



Clean Water for North Carolina

Clean Currents

Winter 2020

A newsletter of clean water and community environmental justice issues

Cultivating Hope, Demanding Change: Action to Save the Living World (and us!)

In one person's long lifetime, two thirds of our planet's wild areas have disappeared. Documentarian David Attenborough's latest film, *A Life on Our Planet*, is his powerful "witness statement" of this loss during his 93 years, the implications for human life, and a hopeful vision of restored healthy ecosystems in which we'll have a place if we learn to diminish our ever-expanding lethal footprint. These wild places, once brimming with diverse life, have been destroyed at an accelerating pace to support the wealth of developed nations, disrupting the very balance of life on Earth through climate change and habitat loss. Humans and the animals they raise for their food now make up over 90 % of the weight of all animals on the planet, Attenborough tells us!

Severe biosphere imbalances are now documented from the Arctic and Antarctic to tropical rainforests, and everywhere in between. In NC, the impacts of climate change include higher energy hurricanes, massively more destructive rains, and heat waves; all are accurately called climate disasters. The NC Climate Risk Assessment and Resilience Plan, released earlier in 2020, reflects the proposals of multiple state government agencies to mitigate North Carolina's vulnerability to climate change. Part of this plan would overhaul the ways we produce and manage energy. While we question some of the report's recommendations, such as collection of "biogas" from animal agriculture (more on pg. 6), implementing many of the recommendations will increase the health and well-being of our most vulnerable populations.

Whether due to polluting industries, bad urban planning or the waste and climate impacts of agriculture, deforestation, and energy production, it is People of Color, Indigenous and low-income communities that face increasingly disproportionate burdens. These communities must have priority in planning, job creation and formulating lower impact energy, food, and health systems.

In 2019, the NC Department of Environmental Quality's NC Clean Energy Plan focused overwhelmingly on

reducing carbon dioxide while ignoring methane, a far more powerful greenhouse gas, as do Duke Energy's projections. The Solution's Project's 100 % Clean Energy Plan for NC by 2050 says the most achievable and cost effective energy mix will be 40% reduced energy demand (shutting down wasteful baseload power plants and making homes and businesses more efficient), and 50% of our energy from huge offshore wind resources.



The largest NC contributors to clean energy and climate stabilization by 2050 will be offshore wind, energy efficiency /conservation and reforestation.

We've got our work cut out for us, but it looks hopeful that we can stabilize the climate and restore biodiversity in under 100 years! Reforestation, improving energy efficiency, increasing renewable energy, and halting use of fossil fuels are all critical to restore a sustainable world. By integrating social and Environmental Justice into every step, NC can become a leader in the "just transition" of our nation and the world.

We are increasingly aware that reducing the amount of land we use to raise food for human consumption is critical for restoring the planet's ability to consume carbon dioxide through photosynthesis and restore healthy water retention

with reforestation, and water cycling through diverse living systems. As animal agriculture uses far more land and creates more waste than vegetable-based protein, adjusting our diets will be important for reducing our individual footprint and allowing "room to breathe." Population growth has been stopped or reversed in societies that have made education widely available, improved public health and increased opportunities for women. The Covid-19 pandemic's selective and massive displacement of women from the workforce shows that women's contributions to society are still undervalued, so public policies for child care, health and workplace flexibility must be strengthened

We must hold governments—local, state and federal—accountable for implementing the necessary long-term changes to ensure a safe home for all forms of life. If we work together, our actions can build a future that's MORE livable and equitable than ever before, for generations yet to come.

WHO WE ARE

Clean Water for North Carolina

Clean Water for North Carolina is a private, non-profit organization based in Asheville, NC. CWFNC works to ensure that all people have a right to live, work, and play in clean and safe communities. Together, we have the power and responsibility to work for a healthy and sustainable environment. Our staff works with an active and diverse board of directors, as well as members, to increase grassroots involvement in environmental decisions.

CWFNC spearheads action statewide and helps grassroots and environmental groups, individuals, and local governments develop strategies to address threats to the environment.

