

Walnut Creek Wetland Community Project

Spring/Summer 2017 Updates



Who we are

The Walnut Creek Wetland Community Project (WCWCP) is an informal but organized hub for sharing about and collaborating on efforts for the natural and human communities surrounding the Walnut Creek wetlands in SE Raleigh. Participation is open and currently includes academic, non-profit and community groups, local government, and interested residents. See a list of groups at our website go.ncsu.edu/WalnutCreekWetlandpartners

Project partners meet a few times per year in person and as needed, and communicate through a project listserv. The next meeting is in early fall 2017, date TBD. Current WCWCP coordinators include Christy Perrin, NC Water Resources Research Institute, and Dr. Louie Rivers, Dept. Forestry & Environmental Resources at NC State University College of Natural Resources. Please contact either with questions or to be added to the listserv:

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SPRING MEETING HIGHLIGHTS AND PROJECT UPDATES

WCWCP partners met in March to share their individual and collective work, and to share ideas for new work.

Rochester Heights/Biltmore Hills research and engagement

Dresden McGregor, NCSU graduate student, shared an update on her and Dr. Louie Rivers' effort to learn how neighborhood residents view and interact with local streams and local government.



Volunteers plant the St. Ambrose rain garden

They began distributing surveys in the spring, then realized that their response would be better if they stayed with the resident while they completed the survey, rather than came back for the survey later. A modest cash or gift card incentive is provided to respondents when the survey is completed. Once they have received back as many surveys as possible, Dresden will analyze and write up the results.

Louie explained the focus groups were mostly about flooding. Participants voiced support for watershed planning to assess the bigger picture and causes. A core group of people in the neighborhood are actively engaged and interested in participating in follow-up activities. We could provide them real decision-making power in how research is conducted.

The group discussed the idea of partnering with an NCSU scientist to conduct neighborhood streamflow monitoring to get data about flooding events. Comments include local streams may back up when Walnut Creek is high due to the runoff from land in the watershed. Engineering standards for roads may contribute.

Summer update:

Louie invited Dr. Ryan Emmanuel to lead an assessment of hydrology (water flow) in neighborhood streams. American Rivers will fund the work through the end of 2017.

Lory Willard, City of Raleigh Stormwater, met with the neighborhood about issues and possible ways the City could help.



City of Raleigh Stormwater cost share helped pay for the St. Ambrose rain garden, shown under construction.

Walnut Creek Wetland Park Planning

The City of Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Dept. has hired Alta Planning & Design as the design consultant for the Walnut Creek Wetland Park Master Plan.

Summer update:

Alta, led by Britt Storck, completed a situation assessment and survey of interested stakeholders. The report and recommended list of members for a Citizen Planning Committee was approved by City Council. The Planning Committee will meet from June-October. Several people who participate on the Walnut Creek Wetland Community Project serve on the Park Planning committee. We will keep you informed about progress and opportunities for feedback via our listserve. The city's website is

www.raleighnc.gov/parks/content/ParksRec/Articles/Projects/WalnutCreekWetlandParkMasterPlan.html

Telling stories and watershed planning

The group discussed the idea of creating a plan for the Walnut Creek watershed. Town of Cary is interested in redeveloping Cary Town Center, and developing the East Cary Gateway part of their vision plan. The group noted the need to engage Cary as these areas are within the watershed. Triangle J Council of Governments has access to a watershed planning fund, EPA 205 (j) grants (only COGs can use them).

An NCSU work study student compiled as many existing reports and data sources for the watershed as he could. These are summarized in a report that can be added to our website. City of Raleigh also has stream monitoring data that could be added. Cam McNutt, NCDWR, would also be a good contact. David Shouse lives in Cary, could help with engaging staff. Christy talked briefly with Town of Cary staff and NCSU's Sustainability Director, who all expressed interest in participating.

City of Raleigh will likely make policy changes to get better stormwater management. Stormwater staff are interested in putting in retrofits but since the City doesn't own much land here, a broader strategy is needed.

Discussion moved to the idea of creating a case study from the bottom of the watershed to share with upstream neighbors. What we learn here can also be documented to help with other similar low-lying communities.

