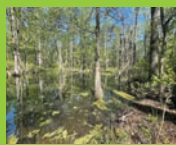




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Swim Guide back; meet this summer's "swim-terns"
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1 year later: White Oak Farms spill still polluting
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TREADING WATER: A waterlogged sneaker is one of the latest finds at a trash trap clean-out, part of Sound Rivers' Litter-Free Rivers program – page 6



CURRENTS

Sound Rivers' Quarterly Newsletter | Volume 9, No. 2 | Summer 2023

Now, more than ever

Shocked. I really did think that after more than 40 years of Republican and Democratic administrations – both agreeing to protect most wetlands and smaller streams and recognizing the value in doing so – that the U.S. Supreme Court would uphold the EPA's ability to protect the very landscapes that keep our waters cleaner. But I was wrong ... and I was shocked.

The U.S. Supreme Court, ignoring science, has weakened the federal Clean Water Act so much that we estimate a minimum of 45 million acres of wetlands across this country have lost pro-



tections. In North Carolina, we estimate that in the Neuse and Cape Fear River basins alone, at least 800,000 acres of wetlands no longer have federal protections from being paved over. We know what this means – more flooding, more extreme low-water condi-

“We need you now more than ever – get outside this summer, remind yourself of why you love these natural places: our rivers, streams and wetlands. Remind yourself that healthy communities begin with healthy environments. Then take action any way you can. Support your Riverkeepers with your actions by talking with elected officials; give a financial gift to support our everyday work; volunteer for Loose on the Neuse, Swim Guide and Litter-Free River programs; and as always, vote for candidates who support clean water during elections.”

tions during droughts impacting farmers, poorer water quality and a future that is not sustainable.

The Supreme Court is saying that it's now up to each state to decide how to regulate wetlands – removing the federal minimum – the federal backstop. By the time you are reading this column, we will likely know whether North Carolina legislators step up and protect the state's ability to protect these wetlands, which is our current law, or whether they give in to special interest groups hellbent on building anywhere they can.

This ruling goes against the will of four out of five Americans who support strong protections for our wetlands and waterways. And that statistic gives me hope. That statistic is why your Riverkeepers will keep fighting so that our communities can better withstand the challenges of a changing climate. That is why, now, we are fighting for North Carolina to keep their stronger wetland protections in place.

We need you now more than ever – get outside this summer, remind yourself of why you love these natural

Continued on Page 2

YOU
MADE THE
Match!

We'd like to say
"Thank you!"

to everyone who
contributed to our
April Match
campaign!

For a second year, YOU
exceeded our \$30,000
goal tremendously,
making this the most
successful April Match
campaign we've ever had.

AGAIN!

The total impact?

\$67,537!

Thanks to you, the fight
continues for clean
water, to make all your
waterways

fishable
drinkable
swimmable



Sound Rivers News



NC SUPREME COURT HEARS BLOUNTS CREEK CASE: Blounts Creek residents and business owners traveled to Raleigh and the N.C. Supreme Court on April 27 to listen to oral arguments for the Southern Environmental Law Center, Sound Rivers and NC Coastal Federation's case against the mining company Martin Marietta Materials.

"We're grateful to the attorneys at the Southern Environmental Law Center who have stuck with us and worked with us for over 10 years now to try to save this creek. Now we'll wait on a ruling from the Supreme Court," Sound Rivers Executive Director Heather Deck said after the hearing.

During the proceeding, justices asked few questions regarding the case that has bounced around the court system since 2013, when the state issued a permit that would have allowed the mining company to discharge up to 12 million gallons of fresh water per day from the limestone mining process into the brackish headwaters of Blounts Creek, a tributary of the Pamlico River.

The mining company's permit has since expired, and should they reapply, they may have to go through another public hearing process. There is no set date as to when the N.C. Supreme Court will hand down its decision for the case.

Now more than ever continued from page 1

places: our rivers, streams and wetlands. Remind yourself that healthy communities begin with healthy environments. Then take action any way you can. Support your Riverkeepers with your actions by talking with elected officials; give a financial gift to support our everyday work; volunteer for Loose on the Neuse, Swim Guide and Litter-Free River programs; and as always, vote for candidates who support clean water during elections.