Our Mission

CWFNC promotes clean, safe water and environments and empowered, just communities for all North Carolinians through organizing, education, advocacy, and technical assistance.

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Belinda Joyner, Northeast Organizer

Welcome Kyle Cornish to the Clean Water for NC Staff!

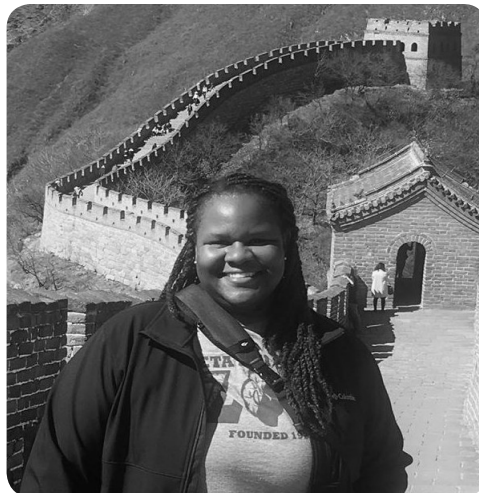
Clean Water for NC welcomes our newest Environmental Justice Organizer and Researcher to our Durham office—Kyle Cornish! Kyle (pronouns: they/them) first got involved in Environmental Justice while studying about Black history and environmental science at the University of Virginia. Kyle knew there must be an overlap between the two subjects, and after developing an interdisciplinary focus for their studies, became passionate about getting more involved in the Environmental Justice movement.



Kyle's dedication to Environmental Justice advocacy work grew further as they worked with a team of researchers to conduct an EJ analysis of post-hurricane funding and planning in NC, and they learned the power of grassroots community organizing to overcome environmental threats.

Kyle is excited to build relationships with the communities we work with to ensure all North Carolinians have access to safe, clean water and healthy, just environments. We are very much looking forward to incorporating Kyle's research and organizing experience to our work "on the ground," as outreach becomes safe again, and building a safer, more sustainable future for communities across our state. Welcome to the Clean Water for NC team, Kyle!

New CWFNC Board Member from Charlotte!



Emma Sellers, originally from a small farm community in SC, has lived in NC for the past 14 years and resides in Charlotte, NC. She currently serves as the Director of Multicultural Affairs at Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory. In addition to being a new member on our board, Emma serves as the Secretary of the Western Piedmont Symphony Board of Directors and Vice President for Exodus Homes Board of Directors. In her free time she truly loves spending time with her niece and nephews, chasing behind her St. Bernard (Sir Winston) and traveling to see as many Wonders of the World as possible. Emma is passionate about social justice and equality for all people and understands that environmental justice IS social justice. She is looking forward to working with CWFNC to reach the goals of promoting clean and safe water and empowering communities.

Water Justice

Multi-Residential Tenants Have Rights to Clean Water, Too!

by Leah Barnes, CWFNC Volunteer

Multi-residential dwellings are a form of housing in which multiple separate housing units exist within a larger building or complex, such as apartments or a mobile home parks (MHP). In most cases, tenants living in multi-residential dwellings pay rent to a landlord or property owner, and may pay their water bill “in-rent” – the cost of monthly water fees is included in monthly rental costs. It’s no surprise, then, that many folks living in apartments or MHP’s may be in the dark on who actually provides their drinking water, who to contact when there are water quality or service issues, or if any problems will actually be taken care of.

The situation is further complicated when residents hesitate to complain about drinking water issues, due to fear of eviction or other punitive measures by their landlord. Residents of a MHP in Robeson Co. faced this exact pressure after Hurricanes Matthew and Florence,

when the new out-of-state property manager jacked up lot rents more than 200% and refused to clean up standing water and fallen tree limbs. Instead of facing potential repercussions, feeling their living situation wouldn’t be improved, many residents packed up and left.

No matter the type of living situation, you have the right to clean, safe water. If you live in a multi-residential housing community and have questions or concerns about your drinking water, always reach out to your landlord first. However, if you don’t get help or don’t feel comfortable speaking with your property manager or landlord, you can contact NC’s Public Water Supply Section at 919-707-9100 to anonymously report drinking water quality or service issues. CWFNC is also here to help – call our Water Justice Manager, Rachel Velez, at 919-401-9600 and we’ll work with you to get answers or help connect you to someone who can!

