wastewater system."

Hunt became involved in 2018, urging DEQ to keep track of the ongoing sewage spills and monitor projects' progress.

"Most of my action has been talking to and working with DEQ," Hunt said. "Up until I started talking to DEQ, the city had only been fined twice for 10 spills: \$2,047

total. After that, they started being fined for every spill."

Hunt said the city has met the majority of its deadlines, but one fix may be causing other problems: fixing one particular manhole — the site of consistent sewage spills during rain events since 2015 — has simply been shifted spills down the line.

"There have been several spills since then, but none at that specific one. It seems like instead of fixing it, they've just spread the problem around," Hunt said. "They've done some more engineering reviews, and they've identified the main problem is a bottlenecking effect happening at this one

junction — two or three lines that are 12-to-16-inch diameter are flowing into a pipe that is an 8-inch diameter."

Hunt said Havelock residents have expressed frustration with the lack of communication from the city about its plans to fix the problems and inadequate notification of sewage spills when they happen.

"I've encouraged DEQ to hold a joint meeting with the City of Havelock — 'Here are our plans, et cetera' — giving residents the opportunity to learn, rather than just be angry every time they hear about another sewer spill," Hunt said.

TOUR DE TAR 2020: Jill and Clay's Excellent Adventure

Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell and Sound Rivers' Environmental Projects Coordinator Clay Barber took an epic 10-day kayak trip in October, exploring the Tar River from Oxford to Washington. Pictured are a few highlights from the trip, and you can share a recap of their adventure at soundrivers.org/looking-back-at-the-tour-de-tar. (Photos by Clay Barber)



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SOUND RIVERS

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|--------------------|--|
| Jan. 12, 7-8 p.m. | The Clean Water Landscape, Mitch Woodward, N.C. Cooperative Extension and Clay Barber, Environmental Projects Coordinator |
| Feb. 9, 7-8 p.m. | Addressing Pollution through Engineered Solutions at Lake Mattamuskeet, Dr. Randall Etheridge, East Carolina, with Jill Howell, Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper |
| March 9, 7-8 p.m. | To Be Announced |
| April 13, 7-8 p.m. | Storm-driven Pollution in the Neuse River: Sleuthing the sources of nutrient pollution, Chris Osburn, N.C. State University, with Katy Hunt, Lower Neuse Riverkeeper |
| May 11, 7-8 p.m. | Sea Level Rise: how saltwater is transforming our coastal ecosystem, Justine Neville, Graduate student at N.C. State University, with Jill Howell, Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper |