



FY2025-2026

ANNUAL REPORT

**DURHAM SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**



www.dconc.gov/swcd



919-560-0558





Table of Contents

Photo credit for cover: Celeste Burns

3

Mission and Vision

4

Meet our Board & Staff

5

Celebration of Eddie Culberson's
42 years of service

7-11

Ag Development

12-16

Cost Share Programs (ACSP, AgWRAP,
CCAP, and ISIP)

17-28

Environmental Education & Outreach

29-31

Stream Restoration Projects

32-36

Partners

37

Thank-You Message

MISSION

To conserve, enhance and promote the natural resources of Durham County by providing technical assistance, environmental education information and economic incentives to County residents and by exhibiting a diversified program to meet its changing needs.



VISION

To address all natural resources on every acre in Durham County in a way that will benefit the environment, wildlife, its people, and the natural resources themselves, plus produce an environmentally conscious group of residents who will set a trend of conserving, enhancing and promoting our natural resource base.



Meet our Board and Staff

Board

The District is a governmental subdivision of the State; a public body organized in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 139 of the General Statutes of North Carolina and is subject to the powers and restrictions as outlined in G. S. 139. Under this law, the District has the responsibility of conserving soil, water, and related natural resources within the District boundary. The District board is made up of five Supervisors (two appointed and three elected Supervisors).

Talmage Layton
Chair (Appointed)



Mark Waller
Vice-Chair (Elected)



Kenny Browning
Secretary/Treasurer (Elected)



David Harris
Financial Officer (Elected)



Ja'Nell Henry
Member (Elected)



Staff

Partners

Grace Messinger
Executive Director for Piedmont
Conservation Council (PCC)



Haley Bock
Project Manager for Piedmont
Conservation Council (PCC)



Olivia Zema
Supervisory Soil
Conservationist for
Natural Resources
Conservation Service
(NRCS)



PICTURED: (Left to Right) Education & Outreach Coordinator, Elicia Senff; Natural Resources Coordinator, Dustin Brewer; Senior Administrative Officer, Lisa Marochak; Ag Development Coordinator, Sherry Scully; and Agri Business & Environmental Services Manager, Jack Brown

CELEBRATING EDDIE CULBERSON'S 42 YEARS OF SERVICE IN SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

FY25-26 marked an important milestone for Durham Soil & Water Conservation District (Durham SWCD) as we celebrated the remarkable career of Eddie Culberson. With 42 years dedicated to the field of soil and water conservation and 38 of those years spent serving the people of Durham County, Eddie has left an enduring legacy of leadership, innovation, and unwavering commitment to natural resource stewardship.

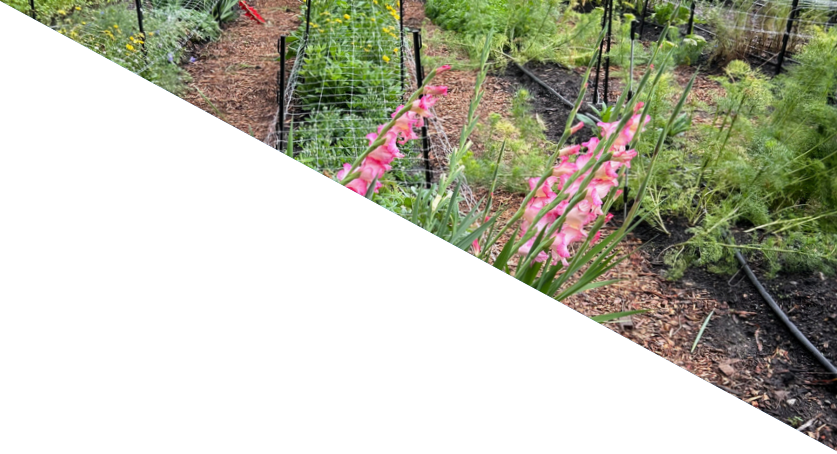
Eddie began his career in soil and water conservation in 1984, and four years later he joined Durham County, where he became a cornerstone of the District's work. Throughout his tenure, Eddie consistently championed practical, community-focused conservation programs. He played a vital role in expanding technical assistance to landowners, strengthening partnerships across agencies, and enhancing conservation programs for residents. His steady leadership helped guide the District through periods of growth, evolving environmental challenges, and new opportunities to protect Durham's natural resources.

At the end of June 2026, Eddie concluded his distinguished career and entered a well-deserved retirement. While we are excited for the next chapter in his life, his presence will be greatly missed by staff, partners, and the many community members he has supported over nearly four decades.

The Durham SWCD extends its deepest gratitude to Eddie for his extraordinary service, dedication, and leadership. His legacy is one of care for the land, the community, and for the future of conservation in Durham County.







AG DEVELOPMENT



AG ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GRANT

The Durham County Board of County Commissioners approved an allocation for the Agricultural Economic Development (AED) Grant Program of \$250,000 for the fiscal year 2026. This program's purpose is to offer cost share grants to assist farmers and nonprofits in their agricultural endeavors and to promote Agriculture Development and Outdoor Environmental Learning Centers in schools.

The Agricultural Economic Development Grant Subcommittee administers this grant program. This committee is made up of nine (9) members that manage the program and evaluate each application. These nine members represent multiple agencies that assist the farming community as well as members of local non-profit advisory boards.

Program Impact & Data	FY 26
Funding level	\$250,000
Request for funding from applicants	\$399,719
Number of applications	51
Number of farm applications	47
Number of farm projects funded	31
Number of farms funded for food safety compliance	4
Number of agricultural nonprofits that applied	6
Number of nonprofits funded	1
Number of school applications	3
Number of schools funded	3



Left: Wash Station



Greenhouse

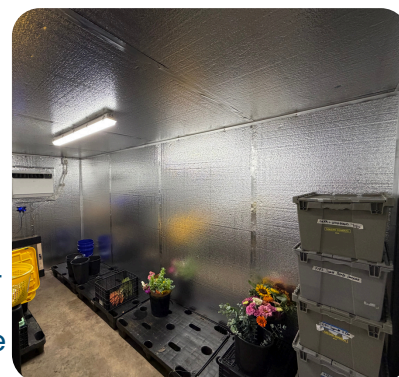


Left: Extension for working cattle



Above: Animal Care and Husbandry Tools

Breakdown of Project types	FY26 Applicants	FY26 Funded
Number of farm operations that raise livestock only	9	9
Number of farm operations that raise livestock & produce	7	6
Number of farms that grow produce only	19	10
Projects that improved access/equity/nonprofits with direct sales	6	1
Schools supporting Agriculture Education	2	2
Other Agriculture Commodities produced (Hay, flowers, compost, etc.)	16	7



Right: Cooler-Produce and Seed Storage

FARMLAND PROTECTION ADVISORY BOARD



MISSION

The mission of the Farmland Protection Advisory Board (FPAB) is to foster the wise use of our farmland resources by working with farmers, the community, government entities, agencies, and other resources to identify and implement strategies for the preservation and enhancement of our farming community while protecting the land and soil for future generations.

