Voice of the Haw

The Haw River Assembly Winter 2023-24



P.O. Box 187 · Bynum, NC 27228 · (919) 542-5790 email: info@hawriver.org · www.hawriver.org



Haw Riverkeeper, Emily Sutton, assisted by Water Quality Specialist Mike Wallace, have released a State of the Haw report for 2023. In this report, we have shared data collected over several years from various investigations into pollution sources in the Haw. These parameters include sediment, bacteria, nutrients, industrial toxins and plastics. Investigations begin with citizen complaints, new permit or project proposals, or general scouting patrols. We conduct sampling with EPA certified and calibrated meters, collect macroinvertebrate surveys, and partner with certified laboratories for sample results that we can not process internally.

This data not only informs the public of water quality issues, which can prevent harm from exposure due to swimming, paddling, or drinking water consumption, but also guides our advocacy. When sources of pollution are discovered and properly identified, we work with state agencies and legal firms to uphold the Clean Water Act and hold the polluters accountable. This report also shows us where to prioritize those efforts based on the greatest threats to water quality. Our findings have shown the following:

- Poor development practices, lack of buffers, and erosion lead to increased turbidity.
- Excess nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus from runoff pollution and wastewater, are leading to increased pH and low oxygen levels in the water.
- Industrial toxins, PFAS (or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) and 1,4-dioxane (a chemical solvent used in manufacturing practices) have made their way into our streams through sources of manufacturing in Burlington, Greensboro, and Reidsville. These toxins are known to cause cancers and many other serious health illnesses.

- Macroplastic and microplastic contamination is present in all samples we've collected throughout the Haw River watershed.
 This results from poor waste management systems, stormwater runoff and plastic manufacturing.
- In our urban waters, macroinvertebrates (small aquatic insects) which serve numerous positive functions in our water systems, are overwhelmingly being affected by water pollution. The pollution sensitive macroinvertebrate score in urban streams was significantly lower than populations in more rural areas, suggesting that these urban populations are being impacted by stormwater runoff and urban water pollution.

Landowners and community members are often the first people to notice localized impacts, while conservation and water quality groups conduct periodic and on-going sampling throughout the year. This is especially important for smaller streams, tributaries, drainage areas or retention basins that may not be part of regular county or state sampling and monitoring plans, and where sediment issues can initially develop. HRA responds to community member tips and complaints, tracks and investigates various sites, and submits reports to regulators and decision-makers.

Many of the water quality issues in the Haw watershed are complex and require legislative mandates, regulatory agency enforcement and strong local advocacy to remedy. Haw River Assembly continues to work on policy efforts with state and local community members. This is an invaluable role for communities in our watershed to play.

You can read the full report on our website at https://hawriver.org/2023-state-of-the-haw-report/. We appreciate the advocacy and volunteer efforts of our members who help us keep on eye on our river and streams, so that we can respond quickly to pollution issues.

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Madison Haley, Plastics Program Assistant Carolyn Paden, Office Manager Cynthia Crossen, Print Newsletter Editor

Thanks to **Jan Burger** for art throughout this newsletter: Climate Action Logo, Plastics Campaign Logo, River Watch Heron, Haw River Festival Heron, and Haw River Island Ramble.

To join the Haw River Assembly or renew your membership, send a check to **HRA, P.O. Box 187, Bynum, NC 27228**; or go online at http://hawriver.org/join-hra/.

All contributions are tax-deductible.

Thanks for your support!

Individual: \$30 Family: \$45

Sustaining: \$60 Heron Circle: \$100 & above

Low Income: \$10

The Haw River Assembly is a nonprofit grassroots organization founded in 1982. Our mission is to protect and restore the Haw River, its tributaries, and Jordan Lake; and to build a community that shares this vision.

(919) 542-5790 www.hawriver.org

Notes from the Haw

We've had a GREAT year at the Haw River Assembly as we've grown our programs, added staff, and welcomed new volunteers and members.

