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District aids urban stream revival in Charlotte

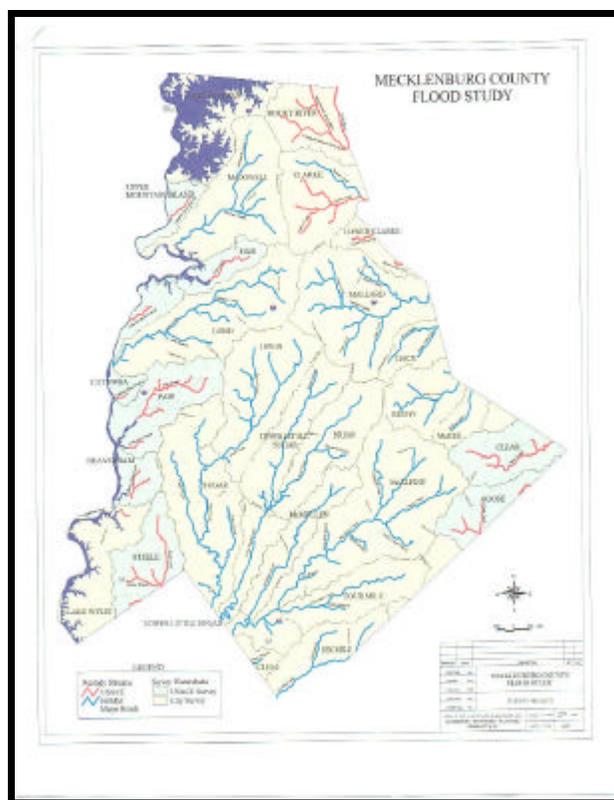
by Penny Schmitt

Culverts, concrete troughs, turbid water ram-paging through collapsing banks and back yards—this picture of urban watercourses is not what Charlotte and Mecklenburg County wants for its streams. Working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District, Mecklenburg County and Charlotte are creating healthier streams, and planning to upgrade water quality and flood control as their city continues to grow.

Revitalizing stream habitats

“None of the programs we are working with are new,” said Daniel Small, the Corps Project Manager. “Continuing authorities under the Water Resources Development Acts (WRDA) of 1986 and 1996, and the Flood Control Act of 1948 support the three projects we are planning. What is new and unusual, is that we are working to upgrade habitat and stream quality in a highly developed urban environment. Still more unusual, our projects in Charlotte are designed to evolve along with urban development, and the emphasis is much more on bioengineering for a healthy stream than in straight channelization.”

The sponsor of the project, Mecklenburg County, is focusing on the quality of life for the City of Charlotte and the neighborhoods around these streams. They don’t want to just drain water away from the area, they want a holistic design that is friendly and inviting to the people who live there. Small reported that partners in the effort in-



clude not just the county, but also the City of Charlotte’s Parks and Recreation Division, the City Master Planning Department, and the Zoning Board, all of whom oversees present use and future development.

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Eyes on the prize—As Operations Plan 2000 advances, District TEAM envisions Plan 2001

By Penny Schmitt

The Millennium Operations Plan is gathering points rapidly, with 24 officially documented, and more poised to flash up on the District's Balanced Scorecard by the end of May. "We achieved our Support for Others Goal, which earned six points," said B.J. Suggs, District Auditor. "And several of our Capable Workforce Objectives are near completion."

As the year's mission objectives post on the scoresheet, the District prepares to set the next wave of goals for the year 2001.

The TEAM will meet at the Wilmington Hilton on 7 and 8 June to review goals and select new objectives for the coming year.

"TEAM members are reviewing a questionnaire and composing new objectives," Suggs said. "We have also some materials that TEAM members can study to deepen their understanding of the process we're committed to."

Selected materials include **The Balanced Scorecard**, by Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton, and **Hope is not a Method**, by Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper.

TEAM members are also assessing Command Management Review Indicators as they relate to our strategic planning.

"As we mature more and more in the strategic planning process," Suggs said, "The District is developing an exciting momentum. We have some great proposals based on the growth we've achieved in the past, and the achievements we are building now. I think we'll come to the Operations Plan meeting with some excellent ideas, and I know that more will emerge as we talk."

