

ANNUAL REPORT

WAKE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
WAKE COUNTY
SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

2025-2026

FISCAL YEAR



 **USDA** Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Department Overview

VISION

The vision for the Wake Soil & Water Conservation District is to be the leader in providing education, natural resource management planning, conservation, and implementation activities throughout Wake County. In pursuing this vision, we continue to rely on core values that have contributed to over 60 years of conservation success. We value the rights and responsibilities of private property owners and their ability to make informed natural resource conservation decisions on their own land. We value voluntary, non-regulatory efforts to accomplish natural resource conservation objectives. We value locally led, grassroots implementation of 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 COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

COUNTY STAFF

Teresa Furr, District Director

Emily Bateman, Conservation Program Manager

Conor McKearney, Natural Resource Conservationist

Steven Ward, Natural Resource Conservationist

Loren Hendrickson, Farmland Preservation Coordinator

Leah Purvis, Environmental Educator

Winifred Dorer, Administrative Coordinator

Alexandra Heinemann, Big Sweep Coordinator

USDA NRCS

(Natural Resources Conservation Service)
Raleigh Field Office Staff - Team 10 & 8

Olivia Zema

Supervisory Soil Conservationist

Gabriela Velez Rodriguez

Soil Conservationist

De'Aree Harris

Soil Conservationist

WAKE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS

Beth Pugh Farrell, Chair

Thomas Dean, Vice-Chair

Ryan Broadwell, Treasurer

Jenna Wadsworth

Reese Wamsley

ASSOCIATE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Marilyn Grolitzer

David Adams

John Phelps

Robin Hammond

Nervahna Crew

WAKE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD

APPOINTED OFFICIALS

Patrick Johnson, Chair

Joanie Bowden, Vice Chair

David Canady

Talmage Brown

Eric Regensburger

William Upchurch

Brittany Marshburn

Best Management Practices Conservation Planning and Installation

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 **74** Best Management Practices (BMPs) on **19,603.9 acres** to enhance soil health and protect water quality.
- **Distributed over \$377,022** in financial assistance for conservation efforts.
- Developed **45 financial assistance contracts** with farmers and landowners.
- **Secured and encumbered \$941,014** in combined state and federal cost-share funding to support on-farm conservation practices.



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



An excavator removes sediment that has washed into an irrigation pond over the years, increasing the storage capacity.



A newly installed livestock watering system providing clean drinking water for horses and helping to keep sediment and nutrients out of waterways.

Best Management Practices Conservation Planning and Installation

STATE FARMERS MARKET - RALEIGH

The Wake Soil and Water Conservation District is managing a grant-funded feasibility study aimed at restoring a stream and managing stormwater at the State Farmers Market in Raleigh. The study is funded by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's Division of Water Resources and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and is being conducted by Kris Bass Engineering. The project area at the State Farmers Market contains large buildings, paved roads, and extensive parking areas. About 41 of the site's 85.6 acres are impervious, causing significant stormwater runoff to flow directly into a highly degraded tributary during rain events. The feasibility study aims to identify solutions that slow and reduce stormwater flow and develop a design to restore 1,500 linear feet of the unnamed tributary, which joins Walnut Creek about 1,000 feet downstream. Walnut Creek is listed as impaired due to PCB contamination, sedimentation, and increased stormwater flows resulting from widespread impervious surfaces in its watershed. The study will position project sponsors to advance toward plan approval and funding for the proposed stream restoration and stormwater treatment project. The study is expected to be completed in the fall of 2026.

TOTAL PROJECT FUNDING SECURED \$33,550.00



A highly degraded, unnamed tributary to Walnut Creek at the State Farmers Market is being studied for a future stream restoration project.

Outreach & Special Events

Keeping the Farm and 60th Anniversary

KEEPING THE FARM WORKSHOP

The 21st Annual Keeping the Farm Workshop was held on March 11, 2026 at the Wake County Commons Building. Over **150** people attended the free event to learn more about farm succession planning, property tax updates, deeds and public records, farm safety and security, farm pond management, wildlife programs, and the Voluntary Agricultural District. 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 **81,000** acres of actively cultivated farm and forest land.