Sound Rivers will continue to advocate for sensible laws and protections and for all in our community

to have a voice in those decisions. We will continue to work with many partners, including our schools and governments, to plan for and build projects that better protect us from a changing climate and keep our rivers cleaner. We are grateful for all your support, and together we will continue to fight for a clean water future.

Sincerely,

Heather Deck
Executive Director, Sound Rivers

SAVE THE DATE - NOV. 11, 2023
FOR THE SOUND RIVERS **OYSTER ROAST**



"Since the Oyster Roast is our biggest fundraiser of the year, it takes all hands on deck to put it on. We will need volunteers to help set up before the event, to help serve food during, and a team to tear down after. It takes about 60 volunteers in total to put on this event, and we are thankful for each and every one. It is such an amazing event - you get to eat oysters, drink beer, listen to live music and support Sound Rivers, all in one night! You can't beat that!"

- Emily Fritz, Sound Rivers Volunteer Coordinator

If you're interested in volunteering, email emily@soundrivers.org today!



(Left) Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell kayaks with her dog, Miller, during an August 2021 staff event. Miller went on two epic paddling adventures with Jill: a five-day tour down the Pamlico, from Washington to Swan Quarter, in 2021, and a 10-day trip down the Neuse, from Smithfield to New Bern in October of 2022.

Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper heads to higher ground

Well, Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill has left us. She saw the light - decided to head to higher ground before a hurricane actually happened on her watch; hightail it out of here before eastern North Carolina is buried beneath a couple of feet of

sea level rise ...

Actually, none of that is true except that Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Jill Howell has set out on a new adventure. She's headed north, to take the lead role at Upstream Watch, a small environmental organization that's been working to protect the waters of mid-coast Maine and Penobscot

Bay. We, at Sound Rivers, are going to greatly miss her enduring idealism, and unwavering and strangely inspiring pessimism about all things environmental.

We will especially miss her First Mate, Adventure Pup and Sound

Continued on Page 10



SWIM GUIDE LAUNCH AN 'ALL CLEAR'

Swim Guide returned to a clean water-quality slate Memorial Day weekend, making this the sixth year Sound Rivers has been letting you know where it's safe to swim all summer long.

"Swim Guide is one of our longest running and most successful annual programs. It's successful because it easily provides public access to important public health information, water-quality data and engages the communities within our watersheds," said Clay Barber, Sound Rivers' program director.

Every Friday afternoon until Labor Day, Sound Rivers lets the public know where it's safe to swim from the Piedmont to the Pamlico Sound via social media, website posts, direct text alerts and broadcasts on Public Radio East.

This year, 54 popular recreational sites in the Neuse and

Tar-Pamlico watersheds are being sampled weekly by a team of Sound Rivers volunteers. Samples are tested for the presence of E. coli in fresh water and enterococci in salt water, both of which can cause an increased risk of gastrointestinal illness and skin infections in both humans and their pets. Sites are given a pass/fail designation based on federal and state water-quality standards.

Sound Rivers Volunteer Coordinator Emily Fritz said volunteers are the backbone of the summer-long program.

"This is my first year leading our Swim Guide program and we have had a pretty solid turn out of volunteers. It is nearly split down the middle – half of our Swim Guide Volunteers have been sampling for us for years while for the other half this is their first summer. It has been really powerful to hear how every-

one has learned about our Swim Guide program and hear their personal stories of their connection to the rivers," Emily said. We are still filling in the final gaps of coverage for sampling in Raleigh and along the Tar/Pamlico River.

Sound Rivers' Swim Guide program is sponsored by the Water-Quality Fund in memory of Gene Pate, Grady-White Boats, Cummins, Public Radio East, UNC Lenoir Health Care, the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, UNC Pavel Molchanov Scholars, ECU SECU Public Fellows Internship Foundation, City of Greenville, Lake Royale Property Owners Association, Melinda Vann and David Silberstein, and Wendy and Tim Wilson.