Corps Day activities set for June 2



Whether it's softball, baked beans or BINGO under the pines, District TEAM members are marking their calendars for Corps Day celebrations to be held at Empie Park on June 2nd.

The Millennium celebration also marks the 225th Anniversary

of the US Army Corps of Engineers, the most venerable command of the Army. Festivities will include recognition of length of service and the announcement of the Employee of the Year Award.

Committee members are planning a memorable day for

all. Please support their efforts! Whether you buy a brownie at the bake sale or contribute a BINGO prize or take a team position or entertain kids or set up and clean up—your efforts as part of the TEAM are valued! See y'all there.

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District aids continued

(Continued from page 1)

“One of the projects will be developed concurrently with redevelopment of an old factory and warehouse area that’s being renovated and upgraded into condos and commercial real estate,” he said. “That project, done under section 206 of WRDA, will restore aquatic ecosystem habitat within Little Sugar Creek.”

Measures that will be taken to improve the stream include installing fish habitat features and stabilizing the stream banks to prevent sediment from collapsing into the creek and smothering habitat areas. Trees—primarily willows—will be planted along the banks. “This isn’t just attractive,” Small explained. “It actually helps to keep the stream bottom alive. Hot sun beating down on a small stream eventually starves it of oxygen so much that it can’t support life. A shaded stream, surrounded by plenty of trees, promotes life in the water.” Trees will be planted on channel side slopes even where they have to be stabilized by concrete, grouted or rock riprap, or soil bioengineering. The goal is a healthier stream environment and a more natural appearance. The project will also include creation of a small wetland area, planted primarily with cattail, at Freedom Park.

“The City of Charlotte is contributing to this project as well,” Small said. “They are acquiring some pieces of property along the stream bank to create more green space.”

A second project on Little Sugar Creek will create similar in-stream fish habitat features in an area further downstream. Bank stabilization will protect these structures from situation and provide other erosion control benefits. “There are places along the stream where the banks are slumping and could actually erode people’s yards and undermine structures,” Small said.

The third project will protect Irwin Creek against flooding. This creek has been subject to flash flooding so severe that in one instance, a drowning occurred there. “These projects have just taken a further step toward fruition,” Small explained. Following a preliminary assessment structured to ensure plenty of public input into the project proposal, the Corps is now entering its feasibility study phase. The study will be completed in January 2001.

“That assessment was very important,” Small said. “The information we gathered made the trend toward redevelopment in the area clear, and guided our decisions about the types of features the public would want.” After the study creates a fleshed-out picture of the city’s needs, the Corps will proceed to plans and

specifications, aiming to complete construction of the project by 2004. “The streams will be redeveloped alongside the city,” he said. “We look forward to being part of a revitalization that is good for people and for nature.”

Better tools for flood control

Along the edges of Mecklenburg County, another Corps project is underway to help delineate the flood plains along 75 miles of streambeds. Ray Batchelor, of the Wilmington District’s planning section, described the project as a decision-making tool for the county.

“We are able to pick up 50 percent of the costs of this project under our authority to do Planning Assistance to States,” he explained. “Most localities have severely outdated information about development and conditions in their flood plains. It is expensive to create or upgrade that information. Through this authority, we can add value by making it possible to do half again as much as they would be able to do alone.”

The Wilmington District is also gaining expertise in the project. “We are using GIS technology to create a database for the county,” he said. “It is all digital information, and can be used as a living model that can be modified to reflect changes, or even used to test out different development scenarios.”

The Corps is sharing the project with a private contractor, Hayes, Seay, Mattern and Mattern, who is carrying out the County-funded half of the project. “We will deliver our database by the end of July this year,” Batchelor said. “It will then become the County’s database, and will serve as their basic tool for decision making about land use in the flood plain.”

“Planning Assistance to States is a great resource for local governments,” said Coleman Long, Wilmington District’s Chief of Environmental and Planning section. “Last year’s disastrous flooding highlighted the need for more and better information to help communities and counties better manage growth in and around flood plains. The 50/50 cost-sharing available under the program can easily double the effectiveness of a local government’s efforts.”