60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION



For 60 years, the District has celebrated individuals and organizations committed to protecting the county's natural resources with its Annual Awards. On October 2, 2025, the District commemorated its 60th anniversary milestone by inviting back all the past winners for a BBQ luncheon and presentation of the 2025 Annual Awards. **80** people took part in the festivities including

Wake County Commissioners, past supervisors and staff, farmers, business partners, and friends. Guests had the opportunity to peruse our "Walk Down Memory Lane" exhibit, filled with archival news clippings highlighting important accomplishments over the District's lifetime. They also heard special remarks from past District Directors that illustrated the lasting impact of dedicated conservationists in our community.

Outreach & Special Events

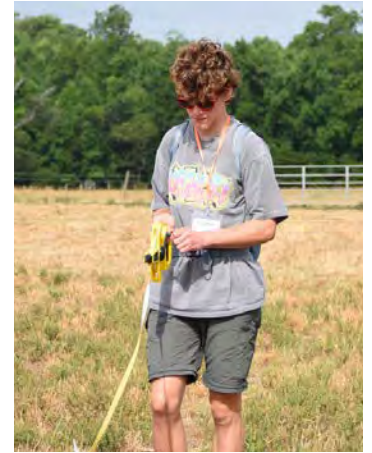
RCW

RESOURCE CONSERVATION WORKSHOP 2026

Wake SWCD and the Friends of Wake SWCD provided a total of **\$4,225 in scholarships** to support **seven** students from Wake County to attend the 2026 Resource Conservation Workshop at NCSU. These students joined 65 others from across the state in mid-June for a week-long immersion into conservation careers, getting valuable hands-on experiences learning from professionals in a variety of fields.

An entire day of the camp focused on issues and careers in Soil and Water Conservation Districts and was coordinated and taught by Wake Soil and Water Conservation District staff in collaboration with other districts and partner organizations. Students learned about the importance of managing livestock farms in sustainable ways to promote the healthiest forage and livestock while protecting soil health and water quality. They gained hands-on experiences in grazing management, pond protection systems, pasture renovation, and critical area plantings. To bring it all together, they developed conservation plans for a realistic farm scenario using the best management practices they learned in the field, and presented their plans to judges.

For the past 30+ years, RCW alumni have shared that they find this week to be an invaluable immersion into the art and science of conservation, giving them a new perspective on natural resources management and inspiring them to pursue careers in conservation.



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 (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 26 VAD (2,031 acres), 1 EVAD (13 acres) and 17 Conservation Easement applications (755 acres) totaling 2,799 acres** during the 2025-2026 Fiscal Year. There are currently **19,780 acres** enrolled in the Farmland Preservation program. Staff also submitted ten applications to the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund for permanent conservation easements to be held by Wake SWCD, in addition to an Agricultural Growth Zone grant for \$2 million. Four of these ten easement projects had a companion federal funding application submitted. During this fiscal year, the program successfully closed three permanent conservation easements, resulting in 90 acres protected forever. Finally, the Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan was adopted by the Board of Commissioners in June, charting a path for preserving Wake County Farmland for the next ten years. The plan has four focus areas, each with numerous recommendations, and it integrates with the County strategic plan to ensure Wake County effectively preserves working lands to balance future growth.