To promote this mission, the FPAB is responsible for:

- Reviewing and approving Voluntary Ag District applications.
- Providing guidance to DCo Open Space staff in acquisition of conservation easements through their Farmland Protection Program.
- Advising staff and BOCC on projects, programs, or issues affecting the agricultural community.
- Educating the public and farming community on the benefits of protecting and continuing farming.
- Promoting, administering, and implementing the Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan and Ordinance.

The Farmland Protection Advisory Board is comprised of 15 Durham County residents including:

- Representative landowners who are actively farming from each of the Voluntary Ag Districts: Flat River, Little River, Eno, Falls, and Cape Fear.
- Representatives from the BOCC, SWCD Board, Durham County Farm Bureau, and Durham Open Space and Trails Commission.

**The Farmland Protection
Advisory Board meets the
third Thursday of each
month at 6:00 p.m.**

at Durham Farm Bureau- 1901 Hillandale Rd
Durham, NC 27705

Durham County



Board Members

Chair

- Nicole Connelly - Little River VAD

Vice Chairman

- Mark Waller - Durham Farm Bureau Representative

2nd Vice Chair

- Kenny Browning - Eno River VAD

Board Members

- Michelle Burton - County Commissioner
- Talmage Layton - Falls/Lick Creek VAD
- John Cowan - Cape Fear VAD
- Douglas Daye - Flat River VAD
- Deborah Luecken - Open Space & Trails Representative
- David Harris - Durham SWCD Representative
- Chris Young - Business Representative
- Matthew Eagle - At Large (Farmland Board Appointed)
- Carolyn Rose-Seed - At Large (Farmland Board Appointed)
- David Heeks - At Large (Farmland Board Appointed)
- Helena Cragg - At Large (Farmland Board Appointed)
- Samantha Gasson - At Large (Farmland Board Appointed)

FARMLAND PROTECTION ADVISORY BOARD

The Farmland Protection Advisory Board was very active in FY2025-2026, working towards their mission and participating in a number of events in addition to their monthly meetings. On September 2, 2025, the FPAB members attended a Durham County Board of County Commissioner (BOCC) Work Session to share their FY2024-2025 Annual Report and to highlight their work in FY 2025. They rallied together again on March 23, 2026, to show support at the BOCC Regular Session to celebrate recognition of 25 years of the Durham County Farmland Protection Program success.



FPAB Members, Staff support
and Landowners at the
March 23, 2026 BOCC Meeting

Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan Update

Throughout the year, the Farmland Protection Advisory Board has been steadfast in their support of the Durham SWCD staff and contractor, Matzah Rising leading the development of the 2026 Agricultural Economic Development Plan. On June 11th, the FPAB held a retreat to review the plan and to help create goals for the 2026 Agricultural Economic Development and Preservation Plan update. Grant funding from the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund was received to update the plan and is on schedule to be completed September 2026.



FPAB Retreat June 11, 2026

FARMLAND PROTECTION ADVISORY BOARD

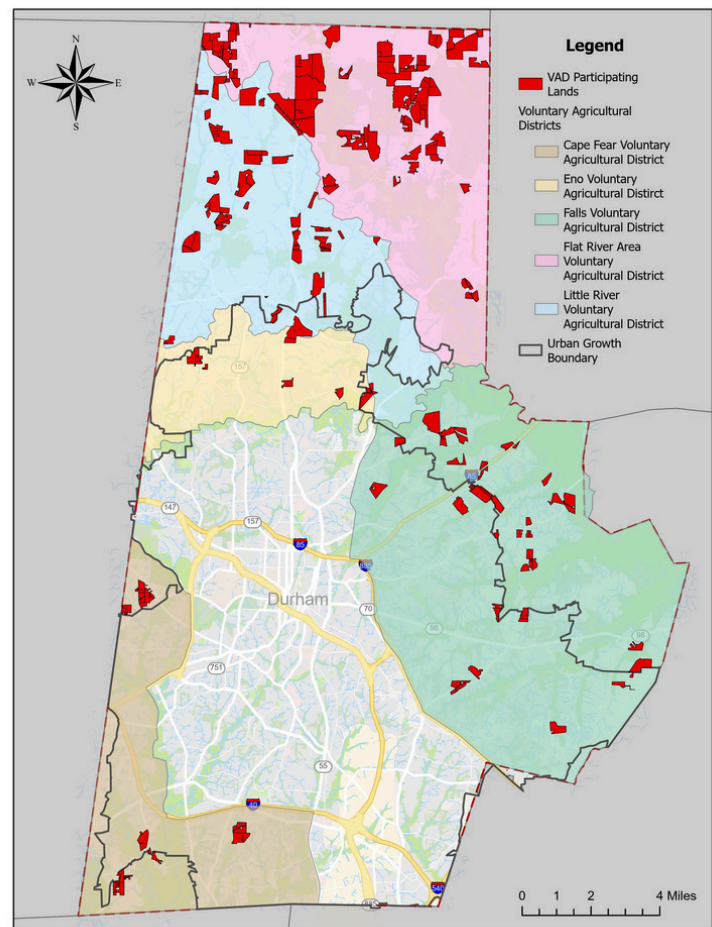
Winter Breakfast Series

Over the winter months, the board hosted three Farmer and Landowner Breakfasts and presentations on beneficial topics as follows: Farm Law, Farm Tax, NCSU Plant Disease and Insect Clinic, and Farmland Preservation. Over 97 people attended the breakfast events.



Voluntary Ag District (VAD) Program

Working farms have an important, positive impact on the economy and culture of our region. In 2000, Durham implemented the Voluntary Ag District (VAD) program. VADs, certified by the Farmland Protection Board and administered by the Durham Soil and Water Conservation District, help ensure the voluntary preservation of the land and the protection of farms. Interested landowners sign a non-binding contract committing to prohibit non-farm use of the land for 10 years. VADs are recognized with a roadside sign to notify passersby that there may be odor, dust or noise experienced in the area. These signs are a way that farmers can share that farms are here to stay. This year, the GIS VAD data layer was considered by City-County Planning during development of the Unified Development Ordinance.