To sign up for text alerts, text "SWIM" to 33222 to have results delivered weekly. For results in Spanish, text "NADAR" to 33222.

NEUSE & TAR-PAMLICO SITES



UPPER NEUSE

Anderson Point launch, Raleigh
Poole Road launch, Raleigh
Clayton River Walk
Neuse Golf Club, Clayton
Smithfield Town Commons

Hickory Hill boat ramp, Falls Lake
Ledge Rock boat ramp, Falls Lake
Beaver Dam Lake day-use area, Falls Lake
Rolling View boat ramp, Falls Lake
Highway 50 launch and recreation area, Falls Lake
Upper Barton Creek boat ramp, Falls Lake
Falls of the Neuse canoe launch, Falls Lake
Buffaloe Road launch, Raleigh
Milburnie launch, Raleigh



LOWER NEUSE

Oak Bluff Road boat ramp, Kinston
Highway 11 boat ramp, Kinston

Maple Cypress boat ramp, Grifton
Cowpen Landing, Vanceboro
Spring Garden boat ramp, New Bern
Glenburnie Park, New Bern
Town Park, Bridgeton
Black Beard Sailing Club, upper Broad Creek
Lawson Creek Park, New Bern
River Bend kayak launch
Trent Woods
Brice's Creek, James City
East Street boat ramp, Pollocksville
Slocum Creek boat ramp, Havelock
Rice Creek, Bay River
Midyette Street boat ramp, Oriental
Pierce Creek, Oriental



RACHEL GEYER

Rachel Geyer comes to us from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

A native of Raleigh, the rising junior is majoring in environmental science with minors in geology and journalism. Rachel's dream is to work in coastal conservation research and study the effects of microplastics on reef life.

What drew her to Sound Rivers is a desire to get outside and take action to protect the environment, in the place where she grew up.

"I'm concentrating in ecology and natural resources, and by working with rivers, I get to be involved with a natural resource that ties land and sea ecosystems together. The Swim Guide program also ties in communicating environmental information, which is what I hope to do with my journalism minor," Rachel said.

Rachel is working out of the Raleigh office and coordinating Swim Guide on the Upper Neuse.



DANISHA HARRIS

DaNisha Harris comes to Sound Rivers from East Carolina University. A rising senior, she's majoring in Health Service Administration and minoring in business management.

Her post-graduation goal is to work in her chosen field at Tampa General Hospital, in her native Florida.

Public service brought DaNisha to Sound Rivers – a desire to serve the community and learn about how local water quality may impact individuals' overall health. She said she sees her internship as an opportunity to for professional growth: "This will help my career by expanding my knowledge of assisting others in various platforms to improve our community," DaNisha said. "This opportunity also enhances my professional capabilities and skills to use in the workforce."

DaNisha is coordinating Sound Rivers' Swim Guide program on the Tar-Pamlico this summer and working out of the Washington office.



TAR-PAMLICO

Clubhouse Beach, Lake Royale
Clubhouse Boat Dock, Lake Royale
Moccasin Deck, Lake Royale
Pavilion Beach, Lake Royale
Pavilion Boat Side, Lake Royale
Tar River Reservoir, Rocky Mount
Sunset Park, Rocky Mount
River Road boat access, Tarboro
Town Common, Greenville
Wildwood Park, Greenville

Port Terminal, Greenville
Yankee Hall, Pactolus
Downtown waterfront, Washington
Mason's Landing, Washington
Havens Gardens boat ramp, Washington
Chocowinity Bay, Cypress Landing
Broad Creek at Pamlico Plantation, Washington
Blounts Bay
Blounts Creek at Cotton Patch Landing
Dinah's Landing at Goose Creek State Park
Bonner Point, Bath
Plum Point, Bath
Wright's Creek boating access, Belhaven

MEET 2023 SWIM GUIDE INTERNS

*Adopt a
Swim Guide
site!*

Pick your favorite recreational spot from our list and help keep it safe this summer with your \$25 gift for testing at your site!