Farmland Preservation Program Funding & Conservation Easements

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, all of our allotted funds have been committed to projects, and there is now a waitlist for upcoming projects. The following depicts the funding devoted to conservation easement projects:

Completed Projects

Projects	Acres	Wake Funding	State Funding	Federal Funding	Total Conservation Value
7	407	\$4,116,505	\$1,482,529	\$500,000	\$20,570,393

In-Progress Projects

Projects	Acres	Wake Funding	State Funding	Federal Funding	Total Conservation Value
26	1,293	\$17,068,013	\$12,682,841	\$8,102,198	\$50,178,769

In addition to county funding commitments, in June, NCADFP announced that all of our projects had secured match funding. Furthermore, our application for an Ag-Growth Zone Grant was approved. Plus, all four NRCS projects received funding. All together, NCADFP & NRCS recommended over **\$10 million** in funding for Wake County Farmland Preservation for FY 2026 alone. The focus now turns to closing easements as efficiently as possible, given the growing list of projects.



Environmental Education Youth & Adult Programs

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 **2,000 students and adults** in the District's environmental education programs in Fiscal Year 2025-2026. The district engages Wake County's youth through outreach programs at schools, the annual Conservation Poster Contest, the Envirothon competition, and the Resource Conservation Workshop (RCW). Through these programs, **27 Wake County students** in grades 3-12 were awarded **\$14,275 in scholarships** sourced from Wake SWCD and partner organizations. These education programs and scholarship awards go a long way to support students' academic careers, fostering a new generation of passionate conservation professionals.

POSTER CONTEST

This year's "We All Live in a Watershed" conservation poster contest engaged a total of **560 students in grades 3-5** from 28 classes across **5 elementary schools** in Wake County.

Students explored watersheds – what they are, why they are important, and actions we can all take to protect our local watershed. Congratulations to each student who worked hard to create masterpieces showcasing their artistic and academic skills while learning about conservation! Wake SWCD poster contest cash prizes are generously donated by Novonesis.



Fifth grader Edward Ng from Green Hope Elementary won 1st place at the Wake district and Area 4 contests, and placed 2nd place at the state competition, earning a total of \$250 in prize money!

L to R: Leah Purvis, Edward Ng, Beth Pugh Farrell, Kristin Walker

Environmental Education Youth & Adult Programs

ENVIROTHON

The Envirothon is an academic competition that challenges middle and high school teams' knowledge of aquatic ecology, forestry, soils and land use, wildlife, and current environmental issues.

International Envirothon 2025

In the summer of 2025, our talented NC Envirothon State Champion team, “Subchronic Exposure,” competed for the second year in a row at the international level at the NCF-Envirothon. This year’s competition was located in Alberta, Canada.

The team’s knowledge of soils, aquatic ecology, wildlife, forestry, and current environmental issues was tested alongside the top high school teams from across the United States, 8 Canadian provinces, Singapore, and China. The team finished in **4th place**, and also earned an award for getting the **highest score on the Current Environmental Issues test**, bringing their total prize winnings to **\$4,500!** The scholarships will go toward supporting the students’ college educations.

The current issue topic, “Roots and Resiliency: Fostering Forest Stewardship in a Canopy of Change,” encouraged students to explore the role of indigenous knowledge in managing natural resources, particularly in forestry, and to consider environmental justice issues.



Environmental Education Youth & Adult Programs

ENVIROTHON

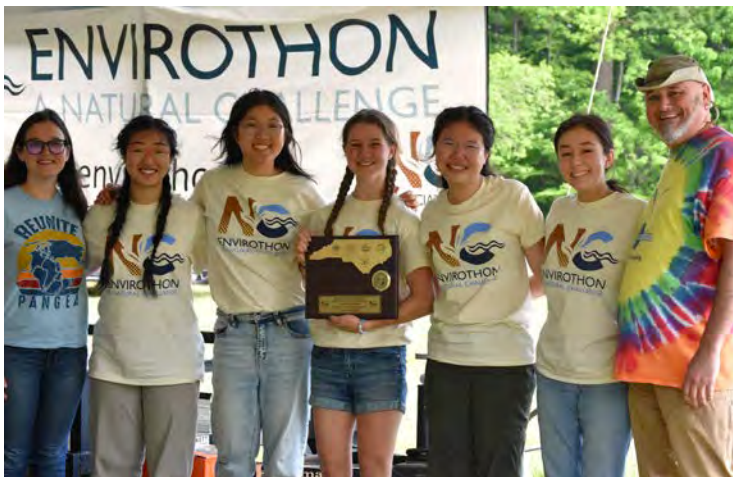
Area 4 Envirothon 2026

After spending the fall and spring diligently preparing, a total of **29 teams from 11 schools** in Wake County participated in the 2026 Area 4 Envirothon competition in March.

