

Haw River Assembly Accomplishments 1982-2021

1982

- 150 people attended the February charter meeting of HRA in Pittsboro. A non-profit organization was formed with a Board of Directors was formed.
- HRA organized a "Canoe-A-Thon" for clean water at the state dedication of Jordan Lake on May 1, 1982.

1983

- The "Great Haw River Race" was held in Haw River, including a field trip program, landowner contacts, and work with elected officials to help protect the Haw River.

1984

- The state began a "Stream Watch" program, and Miles Agee of HRA organized volunteers to begin monitoring the Haw.

1985

- HRA published "Haw River Drinking Water Survey: A Study of Synthetic Organic Chemicals in Pittsboro Drinking Water and Influent Haw River Water", a scientific study funded by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.
- A report and recommendations on clean water legislation were made to the General Assembly.

1986

- The first Haw River Spring Festival was held at Jordan Lake.
- HRA was involved in efforts to build trails at the Lake and continued educational work on clean water.

1987

- HRA worked with the Bynum community and public health officials to investigate a possible cancer link to the insufficiently treated Haw River drinking water used in the village from the 1940s- 70's.

1988

- HRA worked unsuccessfully with Alamance citizens to attempt to stop siting of a landfill on the river.
- The first Haw River trash clean-up was held in Bynum.

1989

- HRA talked with officials about the possibility of a future state park on the Haw.
- Louise Kessel proposed a new "Haw River Festival Learning Celebration" for schools, modeled on programs she took part in on the Hudson and Mississippi rivers. Organizing began, with Louise and amazing volunteers leading the way.

1990

- The first Haw River "Learning Celebration" took place for three weeks in May, bringing hundreds of volunteers (including naturalists, cooks, artists, scientists, musicians, inventors) together with over 2000 schoolchildren.

1991

- The annual March Clean-Up-A-Thon expanded to sites upriver.
- HRA sponsored "River Jamboree" in Pittsboro, bringing together 20 North Carolina river groups.
- HRA worked with citizens to stop re-zoning around Lake Jeanette and stop a sewage discharge at the Haw headwaters near Oak Ridge.
- The Learning Celebration was now 4 weeks long, including a public Festival Finale. Clyde Jones designed his first Festival T-shirt.

1992

- HRA teamed with Jordan Foundation to hold the first "Meadowfest" concert and fundraiser, a weekend of music near the river in Saxapahaw.
- HRA joined the battle to stop siting of Alamance landfill at Austin Quarter Rd near the river in Saxapahaw.

1993

- HRA got a home! Bynum mill owner Mr. Stevens rented the last house still owned by the mill to HRA for a very modest sum; we renovated and moved in.
- Stream Watch project was revived and re-envisioned as River Watch; grant funding was sought to hire staff coordinator.

1994

- HRA received grants from EPA and Z. Smith Reynolds to start the expanded "River Watch" monitoring project and provide funding for new outreach work to bring in a more diverse membership (including racially and geographically).

1995

- The Learning Celebration evolved to a new model: 3 weeks at 3 sites with 3 public "finales", partnering with Alamance Community College and The Summit Conference Center. Pete Seeger and grandson Tao Rodriguez performed a benefit concert for the Learning Celebration.
- We launched the new "River Watch" project.
- Cary annexed Chatham land on the NE side of Jordan Lake, approving plans for the huge "Amberly" development.

1996

- Hurricane Fran caused massive flooding along the Haw, cresting the bridge at Saxapahaw and altering streambanks, rapids and islands.
- HRA joined with other organizations in the state calling for a moratorium on intensive swine operations and on storage for low level radioactive waste.
- HRA organized a meeting at Camp Guilrock to discuss a vision for a future "Haw River Trail".
- HRA co-founder Chuck Brady was NASA flight surgeon on the Space Shuttle!

1997

- HRA was asked to be on the state's River Assessment Advisory Committee.
- HRA joined with Deep River activists to protest building of Randleman Dam, since Greensboro's increased water supply will end up as wastewater in the Haw. The American Canoe Association sued Greensboro under the Clean Water Act for pollution from their WWTP.
- HRA organized a "flotilla" for clean water on Jordan Lake as Chatham development encroached.
- HRA Board President Elaine Chiosso is hired as HRA's first Executive Director

1998

- Chris Carter, River Watch Coordinator, took to the air to investigate a massive sediment plume, tracking it to huge land clearing in Guilford Co.
- HRA helped save the old Bynum Bridge from destruction.
- We received a grant from U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the new N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund to preserve the headwater springs of the Haw in Forsyth County. Kudos to our land committee, led by Deborah Amaral and Lynn Featherstone!