**Thank you to the 2025-2026
Southern School of Energy
and Sustainability students
who helped build the frames
for the VAD signs.**



**112 VAD participants
257 land parcels
9,335 acres**

COST SHARE PROGRAMS



AGRICULTURAL COST SHARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



The Agriculture Cost Share Assistance Program (ACSP) is a voluntary program for qualifying farmers and agricultural landowners to address natural resource concerns on the land and nonpoint source pollution from agricultural activities. The program provides technical, educational, and financial assistance for the installation of conservation best management practices (BMPs) to address water quality issues found on the farm. The ACSP has been putting conservation on the ground across NC since the mid-1980's. Here in Durham County, it is administered by the Durham Soil and Water Conservation District.

The ACSP is a voluntary, cost share program that aims to help producers and landowners improve natural resources (air, soil, plants, animals, and water) on their property by utilizing or installing conservation BMPs. Participants can be reimbursed up to 75% of a predetermined average cost for each BMP installed. The applicant is responsible for the remaining 25% of the costs. In some situations, new or limited resource farmers can be eligible for up to 90% cost share.

The Durham County Agriculture Cost Share Assistance Program received \$56,555 from state appropriations for conservation best management practices in fiscal year 2026. Of the state appropriated funds, 100% were allocated to local Durham County producers/landowners for the following conservation BMPs; agricultural road repair, agricultural pond repair/retrofit, and an agricultural pond sediment removal. The BMPs will mitigate or prevent future losses of nutrients and soil from the farms to nearby streams, thereby improving overall water quality in Durham County.

The District Staff will be working closely with the producers over the next couple of years to provide technical assistance during the installation of the BMPs. Once completed, the District will monitor the BMPs for 10 years to ensure their function and continued use. On April 29th, two supervisors and four district staff visited five ACSP sites. During the spot check, it was observed that all five contracts were in compliance.



Micro Irrigation



Ag Road Repair



Manure Spreader- FY2026
Spot Check

NC AGRICULTURAL WATER RESOURCES ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (AgWRAP)

Established in 2012, the NC Agricultural Water Resources Assistance Program (AgWRAP) assists the Durham County agriculture community with water resource needs. Instead of being water quality driven like ACSP, the AgWRAP program is strictly water quantity based and help address water resource concerns on farms. AgWRAP is intended to:

- Identify opportunities to increase water use efficiency, availability, and storage
- Implement best management practices (BMPs) to conserve and protect water resources
- Increase water use efficiency
- Increase water storage and availability for agricultural purposes.

The state legislated appropriation for AgWRAP is considerably smaller than ACSP, therefore the District allocation is much smaller than the ACSP. In FY 2026, the Durham District received \$9,500 that was used for a water well. The water well was allocated to a farmer to provide a clean and efficient water source for about 3 acres of produce.

Similar to the NC Ag Cost Share Program, once an AgWRAP contract has been signed and approved the producer has two to three years to complete the installation of all BMPs. On April 29th, two supervisors and four district staff visited three AgWRAP sites. During the spot check it was observed that all three contracts were in compliance.



Water Well



FY26 Spot Check



Storage Water Tank

NC COMMUNITY CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCAP)

The Community Conservation Assistance Program (CCAP) is a voluntary program that provides landowners with technical assistance and cost share reimbursement to install best management practices (BMPs) on urban and suburban land. On-site consultations are provided to residents to address erosion, drainage, and water quality concerns along with evaluating BMPs suitable for a site. Staff also hosts community outreach meetings with homeowner's associations and local groups to discuss water quality improvement. BMPs available through CCAP include rain gardens, grass swales, cisterns, critical area plantings, impervious surface conversion, and streambank stabilization. The primary mission of CCAP is to reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients from reaching our streams to improve water quality and aquatic habitat.

Durham SWCD continued utilizing a grant worth \$90,000 from City of Durham and \$94,000 from EPA. The purpose of these fundings is to implement BMPs. During FY26, Durham Soil and Water staff were pleased to conduct outreach efforts and site visits to encumber and expend these funds. The majority of the BMPs installed were in designated priority areas, with the goal of assisting historically underserved communities in Durham. The City of Durham and Durham SWCD collaboration effort is a renewal of the partnership that began with the City of Durham funds in FY 2014. Such funds are vital to the success of the Community Conservation Assistance Program in Durham!



Rain garden



FY26 CCAP Measurable Achievements

Technical Assistance	135
Applications Received	17
BMPs Installed	31
Tons of Soil Saved (annually)	611
Pounds of Phosphorus removed (annually)	6
Pounds of Nitrogen removed (annually)	12
Cost Share Reimbursed	\$47,652



Conveyance - dry creek bed

IMPAIRED STREAM IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (ISIP)

The Impaired Stream Improvement Program (ISIP) seeks to implement conservation best management practices on impaired streams in low-income areas. The selected projects target stream sites where the amount of sediment and/or nutrients entering the stream can be reduced using best management practices (BMPs). Several different conservation BMPs can be utilized in Durham County to improve the health of these urban streams including streambank stabilization, critical area planting, rain gardens, and riparian buffers.

ISIP provides landowners who self-certify as low income with 100% cost-share for BMP installations on their property in cases where water quality concerns are identified. A 'Limited Resource Self-Certification' form has been created and updated for use with this program based on the FY 2025 Income Limits for Durham-Chapel Hill, NC HUD Metro FMR Area (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development).

During fiscal year 2026, the district used the funding to repair a badly needed stormwater conveyance in the Walltown neighborhood. This property has received stormwater from a large drainage area for decades and the increasing flow and multiple obstructions have caused structural damage to the home. This conveyance was restored and the structural damage will be fixed in the upcoming year. The contracts have a 5-year maintenance requirement that the landowners must abide by for all installed practices, beginning once construction is completed. The other project was on Latta Rd in N. Durham for a homeowner receiving increasing runoff from the mixed-use development that has recently been built at the corner of Guess Road and Latta Road. ISIP funds were used to build a conveyance to carry the water around the property as well as construction of a rain garden to treat driveway and rooftop runoff. These projects will reduce erosion on both properties exponentially, while helping protect these two threatened watersheds. The Durham District contracted K&E Environmental and CFB Contracting. Both are certified, insured, environmental contractors with years of experience implementing the best management practices designed by Durham SWCD staff for a total cost of \$50,000.



