

WAKE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025
FISCAL YEAR

60 years strong



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DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

VISION

The vision of the Wake Soil & Water Conservation District is to be a leader in delivering natural resource management planning, farmland preservation, education, community engagement and water quality implementation activities throughout Wake County.

In pursuit of this vision, we continue to uphold the core principles that have contributed to 60 years of conservation success. We respect the rights and responsibilities of private property owners and support their ability to make informed decisions about conserving natural resources on their land. We champion voluntary, non-regulatory approaches to achieving conservation goals. We believe in the power of locally led, grassroots efforts to implement conservation practices on the ground.

MISSION

To conserve the soil, water, and related natural resources of Wake County by providing education, information, technical assistance and economic incentives to County citizens that will protect the water quality of all Wake County watersheds.



STAFF & BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Wake SWCD Staff

- Teresa Furr**, District Director
- Leah Purvis**, Environmental Educator
- Winifred Dorer**, Administrative Coordinator
- Alex Heinemann**, Big Sweep Coordinator
- Steven Ward**, Natural Resource Conservationist
- Emily Bateman**, Conservation Program Manager
- Conor McKearney**, Natural Resource Conservationist
- Loren Hendrickson**, Farmland Preservation Coordinator

USDA NRCS Staff

- Natural Resources Conservation Service
Raleigh Field Office Staff - Team 10
- Olivia Plant**
Supervisory Soil Conservationist
- Gabriela Velez Rodriguez**
Soil Conservationist

Wake SWCD Board of Supervisors

ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS

- Beth Pugh Farrell**, Chair
- Thomas Dean**, Vice-Chair
- Reece Wamsley**
- Jenna Wadsworth**
- Ryan Broadwell**

ASSOCIATE BOARD

- Marilyn Grolitzer**
- David Adams**
- John Phelps**
- Robin Hammond**
- Nervahna Crew**

Wake County Agricultural Advisory Board

APPOINTED OFFICIALS

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Patrick Johnson , Chair | Talmage Brown | William Upchurch |
| Joanie Bowden , Vice Chair | Eric Regensburger | Brittany Marshburn |
| David Canady | | |



CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

OVERVIEW OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

To support the sustainability of Wake County's agricultural lands, the Wake Soil and Water Conservation District achieved the following in partnership with USDA-NRCS:

- Provided high-quality **technical and financial assistance** to the county's farming community.
- Implemented Best Management Practices (BMPs) on **5,953 acres** to enhance soil health and protect water quality.
- **Distributed over \$503,668** in financial assistance for conservation efforts.
- Developed **45 financial assistance contracts** with farmers and landowners.
- **Secured and encumbered \$1,421,305** in combined state and federal cost-share funding to support on-farm conservation practices.



Newly established grassed waterway in a farm field within the Little River watershed, designed to reduce soil erosion, manage runoff, and protect downstream water quality.



A warm season cover crop flourishing in a farm field, helping to improve soil health, reduce erosion, and support long-term agricultural sustainability.



Stream restoration efforts at Falls Lake, in partnership with Wake County Environmental Services, are improving water quality, stabilizing streambanks, and enhancing habitat for wildlife.



CCAP PROJECTS

NORTH WAKE FIRE STATION BIORETENTION AREA

Stormwater control measures were implemented on an 8.5-acre Wake County government-owned site in the Falls Lake Watershed, which includes approximately 1.5 acres of impervious surface. As part of the project, two bioretention cells were installed – one by converting an existing dry detention pond, and the other constructed adjacent to the parking lot to treat runoff from impervious surfaces. These green infrastructure upgrades were designed to reduce erosion on the property and minimize the transport of sediment and nutrients downstream during rain events. The improvements contribute to the protection of Falls Lake, a vital drinking water supply for Wake County. This project enhances local water quality, supports watershed health, and reflects the County’s ongoing commitment to sustainable land and water resource management.

FUNDING

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Wake County IAIA | \$204,400.00 |
| Community Conservation Assistance Program..... | \$50,000.00 |

TOTAL PROJECT FUNDING SECURED

\$254,400.00



Installation of a bioretention cell at North Wake Fire Station to treat runoff from impervious surfaces and enhance water quality in Falls Lake.



AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP & SUPPORT

PARTNERSHIPS

Support and connectivity were provided by the Wake Soil and Water Conservation District to the agricultural community through partnerships and service on various committees, boards, and initiatives. The District staff provided representation and leadership by serving on the Growth, Land Use, and Environment Focus Team, Wake County Water Partnership, National Agricultural Land Network, Capital Area Food Network, Wake County Farm Bureau, Wake Nature Preserves Partnership, Comprehensive Planning Subcommittee, District Employees Association, Piedmont Conservation Council, and many others.