Use the QR code or visit soundrivers.org/donate.



LITTER-FREE RIVERS

SOUND RIVERS EXPANDS TRASH TRAP PROGRAM

“The Litter-Free Rivers program was named for one simple reason: to relay the goal we have for the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico rivers when it comes to trash and plastic pollution. Research has evolved so much in recent years, and we are now getting a pretty good glimpse into the harmful impacts trash has on our waterways – not only from a public health standpoint, but also a water-recreation safety standpoint. Our rivers should be fishable, swimmable and drinkable, and we can’t achieve that without addressing our litter pollution problem.”



Little Rock Creek, Raleigh



Jack’s Creek, Washington



Duffyfield Canal, New Bern



Adkin Branch, Kinston (coming soon)



Crayfish in Little Rock Creek.

We’ve changed the name; rebranded the program; changed Sound Rivers’ way of thinking from individual trash traps to a much larger concept, and undertaking: Litter-Free Rivers.

“The Litter-Free Rivers program was named for one simple reason: to relay the goal we have for the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico rivers when it comes to trash and plastic pollution,” said Sound Rivers Executive Director Heather Deck. “Research has evolved so much in recent years, and we are now getting a pretty good glimpse into the harmful impacts trash has on our waterways – not only from a public health standpoint, but also a water-recreation safety standpoint. Our rivers should be fishable, swimmable and drinkable, and we can’t

achieve that without addressing our litter pollution problem.”

Litter-Free Rivers started as the Trash Trout program in 2022, which itself stemmed from a statewide study on microplastics: where they come from, how they get in our waterways, how long it takes them to break down, and more. The research is ongoing, but the litter traps have caught on, and people can see just how much trash ends up in even small waterways. They also see that they can do something about it by volunteering to monitor and/or clean out the traps.

“The program has been extremely successful to date. We hope to expand to other urban areas over the next five years by finding key partnerships, which will allow us to build connections with local communities, both with community-led groups and municipal partnerships,” Heather said.

The first litter trap was installed in May of 2022 on Jack’s Creek in Washington; weeks later, another went in on Duffyfield Canal in New Bern. In December of last year, a third trash trap was installed on Little Rock Creek, on the grounds of the Walnut Creek Wetland Center in Raleigh.

And the trash traps have, indeed, created new partnerships: in Washington, a core group of trash-trap volunteers have dubbed themselves the “Trashy Friends.” In New Bern, summer camp attendees, school groups and employees taking advantage of volunteer hours have all taken their turns at cleaning out the trash trap. And in Raleigh, Sound Rivers has partnered with long-standing volunteer organizations The Great Raleigh Cleanup and the Walnut Creek Wetland Community Partnership to keep the Raleigh trash trap clean.

“Sound Rivers can’t do this work alone, and building bridges into communities with partnerships results in an ever-expanding network of clean-water advocates, or activists,” Heather said.

The future is bright on the Litter-Free Rivers front: Kinston’s city council recently approved a trash trap for Adkin Branch, a tributary of the Neuse River that runs right through the heart of the town. Sound Rivers is teaming up with Mother Earth Brewing and the Lincoln City Rising project there, and the City of Greenville is in the process of approving a trash trap for a tributary of the Tar River.

Another bonus is that Sound Rivers’ board member Walker Knox, owner of Mid-Atlantic Fabrication & Finishing, is taking on fabrication of Sound Rivers’ trash traps moving forward.

“Nonprofits are very resourceful,

and Sound Rivers is no exception,” Heather laughed. “We’re able to accomplish a significant amount on limited financial resources, and we do that via partnerships, which has the great benefit of sharing cost burdens while also growing a wider community taking action for clean water. Our new partnership with Walker’s company is giving us the opportunity to expand our Litter-Free Rivers program for less cost, so we can put more trash traps in urban streams than we could before.”

After seeing photos of the original trash trap in the newsletter, Walker approached Heather about the possibility of making the next round.

“We have made a number of changes in the design to make the traps easier to manufacture and provide savings to end users. A major advantage of working closely with Sound Rivers is the ability to make design decisions

based on immediate feedback as the traps are deployed and go through high creek flow events,” Walker said.