Stormwater Conveyance- Walltown Project



Stormwater Conveyance
Latta Rd Project



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Durham SWCD increased its Education & Outreach programming by 21% in FY26, expanding opportunities for both adults and students. More than 5,300 students participated in hands-on environmental education programs, and the District increased the number of programs offered to adults as well.

Classroom Programs and Summer Camps



In FY 26, Durham SWCD led a variety of educational programs at Durham grade schools, pre-schools, and summer camps. Lessons ranged from exploring habitats and interdependence to investigating the forces of erosion at Jockey's Ridge State Park.

We began assisting at summer camps as a guest speaker in FY25. In FY26, we partnered with two additional summer camps to present hands-on, nature-based lessons.

Field Days

Durham SWCD's 3rd Grade Field Days provide Durham County students with interactive lessons presented by resource professionals. In FY26, students explored the parts of a tree, animal skulls and scats, watersheds, and water quality.

We hosted 5 field days and engaged 338 students.



Resource Conservation Workshop (RCW)



NC STATE

EXTENSION



Soil & Water



This year, the Durham SWCD Board sponsored two students to attend the Resource Conservation Workshop: William Clark (Durham School of the Arts) and Matthias Mathieu (Northern High School).

The RCW is a weeklong camp held at NC State University for students interested in conservation and natural resources. Students participate in field studies, tours, and hands-on sessions led by resource professionals. Students who attend the RCW are eligible to receive awards and scholarships at the end of the workshop.

Durham SWCD Staff volunteered for Soil and Water Day – a day focused on exploring the work of a Soil and Water District Employee. Our staff led lessons on grazing management, and other district employees taught lessons on pasture renovation, critical area stabilization, and stream protection systems.

AWARDS CELEBRATION & CONTESTS

The Annual Conservation Awards Celebration was held on May 19th at Redwood Ruritan Club. We recognized the winners of the 2026 Conservation Contests and K-2 Bookmark Contest, the Conservation Education Secondary Teacher of the Year, the Urban Conservationist of the Year, and our Durham County Envirothon Teams.

This year's theme for the Conservation Contests was "We all live in a Watershed" and the theme for the Bookmark Contests was "Creek Critters." We received 468 entries from Durham County students! Winners of the Conservation Contests receive a certificate, a yard sign, and a cash prize. The winning entries for the Conservation Contests are submitted to the Area competition where they have a chance to win additional prizes. Seven entries submitted by Durham County students placed at the Area IV competition, and one entry went on to win first at the state competition (see details in the table below)!

Bookmark (K-2nd) Theme: Growing A Garden		
KINDERGARTEN	FIRST GRADE	SECOND GRADE
<u>1st Place</u> Rena Yokoyama <i>Triangle Day School</i>	<u>1st Place</u> Kelsi Gordon <i>R.N. Harris</i>	<u>1st Place</u> Leo Rooney <i>Carolina Friends School</i>
<u>2nd Place</u> Harker Biggs <i>Gorman Christian Academy</i>	<u>2nd Place</u> Sarah-Lee Bijou <i>R.N. Harris</i>	<u>2nd Place</u> Sylvie Stuart <i>Carolina Friends School</i>
<u>Honorable Mention</u> Novah Morales <i>R.N. Harris</i>	<u>Honorable Mention</u> Natalie Mullis <i>Spring Valley</i>	<u>Honorable Mention</u> Naomi West <i>Triangle Day School</i>



First Grade Bookmark- 1st place



Second Grade Bookmark- 1st place

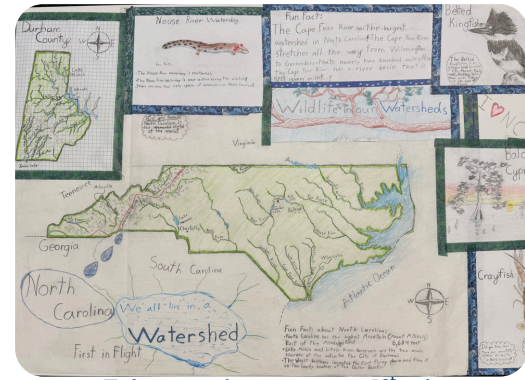


Kindergarten Bookmark
1st place

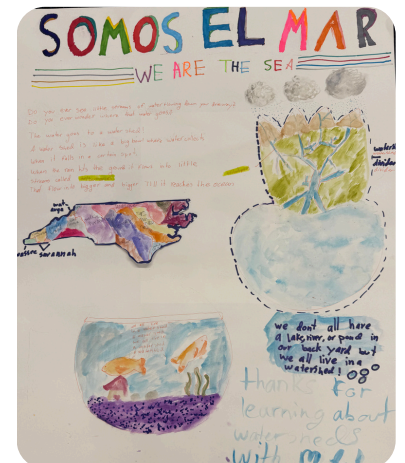


AWARDS CELEBRATION & CONTESTS

POSTER (3 RD - 5 TH) THEME: WE ALL LIVE IN A WATERSHED		
FOURTH GRADE		FIFTH GRADE
<u>1st Place</u> Anne Sparks (Morehead Montessori) 3 rd Place Winner for Area IV		<u>1st Place</u> Kristopher Markatos (Southwest Elementary) 3 rd Place Winner for Area IV
<u>2nd Place</u> Iriana Espinosa Pacheco (Eno Valley Elementary)		
ESSAY (6 TH - 12 TH) THEME: WE ALL LIVE IN A WATERSHED		
SIXTH GRADE	EIGHTH GRADE	NINTH - TWELTH GRADE
<u>1st Place</u> Worlase Kplanyi (Voyager Academy Middle) 1 st Place Winner for Area IV	<u>1st Place</u> Mabel Morton (Excelsior Classical Academy) 2 nd Place Winner for Area IV	<u>1st Place</u> Zoe Robinson (Riverside High School) 2 nd Place Winner for Area IV
<u>2nd Place</u> Nathania Alem (Excelsior Classical Academy)	<u>2nd Place</u> Franchesca Forrester (Excelsior Classical Academy)	<u>2nd Place</u> Josiah Prince (Jordan High School)
SLIDE SHOW (6 TH - 12 TH) THEME: WE ALL LIVE IN A WATERSHED		
SIXTH GRADE	EIGHTH GRADE	NINTH - TWELTH GRADE
<u>1st Place</u> Nathania Alem (Voyager Academy Middle)	<u>1st Place</u> Avery Currin (Excelsior Classical Academy) 1 st Place Winner for Area IV	<u>1st Place</u> Zoe Robinson (Riverside High School)
<u>2nd Place</u> Avelina Burbridge (Voyager Academy Middle)	<u>2nd Place</u> Brayleigh Heijmen (Excelsior Classical Academy)	<u>2nd Place</u> Nick Smith (Jordan High School)
PUBLIC SPEAKING (6 TH - 12 TH) THEME: WE ALL LIVE IN A WATERSHED		
SIXTH GRADE		
<u>1st Place</u> Emory Robinson (Voyager Academy Middle) 1 st Place Winner for Area IV 1 st Place Winner for State		