For more information about the Planning Assistance to States Program, call Coleman Long (910) 251-4505. For information about the types of projects that can be done under the Continuing Authorities Program, contact Ben Lane (910) 251-4929.

This is a test . . . repeat . . . this is only a test

By Penny Schmitt

“If this had been a real emergency, this signal would have been followed by information and directions for your safety . . .” That’s what you hear on the radio when stations test the Emergency Broadcast System. This April, Wilmington District conducted a test of its own, to see how well our Emergency Operations Plan would function to respond to a serious emergency.

In this test—and repeat, it was just a test!—Major Steve Hash, visiting Wilmington District for US Army Reserve training from Las Vegas Nevada, set an emergency scenario in motion. The “plot” of the exercise? An imaginary earthquake struck Wilkes County, North Carolina, causing damage to the earthen dam at W. Kerr Scott Lake.

Scott Project Manager Andy Duncan and his staff responded quickly to the alarm, contacting District Emergency Operations personnel. “I was out of the office, as was Nancy Williams,” said Emergency Operations Manager Joel Hendrix. “We wanted to add the realism of not having everyone poised at their desks to handle a problem.”

The result was still a rapid response to the emergency by June Pauley in Emergency Management, the water control staff in H&H, Dam Safety Coordinator Boyd Alig, Safety Officer Bill Harris, and the Public Affairs Office.

“It was very realistic,” said Eric Farr, the water control manager on the scene. “It went just like it did during Hurricane Fran. I hardly had time to write down one message and absorb it before the phone rang



W. Kerr Scott Lake and Dam

with the newest development. That’s the way it really is when things get hot.”

“We added more to the scenario as the morning progressed,” Hash said. “The fictional problems the staff at Scott and in the District ably addressed included deciding to raise releases to lower water in the lake, then cutting off releases again because of a leak in the conduit, which needed to be repaired quickly.”

“The exercise showed us that we have to put one of the District’s confined-space entry experts on our contact list,” said Safety Officer Bill Harris.

Overall, Hash reported, the District responded extremely well in the exercise. “Because there’s such a low probability of a failure event at any of the District’s sound and very well maintained dams, you might expect emergency plans to be underdeveloped,” Hash said. “Not so. I see the learning experi-

ence more as one of ensuring that response information truly is kept at people’s finger tips, and that transportation to the District’s remotely located field sites is available at a moment’s notice.”

“Preparation is the key,” said District Commander Jim DeLony. “We did well; now we’re going to make doubly sure that information, supplies, and response personnel are identified and ready. We have to be like the 82nd Airborne Division—We have to keep a 50 percent solution in place and in readiness. Those kind of SOPs are what makes it a half-hour job to get people deployed and solutions working when a crisis hits.”

Fortunately, this was just a test! Tested in many real hurricane emergencies, Wilmington District TEAM members confidently face the future well prepared, and ready to refine their responses to an even higher polish.

Thrift Savings Plan open season under way

By Penny Schmitt

Great oaks from little acorns grow. And hefty bank accounts from Thrift Savings Plan contributions grow, as well! Not putting away the maximum allowable into thrift savings? You could be missing one of the best long-term income bargains on the landscape.

From May 15th to June 31st, it will be open season for the federal Thrift Savings Plan. Current contributors may make changes in their funds distribution or add more contributions to enhance their savings. People who aren't on board as yet, can choose to enter the plan during this period.

Federal employees may all contribute, whether or not they are still under the old Civil Service Retirement System or under the present-day Federal Employees Retirement System. CSRS employees may choose to put up to five percent of their earnings into a Thrift Savings account, and enjoy the tax sheltering benefits.

FERS employees may sock away up to ten percent of their salaries—and the government will match their contributions up to five percent. The savings are not taxed until they're distributed at retirement, and are subtracted from taxable income. Thus, saving can also function as a significant tax break.

Employees have several options within the plan, from the riskier, but often higher profit stock funds to the safe and stable, but lower-return G Fund. Adventurous investors may put all their funds in stock funds like the C Fund, while the more cautious may choose to diversify their portfolio by placing some contributions in each of two or more funds. Those very near to retirement are able to shift their money to the safer, slower growing funds, to protect their earnings.

