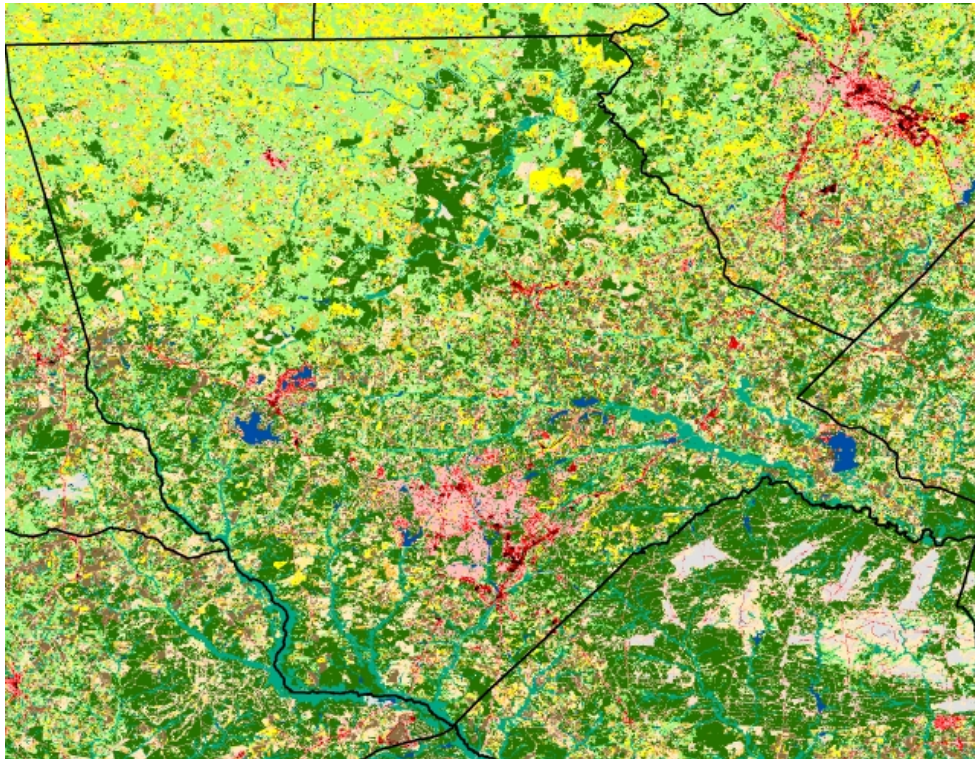


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MOORE COUNTY – NATURAL RESOURCE BASED PLANNING SITUATION ASSESSMENT



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Watershed Education for Communities and Officials
NC Cooperative Extension

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NC NEMO partnership, based out of NC State University, received a US EPA grant to:

1. develop a statewide, map-based curriculum about natural resource based planning
2. work with a community to build capacity for better decision making concerning the impacts of land use on water quality.

The goal of this EPA-funded project is to help communities better incorporate natural resources into planning efforts. This means incorporating existing natural resources and assets at the beginning of the planning process. This helps protect these assets which are often a major impetus for growth in area.

Moore County was chosen as the local community and NEMO is partnering with the Moore County Department of Planning and Community Development. A situation assessment consisting of a series of interviews was conducted to determine the issues of local importance and the potential for a collaborative process.

The two greatest issues of concern seem to be development encroaching on natural areas and water supply. Due to interest, there is great potential for a collaborative process in Moore County. There is already a lot of collaboration among local organizations. In addition, there are a lot of natural resource protection and development issues going on in Moore County.

We recommend using the NEMO team for education about land use impacts to water quality, and facilitating discussion between stakeholders to help best meet their collective needs in this area, as well as helping the County Planning Department to begin its comprehensive planning outreach.

INTRODUCTION

Who is NEMO

NEMO, a national network of Cooperative Extension, stands for Non point Education for Municipal Officials. (NC NEMO works with Counties as well as Municipalities.)

The mission of NCNEMO is to provide education, assistance, and possibly in-ground projects to build local capacity to protect and improve water resources while enhancing economic development and improving quality of life.