5th Grade Poster-1st place



4th Grade Poster-1st place

2026 Durham SWCD Urban Conservationist of the Year



We awarded the Urban Conservationist of the Year to Rah Bickley. This award is given to businesses or individuals who complete a conservation project in an urban setting. Rah Bickley has led several conservation efforts including the Woodcroft Eco-Restoration project and the adoption of Sandy Creek Park.

2026 Durham SWCD Conservation Education Secondary Teacher of the Year



Rachel Owens of Northern High School received the Conservation Education Secondary Teacher of the Year Award for her leadership in sustainability. She integrates conservation throughout her teaching, participates in Envirothon and BETC, promotes a zero-waste classroom, and serves as a facilitator for the Sustainable Schools Coalition.



6th Grade Public Speaking-1st place for Durham SWCD, Area, and State Competitions

BIONOMIC EDUCATION TRAINING CENTER (BETC)

The BETC Program was created in 2010 as a pilot program to teach students about the growing needs, demands and technological developments in agri-science, green industries, and green infrastructure. The Program enhances middle and high school education by actively engaging students in hands-on implementation, activities, and research, as well as the development of critical thinking skills. The Program seeks to improve STEM literacy for students by providing teachers with curriculum and training and advance responsible student behaviors toward the environment by engaging them in water quality projects (e.g. rain gardens) that address how to mitigate urban storm water runoff that threatens our water quality.

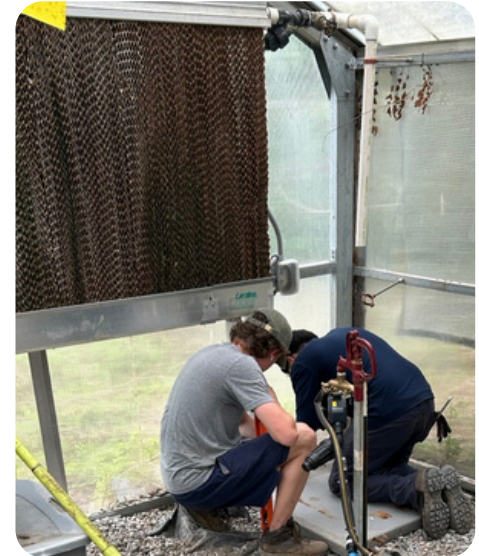
The BETC program is utilized throughout the school year in a few Durham Schools with 98 students participating this fiscal year. During the summer, Durham SWCD partners with the City of Durham to work with interns in the Durham YouthWorks program. Durham YouthWorks is a six-week long internship program that provides students with a opportunity to explore careers of interest and gain work experience. This summer 12 students interned under Jack Brown where they learned and implemented the BETC curriculum. In FY26, eleven stormwater BMPs were installed in residential areas as well as on public lands and community organizations by the BETC students.



Newsome Dr. Project



UCAN Project



SEEDS Project



Youthworks Interns
Awards Celebration
and
Group Presentations



DURHAM SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S DRONE

Durham Soil and Water Conservation District has a DJI Mavic 3 Multi-Spectral Drone that we use for conservation and stream easement monitoring, farm videos and pictures, field checks and construction of projects. Dustin Brewer, our Natural Resources Coordinator, obtained his FAA 107 License in February and now has assisted many landowners with his drone flying capabilities. Others in the office are currently working towards obtaining their drone license, as well. Thank you to the NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation for funding the drone and trainings for staff.

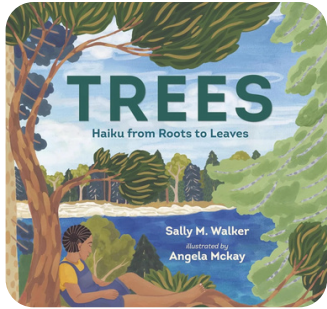


Funding provided by:



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Book Planter



Through a generous donation from Durham Farm Bureau, we are able to provide educators with agriculture-related books and lesson plans. Each month, we donate 5 copies of the monthly book pick to Durham County K-5 educators. In FY26, we dispersed 60 books to Durham County teachers.

Soil Tunnel Tent



The Soil Tunnel Tent was provided by the NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation. During FY26 Durham SWCD utilized it for school programs and civic events.

The tent is available for use by Area 4 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Contact the Durham staff to reserve the tent. 919-560-0558



Booths

In FY 26, Durham SWCD staff tabled at several civic engagement events including Move-a-Bull Durham, Durham Creek Week, Museum of Durham History Family Day of Fun, the NC State Fair, Durham Hunger Day, and DPS STEAM nights.

FY26 Big Sweep

Durham Big Sweep is Durham County's largest annual clean-up. Each year the Durham SWCD hosts the Durham City and County Employee Big Sweep Clean-Up. For FY26, 26 City and County volunteers collected litter along New Hope Creek/Garrett Rd. We collected 28 bags of litter and 15 bags of recycling.



FY26 Creek Week

Every year, Durham SWCD partners with Keep Durham Beautiful, City of Durham Stormwater, and various other organizations for Durham Creek Week. As part of this event, Durham SWCD staff tabled at the Durham Farmer's Market to increase awareness and market upcoming events.

Durham SWCD also hosts the Durham City and County Employee Creek Week Clean-Up. This year we cleaned up a section of Southpoint Auto Park Boulevard near Third Fork Creek. With the help of 27 City and County Volunteers, we collected around 200 pounds of trash!



FY26 Farmer Appreciation Dinner



Each year Durham SWCD hosts a Farmer Appreciation Dinner to thank farmers for all their hard work in the county. On October 28th, the Farmer Appreciation Dinner was held at Coffey Grounds Ranch in Bahama, North Carolina with a total of 100 guests in attendance. Each year Durham SWCD recognizes a Farm Family of the Year and a Farm Heritage Hall of Fame inductee at the dinner.