The opportunity, he said, is one he relished for another reason, as a board member: “Finally, I feel like I am making a significant contribution to the mission!”

We’d like to thank our Litter-Free Rivers program sponsors Grady-White Boats and the Winston Family Foundation, as well as those who’ve sponsored individual trash traps: Triangle Fly Fishers, Mid-Atlantic Fabrication & Finishing and the City of Raleigh; Cardinal Canoes, the Four C’s Coastal Casual Clothing Company and the City of New Bern; Inner Banks Outfitters, Inner Banks Cycling Group, Bill and Sara Hanifin, Joe and Betsy Hester and the City of Washington. If you’re interested in sponsoring Litter-Free Rivers, please email Sound Rivers Development Director Jay Potter at jay@soundrivers.org.



(Left) A riverine wetland, created by river flooding, located in the Croatan National Forest near the Neuse River. The forest, designated a national forest in 1936, also contains isolated wetlands such as Carolina bays and pocosins.

Supreme Court ruling has grave implications

In the 50th-anniversary year of the Clean Water Act, the U.S. Supreme Court has decimated protections for wetlands across the nation.

While the Court was expected to return a decision in *Sackett v. EPA* that would be bad for wetlands, the decision they handed down just before Memorial Day weekend was much worse than clean-water advocates expected.

“The ruling significantly reduces the EPA’s ability to regulate impacts to wetlands and many streams,” said Sound Rivers Executive Director Heather Deck. “This ruling has grave implications for many of our communities along the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse rivers and will increase flood risks for all. Plain and simple – this ruling will mean more flooding and more polluted water for our future and across the entire country.”

The 5-4 decision states that the Clean Water Act does not give the EPA the right to regulate discharges into wetlands near bodies of water unless they have “a continuous surface connection” to those

waters, leaving an open door for polluters and developers of isolated wetlands.

“...by narrowing the (Clean Water) Act’s coverage of wetlands to only adjoining wetlands, the Court’s new test will leave some long-regulated adjacent wetlands no longer covered by the Clean Water Act, with significant repercussions for water quality and flood control throughout the United States.”

— United States Supreme Court Associate Justice Brett Kavanaugh

“There is no dispute that the Supreme Court ruling greatly weakened the Clean Water Act, and now tens of millions of acres nationwide are no longer protect-

ed – meaning they can be filled in, developed, et cetera, without any protections,” said Neuse Riverkeeper Samantha Krop.

Until recently, North Carolina’s wetland protections were stronger than those laid out in the Waters of the U.S. rule, which determines federal jurisdiction for the Clean Water Act. However, state legislation being considered at the time of this article – the 2023 Farm Act – if passed, would reset North Carolina’s wetland protections to only go as far as the federal ones, leaving North Carolinians at risk.

“The Farm Act includes new provisions that eliminate state protections. Deferring to the new, less protective federal definition would be disastrous for the communities along the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse rivers and will result in more flooding, more property loss and more pollution,” Heather said.

Isolated wetlands serve a very important role. They often connect to groundwater and, just like all wetlands, act as sponges, absorbing heavy rains and floodwater. If they’re filled in and paved over, the

water they have previously absorbed will have to find another place to go, potentially adding to flooding problems downstream, or causing flooding problems right where that wetland used to be. The North Carolina legislature has, in recent

years, dedicated tens of millions of dollars to help local communities prepare for and recover from flooding. That work, and taxpayer money, gets zeroed out with the destruction of wetlands.

While the Supreme Court decision,

concurrently with pending state legislation, has set North Carolina up for disaster, Sound Rivers will be joining Waterkeepers nationwide, environmental nonprofits and other partners to undo the damage done to clean-water protections.

White Oak Farms spill: 1 year later

More than a year after a major hog-waste spill in Wayne County,

there’s been no resolution to a state investigation, bacteria and excessive nutrients are still polluting Nahunta Swamp, the facility owners are objecting to the \$34,520 fine for the spill and Sound Rivers only recently got some of the documents relating to the spill – but not all of the documents – requested from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality back in August 2022.

