

Establishing a Water Quality Administrative Work Plan in Franklin County Situation Assessment

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Introduction

WECO, Watershed Education for Communities and Officials, was contracted by Franklin County to facilitate the development of a county administrative work plan for water quality protection. WECO is a NC Cooperative Extension program housed in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at NC State University, and a program of NC cooperative Extension.

This report intends to:

- Identify water quality issues of importance to the local community;
- Begin the process of learning about and understanding the issues;
- Identify stakeholders, both organizations and individuals who can influence water resource decisions or are influenced by water resource decisions;
- Introduce the water quality administrative workplan process to stakeholders
- Assist Franklin County in its development of an administrative workplan for water quality.

The report does not intend to provide a quantitative, statistically accurate analysis of the issues.

Purpose

This Situation Assessment is part of the process of establishing a Water Quality Administrative Work Plan in Franklin County, sponsored by Franklin County. The purpose of the Situation Assessment is to identify stakeholders and learn about the issues and needs surrounding water quality. The results of this assessment will help determine a course of action for establishing a work planning process that best meets the water quality programming needs of Franklin County.

Involving numerous stakeholders is not only beneficial to the planning process, but integral to successful implementation of a plan. The cooperation and enthusiasm of affected parties is key to determining need, obtaining participation, and championing implementation of the resulting plan, including its recommendations to local decision making bodies.

Methods

Stakeholders were identified through a snowball sampling method, which relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. Initial subjects included members of the Franklin County Planning staff and the Soil and Water Conservation District staff and Board.

Other potential stakeholders included municipalities, a private company, Novozymes, a state House representative, Cooperative Extension, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, NC Division of Water Quality, local developers, and the County water and sewer director/ engineer.

WECO interviewed 20 stakeholders including residents, farmers, government staff, elected officials, business and non-government organizations. The WECO team tried to contact each identified stakeholder, but was unable to reach everyone due to time restrictions. Most interest groups are represented in the survey. Responses have not been attributed to specific individuals. Appendix A contains the questions used as guidance during the interviews.

The results of the interviews are summarized in this report, along with WECO's recommendations for moving forward.

Stakeholders

Franklin County is located mainly in the Tar Pam River Basin (Tar subbasins 1, 2, 4) with a small portion along the Wake county line found in the Neuse River basin (Neuse subbasins 1, 2, 6, 7). Stakeholders include anyone impacting or impacted by water quality in Franklin County. This includes interests downstream and outside the county.

Stakeholder interests represented in this report include:

- Town of Youngsville
- Town of Franklinton
- Franklin County staff and elected officials
- Franklin County Cooperative Extension
- Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District, staff and Board
- NC Division of Water Quality
- Home Builders Association
- Non-profit organizations
- Residents of Franklin County

Environmental organizations with interest in Franklin County include the Tar River Land Conservancy and the Pamlico-Tar River Foundation.

In addition to those interviewed, WECO will invite anyone interested to participate further in the planning process.

Issues Discussed by Respondents

In response to the questions asked, participants discussed issues in the following broad categories: growth and development, water quality, water quantity, and water resource programming. The interview results have been used to write the following summaries. All opinions are the respondents'.

Growth and Development

All respondents noted that development in the county is a growing concern. Respondents were unanimous; growth potential is very strong. Words such as “overwhelming,” “exploding” and “tremendously” peppered the responses. Concerns were voiced about the loss of agricultural land to residential development and the associated commercial development needed to support it. Big box retailers are a recurrent concern by a few participants. One respondent mentioned the current slowdown of development pressure due to the saturation of the housing market in the Raleigh area and current economic issues, but felt this was a short term drop and a rebound in development would commence shortly. Growth was predicted by respondents to follow major roads and continue South to North and West to East. Factors influencing growth that were mentioned include: national standing of the Triangle area, widening/improvements of Routes 401 and 1, proximity to Raleigh, affordable land, and elderly farming population.

Water Quality

When asked, “Is quality in Franklin County poor, fair, good, or excellent?”, answers ranged from fair to excellent, with a number of respondents adding, “but I’m not sure.” Answers to this question are based upon a respondent’s knowledge and assessment. Several respondents recognized that much work has done with agricultural BMPs and felt this source of pollution was under control, with water quality problems now arising from residential and commercial development.

Respondents were also asked to comment on general water quality and water resources, allowing them to think and respond subjectively. Responses varied from “outstanding resources that must be protected” to “impaired and probably getting worse with urbanization.” It was noted that some stretches of stream are designated of national significance for habitat, including Sandy and Shocco Creek. Some endemic (meaning restricted to a region) species that are doing well in Franklin County are not doing well in other parts of their Eastern US range. Cedar and Cricket Creek are ranked important at the state level. Because there are no reservoirs in the county, stream habitat has not been altered much in some areas. These high quality areas tend toward the North and middle of the county.