1999

- 10th Learning Celebration took place (with first Puppet performance by Jan Burger and Donovan Zimmerman, who went on to form Paperhand Puppet Intervention). Over 20,000 4th graders have attended since 1990!
- HRA Advocacy Committee focused on the problems of unprecedented growth and sprawl in the watershed.

2000

- HRA took part in a public hearing on state water quality permits for a huge golf course development near Jordan Lake (now "The Preserve").
- HRA received its first EPA/DENR 319 grant and launched a "Stream Steward Project" to work with Pittsboro community to clean up Robeson Creek. Catherine Deininger hired as staff for this project.
- HRA joined other organizations asking the state for mandatory stream buffers on the Cape Fear.

2001

- Heron Circle began to recognize our \$100 + supporters!
- The City of Graham opened a new canoe access on the Haw at Hwy 54.

-HRA joined N.C. Watershed Alliance for the first Clean Water Lobby Day and joined Alamance citizens protesting air pollution from a Stericycle incinerator.

-Severe drought resulted in winter algae blooms on the river.

2002

-Massive developments proposed in Chatham County threatened tributaries and the Haw.

-HRA published and distributed the "Stream Steward Handbook".

-The Upper New Hope arm of Jordan Lake was put on the federal "Impaired Waters" list.

2003

-Stream Steward Campaign teamed up with the Summerfield community in Guilford County for conservation education and outreach.

-The new Haw River State Park was created at beautiful wetlands on the Guilford/Rockingham county line.

-The state began the process of new rules to reduce nutrient pollution in Jordan Lake as HRA joined the Stakeholder Project.

2004

-HRA and Triangle Land Conservancy worked together to help N.C. buy 900 acres of Duke University forest land in Chatham County (between Bynum and Hwy 64 bridge) for a river corridor park: Lower Haw River State Natural Area.

-HRA urged strong rules for Jordan Lake and joined with other state groups for passage of rules to control polluted runoff.

-HRA helped Swepsonville create a new River Park.

2005

-HRA became a partner for the EPA Environmental Justice grant to the Mebane-based West End Revitalization Association, fighting for "Rights to Basic Amenities", including clean water.

-HRA helped win passage at General Assembly of "Drinking Water Reservoir Protection Act".

-HRA was a presenter at the 5th Korean River Day in South Korea; HRA was represented by JJ Richardson, our Learning Celebration coordinator.

2006

-HRA bought our office, we had been renting, the old mill house in Bynum.

-HRA worked with the Triangle Land Conservancy to get 122 new acres added to Lower Haw River State Natural Area, including both sides of the river above the 15-501 bridge and the old mill site and parking lot in Bynum.

-New Bridge Watch and Lake Watch initiatives were launched with volunteers.

-HRA partnered with Elon University on a river conservation assessment funded by CWMTF.

-Local governments along the Haw River signed a memorandum of agreement to promote trails and conservation along the Haw.

2007

- The Two Threatened Streams Project committee, headed by Catherine Deininger, began investigating Dry Creek and Pokeberry Creek in Chatham with 3-year EPA grant.

- A major sediment plume into Jordan Lake was tracked by airplane back to its source from construction of the massive Amberly development in Cary.

- HRA celebrated 25 years with a great dance party and auction. Matt Steible and Nolan Wildfire paddled the length of the Haw River down to Mermaid Point in honor of the 1982 "Canoeathon".

- HRA advocated for strong rules to stop nutrient pollution in Jordan Lake as the draft rules went out for public comment.

- The new Haw River State Park north of Greensboro was threatened by a proposal to build a large golf course development on adjacent land; HRA joined the fight to have the proposal denied.

- HRA was awarded the Independent Weekly's 2007 Citizenship Award.

- Muddy Water Watch was launched in NC to teach citizens how to be watch dogs on construction sediment and how to report pollution and suspected violations to groups like HRA and state and local officials.

2008

- The extreme drought of 2007-2008 finally ended. HRA questioned whether water demands will be met during the next drought as this region undergoes major population growth.

- HRA and Elon University wrapped up a 3-year project to assess lands and reach out to landowners along the Haw River from Graham to Bynum. This stretch of river is currently 80% forested. The data will be valuable for planners and conservation organizations in the Haw watershed.
- HRA became part of the Waterkeeper Alliance and Elaine Chiosso was named our first Haw Riverkeeper.
- HRA received a grant from the state to begin a new 8th-grade Stream Investigation program, bringing students to streams near their schools to explore the ecosystem and causes of pollution.
- HRA reached 95% of a \$100,000 capital campaign goal, begun in 1997. Funds were used for capacity building, including increased staffing and renting a new office.