NC NEMO is managed by Watershed Education for Communities and Officials (WECO) a Cooperative Extension program housed in the NCSU Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. You can learn more here: www.ncsu.edu/weco

The project is funded by a US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant, received through the NC Division of Water Quality Section 319 Non Point Source Grant Program. Section 319

refers to the US Clean Water Act. Non Point Source (NPS) refers to any pollution that does not have a discrete source. NPS examples include stormwater and agricultural runoff.

NC NEMO consists of a multidisciplinary team of state agencies and university departments working together. These include:

- NCSU - Biological and Agricultural Engineering, Water Quality Group, Agricultural and Resource Economics, Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, Forestry and Environmental Resources, College of Design, Natural Resources Leadership Institute.
- UNC - NC Sea Grant, Coastal Studies Institute.
- NC Cooperative Extension (NCSU & NC A&T);
- ECU Center for GIS.
- NC Division of Water Quality.
- National NEMO Network

Purpose

The situation assessment is part of a larger project with NC Cooperative Extension NEMO program. The larger project has 2 parts:

1. develop a statewide, map-based curriculum about natural resource based planning
2. work with a community to build capacity for better decision making concerning the impacts of land use on water quality.

Number 1 is being conducted by the NEMO team in conjunction with numerous local governments statewide. Number 2 is being conducted in Moore County.

The purpose of the situation assessment is to help determine whether a collaborative process might be beneficial in Moore County, and to gather background information to assist and educate NEMO staff. A situation assessment helps to delineate the issues about which people are interested. The results help determine a public involvement process to best meet stakeholder needs.

This report intends to:

- identify issues of importance to the local community,
- identify organizations and individuals, who can influence water resource decisions or are influenced by water resource decisions,
- determine how best to bring diverse interested stakeholders together, and
- begin the process of learning about and understanding individuals' interests.

This report does not intend to provide a quantitative, statistically accurate analysis of the issues, but rather a summary of the issues identified. The summary is followed by our interpretation of the stakeholder interests identified, and recommendations for the project team and stakeholders that may offer the most effective course for meeting multiple interests.

METHODS

Stakeholders were identified through a snowball sampling method, which relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. Initial subjects included stakeholders who have been actively involved in planning and natural resources in Moore County. Fourteen stakeholders were interviewed including residents, government staff, non-profit, and elected officials. The interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. The interview questions are found below:

1. Interest(s) represented?
2. What issues concern or interest you regarding natural resources, in Moore County?
3. Are there any imminent changes in Moore County that you think might impact natural resources or the communities, either positively or negatively?

Where do you get information about local environmental issues? Development issues?

4. What do you think about the possibility of a community-wide collaborative effort to share information, and leverage resources to protect both economic development and natural resources?
5. How is your organization involved in land use/natural resource planning or management?
6. How do you see your organization involved in a community discussion about economic development and the protection of natural resources?
7. What would make it worth your while to come to this discussion?
8. We would like to meet monthly for about a year for a community discussion on economic development and natural resources, that will include an action plan for potential projects. Would you like to participate in these meetings?
9. Could we add you to our contact list for the listserv and mailings of updates?
10. What groups do you know about in Moore County that would be interested in this project? (civic/environmental/development orgs)
11. Is there anyone else we should interview?
12. Before we leave, is there any other issue you want to talk about?

RESULTS: WHAT WE HEARD

Local Information Sources

Interviewees were asked “Where do you get information about environmental and development issues?” Many people mentioned The Pilot newspaper and other typical media sources such as radio and television for local news. Several respondents noted that often only ‘hot button’ issues make the news and may therefore the general public may not receive all

the information needed to understand issues. The many natural resource and community organizations in the Moore County area were mentioned as sources of information that other counties may not have. Another source of information for people is the local government boards and commissions to which they may belong, as well as local government departments they work with and county commissioners. One respondent answered “from anyone I can.” Here is a list of information sources gathered during the interview process.

- Sandhills Conservation Partnership
- Sandhills Natural History Society
- Sustainable Sandhills
- Sustainable Sandhills Moore County Action Team
- USFWS
- RLUAC - Regional Land Use Advisory Commission
- Wildlife Resources Commission
- Planning departments
- Voluntary Agriculture District Board
- Cooperative Extension
- Soil and Water Conservation District
- Moore County Partners in Progress - Economic Development
- Chamber of Commerce
- NC Dept of Environment and Natural Resources
- Army Corps of Engineers
- Moore County website
- BRAC Regional Task Force
- Public notice- via the courthouse
- The Pilot newspaper, TV, internet, magazines
- Some active blogs in Moore County
- residents telling government about particular issues
- Community contacts and colleagues
- County commissioners

Issues

In this section we summarize issues of concern and interest that were raised by the people interviewed. For ease of reading, quotes and italics are not used, except in specific instances.