Aqua NC’s Lust for Profit Trumps Customers’ Concerns – Again

It’s been a little over a year since Aqua North Carolina’s last rate hike, and the company is again requesting that the North Carolina Utilities Commission raise rates for its customers across the state. If the Utilities Commission grants Aqua’s proposed rates, the average water bill for customers would increase by 12%, while sewer bills would rise by 10%.

Customers continue to express their dissatisfaction with the quality of their drinking water and the utility’s constant requests to jack up their rates. These frustrations were again echoed at the August virtual hearing for the current rate hike proceeding.

Over two dozen customers gave comments during the virtual hearing, with the majority speaking about their daily burden of dealing with milky, brown, “rotten-smelling” water coming out of their taps. The discolored water also contains particles and sediment, and causes staining of customers’ fixtures, clogging of household filtration systems, and most concerning, customers’ unwillingness to consume the water and instead resorting to expensive bottled water.

Aqua responded to customers by recommending whole-house filtration systems (at customer cost), visiting customers’ homes to provide gloves & cleaning supplies to clean fixtures stained by the company’s own water, and providing on-site water quality tests to show the water was “safe”.

These actions by the utility fall very short of addressing the full magnitude of Aqua NC’s water problem –

especially when they have consistently been granted higher rates over the years to address these exact water quality issues.

We continue to work with Aqua customers, connecting them to Attorney General Josh Stein and the Dept. of Environmental Quality’s Public Water Supply Section to provide formal complaints and fight to hold the utility accountable for their unacceptable service.

If you would like to keep up to date on the current rate hike proceedings, email Rachel Velez at rachel@cwfn.org.



Animal Operation Impacts

Bird's-eye View: CWFNC's New Report on NC's Poultry Industry

At the start of the pandemic, many of us experienced first-hand how a disruption of our food system can impact us. From ground beef to frozen vegetables, the groceries we relied on were suddenly unavailable. In response to these shortages, the meat packing industry was ordered to remain open, but at what cost?

It's no surprise that farming is highly valued in North Carolina, with poultry now being the state's #1 agricultural industry. For consumers, these products appear neatly packaged, apparently free from any costs beyond the price tag. But the reality is much worse. Across the country, poultry processing facilities have become COVID-19 hotspots. As workers lost their lives, some plants chose to increase the speed of their process lines, heightening the risks to employees' health and safety. This is just one of many hidden costs of this industry.

From the impacts of massive manure management to the risk of diseases—some transmissible to humans, understanding the poultry industry is a complicated task. With this challenge in mind, CWFNC's newest report, *Bird's-eye View: Impacts of NC Poultry Production on People and the Environment*, breaks down the research on today's

industrialized poultry production system. Separated into a 4-part series, Bird's-eye View aims to clarify the potential and existing impacts of this industry, especially here in NC.

Part I, *Eye on Industry*, looks at the farmers and employees who raise and slaughter chickens for a few major companies. Part II, *Monitoring Pollution and Health*, examines the different risks to communities' health and the environments where poultry operations are located. Part III, *Envisioning a Just Poultry System*, digs deeper into the harm this industry may have on communities who are already burdened by disproportionate, and cumulative environmental impacts, and provides suggestions for better practices emphasizing the need for change. Finally, Part IV, which has not been released yet, will be an invitation to farmers, workers, and neighbors who wish to speak about their experiences with the poultry industry.



Read the report today at [CWFNC.org/birds-eye-view](https://www.cwfnc.org/birds-eye-view)! If you'd like to contribute to Part IV, anonymously or on the record, please contact CWFNC staff (shelby@cwfnc.org or amanda@cwfnc.org), or call our Asheville office at 828-251-1291.

NC Deserves Transparency about All Polluting Industries, Including Poultry

North Carolina communities concerned about pollution from any given industry should have access to relevant information or be able to contact someone at the NC Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for help. But what can we do if our own environmental agency doesn't have access to that information? This is a major problem faced by neighbors of many poultry operations in North Carolina.

