



## N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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### **Attention Editors and Environment Reporters: Background on DENR's 2005 Accomplishments**

**Note:** In an effort to assist you in your year-end roundup assignments, I have compiled the attached summary of major environmental accomplishments for 2005. For more information about these and other environmental activities during 2005, please refer to the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources Web site at [www.enr.state.nc.us](http://www.enr.state.nc.us).

Please feel free to contact me at (919) 715-4112 or Diana Kees at (919) 715-7357 if you need any information or assistance. State offices will be closed Dec. 23, 26 and 31. In case of emergency during non-working hours, you can reach Diana at home at (919) 380-8987 or me at (919) 848-2399.

On behalf of the DENR Public Affairs staff and its public information officers, I wish you a joyous and safe holiday season and New Year.

Sincerely,  
Don Reuter

#### **One North Carolina Naturally: Land and Water Protection/Conservation**

The Ecosystem Enhancement Program completed the two-year transition period mandated in its founding agreement among NCDENR, NCDOT and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with an unblemished track record in pursuing its core mission of offsetting unavoidable environmental damage from transportation-infrastructure improvements. In its first two years of operations, the initiative facilitated more than \$1.9 billion in road construction across the state without a single project delay because of a lack of mitigation. Along with managing nearly 400 stream and wetland restoration projects, the EEP collaborated on the preservation of nearly 35,000 acres of natural areas for future generations.

Gov. Mike Easley committed his administration to supporting the missions of the military stationed within North Carolina. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has backed that commitment by helping to ensure that the state's bases and training areas can support the missions of the Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force now and in the future. The agency and other partners are focusing on helping military bases and training areas address problems and threatened problems caused by incompatible development nearby. In May, Easley announced that 37,445 acres within five miles of North Carolina's military bases have been protected from incompatible development since 1995.

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On Feb. 11, Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Bill Ross signed the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan – a landmark conservation package designed to protect and restore critical fisheries habitat. Enhancing oyster restoration and reducing pollution caused by stormwater runoff are among a list of actions being undertaken by DENR and its Marine Fisheries, Coastal Management and Environmental Management commissions to begin implementation of the plan.

The General Assembly authorized new state parks at Carver's Creek in Cumberland County and at Hickory Nut Gorge in Rutherford County. Using grants from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the state parks system incorporated the former Brown's Summit Center in Rockingham County into Haw River State Park and is creating the state parks system's second regional environmental education center. Land acquisition efforts continue at the new Mayo River State Park, also in Rockingham County, with its size doubled in the past year to 1,588 acres. The division also acquired 785 acres at Elk Knob State Natural Area in Watauga and Ashe counties.

Since the Clean Water Management Trust Fund was created in 1996, it has helped protect 3,363 miles of streams, creeks, riverfront and shoreline in North Carolina and it has helped preserve nearly 300,000 acres of land abutting those waterways. CWMTF has awarded 699 grants totaling \$535.4 million in the last nine years. CWMTF grants have helped leverage over \$810.3 million in private or other funds. In August, CWMTF trustees made awards for the first grant cycle of 2005. Trustees approved 76 grants totaling \$52.5 million. Key projects included:

- \$6.6 million for acquisition of three tracts along the Green River;
- \$639,000 to Mecklenburg County for stormwater management to protect drinking water supplies at Mountain Island Lake.

Also in August, the CWMTF Board of Trustees committed over \$12.3 million to protect water quality and military bases from encroachment by development.

Nearly 6,000 acres of ecologically important lands have been protected over the past five years through a historic partnership between Weyerhaeuser Co., one of North Carolina's largest private landowners, various conservation groups and state environmental agencies. The program, which concluded in September, led to a significant addition to Pettigrew State Park, three new Coastal Land Trust nature preserves, two conservation easements and six natural heritage registry agreements.

In March, more than 300 people from across the state attended the "Value\$ of Conservation," which focused on ways we are protecting some of North Carolina's most critical economies - tourism, farm and forest lands, seafood, military bases - through conservation. Many outstanding presenters shared their perspectives on the critical relationship between conservation and a healthy North Carolina economy, in which approximately 25 percent is derived from industries and business that directly rely on our state's natural resources.