The Farm Family of the Year is chosen for showing great conservation techniques. This year, Heeks Farm LLC. owned and operated by David Heeks in Bahama was chosen as our Farm Family. This farmer is always looking for new ways to improve the farm from a conservation standpoint. The farm today consists of about 5 acres of U-Pick berries and produce, 20 acres of rangeland/pasture and 50 acres of woodland and forest. In the past the farm grew vegetables and ornamental grasses. Over the years, Heeks Farm has participated in many different Soil and Water programs while installing conservation practices such as micro-irrigation, cover crops, an agriculture pond, terraces, diversions, grassed waterways, field borders, contour farming and crop rotation.

The Farm Heritage Hall of Fame recognizes individuals for their superior contributions and outstanding leadership in promoting agriculture and natural resource conservation in our community. This year, Durham SWCD inducted Mr. Charles M. Ladd, who had strong agricultural ties and community involvement in Durham County for decades. The Farm Heritage Hall of Fame Committee is made up of farmers, SWCD employees, Farm Bureau members and a Farm Service Agency employee.



2025 Durham SWCD
Hall of Fame Inductee
Charles M. Ladd



Dustin Brewer presented the 2025 Durham SWCD Farm Family
of the Year award to Heeks Farm LLC



Jordan High School FFA Students and
Advisor with Durham Board of County
Commissioner, Michelle Burton

2025 TRI-COUNTY PASTURE FIELD DAY

This year, Durham County hosted the 6th Annual Tri-County Livestock and Pasture Field Day with help from Orange and Person County. This event was held on September 24th, 2025, at Lowell Valley Farm in Bahama, NC with 87 people in attendance.

This event is an opportunity for agriculture and livestock professionals from across the Piedmont to learn about pasture and livestock management techniques. The topics this year consisted of army worms, drone technologies, hay quality (sampling, nutrients, and rations) and multi-species grazing.

There were many sponsors including Durham, Orange, and Person Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NC Cooperative Extension, Durham Farm Bureau, Orange Farm Bureau, Person Farm Bureau, Firsthand Foods, AgSouth Farm Credit, Pasture Management, Mixon Seed Service, NC Forage and Grassland Council, Barenburg, Southeast Agriseeds, JCB Kubota, Tractor Supply of Hillsborough, and Southern States of Carrboro, Creedmoor, Mebane and Roxboro.



2026 ANNUAL DURHAM-ORANGE POND CLINIC

Each year the Soil and Water Department looks at many existing ponds in the county. Citizens pond questions can be anything from a leaking dam, a weed problem, or problems from wildlife. The department also looked at several new pond sites during the year. Older ponds eventually fill in with sediment and need to be cleaned out. This is another service the department offers the landowners in the county through the Ag Cost Share Program.

On May 16th, the Durham and Orange SWCDs held their annual pond clinic at the Snipes Farm in Orange County. We kicked the event off with a youth fishing tournament which was well attended. During this event, residents were able to gain knowledge on topics such as fish production, wildlife management, aquatic weed management and pond construction.

There were 45 people in attendance at this year's event. Sponsors included Foster Lake and Pond Management, Durham and Orange SWCDs, Walmart of Hillsborough, and NC State Extension.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Sammy Soil



Sammy Soil made numerous appearances throughout the 2025–2026 fiscal year, engaging students, families, and community members in conservation education. As a long-time ambassador for soil stewardship, Sammy supported school events, outreach programs, and educational initiatives across the county. Sammy Soil remains available for future programs and community events, continuing to promote environmental awareness in a fun and memorable way.

Rental Equipment



Ant Bait Spreader
funded by the NC
Fondation for Soil and
Water Conservation
(\$10 per day)



No-till Drill
(\$150 per day)

Durham SWCD continued to support local producers through its equipment rental program during the 2025–2026 fiscal year. The no-till drill remained a popular resource, helping landowners improve soil health, reduce erosion, and enhance pasture and field management with minimal disturbance to the soil. In addition, the Ant Bait Spreader provided an efficient option for managing invasive ant populations, improving pasture quality and protecting livestock areas. Both pieces of equipment offer cost-effective tools to support conservation-minded land management, and they remain available for rent throughout the coming year.

Conservation Store- tree sale and native flower seeds



\$5 per pack

Durham SWCD held its Annual Tree Sale on February 24–26 during the 2025–2026 fiscal year, offering residents affordable, conservation-focused planting options. The sale was a success, with 1,078 trees purchased by community members and local organizations. In addition to the tree sale, Durham SWCD continued to offer Native Wildflower Seeds year-round, supporting pollinator habitats, erosion control, and long-term environmental stewardship across the county. All proceeds go to support the Durham SWCD Environmental Education Programs.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH



2026 Envirothon Highlights



The Annual Area IV Envirothon competition took place on March 19th at Owens Park in Franklin County, bringing together middle and high school teams from across the Triangle and upper Piedmont. Students from eleven counties (Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Johnston, Nash, Vance, Wake, Warren, and Wilson) were eligible to participate in this year's event.

The Envirothon is a hands-on, natural science competition that encourages students to deepen their understanding of the environment and think critically about their role in managing natural resources. Teams of three to five students competed across five subject areas: soils and land use, wildlife, forestry, aquatics, and current environmental issues. Their performance demonstrated both technical knowledge and real-world problem-solving skills.

Durham County teams excelled once again, with three of the five participating high school teams qualifying for the statewide competition. The top-scoring FFA team, Falcon FFA from Jordan High School, earned first place among FFA teams. The Fantastic Foxes from the North Carolina School of Science and Math placed fourth overall, and the Performative Puffins, also from the North Carolina School of Science and Math, secured fifth place. These teams advanced to the 2026 NC Envirothon, held April 24th–25th, where they competed against 47 other high school teams from across the state. Durham's Fantastic Foxes team placed an impressive 13th overall in the high school division.

Durham SWCD staff members Lisa Marochak, Sherry Scully, and Elicia Senff, along with District Supervisor David Harris, proudly volunteered at the state-level Envirothon event. Their support helped ensure a successful competition and reflected the District's continued commitment to fostering environmental education and youth leadership across North Carolina.