Dry litter poultry ops can be constructed in communities outside city limits without public notification or even applying to DEQ. This is because these operations are "deemed permitted" under state law-- they don't have to apply for air quality or wastewater permits. In North Carolina, any "bona fide farming" operation, including poultry, is exempt from county authority to adopt zoning ordinances that could control them, tying county commissioners' hands to preventing the rapid spread of these often massive operations in their communities.

Deemed permitted operations are still required to create manure waste management plans for the state, however this information is not submitted to DEQ or accessible to the public. Large amounts of poultry waste hauled away by third parties to be spread on fields require waste hauling records, but these don't specify exact locations of spreading, and represent only a small fraction of the total waste generated.

What we do know is that spreading of poultry waste in excess of what crops can use can have harmful effects on groundwater and surface water through runoff. Poultry operations also impact air quality for neighboring residents, causing respiratory difficulties and other health effects. The bottom line is, North Carolinians deserve to have access to information about any industry that may cause pollution – including dry litter poultry operations. Access to knowledge is a key to justice for communities!



A Love Letter to CWFNC and the Many Communities Who've Worked With Us!



In the next few months, I'll be stepping down as Executive Director, and handing our "ship" over to a new Director and the wonderful staff I've worked with in recent years! Let's celebrate some of the memories that start in the 1980s, when we were able to use some of the new legislation protecting communities' environment and right to know. After our humble founding on a kitchen table in Charlotte in 1984 as Clean

Water Fund of North Carolina, we focused on research and advocacy for drinking water and its sources, always with a focus on communities "downstream" from those threats, and committed to work with them to prevent or challenge harmful discharges and air emissions.

In 1982, North Carolina became an early focus of how "environmental racism" was disproportionately leaving Communities of Color more vulnerable to toxic harms from landfills and industrial polluters. In Warren County, a predominantly Black community was told that they would be the site of a toxic PCB landfill to hold contaminated soil from roadsides where waste had been sprayed. Their rejection was very public and sustained, starting the movement known as "Environmental Justice" today.

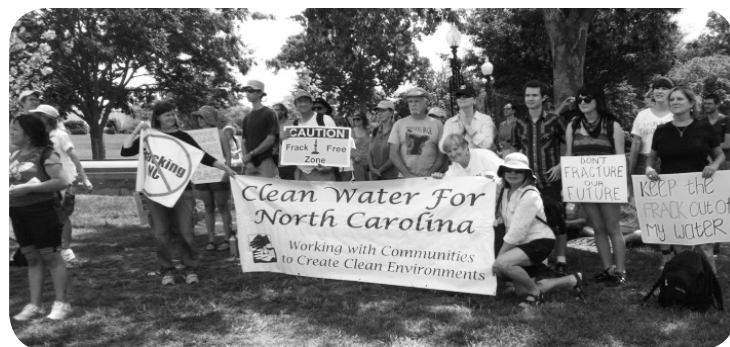
That commitment to work with "disproportionately impacted communities" was intensified when CWFNC's Nan Freeland attended the 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit and helped to develop the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice that still guide our work today. Throughout the 1990s, CWFNC continued to advocate for protection of communities' drinking water, and also against severe threats from toxic air polluters.

As I finished my master's degree in Environmental Chemistry and Biology at UNC's School of Public Health, CWFNC encouraged me to get involved with a community impacted by a toxic Superfund site in Wake County. I had met **Nathanette Mayo of Black Workers for Justice**, whose Shiloh community had been impacted by spreading groundwater contamination from the Koppers hazardous waste site, where a wood treating plant had dumped pentachlorophenol and dioxins. To get media attention to their plight and EPA's commitment to a safe cleanup, Nathanette called the industrial dumping "Toxic Terrorism." After I finished my degree, I was chosen as the official Technical Assistance Grant Advisor and we



struggled together for a complete cleanup of the site and safe drinking water for the hundreds of predominantly African-American families nearby. Together, we learned how to get media coverage, the importance of door to door outreach and churches in community organizing, and how to empower a community to make their own wise decisions and demand respect from agencies.