The state Division of Forest Resources reached a milestone in its reforestation efforts in 2005. In April, state officials announced that 1 million acres of trees have been planted in North Carolina soil using money from a state-funded program that reimburses private landowners for some of the costs to reforest their property. The Forest Development Program was established in 1978 and is the primary mechanism the division uses to encourage people to reforest their property.

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The Division of Forest Resources helped forest landowners whose property was damaged by the seven hurricanes and tropical storms that struck the state in 2004. The division administered the Forest Recovery Program, part of Gov. Mike Easley's \$247 million Hurricane Recovery Act of 2005. A total of \$500,000 in hurricane recovery funds was made available to private landowners aiming to establish or restore forestland. North Carolina forest landowners used every bit of the money by June 18.

The Division of Coastal Management awarded \$1.4 million in grants for 21 projects in 15 local communities for public access projects. The grants help pay for a variety of projects to improve access to coastal beaches and waters, including walkways, dune crossovers, restrooms, parking areas and piers. Funds also may be used for land acquisition or urban waterfront revitalization. The division also supported coastal land-use planning through \$420,000 in grants to 30 local communities.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program closed on 181 conservation easements so far this year. Permanent and 30-year easements now total 571 since the program began. This represents more than 400 miles of streams in the state. CREP is a joint effort of the N.C. Division of Soil and Water Conservation, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the Ecosystem Enhancement Program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to address water quality problems of the Neuse, Tar-Pamlico and Chowan river basins as well as the Jordan Lake watershed area.

### **Customer Service**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources' One-Stop Permit Assistance and Coordination Program expanded to five of the agency's seven regional offices. The one-stop coordinators also provide assistance and coordination to the state's Express Permit Review Program requested by Gov. Easley and established by the N.C. General Assembly in 2003. Both programs will be statewide by January 2006. Express Permitting, on the average, reduces permit application processing time by 60 percent to 90 percent compared to the statutory time. More than 600 permits were issued under Express Permitting in fiscal year 2004-05.

The NC OneMap Web mapping service continues to grow and connect more counties and cities across the state. More than 70 local governments are now serving digital geographic data through the NC OneMap portal, [www.NCOneMap.net](http://www.NCOneMap.net), where their data is combined with data from numerous federal and state sources. Internet users have access to more than 200 North Carolina data sets from one Web site, in real time. North Carolina is the recognized national leader in integrating a statewide Web mapping service.

U.S. EPA recognized the state's Division of Water Quality's wastewater treatment and discharge permitting program as one of the top three most innovative/outstanding programs in the nation. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the environmental effectiveness of the permits.

### **Managing River Basins for Multiple Benefits**

In 2005, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources launched a statewide stormwater awareness and education campaign. Stormwater has been identified as the number one pollution threat to North Carolina's surface water quality. The new Web site, [www.ncstormwater.org](http://www.ncstormwater.org), also offers a wealth of research and resources to assist local government and citizens.

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Six farms in eastern North Carolina have been added as candidates for the third phase of a unique buyout program intended to close swine farms in 100-year floodplain areas devastated six years ago during Hurricane Floyd. The innovative program, the only one of its kind in the nation, was created by the Division of Soil and Water Conservation and financed by the Clean Water Management Trust Fund in the aftermath of Floyd.

The state Division of Environmental Health assisted with financial planning for the Neuse Regional Water System. This will be a major supplier of surface water in the Central Coastal Plains Capacity Use Area, which is underlain by cretaceous aquifers that are threatened by accelerated drainage from groundwater withdrawal and by saltwater encroachment. Access to alternative water sources must be developed and funded to meet public demands.

Central North Carolina has been in a drought since September 2005. The state Division of Water Resources has been working closely with other agencies to manage reservoir operations to conserve water in Falls Lake and Jordan Lake.

The Division of Water Resources has permitted 199 water use facilities in the Central Coastal Plain Capacity Use since 2002. In 2005, the division issued permits to the 52 applications requiring the permit holder to reduce withdrawals from the overused Black Creek and Upper Cape Fear aquifers by up to 75 percent between present day and 2018. These permits will eliminate damage to the aquifer from overuse and require investment in sustainable water supplies in this region.

The Division of Water Resources worked as the lead state agency to secure a new Federal Energy Regulatory Commission hydropower license on the Tapoco Project that provides streamflow for aquatic habitat and recreation on the Cheoah River downstream of Santeetlah dam-operated by Alcoa Power Generating Inc.

