

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
FEBRUARY 24, 2016**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a special meeting with the Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors and staff on Wednesday, February 24, 2016 at 12:00 Noon at the Pineapple Café.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Joseph S. Winslow, Jr., Chairman
Jeff Dixon
Dr. William R. Sterritt
Bettie Parker

MEMBERS ABSENT: Lloyd E. Griffin, III
Cecil Perry
Frankie Meads

OTHERS PRESENT: Rodney Bunch, County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board
Steve Harris, Pasquotank SWCD Chairman
Maurice Berry, Pasquotank SWCD Supervisor
Dwane Hinson, Pasquotank SWCD Technician
Dianne Watts, Pasquotank SWCD Secretary
Rodney Johnson, Albemarle RC&D Council

Mr. Steve Harris, Pasquotank Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Chairman, welcomed everyone. He asked the Board to be thinking about some projects that SWCD can be working on in the future. He said we need to continue working on funding for alligator weed. SWCD Supervisor Maurice Berry gave the invocation and lunch was served. Following lunch SWCD Technician Dwane Hinson updated the Board on several projects on which he said he would like the Board's input.

Mr. Dwane Hinson stated that SWCD has been doing quite a bit of work on the Little River Watershed and they are concerned about the water quality readings that have come about. He said they have tried to address some projects in that area. He noted that there was a large green/blue plume in the water around Edenton this past year. He said it is a non-point source pollution issue, which means the EPA will not move in and the State of North Carolina will not move in under a regulatory capacity. It will be up to the communities to start putting together some programs to address it and then maybe start garnering some help from the State. He said this is the same issues we are looking at with the Little River and it is very hard to predict when it will come.

Mr. Hinson said we recently approved a stewardship program. He noted that many areas have been timbered along the Little River. He explained that every river has a base load of nutrients and others elements in the water and when we disturb areas adjacent to the river the unfiltered waters change the load and the river can no longer buffer and handle it. He said they are trying to design systems to glean off the extra load and rebalance it. The stewardship program has allowed landowners in Perquimans and Pasquotank County to sign up and buffer 300' along the river and receive in return a minimal tax relief. It allows SWCD to utilize the zone and the monies to garnish some funds in the form of grants. He said when drainage inlets were initially dug water quality was not an issue, but there are no buffers or trees left along Little River and now there are no filter mechanisms.

Mr. Hinson stated that SWCD is putting together a demonstration project on Sandy Road at the head of the Little River. He said a tremendous amount of nutrient load and other items are being dumped into the water at this location. The project is funded and is in the process of being bid out. He said they will be creating a filtering mechanism to help reduce the outflow. A filter will be placed in the ditch, a lot of the drainage will be redesigned, and cypress trees will be planted. He reported that bids will be let shortly on the Foreman Bundy Road Project. He explained that this ditch is also a major contributor to Little River and it has a lot of sediment and erosion.

They will redesign the ditches and put in a major wetland down the ditch, as well as installation of an underground tile system which will hold water in the ground and reduce the nutrient loads.

Mr. Hinson suggested the County perform an annual assessment; possibly working through the RC&D district and establish a water management plan that can be updated annually. He said this can be used if we have a need to go to FEMA for assistance. He said we also should think about an annual stream assessment. He noted there are several major blockages in our streams and they would like to use some of their funds received this year from the County to go in and remove the blockages.

Commissioner Parker said a group of students from UNC recently spoke at a commissioners meeting regarding increased sea level rise. She asked if there is a rise in the Little River. Mr. Hinson said there has been a steady rise in water levels over several million years. Currently, he said it is rising at a rate of 1' per century. He said he does not believe sea level rise is directly associated with the county's drainage problems.

Mr. Hinson asked if the County's \$25,000 appropriation is still in good standing. County Manager Bunch noted that there are still funds available in the current fiscal year that can be used for purposes related to water quality and drainage in the county. Mr. Hinson said they would like to maintain the \$25,000 through the next budget cycle.

Mr. Rodney Johnson added that after Hurricane Isabell there were a lot of trees down in all the streams. He stated they were able to go to FEMA, because of the Newland Water Management District and the fact that some improvement had been made in the district. He said if we have a plan for the whole county, all the streams can be cleaned out without having to fight for funding.

Commissioner Dixon asked where we are with the Knobbs Creek assessment. Mr. Hinson said the Core of Engineers did a study, but there has been no maintenance so we are basically waiting for a problem to come about and then react to it. He said that is why he is proposing we do an annual assessment so that basic maintenance such as clearing and snagging and removal of debris can be performed annually. He said the majority of problems at the culverts on Main Street Extended come from lack of maintenance. County Manager Bunch acknowledged that the Department of Transportation removed the City's raw water line, as well as added two additional large diameter culverts on Main Street Extended to help with the drainage in that area.

Chairman Winslow said when he was a child he played on the bridge on Main Street Extended and there was no trash at the site at that time because there was an opening big enough to flush it all through. He feels the smaller pipes have to restrict the flow of water in that area. Mr. Hinson said mathematically it does not. Mr. Harris noted there is a problem at the Creek Road Bridge as well. He said residents want the road raised, but he feels that will make the problem even worse. He said currently the road works as a dam. He added US 158 works as a dam as well. He asked DOT if they did any type of environmental study to see how the Creek Road Project would affect landowners and the only reply he could get was "we don't have anything to do with it, because it came from the engineers higher up".

Mr. Maurice Berry passed out a list of items the State Legislative Committee for the North Carolina Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts will be working on for 2016. Highlighted were items that pertained to our area. He asked the Board to start thinking about funding for a full-time position for a Soil Conservationist. He explained that when Mrs. Watts retired there was not money at the time to hire a full-time position and luckily she came back and has helped on a part-time basis for the past seven years. Eventually she may decide to retire completely. Also, he said Mr. Hinson came back after he retired and is working part-time. He stated that he is supposed to be working 19.23 hours a week, but he does a lot more than can be done in that amount of time. He said we still have a district conservationist, Mr. Doug Wassum, but the way personnel has been cut, he does not have much time to get out of the office because he basically sits in front of a computer all the time. Therefore they are relying on technicians more in the county to do projects. He noted that other counties in our area all have full-time administrative assistants. Currituck and Camden both have full-time technicians and Chowan and Perquimans share a technician.

Mr. Berry said some farmers are now using "land smoothing". He said farmers used to plow all their fields and dig drains. Large rains would wash chemicals and soils into the ditches, canals,

and rivers. Land smoothing slows runoff. No tilling is also being utilized, which slows runoff. He noted that he has been on the Albemarle RC&D Council since 1990. He said the soil conservation supervisors are out every day riding around and they see the drainage problems and they take care of many of them their selves.

Mr. Berry said they do have a lobbyist in Raleigh working with the General Assembly and in Washington everyday helping with projects that they are working on. He said you don't hear a whole lot about Soil Conservation and what they have going on, but he said there is a lot going on. He said they are one of the best kept secrets around. He thanked the Board for its support through the county budget.

Mr. Harris stated that they are not a regulatory agency. He said everything is voluntary. If someone choses to do Better Management Practice on their land, usually the State will cost share with them and pay as much as 75% of the cost of the practice. He noted that State and Federal funds have been cut and the County is being asked to make up for the losses. He thanked the Board for their support.

Mr. Berry informed the Board that Representative Steinburg informed him that he is going to try to get a recurring amount of funds in the budget each year to help with the alligator weed problem.

Mr. Harris thanked the Board.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:20 PM.

CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO THE BOARD