Since I joined CWFNC's staff in 1999, we've fought over the next 20 years to protect drinking water reservoirs, celebrated the 30th anniversary of Clean Water Act by filing a suit with a Yancy County community against state permits for a steep mountainside golf course, worked for safe replacement water for communities with contaminated wells, and organized with Cumberland/Bladen residents to stop DuPont-Fayetteville's production of C-8, the first PFAS chemical, used to make Teflon, and more.



We responded to the 2006 hazardous waste fire in Apex, demanding increased protection for surrounding communities, worked for fair allocation of water during the 2007-2008 drought, and fought against utility rate hikes and for statewide energy efficiency programs, while working with Communities of Color and low income for protective permits and fair siting of facilities. We've organized with A.C.T Against Coal Ash for safe cleanups of Duke Energy's huge coal ash dumps and safe water for those with contaminated wells.

We've resisted fracking in NC, and succeeded, with thousands of folks who joined the statewide movement, in getting strong enough regulations that industry wasn't interested in drilling here. We exposed the safety and economic harms that fracked gas pipelines could bring to eastern NC, held meetings and organized, visiting hundreds of residents along the path of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. This year, Duke and Dominion cancelled the costly, dangerous project and we held a big celebration on Zoom during the pandemic.

Thanks for the wonderful partnerships we've had with so many communities and the amazing support from so many of you for our work! Much love and hope for the future to all of you!

-Hope

Polluter Accountability

Biogas: False Energy Solution

The pastoral vision of the farmer who rises early to milk cattle and tend to livestock in spacious enclosures is a relic of a bygone era. Today, most animal products that end up on our plates come from industrial farming operations. These facilities are referred to as CAFOs—Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations—and they can house thousands of animals at a time. With so many animals in such a small area, waste management at CAFOs is a major issue.

In NC, hog feces and urine are stored in unlined, uncovered pits called lagoons. As these swimming pool sized pits of waste slowly decompose, they release gases and particulate matter into the air and water to devastating effect. Native American, Black, Latinx, and low-income people are more likely to live near industrial hog operations, and they disproportionately bear the burden of pollution from such operations. Rather than pursuing safer waste management systems, companies like Smithfield Foods are doubling down on their dirty practices by pursuing “waste-to-energy” to increase their profits.



“Biogas” refers to energy generated by capturing methane and other gases from animal feces and urine. In NC, biogas relies on the outdated lagoon and sprayfield system that harms local residents and pollutes the environment. Similar to fracked gas, biogas requires significant processing before use, which involves the generation of even more harmful pollutants in Environmental Justice communities

that are already overburdened. To make matters worse, impacted communities are not expected to receive any additional protections or compensation despite shouldering the cumulative impacts of factory farms.

Poultry ops could soon become a target for new waste-to-energy systems. The process is already underway in Lumberton, NC, where Veolia is operating a biomass plant that burns nearly 300,000 pounds of chicken litter each year. However, that is only a fraction of the roughly five million tons of waste generated

annually at poultry operations across the state. Rather than addressing pollution at its source, biogas is a false solution which ultimately does more harm than good.

Duke Energy and its Contractors MUST Protect NC Coal Ash Cleanup Workers

In December 2008, workers arrived on the scene just one day after a billion gallons of coal ash slurry spilled from a TVA dam in Kingston, TN. The workers were employed by Jacobs Engineering, contracted by TVA to take on the dirty job of cleanup. According to a Knoxville News Sentinel investigation, laborers were told the ash was “safe enough to eat” and denied masks and protective gear in an apparent attempt to protect TVA from public scrutiny. Workers and families filed a lawsuit after more than 200 became sick, and 30 had died. A federal jury ruled coal ash exposure was likely the cause and that Jacobs had endangered the workers.

In North Carolina, Duke Energy has been ordered to excavate and relocate coal ash from unlined pits to lined above-ground landfills. It was a huge win for impacted communities across the state, decreasing risk of spills and groundwater pollution. For many, the cleanup will represent resolution, but for the workers who will be hired to do the

cleanup, the challenges of dangerous coal ash exposure are just beginning.