Water

Water was overwhelmingly listed as the number one concern. Water supply issues differ greatly between the county and 11 municipalities because of the differences in surface and groundwater supplies. Some areas have acceptable water supply but do not have adequate sewer capacity for growth. Respondents expressed concern about dwindling supplies, purchasing water from elsewhere, interbasin transfers, and the ability for local governments to supply adequate water in the future due to growing demand. Some commented that while the 2009 drought was not as severe as the 2002 drought, the area’s growth and growing demand for water may exacerbate impacts of future droughts. Water conservation, reuse, and greywater were all mentioned as potential sources. New reservoirs were mentioned as a positive answer to water supply and as a potential problem to habitat and land use. The need for sourcewater protection was mentioned, especially in relation to new developments. Increasing numbers of septic tanks were also mentioned as a source of groundwater contamination.

The water analysis by McGill and Associates was mentioned, but few knew what its conclusions were, or if those resulted in management changes. One respondent stated unequivocally, “water management throughout the county could improve.” Another respondent stated there is a lot of wrangling over water around here.

Growth and Development

Growth is a hot button issue, one respondent stated. Most respondents said Moore County will be growing, especially with the anticipated growth projections of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC). In particular, one predicted that thousands of people will move here in the next 5-10 years. One person said BRAC growth is a little or a lot overstated in some areas, while another thought that BRAC growth along the 690 Vass road corridor will have damaging impacts. An interviewee said most development is just not good for the environment, and another stated we have to get beyond the ‘build it and they will come’ mentality. Alternately, some were frustrated that what seemed to be an environmentally sensitive development was eventually stopped because some people feel all development is bad.

Interviewees highlighted the need to both preserve natural resources and protect economic development in Moore County. Some cautioned that development alone was not the answer to economic growth, but rational development which is thoughtfully planned and sited is more important. Some communities in Moore County are extremely interested in protecting Moore County just as it is right now. Respondents commented that development will have an impact on infrastructure, roads, water, sewer, and the tax base. Some are concerned the development fees do not pay the full cost of infrastructure needs and will put an ‘unbearable burden’ on the local community in the long run. A respondent said impacts from development are positive, at least for big businesses. One respondent stated, ‘we need a new transportation network to begin evolving’.

There are numerous development projects in the works, waiting for the economy to recover. Some people want high density, some want low density, some are concerned about new development taking away from the downtowns, and others are concerned about the public losing the viewshed of natural land. One respondent noted “our future lies with water, development and local sustainability”.

Planning

Several respondents noted the positive aspects of recent and current long range planning activities taking place around Moore County. They noted how it is good to think about how your community will look, the year 2030, and not just next month. The concept of a comprehensive plan was mentioned as a positive move, which would allow people to understand existing resources and how to work with them to grow. The County’s Area A plan was recognized as a good start at looking toward growth and conservation together. Land conservation and land management were mentioned as important as economic growth and construction. Protecting farmland was noted as an important activity that should continue. One person opined that some plans and some ordinances have no teeth to them.

Agriculture and forestry

Several interviewees commented that many people are not happy about farmland converting into subdivisions, but they also understand the need of landowners to sell land. One respondent wished for options for those who want to continue farming. Several respondents are concerned about protecting land, agriculture and other local resources. It was mentioned that many people have a view of agriculture and agribusiness that is limited to food production and organic farms, while it also includes timber and other forestry activities, soybeans, and food processing plants. The respondent mentioned: all of these can be viable economic drivers in Moore County; the future of farming in Moore can be diverse; and the county needs an economic development plan specifically for agricultural. This person pointed out numerous viable agricultural activities that are very protective of the environment and include best management practices (BMPs) that protect the land and water. One respondent mentioned that the current comprehensive plan has a lot of characteristics about protecting rural heritage, rural character and farmland, which many people find important.