Employees may also borrow against their own contributions to the plan for a home purchase or to meet other needs, then pay them-

selves back at a modest rate of interest. It's not wise to borrow against retirement for frivolous reasons, but your fund can certainly help when the chips are down, or assist you in acquiring an equity-producing property. Changes in the plan now make it easier to transfer your savings from one fund to another. In coming months, further adjustments will make it possible to repay loans against your fund more flexibly.

Worried about losing take-home-pay? Choose to increase your contributions by a very small increment, like one or two percent each year, until you have reached the maximum. You'll be surprised to note that often there's little or no money missing from the bottom line on your pay stub, because the tax break washes out the difference. And WHAT a difference! When you have raised your contributions to five or ten percent, plus interest, you will be feeling the gain—and no pain at all!

Greetings from Bosnia

Major Paul Jarvis, formerly assigned to Wilmington District, recently wrote to us from Bosnia. He reports:

"It is pretty cool working with engineers from so many different armies. Today I met with a captain from the Bosnian Army to discuss a bridge repair project. I am enjoying myself. Please say 'hi' to the construction folks, contracting, the front office, and others. Here's a photo of me (*second from right*), hard at work with the Russians."



Corps Family News

graduates galore!

Susan Dwyer, of the Public Affairs Office, graduates from UNCW with a B.A. in Communications on May 13th. Susan's department honored her with a "Perseverance Award 2000," at a dinner for graduating department members and faculty on April 25th. Her children, Cory and Trista, are giving her a trip to Florida for graduation. Beach week isn't just for high school!

Jocelyn Gaines will graduate from UNCW with a B.S. in Computer Science. She plans to move immediately into graduate school for an M.A. in Computer Re-

sources and Information Management.

Keith Odberg, Office Automation Specialist & soon-to-be Park Ranger, of Philpott Lake, graduated with honors from Averett College on May 6th.

Leslie Bernett Small, son of **Daniel (Planning Services Section)** and **Evelyn Small**, will graduate with honors from New Hanover High School this May. Leslie's honors include being a member of the Lyceum Program, the National Beta Society, and an academic scholar in the Army ROTC unit. Leslie was also a starting offensive guard on the varsity football team, lettering in both football and track and field. He has been accepted and will be attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Prince of Pine Valley: Not satisfied to be 'just' a great District Counsel, **Jim Stirling** is also Pine Valley Country Club Champion for the year 2000. Congratulations, Jim!

Jessica Figgins, 13, daughter of **Sheila Figgins (Construction)** won the Country Club of Landfall

Junior Tennis Tournament, 21-23 April. Jessica went into the tournament unseeded, defeated the number six player from Tennessee in the semifinals, and won four matches. Her final win was a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Inez Neives, of Fayetteville, who had defeated the number one seed from the Cape Fear Country Club. Way to go, Jessica!



Michael Pauley, (shown above) son of **June Pauley (Emergency Operations)** won a \$50 savings bond for his poster on the Benefits of Forestry to North Carolina. His poster, along with others, was displayed at the New Hanover County Public Library. Michael is a student at Wrightsboro Elementary School.

Speaking Out

Carol Banaitis, Park Ranger at Falls Dam and Reservoir, was interviewed for an article that appears in the May issue of NC Wildlife magazine.

Sharon Haggett, Joe Tanner and others were 'featured speakers' at a series of public meetings to gather public interests and concerns regarding a Section 216 study of the John H. Kerr Project. The study will determine whether changed demo-

graphics and land use conditions, or the opportunity to enhance environmental conditions, should lead the Corps to change its operations at the John H. Kerr project.

Penny Schmitt served as a judge for the New Hanover HS senior project on Field Pageantry by Sean Bellamy. Sean, who plans to become a music teacher, organized, trained, and directed performances by a drum and bu-

gle Corps recruited from two local Middle Schools. Kids in our community can do amazing things!

Paula Carper, Howard Varnam, & Penny Schmitt staffed exhibits at the annual Port of Wilmington Maritime Day celebration on 20th of May. Paula and Howard promoted Water Safety initiatives, and Penny promoted the Wilmington Harbor Project.