In order to deal with the massive coal ash cleanup ahead, Duke Energy has created a program called Hire North Carolina. Duke claims this is a way to give back by hiring local contractors, but it's crucial they remain responsible for making sure workers are protected during the cleanup. In general, the entity that hires a contractor has not been held liable for the contractor's wrongdoing. This is why, in the Kingston case, it was not TVA who was sued by workers, but their contractor. No guidance has been issued by Duke or NC regulators on how coal ash workers will be protected. Every worker MUST be made aware of the risks of exposure to coal ash, given proper protective gear, and empowered to follow vigilant safety protocols. We must heed the lessons of the Kingston spill, holding Duke directly accountable for its pollution and protecting thousands of North Carolina workers taking the risk to clean it up.



Clean Water for North Carolina

Thanks to Our Generous Foundations and Major Donors!

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AG Stein Sues Chemours, Dupont: "I want them to pay for the mess they created."

The heated fight to hold the Dupont and Chemours chemical companies accountable for their decades-long dumping spree of PFAS into NC drinking water sources just got hotter. In early October, NC Attorney General Josh Stein filed a lawsuit against the companies, stating in an interview, "DuPont and Chemours dumped PFAS into our state's drinking waters when they knew that these forever chemicals are dangerous to humans. I want them to pay for the mess they created."

AG Stein's lawsuit seeks to hold the companies financially responsible for knowingly contaminating the state's natural resources. And while the specific amount of this restitution has not yet been released, Stein's lawsuit plans to force Dupont and Chemours to pay for all past and future costs of investigating and remediating the human and environmental health threats the companies' legacy of contamination has caused in our state. CWFNC had worked with the impacted local community in 2005-2007 to pressure DuPont to stop production of C-8, the first PFAS compound, used to make Teflon.

Join Clean Water for North Carolina (or renew your membership):

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other ☐ I would like to volunteer ☐ I'll give online at www.cwfnc.org/donate-now



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What's Inside

Cultivating Hope & Demanding
Change p.1

Welcome Emma Sellers
& Kyle Cornish p.2

Water Rates, Quality,
& Information p.3

Animal Operations p.4

Letter from Exec. Director p.5

Biogas, Coal Ash p.6

Big thanks to all p.7



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YOUR VOICE NEEDED! “Hog Waste” Biogas Facility NOT an Energy Solution!

Align Renewable Natural Gas (RNG), a joint venture between Dominion Energy and Smithfield Foods, is a proposed biogas facility in Duplin County – the first of its kind in NC. Slating biogas as “renewable” is one of the industry’s latest ploys to continue natural gas buildout across the country and further trap communities into decades of fossil fuel dependence. Don’t let them fool you – biogas is NOT a renewable energy source and has no place in a clean energy future for North Carolina (read more on page 6)!

Align RNG would rely on capturing methane from hog feces and urine to produce energy. This biogas facility would further cement the future of the sprawling hog industry across the state, allowing for the continued contamination of nearby communities’ drinking water, surface water and air. The project also includes building a sprawling facility, laying over 30 miles of pipelines across Duplin and Sampson counties, and emitting more than 60 tons of dangerous pollutants each year, including sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, and other toxic air pollutants.

Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and low-income communities in Duplin and Sampson are overburdened by industrial animal feeding operations, and this facility will only add to the pollution burden of this region at a time when NC is facing an unprecedented public health crisis. Duplin Co. has one of the highest numbers of COVID cases in the state, with communities already facing respiratory burden from the densely concentrated hog and poultry factories in the county.

Tell the Dept. of Air Quality that NO air permits should be granted for facilities that would emit harmful air pollutants when we are facing a global pandemic!

Align RNG Virtual Hearing, Nov. 16th, 6PM!

More info: <https://tinyurl.com/alignrng>

Register to give comment by Nov. 16th, 4PM: <https://bit.ly/33qAtqx> or call (919) 618-0969

Phone: +1-415-655-0003 WebEx Link: <https://bit.ly/3mlsbZO> Password: NCDAQ