We celebrated a big win with our final Burlington PFAS settlement, with gratitude to Southern Environmental Law Center, whose attorneys represented us through the many years we worked for solutions to end this industrial pollution in the Haw River. Our Trash Traps are now in urban creeks in



four Haw watershed cities, with more planned and new help from our Plastic Program Assistant, Madison Haley. They've turned out to be a popular volunteer project – a big shout-out to the teams maintaining them! We're thrilled that our Learning Celebration for schools is still going strong, and we were joined by enthusiastic new volunteers. Kids still tell us it's their favorite field trip of the year. We're also pleased with the initial success of our Nature4All diversity series, which is bringing new people out into nature in our watershed. Kudos to Haw Riverkeeper Emily Sutton and Events Coordinator Hannah Welborn-Lewis for these accomplishments.

We've expanded our staff this year with the addition of a Communications Manager, Anita Moore, expanding and improving our social and mainstream media, our Friday e-newsletter, and website. Mike Wallace, new Water Quality Specialist, joined us in January and increased our ability to analyze a wide range of pollutants in the watershed, and was invaluable in helping create the 2023 State of the Haw Report. Mike left at the end of August for a new job with NC DEQ, and we wish him the best. We welcomed our new Water Quality Program Manager, Kaitlyn Elliot, on December 1, who will be full-time to better match the pollution challenges of our watershed.

Finally, I want to acknowledge our terrific Board of Directors. This diverse and knowledgeable group of people do so much to make HRA the successful organization that it is. They bring knowledge and experience from various parts of our watershed, and are involved in our events and programs on a deep level. I feel grateful to work with such a dedicated team of Board members, staff, and volunteers.

Happy Holidays to all,

For the river, Elaine Chiosso, Executive Director

What a great HRA Annual Membership Meeting!

We had a wonderful 42nd HRA Annual Membership Meeting at Lake Mackintosh in Alamance County on November 12th. It was a beautiful fall day for a hike along the lake, led by Anita Moore, and for sharing lunch and friendship outdoors. We held our meeting inside the clubhouse that overlooks the



Lake. We re-elected all current HRA Board members whose terms were up this year, and heard updates from staff on HRA programs, issues, and events. Emily Sutton, Haw Riverkeeper, gave our keynote presentation, with a first look for all of us at the 2023 State of the Haw Report.

Thanks to everyone who joined us!



Issues in the Watershed

from Emily Sutton, HAW RIVERKEEPER®

emily@hawriver.org (919) 542-5790

MVP Southgate - The Waiting Game

This has been a long year of a waiting game on the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) Southgate proposal which would affect many streams in our watershed. We've been fighting to stop this pipeline for six years now. It would carry fracked gas from Virginia through Alamance and Rockingham counties, facing stiff opposition from communities and landowners.

In June, MVP Southgate requested an extension from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to continue its project. The permit necessary for using eminent domain expired in June of this year, and an extension until June 2026 has been requested. We worked with Representative Pricey Harrison to submit a letter from 46 state legislators to oppose the extension. We have yet to see a decision from FERC on this request.

A blow to communities fighting MVP Southgate was the passage of NC House Bill 600, or the Regulatory Reform Act of 2023. State legislators, several representing constituents who would be directly impacted by this project, added provisions to make it much more difficult for NCDEQ to deny the permits necessary to move the project forward. HB600 gives NCDEQ an incredibly short timeline to review and approve or deny the permit application. If the application is not approved or denied in that truncated timeline, the permit will be granted. Additionally, the permit can no longer be denied based on downstream impacts or impacts of the project as a whole, but rather direct impacts to the streams where the pipeline will be

located. This will make our work even more urgent and essential when that permit application is released, and we will need every voice to be ready to engage on that comment process! We expect a permit application to be submitted before the end of the year. In the meantime, we are working with community groups to raise awareness about the issue and prepare for the comment process. There will also be a public hearing on this project, likely in the first few months of 2024.



Haw Riverkeeper Emily Sutton speaks out against PFAS pollution in Pittsboro.

PFAS and 1,4-dioxane – We're Still Fighting for Cleaner Water!