2009

- Jordan Lake rules went to the NC General Assembly for approval. HRA staff and members went to Raleigh to urge legislators not to weaken them. The final rules were made law in August, and though not perfect, the important rules to combat existing pollution, not just new pollution, were precedent setting.
- HRA worked with Durham activists to protest a move by Durham Co. and the state to accept a developer's survey of the normal pool elevation boundary that would shrink the protected development zone so that the big "751 South" mixed-use development would be outside the protected area. We raised funds from 150 donors to do a new (better methodology) survey. Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) worked with us and represented us in a legal challenge. We lost this one.
- HRA bought the remaining 2-acre forested section that enclosed the headwater spring at the beginning of the Haw River in Forsyth Co. just west of Oak Ridge. The first section was purchased in 1999.
- The Two Threatened Streams Project wrapped up, with a report detailing the ecosystems, aquatic life, visual assessments, pollution issues and overall conditions of these two Chatham Co. streams threatened by development.

2010

- Haw River Festival moved from Bynum to Saxapahaw, overseen by Germane James, our "Rainmaker".
- We put on our 20th Haw River Clean-Up-A-Thon and 20th Learning Celebration!
- HRA spoke at public hearing for strict emission standards for the Stericycle medical waste incinerator, which has been emitting heavy metals and other chemicals into the surrounding area near the Haw River in Graham.
- HRA questioned a lack of state investigation after a 1.45-million-gallon raw wastewater spill from Greensboro following a storm. Paddlers downstream in the Haw alerted us to a resulting fish kill.

2011

- Fracking for shale gas in the Triassic Basin of the Haw River watershed became a new threat. We joined forces with Clean Water for NC and other groups to fight to keep current laws in place that prohibit it.
- HRA rallied river lovers to speak out at the public hearing on a proposed permit that would allow Pittsboro to build a new sewer outfall on the Haw River right at the Lower Haw State Natural Area near the Hwy 64 bridge. (The permit was approved but we got some hefty conditions placed on it. It is still not being used and we will continue to urge that it never is).

2012

- HRA held a "Rally in Raleigh" as fracking continues as a big issue. NC's Republican-led legislature passed bills to fast-track fracking in our state. Later in spring we helped organize large turnouts for the state public hearings in Chapel Hill, Sanford and Pittsboro to speak out against draft fracking rules.
- HRA joined the battle with community activists in Greensboro to stop the re-opening of the White Street Landfill, located in a primarily Black neighborhood. The city finally agreed to keep it closed and it is currently used only for a mulching operation and C&D.
- Jane Sharp McRae, one of NC's greatest environmental activists and a long term HRA board member and supporter, passed away at age 95.

2013

- HRA joined with UNC-CH scientists to investigate the runoff of pollutants from sludge fields in our watershed, primarily pastures and hayfields where bio-solids from municipal sludge are spread and may be impairing rural streams.
- Preston Development from Cary asked Pittsboro to rezone 7,210 acres with the town's Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) to build a massive mixed-use development for 55,000 people, including commercial areas. HRA spoke at the public

hearing with major concerns about water quality and loss of tree coverage on this land adjacent to the Haw River and Jordan Lake.

- NC General Assembly delayed the implementation of the Jordan Lake rules for 3 years, and approved spending \$1 million for an unproven water aerator system (Solar Bees) to reduce algae in the lake.
- HRA urged NC to adopt better water quality standards for our state waters as public comments finally opened on the long-delayed Triennial Review of surface water standards.

2014

- A massive 3.5-million-gallon raw sewage spill into the Haw River from Burlington's aging sewer system was the third significant spill in just one month. HRA, represented by SELC, brought a 60-day Notice of Intent to Sue the City of Burlington in April to prevent future spills. This brought them to the table for negotiations that resulted in an agreement signed in September that included fixing and replacing sewer pipes, improving their grease reduction program, and faster notification to the public of spills.
- HRA helped organize (with FrackFreeNC) a turnout of over 1500 people to protest new rules for fracking in the state, proposed by the new Mining and Energy Commission hearings. 59,000 petitions were also collected and delivered to the Governor calling for a ban on fracking.
- Pittsboro Matters and local residents filed a lawsuit to overturn the re-zoning of the 7,120 acres for Chatham Park by the Town of Pittsboro, on grounds it does not conform to the town's land use plan and their ordinances. HRA continued to advocate for better environmental protections to be mandated for this massive development.
- HRA was named one of "America's Most Endangered Rivers" by American Rivers, due to threats from wastewater and stormwater to the river and Jordan Lake.
- Cynthia Crossen retired after many years as our Haw River Watch Project Coordinator, having trained and inspired hundreds of volunteers, the public and school kids to appreciate our living waters. Our new Watershed Education Coordinator, Tracy DeVoe took on the project. Cynthia continued as our fantastic newsletter editor.