Habitat

People mentioned that habitat protection benefits humans as well as animals. The desire to develop in a way that minimizes the impacts on long leaf pine ecosystems and resident species such as red-cockaded woodpecker was mentioned. In particular, development pressure encroaching on Fort Bragg was a concern. Impacts include habitat fragmentation and loss of connectivity in upland areas as well as floodplains. One respondent commented that while some laws and rules protect floodplains and wetlands, important upland habitat is not provided the same protection unless the red-cockaded woodpecker was there. They said habitat protected for other species is also valued by humans for recreation. It was noted there is a lot of beautiful habitat in Moore County that people cannot access. A respondent noted there seems to be support for protecting recreational habitat such as greenways and parks.

Waste

A few respondents noted concern about waste management and disposal. One commented that landfills are filling up and there will be a need for more landfill space. They thought recycling should play a bigger role throughout the county. This same person felt that people should change their way of thinking about their purchases and production of waste. One interviewee noted that there are sites around the county that contain toxic waste, both federally registered sites such as Superfund sites, and also numerous small sites that are not on anyone's radar.

Other issues

Many other issues related to natural resource planning were raised by participants, including:

- The role of agriculture in reducing childhood obesity (the Farm to Table project was provided as an example)
- The role of planning in reducing obesity by providing outdoor facilities for exercise
- The absence of air quality on the planning horizon.
- Incorporating local energy production such as solar energy and other renewable energy into growth.

- Underemployment impacts on development
- Environmental justice- siting undesirable land uses such as landfills in economically depressed areas, and the need to provide water and sewer infrastructure to support communities.
- A lack of funding to implement measures.
- A lack of communication and/or understanding between people, such as citizens/policy makers/decision makers/elected officials/staff.

Education

The following educational needs were raised by participants:

- Target audiences should include the general public and boards and commissions
- Topics of education for these audiences include:
 - the link between land use and development, and its impact on natural resources, including water
 - xeriscaping or waterwise gardening, especially due to the recent droughts.
 - clarifications of different types of development, such as conservation design and cluster development.
 - land use, property rights and conservation.

Current Local Initiatives

Many planning and natural resource initiatives are taking place in Moore County. Respondents told us about the following. There are likely other initiatives that are occurring that were not captured through our interviews.

NC Wildlife Resources Commission

- NCWRC manages the Sandhills Game Land in Moore County.
- Green Growth Tool box (GGT) - a technical assistance tool designed to help communities conserve high quality habitats alongside development. NCWRC worked with other partners including US Fish and Wildlife Service and Sustainable Sandhills to obtain a grant to help with the implementation of the GGT.

Sustainable Sandhills:

- This non-profit organization has developed a series of maps outlining the suitability for different types of land uses and development for Sandhills, balancing natural resource, cultural and economic data. Currently they are developing the tools to incorporate this

reference data into decision making. The Suitability maps project developed from past land use forums.

- Organizes county wide Community Action Teams. The Moore County CAT meets monthly, currently alternating each month between a meeting night and an educational movie night. It strives to be project oriented.

BRAC Working Lands Protection Program

- Writing a working lands protection program plan for Moore County as well as other BRAC counties. The plan strives to gather all agricultural information to form a current picture of the county, assess where it is going, and make recommendations.

Sandhills Conservation Partnership

- A collaborative partnership of various federal, state and non-profit conservation groups engaged in conserving the long leaf pine ecosystem.
- Advises on specific developments impacts from a natural resource standpoint.
- Voting members of the Partnership include: U.S. Army at Fort Bragg , North Carolina Division of Forest Resources, NC Division of Parks and Recreation, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Nature Conservancy – NC Chapter , Sandhills Area Land Trust, Sandhills Ecological Institute, U.S. Army Environmental Command, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- The Partnership has many non-voting stakeholders including: BRAC Regional Task Force, NC Department of Agriculture, NC Department of Commerce, NC Department of Transportation, NC Natural Heritage Program, Fort Bragg/Pope AFB Regional Land Use Advisory Commission, Sustainable Sandhills and representatives of NC landowners, consulting foresters, pine needle harvesters, and the real estate industry.

Sandhills Area Land Trust

- Works with private landowners to negotiate voluntary conservation agreements /easements on private property.