Our litigation against the city of Burlington has resulted in dramatic decreases in PFAS compounds since we first filed a notice of intent to sue the city in November of 2019. Levels that were once consistently over 30,000 parts per trillion are now below 500 ppt, and that number is still decreasing. As municipalities continue to have discussions about how to meet new EPA guidelines from drinking water, they are turning to their upstream dischargers and looking for direction from our case with Burlington. This investigation created a playbook for how to use the pre-treatment authority to stop PFAS discharges at the source, preventing the toxins from ever reaching this wastewater treatment plant. This also prevents the toxins from reaching the sludge.

We are starting to see PFAS monitoring requirements and industrial survey requirements put on discharge permits, but these permits have yet to set any numeric limits for PFAS discharges. The permits that are under review right now by the state are the permits that have the highest levels of not only PFAS, but also 1,4-dioxane.

North Carolina has set a limit on toxic substances based on a 1 in 1 million cancer risk. For 1,4-dioxane that translates to no higher than 0.35ug/L. Asheboro is the first permit to have numeric standards on 1,4-dioxane based on this rule. Asheboro has challenged that permit, stating the NCDEQ does not have the authority to set limits for 1,4-dioxane. Reidsville and Greensboro have also petitioned to intervene in the case supporting Asheboro, stating that NCDEQ doesn't have the authority to set limits on any toxins listed under the NC Toxic Substances Act, which covers about 120 toxins. Fayetteville, Brunswick County, and Wilmington utilities have all petitioned to

intervene in the case supporting NCDEQ's limits on 1,4-dioxane. Noticeably absent from that list is Pittsboro and Sanford, both of whom will be more immediately impacted by the unchecked and unregulated levels of 1,4-dioxane coming from Asheboro's wastewater treatment plant if this challenge is successful.

Other cities are also paying close attention to this challenge, because this permit will set a precedent for all other discharge permits in the state. Next in the queue for permit reviews are Greensboro, Reidsville, and Burlington. We are closely monitoring this case and urging Pittsboro to intervene on behalf of NCDEO.

Thirty-Two Years and Going Strong -

Another Wonderful Haw River Learning Celebration for Schools!



from Hannah Welborn-Lewis, Events & Volunteer Coordinator (919) 542-5790; events@hawriver.org

We had a great time with students and volunteers at our 2023 Haw River Learning Celebration from September 23rd to October 13th! Over 784 students from Chatham, Alamance, Guilford, Rockingham, and Durham counties came to our three different sites along the Haw River! Students learned about animals, water quality, pollution control, history and more. Although Tropical Storm Ophelia delayed our first set-up day at the start of the Learning Celebration, we were beyond thankful for the most beautiful sunny weather for all three weeks! From

long-time volunteers to adding some new faces, we are thankful to every volunteer, meal provider, staff member, helper with set-up and moves, and every individual who contributed to make this meaningful event possible.

Starting off at the bottom of the Haw River watershed in Bynum, we welcomed students from Duke School, Pittsboro Elementary, Perry Harrison Elementary, and Willow Oak Montessori. While the tropical storm pushed us back, we had several mighty volunteers join together to help us set-up the hoop house, the kitchen structure, and puppet stage! It was truly a group effort! We enjoyed a variety of food ranging from quiches to sushi from meal providers. Special thanks to Carrburritos of Carrboro, Chatham Marketplace of Pittsboro, and Maxie B's of Greensboro for bringing food for our volunteers. Thanks also to Mark Marcoplos and Wanda Sundermann for hosting our volunteer thank you party!

I really enjoyed my first year being the coordinator of this LC and couldn't have done it without our great Safety and Logistics coordinator Jason Gabriel; the support of

Elaine Chiosso, HRA Executive Director; and the wisdom and experience of our seasoned volunteers.

We always need more volunteers to help us put on this amazing program for the 4th-graders. Please consider joining us next fall – and read more about it at https://hawriver.org/projects/learning-celebration/.



