2015

- HRA protested Duke Energy's plans to build massive coal ash dumps in the SE corner of Chatham Co and in neighboring Lee Co. that could impact water quality in the Haw and Cape Fear rivers and harm surrounding communities.
- SELC filed a lawsuit on behalf of HRA and a Lee Co. landowner to overturn fracking rules in NC after a court decision that the legislature had overstepped their authority in setting up the MEC, who developed the rules. We won an injunction that prohibited any fracking permits to be issued while the case is heard. Chatham, Lee and Rockingham counties all passed moratoriums on fracking within their jurisdictions.
- Haw Riverkeeper Elaine Chiosso was co-author of the "Sludge in Our Waters" report published by Waterkeepers Carolina, examining how land-applied municipal sludge contains industrial contaminants that pollute streams during storms, including PFAS and 1,4-Dioxane. The report was accompanied by an interactive mapping tool so that people could see location and other data for over 4000 sludge fields throughout the state. The report was made possible by investigations by a team of scientists in our region, led by UNC-CH professor Steve Wing.
- HRA was awarded a Conservation Awareness Grant from Triangle Community Foundation for our work to raise public awareness and concerns for public lands along the Haw, especially the Lower Haw River State Natural Area, threatened by development pressure from Chatham Park.

2016

- HRA invited State Geologist, Phil Bradley, for a hike along the Haw to explain the amazing geological history of the Haw River basin with its volcanic formed metamorphic rocks that are over 500 million years old.
- NC DEQ released a report on the ineffectiveness of Solarbee devices for suppressing algae growth in large, nutrient-rich reservoirs such as Jordan Lake, noting that pH levels had actually worsened. DEQ announced that it is removing the Solarbees after 21 months. An idea was discussed and rejected to fund a study as to whether mussels could be used to filter pollution in Jordan Lake, despite the fact that mussel populations have plummeted in the Haw and Jordan Lake due to sediment and other pollution. We urged the state to get back to the work of reducing sources of pollution.
- We urged the Town of Pittsboro to require a full Environmental Impact Assessment for Chatham Park instead of the piecemeal approach currently underway.
- Emily Sutton was hired as the new Haw River Watch project coordinator.
- Friends of the Lower Haw River State Natural Area was formed as a new chapter, after a successful organizing meeting was held by HRA. We completed our new brochure/map of the LHRNSNA for public use.

- Duke University PH.D candidate Danielle Purifoy gave the keynote presentation at HRA's Annual Meeting about her "In Conditions of Fresh Water" oral history project looking at environmental justice issues in Alamance County and Lowndes Co. Alabama.
- Haw River State Park opened the new trails through their 693-acre Iron Ore Belt Access, land they acquired after the Guilford Co. community and environmental organizations (including HRA) defeated approval for building of a private golf course development.

2017

- Haw River Watch project grew to 28 teams along the river and its tributaries. Emily Sutton started new Muddy Water Watch trainings.
- The NC legislature proposed to "fix" Jordan Lake pollution by using algaecides to poison the algae in the lake, is something never done in a large drinking water reservoir and would include use of the chemical glyphosate (used in Round-Up). State agencies and environmental groups, including HRA, condemned the idea and urged the Army Corps of Engineers to reject it, which they did.
- The Haw River Assembly celebrated its 35th Anniversary in November at the Haw River Ballroom in Saxapahaw, and Elaine Chiosso turned the torch over to Emily Sutton to be the new Haw Riverkeeper. Chiosso remained as Executive Director.
- HRA received new grant funding from NCSU to fund research, monitoring and community outreach about the industrial chemicals in the Haw River.