Save Our Sandhills

- Seeks to “save and protect the Sandhills and those special features and qualities of our towns that make them such wonderful places to live.”

Moore County

- Considering a local sedimentation and erosion control program
- Updating comprehensive plan [need correct language]
- Updating floodplain maps on regularly scheduled basis

Southern Pines

- New Land Use Plan [need to find out when]

Community-wide collaborative

We asked interviewees what they thought about the possibility of a community-wide collaborative effort to share information, and leverage resources to protect both economic development and natural resources. Collaboration was defined as working with other parties toward achieving common goals.

Here is a paraphrased list of their responses.

I think it is a great idea. It is needed. Make sure it doesn't become another competing partnership. We have many groups in Moore County that are interested in natural resources and some in economic development also. Be sure to involve these groups and not repeat what they do. Don't reinvent the same wheel. It would be the ideal way to have discussions like this since there is such different perspectives between everyone, even people who work for the same organization or local government don't always agree on how things should be done. There are a lot of ongoing efforts – so what might be different about this process?

It would be nice if more people had a voice, sometimes it is only the squeaky wheels that get heard or the ones with money. Some of the fringe folks sometimes have a lot of power. It would be great to have someone facilitate a process like this. It has been tried in past, but there always seemed to be something holding it back.

It would be a great resource and it would give us a lot of information in the longrun. It would be beneficial public input and getting the public, planning boards and elected officials all involved and educated on the same topics. People could learn about agriculture as a natural resource too. Some entities have a lot of data and resources to offer and others need help in certain areas. Any effort that gets info out about this is good. I think there is a good climate for this. Shared resources and shared tools could help many. The greatest resource we could get out of this is finding out what everyone needs and what everyone would like to see.

I'm all for it. Some organizations are doing this to an extent and this could help them and us move forward. Overall, I feel Moore County people as a whole are trying to protect natural resources and still develop— I think this would help us achieve both. It's a great concept, worthwhile to explore. It is a big county, with many people living in very different places. It may be more divided than other counties. Helping develop a best management practice model we could all share for moving forward would be good, but don't think you can get everyone to agree – that's too hard. As far as making decisions based on common criteria: if you can reserve the density decisions for local communities but come up with broad sweeping ideas that can be adopted by all - that would work.

We have good enough relations between all the local governments and organizations that we could get a visioning exercise together. The idea sounds wonderful, but implementing it would be problematic. Groups have tried for years to get people to communicate. The towns won't

talk to the county and vice versa. The citizens feel left out. There are probably 4 or 5 citizens groups trying to do something. We are stymied as to how to get this done.

It would probably require pretty massive publicity campaign. So many people that are participating are already doing it through other groups. The county is going its own way with water. They aren't listening. The problem in the past is that some groups and governments tried to dictate things – that was a stumbling block.

Counties and towns seem to talk to each other through the Pilot newspaper – that's how they interact – and not in a good way. Involving numerous governments, local, state and federal would be good – the regulations are often unclear about certain development – it varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. We need to be able to coordinate between county and local jurisdictions.

It is absolutely critical at this juncture. Everyone thinks they have the best idea. People have been unwilling to hear of another possible solution. We should be truly engaged in finding new ways to solve our current problems - Einstein said we can't solve our current problems with the same thinking that got us here. Only truly engaged communities will thrive.

Might be hard getting it off the ground, but in my opinion, that what we ought to try – all municipalities and county working together, and there is no one cure-all - we are self destructing.

Stakeholder Ideas about Collaboration

We asked respondents what might make it worth their while to come to collaborative discussions about natural resources and economic development. Here is a paraphrased list of their responses.

The biggest thing limiting is my time. This is critical to planning in Moore County so I will come. If you can tell me there will be a good group of well rounded people, I will come. Providing well rounded unbiased information is also necessary. I'll certainly come the first time, but you'll have to prove to me then that it is worthwhile to come back. Please, don't just have another meeting, have it for a good reason

Discussion is the key term here – things can quickly degrade into finger pointing, but if you can facilitate real discussion, it would be worth it. There needs to be a balance between all the people and competing interests. It is OK if people disagree, as long as they are engaged in honest discussion and the improvement of Moore County is at the heart of it.