FANTASTIC FOXES
NC School of Science and Math



FALCON FFA
Jordan High School



PERFORMATIVE PUFFINS
NC School of Science and Math



STREAM RESTORATION PROJECTS

CHARLESTOWN STREAMBANK RESTORATION PROJECT

Project Partners:

- Reinvestment Partners
- Piedmont Conservation Council (PCC)
- Durham Soil and Water Conservation District (Durham SWCD)
- The John R McAdams Co
- Land Mechanic Contractor

Funding:

- North Carolina Division of Water Resources (NCDWR): \$120,000
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 319 Program: \$75,000
- North Carolina Division of Soil and Water Conservation (NCDSWC) Streamflow Rehabilitation Assistance Program (StRAP): \$212,500

Additional Information:

www.dconc.gov/swcd



201 E. Main St.
5th Floor, Suite 257
Durham, NC 27701
sscully@dconc.gov
Office: 919-560-0558

Objectives of the project were to:

1. **Stabilize Failing Streambanks:** Reduce active erosion along 150 linear feet of an unnamed tributary to Little Lick Creek to protect nearby buildings and critical infrastructure.
2. **Improve Water Quality:** Reduce sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus entering Little Lick Creek and Falls Lake by addressing severe bank erosion and untreated stormwater runoff.
3. **Install Green Infrastructure:** Add a rain garden and linear biofiltration swale to capture and treat roof and parking lot runoff before it reaches the stream.
4. **Enhance Channel Stability:** Incorporate grade-control structures, minor channel realignment, and a bankfull bench to create a more stable, resilient stream channel.
5. **Protect Affordable Housing & Community Assets:** Prevent further stream migration toward the Charlestown Apartments and safeguard nearby sanitary sewer line serving the community.

Location: The project is located along an unnamed tributary to Little Lick Creek in Durham, NC, within the Neuse River Basin, in a mostly urbanized 200-acre drainage area surrounding the Charlestown Apartments.

Description: The Charlestown Streambank Restoration Project stabilized 150 linear feet of rapidly eroding streambank along an unnamed tributary to Little Lick Creek to protect nearby affordable housing and critical sewer infrastructure. The project used minor channel realignment, grade-control structures, a bankfull bench, and bioengineered stabilization to reduce erosion and improve long term channel stability. Two green infrastructure practices, a rain garden and a linear biofiltration swale, will capture and treat stormwater runoff from roofs and parking areas before it reaches the stream. These improvements reduced sediment and nutrient loading to Little Lick Creek and downstream to Falls Lake, which serves as a drinking water reservoir for the surrounding areas. The project addresses untreated runoff from a 200 acre drainage area and supports local goals for nutrient reduction and watershed health. Strong collaboration between Durham SWCD, Reinvestment Partners, Piedmont Conservation Council, and other project partners ensure effective construction and long term community benefits. Project completion date: October 2026.



Before Project
Began



Project In
Progress

UTs TO ELLERBE CREEK STREAM RESTORATION PROJECT

Project Partners:

- Private Landowners
- Piedmont Conservation Council (PCC)
- Durham Soil and Water Conservation District (Durham SWCD)
- Knickpoint Engineering
- Land Mechanic Contractor

Funding:

- Central Pines Regional Council (CPRC): \$506,000
- North Carolina Division of Water Resources (NCDWR): \$200,000
- North Carolina Land and Water Fund (NCLWF): \$500,000
- North Carolina Division of Soil and Water Conservation (NCDSWC): \$126,663

Additional Information:

www.dconc.gov/swcd



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5th Floor, Suite 257
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Office: 919-560-0558

Objectives of the project were to:

1. **Restore Stream Function & Stability:** Reconstructed 4,456 linear feet of unnamed tributaries to Ellerbe Creek using natural channel design to reduce erosion and improve long-term channel stability.
2. **Reduce Sediment & Nutrient Pollution:** Achieved an estimated ~95% reduction in sediment load, preventing ~926 tons of sediment per year from entering Ellerbe Creek and Falls Lake.
3. **Reestablish Riparian Buffers:** Installed over 13 acres of stable riparian vegetation with a minimum 50-ft buffer on both sides of the restored stream.
4. **Enhance Floodplain Connectivity:** Improved overbank flooding and floodplain access, reducing in-channel stress during storm events and improving habitat conditions.
5. **Secure Long-Term Stream Protection:** Established a 13-acre permanent conservation easement to protect restored stream corridors, riparian buffers, and water quality improvements.

Location: The project is located along unnamed tributaries within head waters of Falls Reservoir in Durham County, NC, within the Ellerbe Creek watershed of the Neuse River Basin.

Description: The Eagle-Honeycutt Stream Restoration Project restored 4,456 linear feet of degraded stream using natural channel design to reduce erosion, improve water quality, and reconnect the floodplain. Completed in April 2026, the project also established over 13 acres of riparian buffer with a minimum 50-foot width on both sides of the channel and secured a permanent conservation easement to protect the restored corridor. Early results show improved overbank flooding, reduced channel stress, and stronger riffle-pool habitat. The project is expected to prevent roughly 926 tons of sediment per year from entering Ellerbe Creek and Falls Lake, while also reducing 945 tons of soil loss, 65.88 lbs. of phosphorus, and 1,023 lbs. of nitrogen annually. These reductions provide meaningful water-quality benefits for the Ellerbe Creek watershed and the larger Neuse River Basin. Strong coordination among Durham SWCD, PCC, landowners, and the design-build team ensured smooth construction and long-term ecological benefits.



Before
Project
Began



Completed
Project





PARTNERS



PIEDMONT CONSERVATION COUNCIL (PCC)

Board Members:

- **Alamance County** Rudy Langley, Millie Langley, Nolan Carter
- **Caswell County** John Hill
- **Chatham County** Susannah Goldston, Matt Jones, Andrew Waters
- **Durham County** Lisa Marochak, David Harris, Eddie Culberson
- **Guilford County** Alex Ashton, Bo Rodenbough, Josh Myers
- **Orange County** Jessica Perrin and Heather Fisher
- **Person County** Nancy McCormick and Aaron Ellis
- **Randolph County** Kathryn Reis, Randy Freeman, William Johnson
- **Rockingham County** Jon Mendenhall Jason Byrd Lindsay Pegg
- **Wake County** Norton Webster, Conor McKearney, George Matthis