From top left: Big River puppet makes its exciting entrance at Guilrock & Children explore the river in Bynum & Chad Bryant teaches at Water Protectors & Ellen Manning teaches about Animals in Bynum & Hannah Welborn-Lewis and Jason Gabriel — our fearless leaders! & Kids enjoy being out on the river in Saxapahaw & Donovan Zimmerman, Althea Clayton, and Lea Clayton — our hosts in Saxapahaw & Our terrific volunteers at the LC Thank You party.

On previous page: Opening ceremony at Guilrock Maja Kricker teaches Stream Watch Happy 4th-graders with Possum.







Standing in the Stream

River Watch Training

On September 16th, seven community individuals and two Haw River Assembly Interns joined our staff for a River Watch Training at Red Slide Park in Alamance County. See photos at right and below. Their catch included a pretty big crayfish and a good size hellgrammite.



Our **next River Watch training** will be at Bold Moon Preserve on Reedy Fork in Guilford County on December 16. Want to get involved with our River Watch stream monitoring project? Reach out to Hannah at events@hawriver.org.



Pokeberry Creek River Watch Team

Earlier this year, we welcomed the Pokeberry Creek River Watch Team! Consisting of Diane Ursano, Amy Coughlin, Dave Thomas, and Ace, the group chose to monitor Pokeberry Creek because of a major beaver removal prompted by a local community association a few years

ago. The team wanted to see the biological and hydrological impacts since the removal. The biggest surprise they have seen since starting surveying the creek is the lack of macroinvertebrate life, and how few places there are for aquatic life to thrive. Nonetheless, they look forward to continuing to monitor the area to capture meaningful data and add new team members!

Expanding our Trash Trap Program



Volunteers help build a Trash Trap.

2023 saw a significant expansion of our Trash Traps in the Haw River watershed. We have now successfully installed traps in urban creeks in Durham, Chapel Hill, Greensboro, and Pittsboro. The Trash Traps serve as an effective litter containment system, capturing stormwater litter and reducing the effort and time required for river cleanups. We hope to soon expand our program into Alamance County. These traps also play a crucial role in protecting downstream waterways from litter, and very importantly, the degraded plastic that breaks down into microplastics. As of 2023, we have yet to sample a stream or part of the Haw that did not contain microplastics.



Pittsboro Trash Trap volunteers with trash from Robeson Creek.

One of the Trash Trap program's most significant benefits is bringing together people with a shared goal. We extend our gratitude towards the volunteers and team leaders who dedicate their time and effort towards community involvement and litter removal in their localities.

Originally, Riverkeepers across North Carolina received a grant with the help of Waterkeepers Carolina, to collaborate with Asheville GreenWorks and their Trash Trout design to help mitigate stormwater pollution in our waterways. Our original Trash Trout is located in Durham at Third Fork Creek. This urban

location accumulates lots of trash, and we have collaborated with Duke University to measure and count our findings. We use that information to better advocate for the Haw River and to inform the public about the prevalence of plastic pollution.

We have designed a new version that we can build ourselves, and are calling it our "Trash Trap". These traps are located in our newer locations and have received sponsorships from local businesses, whose logos are prominently featured on the Trash Trap banners. By displaying these banners on the traps, the public can learn about our initiative and better understand how it helps to reduce the amount of trash in our waterways. Many thanks to all the sponsors of our Trash Traps in the watershed! We hope our program inspires other communities to implement similar efforts.



Hannah with volunteers from City of Greensboro installing a Trash Trap in Battle Creek.



Trash is counted after the cleanup of the Third Fork Creek Trash Trap in Durham.

Nature4All Diversity Series



HRA launched a new Nature4All Diversity series in 2023 to support enjoyment and access to nature for all people. Being able to enjoy the outdoors can generate a deep connection to nature, and one's self. For many people of color there have been generations of exclusion and danger in taking part in experiences that should be a human right. Led by people of color, our diversity series has included paddles, hikes, birdwatching, and nature journaling. We welcome everyone to participate in these programs,

but especially encourage people of color. We hope to foster meaningful connections and new outdoor skills in a safe place in the outdoors. Above: Paddle in August led by Raphael Darden (on far left). At right: Nature journaling with Nicole Gaines, HRA Board President, at Chinqua Penn Trail in Rockingham Co. At right below: Birding on Saxapahaw Island Park in October with Alfie Fearrington (who's also a recipient of our new Sustainable Scholarship fund).