If it benefits the community and integrates with everything that is already going on, it will be useful. I'm excited, this is a great opportunity. I want to know what others are doing and find out what do developers and planners thinks about all these things.

We seek out peaceful opportunities to get things done so we would come to meetings like this. I think I could learn a lot, about natural resources, about what other towns are doing, and

about the county too. What we have to keep in mind the greater good – what is good for Moore County.

I recognize there is a lot of tension between environmental protection and economic development in Moore County. Projects that combine the two are what we like to see. We want people to see all perspectives are valid and it is collaboration that is key.

We are not doing as well as we could. We could be better if we had more resources. If the county and municipalities could work together, everyone would have a whole lot more to work with in my opinion. Not sure if we can get that to fly, but it is work the shot.

Advice on how to proceed

Respondents offered advice on how we should proceed. Here is a paraphrased list of their responses.

It will take some effort to get community involvement on natural resource issues. The last time we tried something like this we were in a drought and that was on everyone's mind, so that's the type of comments we got.

Organize the communication - that is key. There is a lot going on in Moore, but not in concert. A lot of people and groups and want to influence policy and the local governments may like it if all of this was coordinated to some degree. If everyone knew what the other was doing, they might be able to agree on things instead of everyone advising individually. It makes it hard on everyone when different organizations try to get local governments to adopt different policies, some similar, some competing. Remove the walls that hinder communication. The chamber of commerce needs to be kept in the loop. The county manager and the commissioners have to be on board, and so does every municipality

Don't let this be just an exercise. The municipalities need to know that the county is not going to do whatever they want with regards to water and infrastructure, regardless of the outcome of a collaborative. The water summit got some noses out of joint. Make this something that adds value to what everyone is already doing.

The Sustainable Sandhills County Action Team meetings might be a good host for this, but there are whole sectors of the community that don't go to those meetings. It important to get everyone though and it is hard to get people who live outside the municipalities, in the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) areas, but we need them involved. We need everyone involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROCEEDING

The goal of this EPA-funded project is to help communities better incorporate natural resources into planning efforts. This means incorporating existing natural resources and assets at the beginning of the planning process. This helps protect these assets which are often a major impetus for growth in area.

The process by which WECO endeavors to help communities meet goals is through collaborative decision making and leveraging of resources.

In general we heard people say:

- growth is occurring and sure to increase
- growth is occurring because of our natural resources
- growth is occurring at the expense of our natural resources
- our natural resources are important to preserve
- education is lacking about land use impacts on natural resources
- numerous entities are working on planning issues
- people are interested in collaboration

WECO strives to assist communities to identify and build on community assets. We believe people are more inspired to work together when their previous contributions are appreciated. This project offers an opportunity to capitalize on the respondents desire to collaborate and share resources, and add value to current local initiatives.

In Moore County, we are working with the County Department of Planning and Community Development to see how natural resource based planning and collaboration can help them meet their goal of developing a new comprehensive plan. We will work with them to amend and finalize these recommendations.

We propose to:

- A. Develop a curriculum based on the county maps designed to teach local decision makers about natural resource based planning. This will be initially designed using the county maps available statewide from the online NEMO maps, and will be further honed for Moore County using local data.

- B. Facilitate a discussion between local governments, organizations, and the public to develop a tool to help share information between all parties. This has the potential to be a new tool for public input and outreach.
- C. Provide a training workshop about best management practices for public involvement for local government staff.
- D. Develop a factsheet about the educational and planning tools available in Moore County, to include the Sustainable Sandhills Suitability maps, the NEMO online planning tool, the Green Growth Toolbox, NC Cooperative Extension resources, and other identified sources.
- E. A series of 3-4 public meetings, with 3 goals.
 - a. Education on the impacts of land use on water quality and other natural resources
 - b. Reaching out to underrepresented parties
 - c. Crafting a vision for the role of natural resources in Moore County's economic development
 - d. Getting feedback about Moore County Comprehensive Planning initiatives (These meetings could be day, night, or both, for example, a 3-4:30 pm meeting and a repeat of that meeting at 6 pm.)
- F. Offer presentations about land use impacts to local organizations, to be presented at their regularly scheduled meetings. Use these opportunities to develop relationships, gather ideas, reach the membership, advertise the public meetings, and ask the organization to commit time and partner with the County in a natural resource planning endeavor.