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## *Agricultural Advisory Board*

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### **FINAL Minutes**

#### Agricultural Advisory Board

January 21, 2021 7:00 PM CCACC (Chatham County Agriculture Conference Center) & Zoom  
remote video

**Called to order**, 7:04 pm

**Present:** Bobby Tucker (Chair), Cathy Jones (Vice Chair), Ginger Cunningham (NCCES County Director), Sharon Day, Chris Hart, Ben Shields (Secretary), Emily Moose (Planning Board liaison), Tenita Solanto, Susannah Goldston (CC Soil & Water Conservation District), Jeanette Beranger, Jeff Vaughan, Jim Crawford (BOC liaison), Brandy Oldham (CC Soil & Water Conservation District), Tom Gerow Jr. (NCDA-CS Forestry Service – Water Resources Staff Forester)

**Absent:** None

#### 1. Introduction of Guests

Bobby introduced the guest speaker, Tom Gerow Jr., Water Resources Staff Forester from the NCDA-CS Forestry Service.

## 2. Approval of Agenda

Sharon motioned to approve the agenda, Tenita seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## 3. Presentation by Tom Gerow Jr.

Tom Gerow Jr. presented on Water Quality Management in NC Forestry and the new Jordan Lake Riparian Buffer Rules. The NC Forestry Service (NCFS) conducts around 4000 water quality inspections annually throughout the state to check for compliance with state rules and regulations.

The NCFS publishes a quarterly report on state-wide forestry water quality. The state legislature adopted Forestry Practice Guidelines in 1990 and readopted them in 2018. These are performance based regulatory minimal baselines standards. These are tied to erosion and sediment controls of streams and other water ways, both seasonal and perennial.

The new and updated Jordan Lake Riparian Buffer Rules are issued and overseen by the State Water Management Resources, not the Forestry Service. A 50 foot buffer zone around waterways is required for logging with some exceptions allowed for tracts with forestry management plans or enrolled in a county PUV program. The NCFS has a limited role in administering Riparian Buffer Rules; the NCFS will document buffer violations and then sends this to the Dept. of Environmental Quality for determination. Violations require repair plans of the 30 to 50 foot buffer zone, certain numbers of trees replanted per acre, species diversity, annual monitoring for 6 years and possible civil fines.

The NC Forestry Service website, [ncforestservice.gov](http://ncforestservice.gov), has several resources available to the public such as a water quality page including the waterway buffer rules, forestry leaflets including the new Jordan Lake Riparian Buffer Rules, Forestry Practice Guidelines, videos, and FAQ's.

Sharon asked what constitutes water infiltration violations in a buffer zone. Tom responded that this includes groundcover removal, stump removal as well as moderate to severe erosion.

Doug commented that buffer restoration costs are typically higher than revenue from timber sales so it makes little business sense to violate the buffer rules.

Cathy asked who oversees land clearing, such as in the case of expanding farm fields or development. Tom responded this is the purview of DEQ Division of Energy, Mineral and Land Resources and that the NCFS oversees forestry practices only. Tom also commented that NCFS tries to get it right in landowners switching from forestry to development. In clearing forest for agricultural use, the NCFS will notify the county Soil and Water District if riparian buffer zone rules look to be violated.

Bobby asked how does the NCFS become aware of logging sites statewide. Tom said Forestry Rangers are located in every county and it is their job to integrate into the community and know what is happening there. They develop relationships with the local lumbering companies, write forestry plans for local landowners and will drive around looking for logging sites. The NCFS also uses satellite imagery to identify potential changes in vegetation and then notify Rangers of these places, who then go visit to see what has occurred there. Doug then commented that reputable timber buyers know to seek advice from NCFS Rangers while logging to comply with state rules and avoid unnecessary expenses. There is a free lumber harvest planning tool on the NCFS website available publicly.

Toms final words were to encourage folks to seek advice and plan ahead of time of disturbing land by logging.