Wake teams did spectacularly well at the Area 4 competition, with many Wake County teams qualifying for the state competition. **Five high school teams** place in the top 7 and **six middle school teams** placed in the top 7!



Middle School 1st place winner - "Bouncing Bunnies FFA" from Herbert Akins Rd Middle School



Enloe High School's "Subchronic Exposure" team won 1st place at the 2026 NC Envirothon competition, qualifying them for the international NCF Envirothon for the third year in a row!

NC Envirothon 2026

Enloe High School's Subchronic Exposure won 1st place at the 2026 NC Envirothon at Cedarock Park in Alamance County for the **third year in a row**. The state champions won an engraved plaque and **\$2,700** in cash prizes. They will compete at the international level at the National Conservation Foundation (NCF) Envirothon competition in Starkville, Mississippi in July 2026.

Environmental Education Youth & Adult Programs

SHEILA B. JONES ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP

Wake District staff coordinated the Sheila B. Jones Environmental Education Scholarship on behalf of the Friends of the Wake SWCD. This scholarship honors the legacy of Sheila B. Jones, a longtime employee of the Wake SWCD and exceptional environmental educator. This year, **two** exceptional students (pictured below) were awarded one-time **\$1,000 scholarships each** to support their academic journeys in becoming professional environmental educators.