The Division led DENR's efforts with FERC and other parties to arrive at a new revised license for the Gaston and Roanoke Rapids hydropower facilities operated by Dominion Energy on the Roanoke River. This license was issued in March, 2005 and will provide minimum and spawning flows to the bypassed reach below Roanoke Rapids dam, increase minimum flows in the lower Roanoke River during some months, further stabilize flows during March and enhance recreational use around the impoundments and downstream.

A key environmental issue recognized by the General Assembly in 2000 was the need to address sewer collection systems. In legislation passed that year, the legislature required whole collection system permits. Permitting for all major systems, 277 systems, was completed this year. These permits address critical infrastructure issues associated with the operation and maintenance of the collection systems.

The Division of Water Quality issued stormwater permits for 120 municipalities in 2005, beginning the full implementation of the Phase II stormwater program that will assure improved water quality protection associated with urban environments. Additionally, a general permit was issued for smaller municipalities.

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-5-

## **Environmental Education**

North Carolina's Environmental Educator Certification Program continues to grow with 186 newly enrolled educators this year and 48 becoming certified. This brings the total to 1,386 educators enrolled and 639 certified environmental educators. Many states, including Arizona, Virginia, and Oklahoma, are using the N.C. Environmental Education Certification Program as the model for developing their own certification programs. Community colleges across the state also continue to offer the environmental education certification courses.

The North Carolina Aquariums received federal designation as America's 18<sup>th</sup> Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center in January. Members of the inter-agency partnership share in a wide variety of resources, including research vessel time, expert speakers, educational publications, lesson plans, exhibit materials, films and more.

The N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences was the most visited museum in the state and named the number one field trip attraction in the state by North Carolina Fieldtrips magazine for the second year in a row.

## **Improving Air Quality**

High ozone days have declined substantially across North Carolina over the past few years, due in part to lower emissions from coal-fired power plants, other industry and motor vehicles. The number of days when ozone levels exceeded the federal standard peaked at 70 days statewide in 1998. In 2004, North Carolina had only five high ozone days, the fewest since at least the early 1980s. The decline in high ozone days goes hand-in-hand with recent state and federal actions to reduce ozone-forming emissions from power plants, other industry and motor vehicles. These actions and pending measures include the Clean Smokestacks Act, adopted by the legislature and signed by Gov. Mike Easley in 2002.

The Division of Air Quality, in cooperation with the Division of Motor Vehicles, continued the four-year expansion of the emissions inspection program for cars and light-duty trucks. The program added seven new counties on January 1 and eight more counties on July 1. The expansion will conclude in January 2006, with the addition of five more counties, bringing the total to 48 counties statewide. Motor vehicles account for about half of North Carolina's ozone-forming emissions.

In March, the Division of Air Quality awarded \$697,520 in grants for projects to reduce air pollution from motor vehicles, such as retrofitting school buses with controls to curb diesel emissions. DENR awarded the grants through the Mobile Source Emissions Reduction Grants program, which is administered through the Division of Air Quality. This year's grant winners included 10 projects from seven counties.

## **Protecting Groundwater and Restoring Contaminated Properties**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources projects that North Carolina's Brownfields Program will enter into 21 more brownfields agreements in 2005. These projects and others in the pipeline represent \$1 billion in private investment committed to the redevelopment of environmentally impacted properties under the state's brownfields statute.

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-6-

In conjunction with the Hurricane Recovery Act of 2004, the Division of Waste Management has entered into contracts to locate and characterize the condition of over 300 old landfills/old waste dumps posing a substantial threat of release in eligible counties. Other project work is being done to locate and evaluate inactive hazardous waste sites, such as abandoned manufacturing plants and industrial waste treatment lagoons located in flood-prone areas.

### **Progress toward Sustainability**

The N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance supported the growth of the state's recycling industry through a number of mechanisms including providing grants, continuing implementation of a revolving loan fund, operating the state markets directory, conducting direct technical assistance and assisting the N.C. Department of Commerce recruitment efforts. The number of businesses listed in the markets directory grew by about 4 percent, or 30 new companies in 2005, increasing the total number of companies in the directory to 765.