2018

- HRA fought Mountain Valley Pipeline South, quickly mobilizing when we learned that the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) had applied for a permit to build a new pipeline for fracked gas from Virginia through Rockingham and Alamance counties. The pipeline would cause destruction to communities, health, and the streams. HRA joined many others already fighting the main pipeline and began reaching out to landowners and communities in the path of the pipeline and blast zone to organize against MVP South.
- HRA objected to the Town of Pittsboro and to the state about the stormwater management plans for Chatham Park, which are insufficient to protect the Haw River and endangered and threatened aquatic species. In November, SELC filed a motion of behalf of HRA to intervene in the state's hearing on this issue, with HRA supporting NC Division of Environmental Quality's efforts to get more effective stormwater protections in place as Chatham Park is built.
- Haw Riverkeeper began monitoring water quality downstream of big poultry operations where runoff from chicken litter is getting into streams. With support from Waterkeeper Alliance we now have in-house lab equipment to analyze water samples for bacterial levels, and the Riverkeeper reported 4 operations in violation of the state standards.
- There were 3 flood events on the Haw River in the fall of 2018, with two reaching over 17', considered major flood stage. Climate change is predicted to cause more intense rains in our region, contributing to bigger and more frequent floods.

2019

- Hundreds of people turned out for demonstrations in Pittsboro to demand a much stronger tree protection ordinance for Chatham Park. Builders are currently proposing to save only 10-20% of the existing trees on the 7000 mostly-forested acreage, with as little as 0% in the most urban areas. Paperhand Puppet helped us create a colorful forest of tree and animal puppets for two "Procession of the Trees" around the downtown county courthouse in Pittsboro. HRA also submitted detailed comments on the tree ordinance and organized many others to do so.
- Local governments (including Alamance Co. and state agencies) joined in the opposition to MVP Southgate Pipeline during the FERC comment period on the company's EIA. HRA began organizing opposition to MVP's 401 permit (for stream and wetland impacts), which the state has already denied.
- HRA celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the Haw River Learning Celebration, our successful river education program that has reached over 48,000 fourth-graders from schools in our watershed, along with hundreds of volunteers.
- HRA started a Swim Guide program to monitor and report E-coli levels at popular swimming spots along the Haw River and at Jordan Lake. The public can download an app to find out weekly results or check in on our social media.
- HRA, represented by SELC, sent Burlington a Notice of Intent to Sue over the continued high levels of PFAS and other industrial chemicals being released into the Haw River from the city's wastewater treatment plant. This legal action aims to get them into negotiations with us to identify the industrial polluters and begin actions to stop pollution of the river and downstream drinking water.

2020

-In February, Actor/Producer/Activist Mark Ruffalo visited the HRA office in Bynum as part of his tour of NC. Following the release of his film "Dark Waters", he was discussing PFAS pollution with community leaders and the NC legislature. Riverkeeper Emily Sutton was appointed to Pittsboro's Water Quality Taskforce to look at solutions for the Town's drinking water.

-In response to the Covid pandemic, HRA canceled most in-person activities for the year and created new online programs and materials to keep people engaged about the river. Partnering with Paperhand Puppets, HRA produced a 6-part video series of the Learning Celebration for use by schools and did virtual streamings for the Haw River Festival and the Wild and Scenic Film Festival.

-We launched 2 new campaigns in 2020, Climate Action and Plastic Free Haw River.

-The City of Burlington signed an Agreement with Southern Environmental Law Center, on behalf of HRA, to investigate the exact sources of PFAS and 1,4-dioxane in their wastewater and take steps to stop this pollution from entering the Haw River.

2021

-Our Climate Action Committee researched and summarized information on how climate change will impact our watershed and sent letters to all elected officials at the local, state and federal levels who represent us, providing this information as well as recommendations for legislation.

-Haw Riverkeeper worked with the owners of Haw River Mushrooms on an innovative myco-remediation restoration of stream banks that had been eroded and compacted by livestock. Volunteers helped fill burlap bags with spent mushroom substrate as both erosion control and for filtering toxins. 300 native live-stake plants were donated by Mellow Marsh Farm.

-HRA joined with communities fighting environmental injustice in Burlington, where a former Army missile plant is polluting surface and groundwater, and in western Caswell County, where a proposed asphalt and batch concrete plant would create air pollution in the surrounding neighborhood and pose a risk to a tributary of the Haw River. Both communities have majority Black, Indigenous and Latino populations.

-In November the EMC agreed to a settlement with HRA and Fayetteville that will require Greensboro to meet stricter limits and penalties for 1,4-Dioxane under a new Special Order of Consent. Greensboro also must do more monitoring and investigate the source of this industrial chemical that is coming into their WWTP.