If none of this seems right, that’s because it isn’t, according to Neuse Riverkeeper Samantha Krop.

“Here we are, a year later, and we have no resolution, and we know there’s an ongoing issue with pollution in the water,” Sam said. “We’re in a stalemate where there is an open DEQ investigation

dragging on, and while it’s open, we get absolutely no information about the investigation.”

The spill happened over Memorial Day weekend of 2022, though it wasn’t made public other than with a small, legal notice printed in a local paper. When Sam, by chance, observed the telltale signs of major

clean-up during a routine surveillance flight in August, she and



(Above) Neuse Riverkeeper Samantha Krop takes a water sample during the March trip into Nahunta Swamp.

ruptured biogas cover. The foam was made of decomposing hog waste, hog carcasses, expired Smithfield deli meats and hot dogs, which then spilled into the swamp, and killed vegetation in approximately 1 1/2 acres of conservation easement – the buffer between the facility and the swamp.

What the Riverkeepers could not see until they traveled into the swamp to take water samples upstream of the facility, at the site and downstream of facility, was ongoing pollution: super-high levels of fecal bacteria and excessive nitrogen and phosphorous, with a signature of hog DNA attached. In December, six months after the spill, and in March, nine months after, the numbers remained off the charts.

When NCDEQ delivered records to Sound Rivers in late May, initially absent were any water-quality reports.

Another request turned up results of DEQ’s sampling done in April 2023 that backed up the Riverkeepers’ findings:

it’s still polluting, though the facility hasn’t been in operation since the spill.

“It’s totally abandoned – There’s no one there; there’s nothing going on there,” Sam said after a flyover in early June. “But the pollution issue isn’t visible, so we’ll have to keep going into the swamp to sample.”

Rivers' Office Dog, Miller, who has grown from puppydom to handsome young lad under the staff's watch.

It's a great move for Jill – executive director with the potential to start a Riverkeeper program – that takes her back to her old college stomping grounds and closer to her home in Boston. In Maine, she will presumably resume speaking with the native Boston accent she occasionally lets slip, and will therefore be unintelligible to us Southerners, even though we also drop all our R's ... just in a different (better) way.

"It felt like a unique opportunity to be able to not just take the executive director role but the role at an organization that is new, and figure out how they want to go about doing advocacy and enforcement work in the region. Being there at the start of this organization is exciting – to be able to be there and build this out. It also gets me back closer to home, to friends and family up there," Jill said.

Jill joined the staff of Sound Rivers in June of 2019 as the Environmental Projects Manager, but when Pamlico-Tar Riverkeeper Forrest English left in August that same year, Jill jumped right into the Riverkeeper role, where she has been a staunch advocate for not only the Tar-Pamlico, but, as advocacy program manager, the Neuse, as well. Along the way, she's had some great wins, one of which was helping a community prevent local authorities from allowing rural land abutting a historic, Black neighborhood in Kittrell from being turned into a landfill.

"On a grand scale, if that had gone in, the impacts in the Tar River would have been incremental, but it would have been life-altering for the neighbors living around the landfill and devastating to the smaller creeks running through the property where the landfill was proposed," Jill said.

She also made quite a few memo-

ries during her Sound Rivers' tenure, which will heretofore be used to warm her up on those sub-zero, wading-through-four-feet-of-snow-with-icicles-hanging-from-her-nose nights – most of them having to do with Miller and kayaks.

"Seeing Miller in a life jacket was adorable," Jill said of two of the three days-long paddles, exploring the watersheds that she will now abandon



to their fates.

In October 2020, Jill and Sound Rivers' Program Director Clay Barber kayaked 10 days down the Tar River from Oxford to Washington (sans Miller); October 2021, the two took to the Tar-Pamlico again, this time paddling five days down the Pamlico and up some of its tributaries from Washington to Swan Quarter; and in October 2022, Jill, Neuse Riverkeeper Samantha Krop and Oregon's Rogue Riverkeeper Emily Bowes paddled 10 days down the Neuse from Smithfield to just west of New Bern (Hurricane Ian forced them out of the water one day, and the last day was cut short by high wind and waves on the Neuse).