Gov. Mike Easley signed into law Senate Bill 692, clearing the way for the Green Square Project, an innovative public-private partnership that will significantly expand the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences in downtown Raleigh. The legislation allows the state to sell most of a Raleigh city block to the State Employees Credit Union for \$1. As part of the \$100 million project, the credit union would finance and develop a four-story Nature Research Center for the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences, offices for about 615 employees of the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources and new credit union offices for more than 300 workers.

In its fourth year, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' Environmental Stewardship Initiative continues to grow and promote superior environmental performance by the state's regulated community. Participants in the program agree to report annually on progress toward goals and reductions in environmental impacts. In 2005, 29 participants in the program prior to 2004 reported the following for calendar year 2004:

- reduced air emissions by 889 tons
- reduced water use by 369,160,801 gallons
- reduced solid waste disposal by 1,030 tons
- reduced hazardous waste by 12.3 tons
- reduced energy use by 2,404,893 kWh
- reduced propane use by 79.2 tons
- reduced material consumption by 298.2 tons
- increased recycling volume by 10,277 tons/yr.

The Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance conducted two grant cycles in 2005 resulting in the funding of 44 separate projects conducted by local governments, non-profits and recycling businesses statewide. The projects are cumulatively expected to result in diversion of more than 60,000 tons of recyclables from North Carolina's waste stream.

### **Protecting Public Health/Disaster Response**

The Division of Water Resources issued grants for 19 counties in northeastern North Carolina for the cleanup of stream debris as a result of Hurricane Isabel. More than \$3.4 million in funding has been granted to these counties to pay for this cleanup, which should be completed in 2006.

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-7-

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources' Geological Survey Section initiated a three-year Landslide Hazard Mapping Program. The goal of this new program is to create landslide hazard maps for five western North Carolina counties affected by the remnants of hurricanes Frances and Ivan in September 2004. Geologists provided emergency technical assistance to local and state emergency management personnel with landslides; participated in technical review committees to determine causes of landslides and where other landslides may happen and presented information on landslides to local government and interest groups.

The Division of Coastal Management provided assistance to coastal residents recovering from Hurricane Ophelia by issuing 142 CAMA emergency permits (as of Nov. 2) for rebuilding docks, piers, boathouses, sand dunes and other development activities and authorizing hundreds of more structures to be repaired under the statutory provisions of the Coastal Area Management Act.

The Division of Water Resources is preparing to award contracts to consultants to prepare three flood hazard mitigation plans for the four areas of western North Carolina that were the most severely damaged by Hurricane Frances and Ivan: Biltmore Village (city of Asheville), towns of Canton and Clyde (Haywood County) and the town of Newland (Avery County). These studies should begin in 2005 and be completed by July 2006.

The DENR's Geodetic Survey Section has been recognized by the Department of Defense for the high tech survey training it provided to the Army in the Continuous Operating Reference System for use in Iraq. The Geodetic Survey provided surveying support for the State Floodplain Program and emergency management during hurricane emergencies.

Inspection and enforcement activities conducted by the state's Hazardous Waste Section from October 2004 to September 2005 resulted in the prevention or mitigation of potentially significant adverse human health and environmental effects. As a direct result of these activities, more than 4,000 tons of hazardous waste soil/debris/contaminants and 29,000 gallons of hazardous waste were either remediated or brought into compliance with management requirements. These actions have prevented more than 4,500 individuals from being adversely affected by the mismanagement of hazardous waste.

The state's Public Water Supply Section received an EPA grant to assist in the development of Vulnerability Assessments and Emergency Response Plans for all public water systems serving populations greater than 3,300 persons, as required by the Bioterrorism Act of 2002. The grant work plan also includes a commitment to prepare an emergency response guidance document, primarily for use by state agency responders, to malicious acts directed at public water systems.

From the start of the year through Dec. 19, the N.C. Division of Forest Resources responded to 3,932 wildfires. Those fires burned more than 15,417 acres - meaning the division managed to contain fires to an average of 3.9 acres - smaller than the average size of wildfires in other states in the Southeast.

The Division of Forest Resources provided significant help to Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama and Georgia in the wake of the devastating hurricane season. Since Hurricane Katrina first made landfall in Florida on Aug. 25, the division has dispatched more than 300 employees to the Gulf Coast and the Sunshine State. Some staff have run centers for receiving and distributing food, water and medical supplies while others have operated a base camp in the New Orleans airport for emergency responders.

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