

Chatham County Conservation Newsletter

Brandon Dawson <brandon.dawson@chathamcountync.gov>

Fri 8/30/2024 4:39 PM

To: ccp@lists.ncsu.edu <ccp@lists.ncsu.edu>

Chatham County Conservation Newsletter

The Chatham County Conservation Working Group (CWG) is an internal committee of county staff representing 14 different departments that address the environmental goals outlined in Plan Chatham. These staff meet monthly to collaborate on projects, seek guidance from other departments, and share updates on conservation efforts. These updates from the second quarter of 2024 have been compiled below.

Land

Farmland Preservation

- The Chatham Agricultural Preservation & Development Trust Fund has approved its [first round of grants](#). The funding was awarded to Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC) for the permanent conservation of three Chatham County farms totaling 287 acres and for organizational support to assist TLC in prioritizing farmland preservation efforts in Chatham County.
- Chatham County has been working on an update to its [Farmland Protection Plan](#), a guiding policy document focused on retaining farmland and boosting the county's agricultural economy. Following review from the Agriculture Advisory Board, the updated plan will be presented to the Board of Commissioners at an upcoming meeting. Visit the Agriculture Advisory Board page to learn more about the Farmland Protection Plan.
- The Farmland Preservation Program hosted a [farm transition and estate planning workshop](#) on Thursday, June 20 at the Chatham Conference Center. Anna Cates Williams from [Cedar Grove Law Firm](#) presented to the thirty-eight landowners in attendance!

New GIS Tools

- Staff in the GIS department have been collaborating with other departments to update and create public tools that can assist in conservation efforts:
 - [Parks & Recreation Locator](#) – this new online map allows viewers to explore park facilities and filter results by amenities such as kayak access, picnic shelters, and individual sports.
 - [Tax & Land Information Viewer](#) – this map offers a new platform for viewers to explore land data in layers such as flood hazards, zoning, and roadways. The viewer also comes with a “Quick Start Guide” and tutorial video to help new users navigate the tool.
 - [Conservation Viewer](#) – this map is next in line to get updated and transferred to a new platform. GIS staff are looking for input from organizations and individuals who utilize this tool on helpful ways to sort/organize the data in the new version. The current version offers layers on data such as habitat, species, and managed land. Any input for the new viewer should be sent to savannah.thomson@chathamcountync.gov

Public Funding

- Conservation Tax Credit
 - On July 3rd, Gov. Cooper signed a bill reauthorizing a tax credit for conservation easement donations. North Carolina donors who make a qualified conservation easement donation may now receive up to 25% of the conservation easement value as a state income tax credit in the year following the donation and up to five years thereafter. The total credit is capped at \$250,000 for single landowners and \$500,000 for married landowners filing a joint return. Conservation organizations believe this incentive will increase conservation easement donations across the state.
- County Funds for Trails
 - Members of the Haw River Trail Steering Committee, a collection of County staff and community organizations focused on implementing the recommendations of the [Haw River Trail Feasibility Study](#), are working with the Board of Commissioners and relevant County departments to [assess options for creating local funding](#) for trail building.

Water & Watershed Protection

County Feasibility Studies

- Chatham County is currently conducting a feasibility study to explore the potential implementation of Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) in the County's utilities system. These changes could offer increased data on home water usage and help ensure that leaks in water utility lines are discovered and addressed faster.
- Chatham County is seeking to conduct a study to address erosion issues at the South Bynum River Access on the Haw River.

Rivers of Chatham Webpage

- This [online hub](#) offers real-time updates on safety conditions, info on water quality, and helpful tips for trips along the County's major rivers. "Rivers of Chatham" was showcased at the National ESRI Conference in San Diego.

Development Review

- As the County continues to grow, staff are ensuring that new developments meet regulations aimed at protecting Chatham County's watersheds. The following have been conducted in the second quarter of 2024:
 - 880 Erosion Control Inspections
 - 37 Riparian Buffer Reviews
 - 4 USGS/NRCS Confirmations
 - 19 Stormwater Control Measure Inspections
- Increased focus on stormwater:
 - Developing new online forms to increase efficiency of stormwater review and streamline contact/questions between staff and developers/owners.
 - Increasing overall data collection of [stormwater control measures](#) (including new and more conventional SCM name types, new symbology for NCDEQ regulated SCMs, and a new Watershed Protection tab on the Land Records Viewer that houses SCMs).
 - New internal process for ensuring adequate documentation of stormwater control measures on commercial projects.
 - Watershed Protection staff have been engaging with the community through educational opportunities, including 4 major events, which reached 738 people and received 47 staff hours dedicated outside of normal business hours.

