

**Chowan River Basin Regional Council Workshop:
Designing a Two-Year Program of Work
April 23, 1998
Edenton, NC**

Introduction

The Chowan River Basin Regional Council held a workshop on April 23, 1998 in Edenton, NC, to begin to develop a two year program of work for the Council. At this and earlier sessions, members identified a number of issues of major concern in this Basin.

- quality of water flowing in from Virginia
- paper, fertilizer and dye plant discharges
- nonpoint source impacts from agriculture, forestry and septic tanks
- pfiesteria outbreak potential
- household use of fertilizers and other chemicals
- municipal waste treatment and land application
- pollution potential from septic systems
- herbicide use in utility corridors
- planning capacity at the local level.

Major themes that emerged from the group's discussions about water quality concerns included the need for better understandings and working relationships between Virginia and North Carolina, and better public understanding of the effects of various activities on water quality. The Council also expressed concern that a rural area like the Chowan Basin may become a location for siting facilities that threaten water quality and the environment, resulting in a form of environmental discrimination. Finally, they expressed interest in the possibility of establishing a wetland mitigation bank for small landowners in the area.

After reviewing all the possible action areas, the Council selected several areas to focus on:

1. a citizen monitoring initiative
2. local partnerships to protect and restore water quality
3. pollution from non-agricultural chemical use
4. selected policy issues.

The following is a summary of the Council's first round of discussion on these 2-year workplan agenda items.



2-Year Program of Work

1. Citizen Monitoring Initiative

Council members believe a citizen monitoring initiative can help accomplish two important objectives in the basin. It can supplement data collected by the state to maintain a profile of water quality conditions in the basin. It also can be a useful tool for educating the public and involving them in river conservation efforts.

Council members brainstormed about what such a monitoring program should include and who might participate. They agreed one of the first things that needs to be done is to identify specific river or tributary segments to focus on. They also want to learn what monitoring is already being done, including other citizen monitoring efforts. The Council imagines using both citizens and students to do the monitoring. They agreed it would be important to select the right equipment and protocol to produce the best data possible.

The Council identified a four step process for developing and implementing this initiative.

Step 1: Get briefed on what is already going on. The Council wants to be briefed by state agency representatives and others on what kind of monitoring information is available from the state of North Carolina, from the state of Virginia, from major industries in the basin, and other citizen monitoring efforts, to know what kind of information already exists, where monitoring is already occurring, and where the gaps may be.

Step 2: Design and implement the program. Building on what they learn from the briefing and from the experience of other citizen monitoring efforts, the Council will design their program, identifying specific stream segments, designing a monitoring protocol, and recruiting partners and citizen monitoring teams. They see opportunities for partnerships with Chowan College and others who may have lab equipment to do testing.

Step 3: Provide information and alerts on specific problems. Once data has been collected, it will be passed along to the state and used to alert them to specific problems that arise. It can also be used to help inform the public about what is going on in the river.

Step 4: Identify opportunities to stimulate additional monitoring and research. In addition to launching its own citizen monitoring initiative, the Council will continue to look for opportunities and sources of funding to promote monitoring and research in the Chowan Basin.



Timeframe and Implementation

The Council Chairman appointed an ad hoc committee to work with staff to identify existing monitoring efforts and develop an agenda for the next meeting which will focus on this topic. Staff and the ad hoc committee will work together to invite selected individuals to provide briefings and respond to questions. Following the briefings and the ad hoc committee report, the Council will determine the best way to proceed with the citizen monitoring initiative and will establish a timeline and responsibilities for this part of the workplan.

2. Local Partnerships to Protect and Restore Water Quality

The Council decided the best way to approach many of their major concerns is to build partnerships with local governments and organizations. Their goals are to learn from local governments and organizations what is already being done to protect water quality, and share information that can help maximize the benefits communities receive from maintaining a clean river, including economic and recreational opportunities. Local government members on the Council will provide ongoing guidance on this initiative to be sure it is seen as a collaborative effort, not as an effort to evaluate or challenge what is happening at the local level.

The Council identified a number of steps that will be involved in implementing this initiative.

Step 1: Learn what is already out there. The Council wants to start by learning what is already being done at the local level. They want to learn:

- what kinds of provisions exist in local plans
- whether counties are part of the state's Coastal Management Program
- what the local health departments are doing that affect water quality, including programs for permitting septic systems
- what kinds of activities the Cooperative Extension Service and Forest Service are involved in at the local level, including cost share programs
- what local groups are working on riverfront trails, buffers, or other initiatives that play a role in protecting and enjoying the Chowan and its tributaries.

Special emphasis will be placed on finding success stories and identifying where leadership is coming from on these efforts.

Step 2: Launch an information exchange process. Once they have learned what is out there, the Council wants to develop ways to help localities exchange information, learn what can be done to integrate

water quality and habitat protection into local planning and decision making, and find ways to capitalize on the opportunities the river and its resources offer communities in the Basin. They considered such things as fostering one on one exchanges between communities, and developing a newsletter that could share ideas and successes.

Step 3: Enhance local capacity to deal with environmental planning issues. The Council would like to work cooperatively with localities to help them find ways to increase staff and strengthen their capacity to address environmental planning issues. For example, the Council might explore funding sources for a small team to be shared among localities. The goal is to help local governments be more pro-active in addressing issues related to protecting water quality and the environment.

Timeframe and Implementation

The Council Chairman appointed an ad hoc committee to research what is going on in local communities related to water quality protection and environmental planning today. The ad hoc committee will conduct an initial inventory and report back at the Council meeting following the one dedicated to the citizen monitoring initiative. The ad hoc committee on local partnerships will be looking particularly at what problems local governments are facing in the areas of water quality and environmental protection, what is being done to address them, and where the greatest success has been achieved. The committee may invite a few people to report to the group on local experiences and activities. Once they have had this briefing, the full Council will explore the best way to proceed with this initiative, including designing a communication plan tailored to the audiences they hope to reach.

3. Nonpoint Source Pollution from Non-Agricultural Chemical Application

The Council identified this as a third initiative they would like to undertake if time permits. Areas they are interested in pursuing include homeowner use of chemicals on lawns and gardens, chemical applications in parks and on golf courses, and chemicals being sprayed in highway and utility corridors as an alternative to mowing. They agreed to wait until they had more specific workplans for their first two initiatives before proceeding further with this.

4. Policy Issues

In addition to the Basin specific initiatives the Council wants to pursue, they identified several policy issues they want to bring to the attention of the CCMP Coordinating Council.



- **Cooperation with water quality agencies in Virginia.** The Council wants to be kept informed about state efforts to work with Virginia on monitoring and water quality issues of mutual concern.

- **Use of spraying in highway and utility corridors.** The Council would like the Coordinating Council to review state policies in this area and see if they need to be changed to minimize nonpoint source pollution going into rivers in all river basins.

- **Land Application of wastewater effluent.** The Council is interested in learning more about state programs and policies for land application of wastewater and implications for water quality.

- **Establishing a wetlands mitigation bank.** They want to learn more about how landowners in the Basin could participate in some type of wetlands mitigation bank when only small areas of wetlands are involved.



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