Hanna Campbella



Amarion Singletary



L to R: Amarion Singletary, Sheila Jones, Hanna Campbella



L to R: Talmage Brown, Jeff Essic, Hanna Campbella, Sheila Jones, Leah Purvis

Volunteer Program

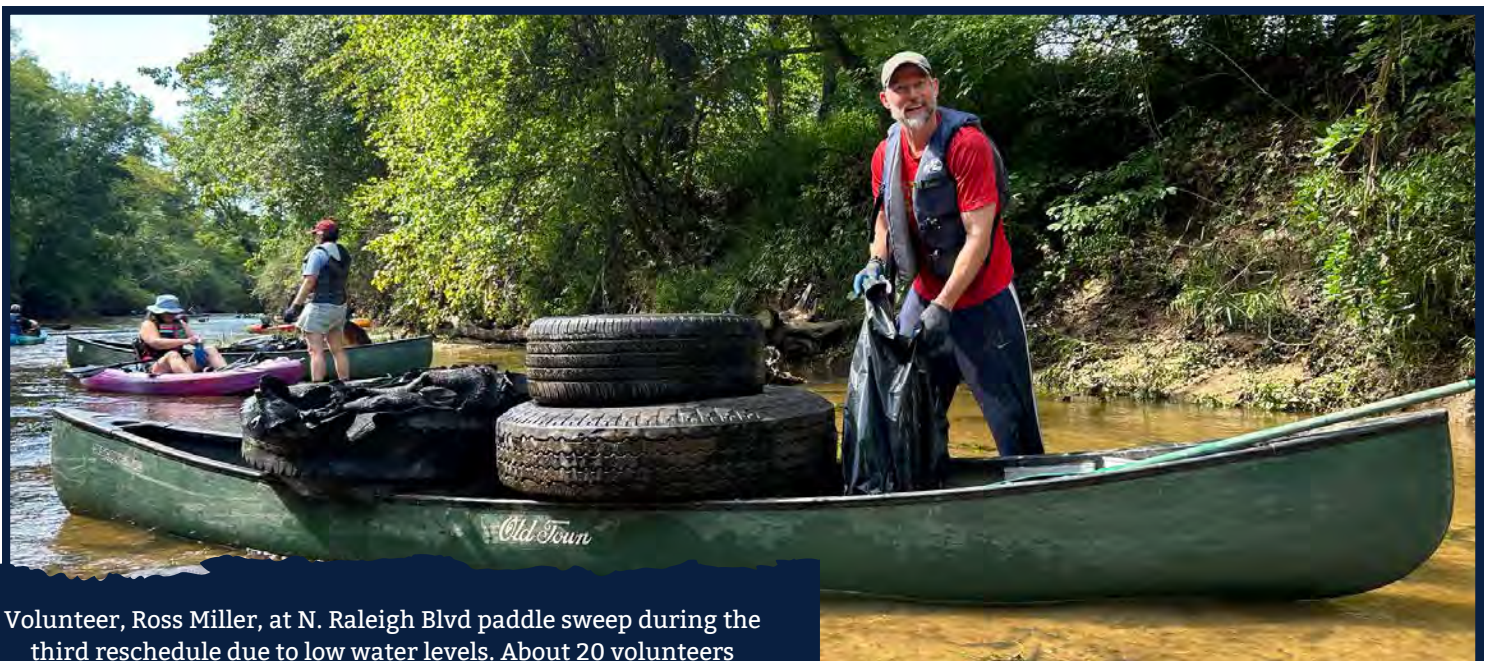
Wake County Big Sweep

VOLUNTEER IMPACT



Wake County Big Sweep had a successful fiscal year including some of our largest hauls in the history of Big Sweep including the removal of **583** tires. We achieved **12** watercraft events this year. Big Sweep also celebrated 38 years, cleaning watersheds and waterways 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 **49** cleanup events this fiscal year, covering over **2,553.50** acres, throughout Wake County. The program had **1,353** volunteers who donated **3,819.5** hours valued at **\$129,606.13**. In total, **76,747** pounds of litter were removed. Of that, **26,025** pounds were diverted from the landfill through recycling.



Volunteer, Ross Miller, at N. Raleigh Blvd paddle sweep during the third reschedule due to low water levels. About 20 volunteers cleaned up 520 LBS out of Crabtree Creek.

Volunteer Program

Wake County Big Sweep

WATERSHED IMPACT

Watersheds are delineated by United States Geological Survey (USGS) using a nationwide system based on surface hydrologic features. In total, Wake County has **46** 12-digit HUC (hydrologic unit code) subwatersheds that are entirely or partially within the county border. Of those, **23** subwatersheds have drinking water supply sources associated directly. Big Sweep also targets impaired and threatened waterways as designated by the 303(d) list that NC Division of Water Resources with the NC Department of Environmental Quality assembles. In Wake County, **43** subwatersheds have uniquely impaired waters. Watersheds used for Wake County Big Sweep data analysis are the 12-digit HUC subwatersheds. Below is a table outlining the percentages of subwatersheds cleaned in each category throughout past and present fiscal years based on unique targeted areas.

Fiscal Year	Total Watersheds	Drinking Water Sources	Impaired 303d Listing
FY26	63%	57%	91%
FY25	65%	43%	95%
FY24	59%	35%	86%
FY23	50%	39%	91%

Acknowledgements

THANK YOU

We would like to 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.

Wake County Board of Commissioners
Wake SWCD Board of Supervisors
Wake County Agricultural Advisory Board
Wake County Farm Bureau
Friends of the District
Triangle Land Conservancy
Green For Life
Wake County Parks & Open Space
NCASWCD
Wake Planning and Development Services
NC ADFP
NRCS
Novonesis

COR PRCR
COR Stormwater
COR Water
Town of Cary
Town of Fuquay-Varina Stormwater
Town of Garner
Town of Apex Stormwater
Piedmont Conservation Council
NC Division Soil and Water
NC FSWC
Heidelberg Materials
AgCarolina Farm Credit
DEQ DWR

CONTACT US



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