Staff continue to serve on local, state, and national boards, bringing attention to Wake County as a destination to showcase conservation projects and to highlight our award-winning Farmland Preservation program.

Water Partnership tour of the newly installed green stormwater infrastructure at Wake Tech's Eastern Campus.



KEEPING THE FARM WORKSHOP

The 20th Annual Keeping the Farm Workshop was held on March 19, 2025, at the Wake County Commons Building. Over 180 people attended the free event to learn more about farm succession planning, properties in the present use value program, eminent domain, asset protection, register of deeds, and farmland preservation. Many people see Wake County primarily as the bustling state capital of business, yet some of its largest productivity comes from our 664 farms and over 62,323 acres of actively cultivated farm and well-managed forest land.



Wake County Commissioner Don Mial welcomes attendees to the Keeping the Farm Workshop.



FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

The **Wake County Farmland Preservation** program launched in January of 2023, with the additions of the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District (EVAD) and Conservation Easement (CE) programs to the existing Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program. These programs encourage the sustainable growth of agriculture, horticulture, and forestry through protection from non-farm development and other negative impacts on properly managed farms. The staff worked with the Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) to manage all Farmland Preservation applications.



The AAB **approved 67 VAD (4,460.54 acres), and 8 Conservation Easement applications (312 acres) totaling 4,772.54 acres** during the 2024-2025 Fiscal Year. There are currently **17,382.02 acres** enrolled in the Voluntary Agricultural District program. Staff also submitted four applications to the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund for permanent conservation easements to be held by Wake SWCD. Two of these projects had a federal funding application submitted. During this fiscal year, the program successfully closed two additional permanent conservation easements, resulting in **72 acres** protected forever.



Wake County Agricultural Advisory Board honored with the NC Friends of Farmland Award, presented by NC Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler.



CONSERVATION EASEMENT FUNDING

Permanent conservation easements serve as the foundation for the Farmland Preservation program. Our success is built upon partnerships and the county's matching funds for conservation easement applications, which have been crucial to our achievements. Regarding the deferred taxes allocated to easements, 100 % of our allotted funds have been committed to projects, with 33% spent in just 3 years of work. The following depicts the funding devoted to conservation easement projects:

COMPLETED PROJECTS:

| Projects | Acres | Wake Funding | State Funding | Federal Funding | Landowner Donation | Total Conservation Value |
|----------|-------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 4 | 319 | \$3,165,871 | \$497,700 | \$500,000 | \$11,561,530 | \$15,725,101 |

IN-PROGRESS PROJECTS:

| Projects | Acres | Wake Funding | State Funding | Federal Funding | Landowner Donation | Total Conservation Value |
|----------|--------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 13 | 502.69 | \$7,808,300 | \$6,513,282 | \$2,817,712 | \$3,290,780 | \$20,430,074 |

The department is currently leading the development of a comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan for Wake County to help protect and sustain agricultural land in the face of ongoing growth and development. To support this effort, we have contracted with Equinox, a firm with extensive experience in conservation planning, to assist in creating a data-driven, community-informed strategy.

The plan will identify priority farmland areas, outline tools for long-term preservation, and provide recommendations to help ensure the continued viability of agriculture in Wake County for future generations.

The Walton Farm, one of the last large working farms in Raleigh, is now permanently protected by a conservation easement.





EDUCATION & SCHOLARSHIPS

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION OVERVIEW

Wake District staff engages citizens of all ages in learning about the importance of natural resources and how to protect them. Wake District staff worked with a total of **1,109** students and adults in the District’s environmental education programs in fiscal year 2024-2025. These programs include outreach programs at schools and libraries, field trips, training events, school career fairs, the Annual Conservation Poster Contest, the Envirothon competition, and the Resource Conservation Workshop (RCW). The District also provides scholarships for students to attend RCW, and manages the newly-launched Sheila B. Jones Environmental Education Scholarship (see below).



SHEILA B. JONES ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP

In January 2024, the Friends of the Wake SWCD launched the Sheila B. Jones Environmental Education Scholarship to honor the legacy of Sheila B. Jones, a longtime employee of the Wake SWCD and exceptional environmental educator. This year, two recipients (pictured below) were awarded \$1,000 scholarships to support their academic journeys in becoming professional environmental educators.



Dae Borg



Addisu Serba



Friends of Wake SWCD board members and Sheila Jones present award to Addisu Serba.



CONSERVATION POSTER CONTEST

2024-2025 POSTER CONTEST

This year's Annual Conservation Poster Contest theme was "Wetlands are Wonderful," focusing on the functions and importance of wetlands for both people and wildlife. Students dove deep into learning about wetlands and combined both art and science to design an educational poster to display their new knowledge! The top posters were judged by the Wake SWCD Board of Supervisors.