The recent Nile Project event showed the power of storytelling. Telling the story of our community- about the uniqueness of the wetlands and creek, the center as a model for respecting the natural

environment, long-term residents, Neighborhood Ecology Corps students, the church rain garden. Can we tell our stories to the top of the watershed? Can the NEC kids tell stories? Sustainable development is expensive, can a story help motivate going above and beyond? Some ideas about storytelling:

- I love maps to show connection to Neuse, where water goes
- Stories tell the creek is special-Frank McCay shared that kids found sea lampries here- lack of dams below Walnut Creek allows movement. His students created a physical display with artwork, science.
- One of my neighbors, long term resident, was interviewed for that project. We could include Frank's work.
- A bigger storytelling cadre includes the NC Black Storytellers Association, Beverly Burnett. Could give a grant proposal juice.
- Include new neighbors' perspectives to include in cultural aspect of area.
- Could Dresden's project open the door to people not yet connected?
- A City of Raleigh technician helped with Dan River oral history process.
- Nate Meyers, SE Raleigh resident/ NCSU grad, has start-up at HQ to teach young people video skills. (Craig Brookins)
- SE Raleigh Promise is potential partner
- Randy Senzig worked with students in S Florida to tell story of Everglades' impact in community. Something similar here- train kids to interview elders?
- Students in the NCSU Public History doctorate degree are in need of projects- I can speak with the Director.

- Be aware that residents don't want to be somebody's project.
- This type of storytelling could build community.
- PEJ is creating a short documentary about their efforts.
- City of Raleigh Stormwater is creating a video about the St. Ambrose rain garden to highlight the cost-share program.

What moves you?

- Storytelling. The cultural jewel could bring people in for the ecological. This neighborhood is special for Raleigh.
- Collecting the technical data residents have requested.
- Short documentary. The powerful idea of creating meaning for the watershed, that the wetland park is a part of a bigger story. Represent the park and the idea of the watershed flowing to the Neuse. The unique history of PEJ in recognizing the resources and value. The meaning of the place is important to capture and time is of the essence.
- We have a park with so many people passionate about the area, and claim it as their own.
- Concrete ways to include community for them to buy in, for example people connect with music. People come here from far away, how can we create a connection with local neighbors?
- A bridge across Walnut Creek would be a literal connection.

- Access to Walnut Creek for kids.
- Excited about the storytelling. I've told the story of this place in 3 different Triangle churches lately (evangelist of the wetlands?)
- Guided nature hikes for developmentally disabled adults and older generations starting at park (thanks to Stacie Hagwood)
- If NCSU students remember that their project builds community, it will do what is needed.

Grants and funding update

Partners continue to seek funds for various projects to support our mission.

American Rivers will provide funding through 2017 to monitor local creeks, and for Neighborhood Ecology Corps students to organize and host fall community workshops to educate about and identify potential green infrastructure sites.

Conservation Fund invited us to participate as one of 5 cities in a proposal to JPB Foundation to work with residents to identify greenway, park or green infrastructure facilities that can provide multiple benefits. The grant would also help fund construction.

TJCOG (Jen Schmitz) with help from American Rivers submitted a proposal to the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation for watershed planning, though it was not funded.

Ideas are welcomed for making our storytelling/watershed planning plans come true!



Reverend Taylor and Reverend Cunningham kick off the volunteer rain garden planting with a blessing

St. Ambrose Church rain garden

In April the Community Project completed our first in-the-ground project, a rain garden to capture and treat storm water running off a parking lot at St. Ambrose Episcopal Church. Originally planned as a small educational project, the Church Vestry opted to increase the size of the rain garden, thus removing more pollution from nearby Walnut Creek. A grant from American Rivers was leveraged to obtain City of Raleigh stormwater cost share funds, allowing the increase in size. Christy coordinated efforts, and Kris Bass Engineering designed and oversaw construction completed by Dragonfly Pond Works. Rain gardens are landscaped areas that collect and soak in rain water running off of hard surfaces, preventing pollution from entering nearby waterways.

Parishioner volunteers selected a range of colorful native plants, like bee balm and swamp milkweed, that are beneficial to pollinators for the rain garden. A large group of church parishioners joined Neighborhood Ecology Corps students to install the plants during a fortuitous break in rain after Sunday services. Stop by 813 Darby St. to see how this rain garden grows!