Water Quantity, Capacity, and Drought

Current water quantity for drinking supply is believed by respondents to be adequate. Water is supplied within the county from the Town of Henderson/Kerr Lake Regional Water Authority, The Town of Louisburg, and the Town of Franklinton (totaling 3.583 million gallons per day or mgd). The Towns of Franklinton and Louisburg have additional supply for themselves. Louisburg and Franklinton have drainage basins in Franklin County. Small portions of Franklin County drain into the Falls Lake and Little River water supply reservoirs in the Neuse River Basin, with the remainder draining into the Tar-Pamlico River Basin. Future residential growth will require more water and some are concerned that the supply is currently inadequate to meet that need. The drought has brought attention to this issue, particular since it was mentioned that some wells are going dry. A need was voiced for water service to all areas to insure quality drinking water, with one suggestion for pumping water from Kerr Lake into a reservoir for Franklin County.

A potential for a new reservoir in the Neuse river basin to accommodate growth in Wake County was mentioned as potential driver for stricter land use controls in Franklin County in the headwaters for the Neuse river basin. Another commented that the Neuse river basin could provide for a potential interbasin transfer to provide water to Franklin County residents (with an outfall to the Tar-Pamlico river basin).

Existing and Potential Water Resource Programs

Respondents ranged in their familiarity with existing water resource programs, from not very to very familiar.

When asked if there were new programs that should be considered, several respondents mentioned a need to enforce existing regulations, through increased personpower and better enforcement mechanisms. Some respondents discussed the possibility of additional or stronger regulations, making the following comments:

- existing regulations were adequate but needed to be enforced
- local ordinances should be stricter than the state's minimum requirements;
- if towns are exempt from the Tar-Pamlico Rules, then they should be brought into it;
- development guidelines should be stricter, and subdivision developments should use low impact development techniques such as raingardens.
- be careful not to over-regulate, in particular don't make it hard on small business owners who may be less equipped to handle costs than large retailers.

In addition, respondents suggested other programs, including working with TRLC to develop a county conservation easement program, revising the tax code or collection method to provide favorable rates for conservation, constructing more reservoirs so the county can supply their own needs, and providing education about water conservation.

The Advisory Team

All but one respondent wanted to be kept informed of the process. Although some were wary of an additional time commitment, most felt that it could be beneficial to be involved. Everyone interviewed recognizes the need for changes of some kind to protect water quality in the face of impending growth, so great conflict is not envisioned during this first stage of program planning. It may be adequate for interested parties to attend occasional meetings or to keep up via listserv postings and newsletters. However, the parties interviewed may have resources and novel ideas to share with the county. Bringing them to the table may enable Franklin County to work together to leverage resources more successfully than if each continued working separately. Keeping the process time-limited and focused would help maintain involvement over a short period.

Given the willingness of interviewees to participate, we suggest making it an open process. We would invite representatives from all the towns, the County planning Dept., SWCD staff and board, NCDWQ, Cooperative Extension, Tar River Land Conservancy, the Homebuilder's Association, and interested citizens who have been identified during the situation assessment.

Coordination, collaboration, and consensus emerged as recurrent themes when participants responded to what they would like the group to accomplish. The SWCD staff and the County Planning staff members interviewed all agree on the need for a long range plan, with one commenting that they should show citizens that people in the county care about their water quality. Other respondents wanted the group to determine how the county can conduct the "delicate balance of getting ahead of growth and protecting the existing natural resources, which was separately referred to as an "asset" of the community, and "our life". This included a comprehensive study of options, identify issues to examine, determine if options under or over-regulate to better fit Franklin County's niche. Most seemed appreciative of the County's effort to accomplish this, with one saying "this is a very positive thing!"

Specific suggestions from respondents for the advisory team to consider included:

- Residential water conservation education (the Ag community understands)
- Consistent enforcement of regulations
- A survey of what state and fed regulations address the county and how do they interrelate.
- Plan for a new dept or subgroup that engages Planning, Inspections, Soil and Water departments
- Apply an existing program to the county (don't reinvent the wheel). Get it on the ground and be able to work with developers and homeowners before during and after.
- Create a standing body to the board of commissioners on water resource issues, to enable coordination, collaboration, and bringing ideas to county commissioners.
- Support for writing watershed protection/restoration plans
- Conduct a natural resource inventory
- Enforcement - consider going above and beyond existing state regulations. There is nothing wrong with being better than your neighbor.

Suggested Process

Respondents appreciated the county's efforts to coordinate and collaborate, to involve them in the process of protecting and improving the water quality in their county. Based on our conversations, we suggest using this planning process to lay the foundation of a potentially ongoing collaborative effort. Ongoing participation will increase the likelihood that changes to water quality programming in Franklin County will be accepted and championed. This collaborative effort includes encouraging participants to educate each other about their interests, and to learn about topics such as basic watershed science, and existing and available regulations. When all the parties understand one another, they can more easily come to agreement on a given topic.

WECO was asked to help formulate an Administrative Work Plan for Water Quality. We understand this to be a twofold process. The first is determining the programs needed to protect and improve water quality in Franklin County. The second process is developing the administrative plan of action required to carry out the desired programs. We suggest considering this planning process as two distinct, yet overlapping parts, developing the **Program Plan** and the **Administrative Plan**. To limit confusion, the entire process should be called the '**Work Plan for Water Quality**.'