The contest was open to **3rd, 4th, and 5th graders** in Wake County, and **280** students from **9 schools** across Wake County participated! The students created masterpieces showcasing their artistic and academic skills. For each grade level, a first and second place prize were awarded, each with cash prizes, totaling **\$225** generously funded by **NOVONESIS**.

1st Place Winners of Wake SWCD Poster Contest



3rd grade:
Ashleigh Wuchter,
Adams Elementary



4th grade:
Deetya Parimi,
Highcroft Drive Elementary



5th grade:
Asher Deepak,
Green Hope Elementary

ENVIROTHON COMPETITION

2023-2024 ENVIROTHON

Last July, Enloe High School's "Subchronic Exposure" team competed at the international level at the NCF-Envirothon in Geneva, New York. They finished in **4th place**, competing against the top high school teams from across the United States, Canadian provinces, Singapore, and China. They won a plaque and **\$3,000** in scholarships!

2024-2025 ENVIROTHON

The 2024-2025 season of Envirothon was a great success, with a total of **140 students** in **28 teams** from **12 schools** in Wake County competing at the 2025 Area 4 Envirothon competition in Louisburg on March 20th. This competition had teams participating from Wake, Johnston, Durham, Warren, Vance, Granville, and Franklin counties.

Out of a total of 13 middle school teams from all seven counties, 6 Wake County middle school teams placed in the top 7, qualifying for the state competition. Out of 34 high school teams total, 5 Wake County teams placed in the top 7 to qualify for the state competition. Wake County teams secured 1st place in both middle and high school. The Wake Soil and Water Conservation District covered the costs for all 11 qualifying teams to compete at the NC Envirothon in Burlington on May 2nd and 3rd, and Enloe's "Subchronic Exposure" secured 1st place!



Enloe High School's "Subchronic Exposure" team won 4th place at the 2024 NCF Envirothon Competition, and in 2025 won 1st place at the 2025 Regional Area IV competition and the 2025 NC Envirothon competition! They will represent NC at the international competition in Alberta, Canada.



RESOURCE CONSERVATION WORKSHOP

RCW 2025

Wake SWCD planned and facilitated the activities for “Soil & Water Day” during this week-long conservation summer camp at North Carolina State University. The district sponsored a total of **7** Wake County students, who joined almost **80** other high school students from across the state. The day’s activities were centered around Best Management Practices (BMPs) that Soil & Water Conservation Districts frequently employ, and what careers in natural resource conservation can look like. Students learned about how erosion affects waterways, how to manage livestock to maintain soil health, and how to create a conservation plan.

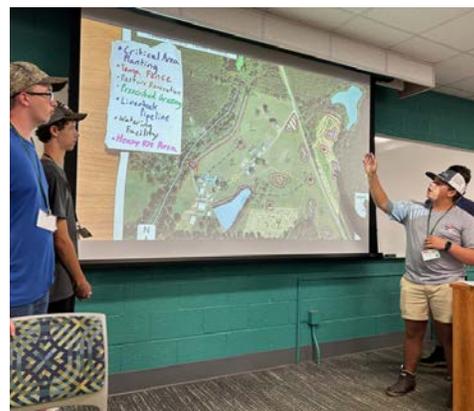
This unique conservation camp experience was made possible for these students thanks to **scholarships** awarded by the Wake SWCD Board of Supervisors (who funded 3 students) and the Friends of Wake SWCD (who funded 2 full scholarships and one partial). Total funding for Wake County students to attend RCW this year amounted to **\$3,440** for 6 students (with one additional self-funding). For the past 30+ years, students have told us they find this week to be a valuable immersion into the art and science of conservation, giving them a new perspective on natural resources management as well as renewed inspiration to be active environmental stewards in their communities.



Wake SWCD staff and NRCS staff demonstrate pasture BMPs using a rainfall simulator.



Wake SWCD staff lead an activity measuring soil loss from a gully.



Students present their conservation plan to the students and counselors.



WAKE COUNTY BIG SWEEP

VOLUNTEER

Wake County Big Sweep wrapped up a successful fiscal year, continuing to use our dedicated fleet of boats and trailer—generously provided by our long-standing partners at **Heidelberg Materials**. This added flexibility enabled us to host a record-breaking **11** watercraft cleanup events, the most in our program’s history, as we celebrate **38** years of protecting local watersheds since 1987.



We focus on zones within drinking water sources and impaired watersheds. Our goal is to improve water quality by eliminating trash and engaging our communities to protect water resources. Volunteers conducted **47** cleanup events this fiscal year, covering over **2,092** acres, throughout Wake County. The program had **1,320** volunteers who donated **3,964** hours valued at **\$132,771**. In total, **51,690** pounds of litter were removed. Of that, **16,214** pounds were diverted from the landfill through recycling.