Climate/Resilience

Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

- Chatham County received federal funding from the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant to build electric vehicle charging stations. Now, County staff are collaborating with Pittsboro and Siler City to identify ideal locations for new chargers.

Waste & Recycling

- The [Chatham County Waste Reduction & Recycling Enthusiast Program](#) (WREP) is an educational program that allows community members to learn more about sustainable practices and waste reduction, and offers volunteer opportunities to engage with the

Chatham community. Explore the program website to learn more and sign up for the program newsletter.

- The Chatham County Waste Composition Study (WCS) is used to determine the makeup of our waste stream. Results from the WCS provide valuable information used to make improvements to current programs or establish new ones. The 2024 WCS has been completed and results will be shared soon. Visit the Solid Waste & Recycling webpage to [explore the County's previous Waste Composition Studies](#).

Haw River Safety

- The Central Pines Regional Council [Regional Resiliency Portfolio](#) identified various safety improvements along the Haw River that would build resiliency to increased climate hazards. The portfolio includes signage on bridge crossings to help with navigation and potential river rescue efforts. The first sign has been [installed on US 64](#) and more are being planned.

Heat Action Plan

- The [Chatham County Heat Action Plan](#) aims to educate the community about how extreme heat can affect county residents and help leadership develop ways to prepare for future heat events. This year marked the first heat season with the plan in place, which has included the following:
 - Pre-heat season kick-off meeting occurred on April 25th, bringing together various county departments, the Town of Pittsboro and Siler City staff, Chatham Hospital, and several community-based organizations.
 - Developed educational materials about preventing heat-related illnesses and ongoing monitoring of heat-related illness emergency calls.
 - Programming for assisting families with high energy bills from cooling and distributing box fans to those without AC.
 - Established cooling centers with water and seating at the three libraries.
 - Created misting stations at county parks for those unable to visit the cooling centers.
- Chatham residents are encouraged to sign up for [Heat Health Alerts](#) from the NC Department of Health and Human Services.
- Chatham County is collaborating with community partners in utilizing the [Energy Futures Grant](#) to establish the three libraries in Chatham County as Resilience Hubs.

Natural Resources

Natural Areas Inventory

- The NC Natural Heritage Program is conducting an ongoing inventory of natural areas in Chatham County. The project has received overwhelming support from property owners, with the inventory receiving permission to survey over 7,000 acres of private lands.

Educational Programming

- The following education programs were conducted by or received presentations from staff at Chatham County Cooperative Extension and Soil & Water Conservation District to help inform the community on the importance and opportunity of conserving the many natural resources in Chatham County:
 - 13 Pollinator Garden Tours in Q2 – 330 participants
 - Landscaping for Pollinators at the Native Plant Conference in Cullowhee – 25 participants
 - Identification of North Carolina Pines Workshop – 17 participants

- Tree Identification and Forest Ecology Walk at Carolina Meadows – 27 participants
- Chatham Conservation Partnership Webinar on Bumble Bee Conservation – 115 participants
- Chatham Conservation Partnership Webinar on Fireflies – 120 participants

Invasive Species Management

- Environmental Quality and Parks & Recreation are collaborating to develop an invasive species control program for county-owned parks. Staff are researching how similar programs at other organizations and governments are managed in order to create a blueprint for Chatham County.

Upcoming Collaboration

Conservation Goals – Dashboard and Implementation Plan

- This project will establish consensus- and equity-based metrics for Comprehensive Plan environmental goals, develop a public dashboard for tracking progress made towards those goals, and create an implementation plan for achieving remaining goals.
- Planning Communities LLC has been contracted to develop the project and will collaborate with the Conservation Working Group, the Board of Commissioners, and a stakeholder group of representatives from community organizations.

Grant Assistance

- The Conservation Working Group has begun collaborating with the Grant Assistance Program at Central Pines Regional Council. This program will allow county departments to identify priority projects in need of funding and increase staff capacity to apply for large grants.

If you have any questions about any of these projects or the County's conservation efforts, please feel free to reach out and we will connect you with the relevant staff member.

Cheers,

Brandon Dawson

Conservation & Resiliency Coordinator | he/him

Chatham County Planning Department

P.O. Box 54 80-A East St.

Pittsboro, NC 27312

Office: (919) 545-8365 | Cell: (919) 548-9174