Haw River Assembly Sustainability Scholarships – Investing in Communities, Transforming Lives These community-based scholarships are made available through the generosity of the late George Pauly, environmental advocate and Board member of the Haw River Assembly. We honor his commitment to a sustainable future by helping others in our community promote nature, sustainability, and environmental protections in the Haw River watershed. Financial support may be used to address any expenses related to training and classes toward certification in programs which foster sustainable practices and stewardship of the environment.

Our first round of scholarships have been awarded to three recipients who are pursuing certifications and trainings in sustainability, ornithology, native plants, and nature therapy. We still have funding available for additional awards for this year, and for more in 2024.

Awards can support a wide variety of certifications and workshops, including those from the N.C. Botanical Garden, community colleges, universities, N.C. Environmental Education, and other appropriate organizations. Scholarships for classes in formal degree programs such as a Bachelor of Science are not eligible.

Awards range from \$200 to \$1,000. Applications will continue to be accepted until December 15, 2023, and will be offered to recipients beginning January 5, 2024. (Applications received after December 15 will be considered in 2024.) The application form is online at https://hawriver.org/hra-sustainability-scholarship/.

New Faces at Haw River Assembly

Meet Our New Staff



Kaitlyn Elliott is our incoming Water Quality Program Manager. She received her B.S. in Environmental Science from the University of Virginia and her Master's in Water Resource Management from Duke University. Kaitlyn previously worked for the U.S. Geologic Survey on a wide range of projects, researching topics such as the impact of climate change on rainfall patterns, and trends in salinity within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Kaitlyn loves data and is excited to be collecting, analyzing, and visualizing it to benefit her community.



Madison Haley is our part-time Plastics Program Assistant, supported by a state grant we received that also supports our Trash Traps. She has an engineering degree and is currently pursuing a graduate degree at UNC Chapel Hill in Environmental Science and Engineering. She previously worked as a water resource engineer and science policy contractor at the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and is passionate about climate resiliency, public health, and environmental justice.

Meet Our New Interns



Karla Mills is our River Watch Intern, assessing stream health through macro-invertebrates. She is a third-year student at the University of North Carolina, who enjoys working with communities in the environmental sector. She previously researched the sustainability of farmers' markets in Greensboro. Karla is passionate about the environment and hopes to continue learning and growing in this field of work.



Hannah McFarland is our Plastics Program
Intern, and is a senior at UNC-Greensboro studying Environment and Sustainability with a concentration in Natural Sciences. She enjoys exploring nature and is excited to learn and contribute to local solutions to the global plastic problem with the Haw River Association.



Caroline Sevier is a junior at UNC Chapel Hill studying environmental science. She worked with the Riverkeeper in her home river basin over the summer and discovered her passion for field work. The experience helped her decide on her career field, and she looks forward to accomplishing great things during her time at HRA.



December 2023

Looking to start a River Watch stream monitoring team? Join us for our training on Saturday, December 16, 2023 (10 am – 12 noon) at Bold Moon Preserve in Guilford County. New teams require training and can sign up on the River Watch tab of our website, hawriver.org. Are you already an existing team, but want to review some of the basics? You can join us too, just email events@hawriver.org.

January 2024

Start the year off by learning about the State of the Haw from Haw Riverkeeper, Emily Sutton, on January 27th (10 am-12 noon) at Chatham Community Library in Pittsboro. Our new 2023 report addresses pollution issues ranging from sediment to industrial contaminants and more. She'll answer questions and provide actions we can take to help keep our river clean! Registration is at https://hawriver.org/saturdays-on-the-haw/.