Piedmont Conservation Council (PCC) works in partnership with Durham SWCD, along with 9 other counties in the North Carolina Piedmont, through innovative conservation projects focusing on protecting water quality, preserving farmland, encouraging outdoor recreation and fostering sustainable economic growth. We mostly work within, but are not limited to, three different categories of projects including Agricultural Sustainability, Community and Education, and Watershed Restoration. Most of our partners with include local governments, community groups, HOA's, watershed associations, general residents, and agricultural communities. We received 97% of our funding via state, foundation and private grants. The remainder comes from our County-member partnerships. PCC likes to say we act as that missing puzzle piece in projects in the piedmont. We take a project from an idea to completion by working with our partners to obtain and manage external funding. PCC's services mostly include grant writing and reporting, project planning, fiscal agent or sponsor, project management and admin, and partnerships and collaboration. If you would like to read more please visit our newly updated website: <https://piedmontconservation.org/>

If you have any questions please contact us:

Executive Director, Grace - grace@piedmontconservation.org

Project Manager, Haley - haley@piedmontconservation.org



This past year PCC has been working on two NCDACS-StRAP funded projects in Durham County to support streambank stabilization and restoration in an urban setting and in a rural setting. StRAP is a state funded grant program that funds projects to reduce flooding and restore stream function across North Carolina. Eligible projects mostly include vegetative debris removal, instream sediment removal, streambank stabilization and streambank restoration.





PCC was awarded \$500,000 in 2024 to work through 4 projects, two in Alamance County and two in Durham County. The two projects in Durham County were located on Ellerbe Creek and Little Lick Creek, both focusing on stream restoration and sediment reduction.



The section on the tributary along Little Lick Creek was experiencing severe bank erosion near Charlestowne Apartments, migrating towards the apartment buildings and sewer infrastructure, it was also identified as impaired for dissolved oxygen and turbidity. The funding was used in partnership with Durham Co SWCD funding to stabilize about 150 linear feet with minor channel realignment, installation of grade-control structures and green stormwater infrastructure. Construction started April 2026 and ended June 2026. The final step is installing native plants Fall.

BEFORE



AFTER



Project #2 in Durham included this section along the tributary to Ellerbe Creek. It was experiencing a channelized stream with incised channel and eroding banks. Sediment was entering the impaired waterway and impacting the downstream water supply reservoir. The stabilization on this project included about 4,400 linear feet of the 303(d) stream, installation of habitat structures, establishment of a 50 foot riparian buffer, and creation of a 13-acre conservation easement.



BEFORE



AFTER

These projects took years of planning with multiple partners. This is just an example of the projects PCC can be a part of in the Piedmont of North Carolina. We value our existing partnerships and are always open to new collaboration opportunities. Durham SWCD has been a longstanding supporter of PCC, and we are so grateful for their partnership and collaboration over the years and look forward to many more! If you are interested in connecting with us please contact us! If you have a project that you need assistance with or another conservation partner, please fill out this project proposal form, also located on our website.

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, in partnership with the Durham SWCD and other partners, provides technical assistance, conservation planning, and resources that help landowners address natural resource concerns on their property. We offer financial assistance to local producers for implementation of conservation practices through Farm Bill programs; these programs include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

In fiscal year 2026, NRCS utilized these programs to fund conservation projects across Durham including \$876K for conservation easements and almost \$75K in payments directly to farmers through EQIP and CSP. Over the past year, we have assisted a broad range of agricultural producers in the county including landowners managing small urban farms, timber stands for wildlife, and rotational grazing operations.

Applications for NRCS programs are accepted throughout the year, but to be considered for the next funding period be sure to submit your application by the state application deadline. You can also find more information on available programs as well as associated applications and forms on our website or by calling our office at (919) 760 – 1272.

NC ASSOCIATION OF SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS ANNUAL MEETING



Sherry Scully
receiving the
Technical Employee
of the Year Award

Durham SWCD staff were proudly recognized at the 2026 North Carolina Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts (NCASWCD) Annual Meeting for their outstanding contributions to conservation, education, and service.

Technical Employee of the Year

Sherry Scully received the prestigious NCASWCD Technical Employee of the Year Award, a statewide honor recognizing exceptional professional skill, leadership, and dedication to advancing conservation practices. Her commitment to providing high-quality technical assistance, reliable support for landowners, and expert guidance in agriculture continues to strengthen Durham County's reputation for excellence. Sherry's work reflects a deep dedication to protecting natural resources and empowering community partners to do the same.



Lisa Marochak being
inducted into the
2026 Envirothon Hall
of Fame.

Envirothon Hall of Fame Inductee

Lisa Marochak was inducted into the 2026 Envirothon Hall of Fame, an honor reserved for individuals who demonstrate extraordinary commitment to the North Carolina Envirothon program. Throughout her service, Lisa has been a steadfast champion for students, teachers, and experiential learning, helping cultivate future generations of environmental stewards. Her passion, leadership, and decades-long support for Area IV and the State Envirothon have left a lasting impact across the state.

Congratulations to both honorees for their exceptional achievements and continued dedication to conservation.

NORTH CAROLINA CONSERVATION DISTRICT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION



On August 13, 2025, Lisa Marochak was officially sworn in as the 2025–2026 President of the North Carolina Conservation District Employees Association (NCCDEA). The oath of office was administered by past president Jason Byrd during a special ceremony held as part of the 2025 Conservation Employees Training (CET) event in Cherokee, NC.

Set against the beautiful mountain landscape of Cherokee, the 2025 CET brought together conservation professionals from across the state for training, collaboration, and recognition. The swearing-in ceremony highlighted the Association's ongoing commitment to strong leadership and professional development within North Carolina's conservation districts.

Lisa stepped into this role with deep experience, a strong dedication to conservation work, and an unwavering commitment to supporting district employees statewide. Her presidency marked an exciting chapter for the NCCDEA as the organization continued to strengthen programs, enhance training opportunities, and promote excellence in conservation service.

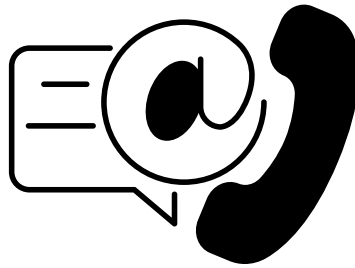


THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to read the Durham Soil and Water Conservation District's Annual Report. The progress highlighted here is possible only through the dedication of our community, partners, landowners, and supporters who share our commitment to protecting Durham's natural resources.

We are grateful for your continued engagement and collaboration as we work together to conserve our soil, safeguard our water, and strengthen the health and resilience of our county. Your support makes a lasting difference, and we look forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead.

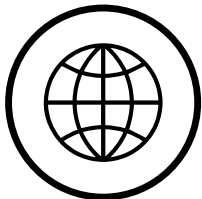
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www.dconc.gov/swcd



 YouTube