Wake County Big Sweep volunteers, in partnership with our Parks and Open Space teams, tackled Beech Bluff County Park’s infamous 'Tire Mountain' on February 27, 2025—recycling 251 tires and removing an impressive 6,505 pounds of trash.



WAKE COUNTY BIG SWEEP

WATERSHED IMPACT

Watersheds are delineated by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) using a nationwide system based on surface hydrologic features. Wake County contains **46** 12-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) subwatersheds that fall entirely or partially within its boundaries. Of these, **23** subwatersheds contain drinking water supply sources. Wake County Big Sweep also targets impaired and threatened waterways identified on the 303(d) list maintained by the NC Division of Water Resources within the NC Department of Environmental Quality. There are currently **43** uniquely impaired waterbodies in the county.

For data analysis purposes, Wake County Big Sweep uses 12-digit HUC (subwatersheds) and named impaired waterbodies. The table below shows the percentage of areas reached through Big Sweep cleanup events during this fiscal year, including:

- the percentage of total subwatersheds in Wake County
- the percentage of subwatersheds containing drinking water supply sources
- the percentage of impaired waterbodies

These metrics provide insight into how effectively cleanup efforts are targeting both high-priority and environmentally vulnerable areas.

| Fiscal Year | Total Watersheds | Drinking Water Sources | Impaired 303(d) Listing |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| FY25 | 65% | 43% | 95% |
| FY24 | 59% | 35% | 86% |
| FY23 | 50% | 39% | 91% |



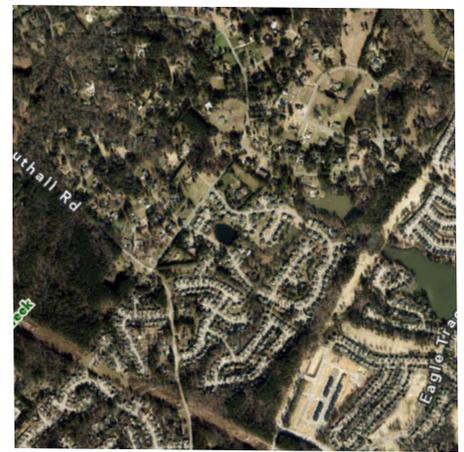
WAKE SWCD'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

The Wake Soil and Water Conservation District was established in 1965, and has supported farmland in Wake County during 60 years of rapid change.

Knightdale - 1965



Knightdale - 2025



Then and Now: Wake County Farmland in Numbers*

| | Acres of Farmland | Number of Farms | Population Density | Value of Land |
|------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1965 | 265,538 | 2,753 | 169,082 | \$428.32/acre |
| 2025 | 62,323 | 664 | 1,229,269 | \$200,000/acre |

*Data was sourced from North Carolina Agricultural Statistics (NCDA)



WAKE SWCD MILESTONES

- 1939** — Neuse River District was formed that included Wake, Durham, and Orange Counties
- 1965** — Wake Soil and Water Conservation District officially chartered
- 1967** — Wake District helped found the Resource Conservation Workshop (RCW)
- 1968** — Wake District leads the effort to pass 1 million bond referendum to support Crabtree Creek Watershed project to reduce local flooding
- 1974** — Wake District assisted with the first urban erosion and sediment control regulations being enacted in the State
- 1985** — Wake District hires first full-time Soil & Water district Environmental Education position in the state
- 1994** — Wake District receives the best District in the nation award from National Association Conservation Districts (NACD)
- 2005** — Wake District holds first Keeping the Farm Workshop
- 2020** — Wake District becomes official stand-alone county department
- 2021** — Wake District hires full-time Big Sweep Coordinator
- 2022** — Wake District hires first Farmland Preservation Coordinator
- 2023** — Wake District receives historic allocation of deferred tax fund for farmland preservation
- 2025** — Wake District celebrates 60 years of locally led conservation work



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank all of our amazing internal and external partners for their continued support and collaboration to help further our work to protect the natural resources in Wake County.

THANK YOU

- *Wake County Board of Commissioners*
- *Wake SWCD Board of Supervisors*
- *Wake County Agricultural Advisory Board*
- *Friends of the District*
- *Triangle Land Conservancy*
- *Green For Life*
- *Wake County Parks & Open Space*
- *NCASWCD*
- *Wake County Environmental Services*
- *Heidelberg Materials*
- *City of Raleigh PRCR*
- *City of Raleigh Stormwater*
- *Town of Cary*
- *Town of Fuquay-Varina Stormwater*
- *Town of Garner*
- *Piedmont Conservation Council*
- *NC Division Soil and Water*
- *NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation*
- *NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts*

CONTACT US

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