To develop the **Program Plan**, diverse stakeholders should be involved, not only to gather ideas and build a vision, but to determine what resources are available and can be leveraged to allow Franklin County to meet its water quality goals. For example, some stakeholders, both public and private, may be able to meet the County's water quality programming needs, thereby freeing the County of that internal cost. An example of this may be the educational programs offered by the Wildlife Resources Commission or the Tar River Land Conservancy. Limiting stakeholder group involvement will limit potential solutions, thereby limiting results and resources.

Once a vision for water quality needs and programs has begun, the **Administrative Plan** can be developed. The responsibility of implementing the Administrative Plan lies mainly on county staff and officials, including the SWCD Board. Although the responsibility for developing the Administrative Plan lies firmly on county staff, it is important to involve other identified stakeholders who bring great technical expertise and options to the table. In addition, having technical expertise present can save time, by having questions answered at the meetings, instead of afterward.

Mutual education and facilitated discussion will be highly important features of both of these processes. Meeting summaries should be available to all interested parties, not merely for transparency purposes, but as a means of sharing and gathering ideas through the process.

We suggest forming the Franklin County Water Quality Advisory Team, consisting of all the currently identified interests and open to all other interests. This team will meet to develop a shared vision for water quality in Franklin County, and start the process of developing a **Program Plan**. The team focus would be on building county capacity for addressing water quality protection and restoration. A subcommittee will be formed to develop the **Administrative Plan**. We suggest this subcommittee include the county planning staff, SWCD staff, NRCS, Cooperative Extension, NC Division of Land Resources, and the NC Division of Water Quality. Other stakeholders that ask to be included should be welcomed.

WECO does not suggest addressing water supply quantity issues, which would require a different range of stakeholders.

To develop the **Work Plan for Water Quality**, WECO suggests five 3 hour meetings to allow enough time for full discussion and decision making. Decisions will be reached by consensus. WECO will facilitate the meetings and the intermeeting communication and outreach. Meetings are public, membership will be open to all, and the advisory team will make every effort to include all interests. WECO will invite all stakeholders to participate and strive to keep all stakeholders updated, regardless of participation. A listserv and the WECO website will be used to disseminate information. If stakeholders choose, they may want to add public outreach workshops for broader public outreach and feedback.

Meeting Month	Agenda includes:
1. Feb-March	Present Situation Assessment Results to SWCD Board of Commissioners, and Franklin County Board of Commissioners.
2. April	Convene Administrative Plan subcommittee. Adopt a group charter. Introduce consensus-building concepts. Idea generation. Overview of regulations by Division of Water Quality and Land Resources. Begin developing logic model by agreeing upon vision.
3. May	Convene Water Quality Advisory Team at a public meeting. Include: basic education; overview of county survey results, (what are others doing); public input; build community vision; develop ideas for a Program Plan
4. June	Convene Administrative Plan subcommittee. Evaluate elements for Program Plan. Draft a Program Plan.
5. July	Convene Administrative Plan subcommittee. Consider county survey results to draft an Administrative Plan.
6. August	Convene Water Quality Advisory Team at a public meeting. Present final draft of Program Plan and public aspects of Administrative Plan. Determine next steps.

WECO recommend all meetings adhere to following principles:

Mutual education of each other's interest and values

Information on collaborative decision-making will be provided to help create a group environment where participants can hear each other's concerns and work together to address those concerns. Information should be shared and reviewed jointly by participants, compiled in an accepted format and dispersed to all interested parties.

Meeting participants' process, psychological, and substantive needs

Participants must feel:

1. they are being heard,
2. their input will influence water quality programming recommendations, and
3. these recommendations will result in specific, measurable actions.

The facilitators must be neutral and unbiased, and ground rules should be adopted and enforced by the group.

A final recommendation for protecting and enhancing water quality in the long run is the formation of collaborative water resources council in Franklin County to involve the public in meeting the changing water resource needs over time. The Water Resources Advisory Team that is put together for this current Water Quality Work Plan can serve as the first step to a longer term collaborative water resources council.

Appendix 1

Franklin County Water Resources Programs Situation Assessment Interview Questions

1. How adequate are current water resource programs for protecting these resources 5-10 years from now?
2. Is water quality in Franklin County poor, fair, good, excellent?
3. How familiar are you with existing programs, voluntary and regulatory, that protect water resources?
4. What growth trends do you think are likely in the next 5-10 years here?
5. How adequate are current water resource programs for protecting these resources 5-10 years from now?
6. Are there any imminent changes in Franklin County that may impact water resources?
7. Any ideas about water resource programs that Franklin Co should consider?
8. The advisory group will look at how other counties with similar demographics are addressing water resource protection, and will suggest ways to build capacity for those issues here. Do you want to be kept informed? Involved now? Later?
9. What would you like this group to accomplish?
10. Who else should we interview?
11. Miscellaneous