February 2024

Help stabilize river and stream banks on February 17th (10 am-12 noon) by joining us for a stream restoration project in Durham. Volunteers should be prepared by wearing gloves and appropriate close-toed shoes. Interested? Registration is at https://hawriver.org/saturdays-on-the-haw/.

March 2024

Looking to start a River Watch stream monitoring monitoring team? Join us for a training in Chatham County on Saturday, March 23rd (10 am-12 noon). New teams require training and can sign up on the River Watch tab of our website, hawriver.org. Are you already an existing team, but want to review some of the basics? You can join us too, just email events@hawriver.org.



Haw River Clean-Up-A-Thon March 16, 2024!

Join us for our annual clean-up of our river, creeks, and lakes from Guilford County down to Jordan Lake. Since 1991, over 6,910 volunteers have picked up over 11,329 bags of trash along the banks of our waterways, plus thousands of tires and all kinds of junk. We organize the clean-up by teams working in dozens of locations, including our trash traps placed throughout the watershed. We welcome new volunteers! More information can be found at our website at hawriver.org/river-cleanup/. Know a location that can be cleaned up near the river or a local creek that we should add? Complete our litter survey at https://hawriver.org/river-cleanup/.





Saxapahaw Island Ramble 5K April 13, 2024

Mark your calendars and get your running shoes ready! The 3rd Annual Haw River Island Ramble will take place at Saxapahaw Island Loop on April 13th. Whether running or walking, enjoy the beauty of running by the Haw River and help contribute to our efforts to keep our watershed clean. Register by March 23rd, 2024 and receive a discount on your entry fee! The registration link can be found here:

https://runsignup.com/Race/NC/Graham/HawRiverIslandRamble At right: Wendy Royce crosses the finish line at our 2023 Haw River Island Ramble in Saxapahaw.



Upcoming 2023-24 HRA Events

Saturday, December 2, 9, and 16, 10 am - 3 pm, Holiday Shop at HRA office (see details at right)

Saturday, December 16, 2023, 10 am - noon, River Watch training in Guilford County, for new and existing teams. See page 9.

Saturday, January 27, 2024 10 am - noon, State of the Haw Report by Emily Sutton, Chatham Community Library. Advance registration required; see details on page 9.

Sunday, February 11th, Save the Date for the Heron Circle Open House at HRA office in Bynum.

Saturday, February 17, 10 am - noon, Stream Restoration in Durham. Advance registration required; see details on page 9.

Saturday, March 16, Haw River Clean-Up-A-Thon. See page 9. Saturday, March 23, 10 am - noon, River Watch Training in Chatham County. See details on page 9.

March 23-24, Haw River Watch Monitoring weekend. For Haw River Watch teams throughout the watershed.

Wed, March 27th, Save the Date for HRA Lobby Day in Raleigh. Sat., April 13, Haw River Island Ramble and 5K race. See page 9.

For **paddle trips on the Haw River** contact our partners Haw River Canoe and Kayak Company, hawrivercanoe.com, and Frog Hollow Outdoors, froghollowoutdoors.com.

Updates and details can be found at www.hawriver.org, on our Haw River Assembly Facebook page, and from our weekly E-newsletters which you can sign up for at info@hawriver.org.

Want to know when your membership dues are up for renewal? Your mailing label on the newsletter shows the last date you made a donation.

Holiday Sale at HRA Office! T-shirts, Books, Art and more

This December, HRA's office will once again transform into a holiday shop with many years of the colorful Haw River T-shirts for sale, all designed by Clyde Jones, Bynum's world famous folk artist.

We'll have shirts from this and past years for \$5 – \$25; many are 100% organic cotton by T.S. Designs. We'll also have artwork by Natathalie Worthington, HRA tote bags, stainless steel water bottles, and the book *Down Along the Haw* by



Anne Cassebaum.
Our holiday shop
will be open
Saturdays,
December 2nd,
9th, and 16th at the
HRA office from
10 am - 3 pm.

Sat. March 16, 2024 - Ast. March 16, App. A.-Thon

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