Bass fishing thrives at Philpott

By Penny Schmitt, Photos by Michael Womack

Nearly 60 fishermen gathered for a recent Region Five Bass Fishing Tournament at Philpott Lake, most went home with at least three fish, and some—including the winner of the 15-lb. catch of the day, bagged as many as the five-fish limit.

Despite low water this winter, and continued dry conditions that are keeping the lake at between 6 and 10 feet below normal pool, Philpott remains a healthy and beautiful body of water teeming with sport fishing opportunities.



A satisfied fisherman hefts his catch.



About 60 people gathered for the Region 5 Bass Federation at Philpott Lake in early May.



The largest catch of the day weighed in at 15 pounds.

Health news comes our way

A healthy work force lives, works, and plays with mental and physical well-being in mind. Keeping those good habits in mind isn't always easy in our over-stressed, overweight, under-exercised and decidedly un-serene society. Bill Harris, of the Wilmington District Safety Office, says "accidents and illnesses can't always be prevented. But the risks of lifestyle-related incidents and sickness can certainly be reduced if we are willing to make small, incremental changes." Harris has taken a highly visible step to give us all a little encouragement to make good, healthy choices in our lives.

Thanks to Bill, all Wilmington District Offices will be receiving

the **HOPE Health Letter** starting this May. It's a lively publication, and offers plenty of boosts to a safe and healthy attitude toward living. May features confirmed Bill's frequent hints to us that our commonest activities can be hazardous—walking on any surface led the way to emergency room visits, sending almost 2 million Americans to the hospital for treatment last year. Summer sports, including barbecuing and mowing the lawn, were other activities that offered pitfalls for the unwary.

The publication also offers nutritional information, a smoking-cessation success story told by the winner herself, and a dozen or so fascinating facts that can be

health-savers. Did you know that alfalfa sprouts are more likely to give you an e-coli infection than ground beef? Did you know that long exposure to the sun, despite use of a high-SPF sunscreen, can still leave you at risk for skin cancer? The health letter contains these not-so trivial pieces of information.

Want to get moving? The issue also charts a 12-week plan to get even the slo-mo guys and gals among us up to 40 minutes of vigorous exercise on a regular basis. Be on the lookout for the bold red-and-white banner of the newsletter making the rounds of your office. Take a minute to read. It could make a big difference in your life.

RETIREE

NEWS



We had a rather talkative crowd of 15 at this month's luncheon. It was such a beautiful day that I suppose some of the regulars were taking advantage of the weather to get some things done at home.

The following retirees and their spouses were present: Bettye and Bob Swart, Max Grimes, Gloria and Paul Woodbury, Virginia

Uzzell, Joe Lewis, Dan Grimley, Bob Doetsch, Sylvia and Rex Phillips, Buddy and Kay Johnson, David Stillman, and Eric Matzke.

In spite of all the efforts made by Kay to keep a secret (can you imagine!) the word got out that this was Buddy's 80th birthday. The Happy Birthday song was sung and, of course, led by Buddy himself.

Max and Gwen attended the Grimes family reunion on April 30th with about 60 of his folks in attendance.

The school year is almost out, therefore Paul Woodbury has scheduled a week of scuba diving in the Bahamas. Gloria says she will be left home with the arm-stretching job of walking their teenage Brittany Spaniel. Paul has acquired an M.A. in English Literature, and an M.F.A. in Fine Arts. His future college efforts depend mostly upon how much he

has depleted his Veteran's benefits.

Bettye and Bob have once again moved out on their Census Bureau job, interviewing those folks who did not turn in a form during the first round. There's nothing like being greeted with open arms when you show up at the door!

Hey, all of you retirees out there, come be with us as we go into the summer season. Make a visit with us as part of your vacation travel plans, that is, you retirees who make those kinds of plans. Remember the first Thursday of the month at the Pier 20 Restaurant on College Road in Wilmington. June's featured guest will be Eugene Tickner, who is currently the District's Deputy for Programs and Project Management. We are still waiting to hear from you folks out there in the field office areas. See you there, or let us hear from you!

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