#### 4. Planning Board Update

Emily said the last 2 Planning Board meetings have dealt with zoning proposals and subdivision updates. The UDO process is continuing and any the subdivision proposals falling under the 2008 rules are almost done and the following subdivision proposals will fall under the UDO rules. The Planning Board has not dealt with any Ag related issues lately.

As for the joint Subdivision Water Supply in Agricultural Areas Subcommittee, there has not been much progress other than learning from state and county experts present on the county hydrogeology and water infrastructure. Sharon shared that it is difficult to know how much water is being used county wide and there is a need to investigate this. There is also little knowledge of water table levels history as well. Data needs to be collected and analyzed for best policy making.

Bobby shared that some new data becomes available as new wells are drilled and can be put into GIS though this is limited by county resources. Hydrogeologic mapping is happening at the state level, see the work of Phil Bradley and Rick Bolich. Bobby then asked Emily how can the subcommittee move forward. Emily responded there is some in depth data on water sources and capacity in Chatham County available but it is not in a usable format. A lot of data on county water is in paper form and needs to be digitized for use. Do we act cautiously or not until data is ready to be analyzed. Given the emphasis on rural character and open space in the UDO, it seems obvious protecting water availability is a priority. There also seems to be a general misconception that ground water resides in aquifers whereas it mostly resides in the soil and subsoil.

Ben shared his thoughts that there are too few knowns and more data needs to be digitized and analyzed. Recommending resource conserving policies are likely good long term sustainability strategies despite the unknowns. Cathy commented how the geological impact of water is mind blowing and how do we then move forward with the frustration of so many unknowns. She also commented on how the last 2 years have been record setting wet.

Sharon shared how she is bothered by how the county does not require notification of dried up wells or reduced water and should this be required reporting. Bobby asked Ginger and Susannah if this would be useful information for the county and Ginger responded that the Cooperative Extension is not regulatory but educational and can help educate folks on this issue. Susannah shared how her family farm has 2 dry wells and that old, shallow wells are typically abandoned and not reported to the county. The only time the county is involved in a dry well is when folks want to close and seal the well, which is then recorded by the county.

Sharon spoke of how most folks don't care about unused wells to which Susannah responded there are lots of abandoned wells that are typically closed when a property changes hands. The county has a program that provides \$500 towards closing the well. Sharon suggested the subcommittee use this program data as well to which Susannah replied this data is not available. Cathy suggested using the Annual Water Usage Report put out by the USDA.

Emily reminded us the subcommittee is tasked making policy recommendations to either or both the Planning Board and the Board of Commissioners on what we can and should do to preserve county resources and reduce associated conflict. Jim Crawford responded the UDO is back on track and that he is willing to help bring any recommendation to the BoD in the 2022 fiscal year.

## 5. Review of minutes from October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

The board reviewed the minutes from the meeting on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Mark Ashness's last name was spelled incorrectly, no other changes were made. Cathy motioned to approve, Sharon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## 5. Voluntary Agricultural District Update

Susannah shared that Brandy Oldham is working on sending invitation to join the VAD program to PUV participants but with the County digital hack recovery still in play, this project is on hold until the files are accessible again. The data is fine, just not accessible. This project will be rolled out slowly so as to not overwhelm the office staff.

## 5. New Business

Bobby said he will keep coordinating future guest speakers and are there any more speaker suggestions. Jeanette shared how there was a great response to a CEFS butchering workshop and can online access be available to Chatham folks. Ginger responded Coop. Ext. can facilitate that and there is a similar workshop video available from a previous beef conference held at the Ag Center. Jeanette shared that 2021 is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of cattle arriving in the New World and can we promote Chatham cattle somehow. She also shared how the US Postal

Service is issuing heritage breed farm animal stamps this year. Ginger said this will work well with the upcoming celebration of Chatham County's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Jim said he will take a resolution to the BoD to proclaim a celebration of 250 plus years of agriculture in Chatham County. Jeanette volunteered to draft the resolution and Bobby volunteered to seek input from and include the Chatham Livestock Association.

#### 8. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 9th at 7 pm.

Bobby motioned to adjourn; Cathy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:38 pm.