"What I loved about the paddle trips was being able to have seen

almost the entire Tar-Pamlico River, minus the part at the top where there's not really public access, to heading out to the sound at Swan Quarter. That felt like a huge accomplishment – learning about the river and coordinating such a huge endeavor," Jill said. "The best parts were meeting people at the end of the day: having a fish fry at Bob Daw's house on Blounts Creek with a bunch of people after that long paddle day, and arriving in Seven Springs on the Neuse and the mayor, Ronda, having us over to eat there."

There are some not-so-great memories she would prefer to leave behind, through they will likely give her the heebie-jeebies regardless of how much distance she's put between her and Nahunta Swamp, where she fell into hog-waste-polluted water, and one night camping along the Tar River, where "there were too many spiders to count," Jill recalled, with a still-horrified expression. "They were everywhere. When we shined our flashlights, there were thousands of eyes shining back at us. And there was nothing to do – it was raining, it was dark, and by the time we realized there were spiders, it was too late. I don't know which was worse, that or falling into Nahunta Swamp."

Our not-so-greatest memory of Jill was the day she left us for good (June 30). That, and the truly horrendous mess she called a desk.

With typical pessimism, Jill said her successor will have their work cut out for them: "What should the next Riverkeeper focus on? Everything. There is so much that a Riverkeeper could dig into to work on. It seems like there is an ever-growing list of issues and constant rollback of regulations and DEQ is so underfunded they're struggling to do their jobs. I think the next Riverkeeper is going to have to focus in on a few issues and focus on what's most pressing and rely on partners for everything else. There's only so much we can do."

STORMWATER PROJECTS



(Above left) Stormwater runoff from Northern Nash High School has eroded the soil around tree roots; (above right) with little stormwater infrastructure in place, rain and runoff rushing from the campus have dug a gully into the woods.

Sound Rivers tackling aging infrastructure

When it comes to stormwater needs for Nash County schools, Sound Rivers Program Director Clay Barber has his work cut out for him – and now he has the funding to lay the groundwork for stormwater projects for years to come.

In April, North Carolina Division of Water Infrastructure approved a \$129,000 grant to Sound Rivers for the Nash County Schools Stormwater Assessment and GSI (green stormwater infrastructure) Planning project. The funding comes from a state Local Assistance for Stormwater Infrastructure Investments grant, which was funded by the American Rescue Plan Act.

The grant will pay for stormwater assessments for 12 schools, and funding from the 2020 state Environmental Enhancement Grant has already paid for another three, making that 15 of Nash County's 29 public schools. The end product for each is an in-depth study of each

campus' stormwater problems, with a detailed list of proposed projects that can fix, or alleviate, those problems.

It's a much-needed undertaking for these schools, according to Clay. "It's not just Nash County. This is representative of a statewide prob-

"It's not just Nash County. This is representative of a statewide problem – it's aging infrastructure ..."

*– Clay Barber
Sound Rivers Program Director*

lem – it's aging infrastructure, and infrastructure and maintenance are being deprioritized based on the funding the school gets," Clay said. "Unfortunately, the more rural a school is, the less funding they get."

Clay said in preparing the grant application, he chose to include

schools based on certain criteria: rural, larger campuses located close to waterways, which trend toward older schools built with little or no plan to deal with stormwater.

"For many of them, they've been using the cheapest, easiest solution to the problem. Some campuses are literally losing land every time it rains, then they don't have money to pay for the lasting repair," Clay said.

In the past, he said the reception he and his team of environmental engineers have received on their site visits has varied based on the school: "I've found that at well-funded schools, with not many stormwater problems – so, new campuses – they wonder why we're there. The other schools? They act like we're heroes coming to save them; they're like, 'Thank God – we've been talking about these problems for years!'"

Clay said he and engineers from Kris Bass Engineering have already started the stormwater assessments.

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