



Times-News

An Environmental Wish List for 2009

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David Weintraub
ECO NOTES



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There's an old saying that one should never grow a wishbone where a backbone should be. 2009 offers some important environmental issues on the horizon for the county. Here are some of issues I'll be wishing for and working towards this year. I hope you'll join me.

PROTECT OUR WATER SUPPLY

The two major issues affecting the county's water supply are over-development that threatens to exhaust existing water availability and poorly regulated wastewater treatment plants (current and planned) on the French Broad River which threatens its quality. What the county does about these twin issues will likely affect our ability to sustain future growth, protect our natural heritage and meet the needs of current residents. The county has taken the positive step of creating a Water Supply and Distribution Task Force. It's imperative that this committee proposes some bold steps to attack these problems including:

- 1) Passage of a local Stormwater Management Ordinance that limits the amount of impervious surfaces a development can have (caps on parking lots, reduction of street widths), protects or requires forested areas around streams, limits steep slope development, and requires filtering stormwater.
- 2) Establish a regional authority to monitor and control wastewater treatment in the French Broad River. The French Broad River will likely be a primary water supply source in the very near future, yet package treatment plants currently dot the river basin, making the likelihood of catastrophic episodes of bacterial and toxic effluence in our drinking water highly likely. The county needs to take control of the situation through exerting its public safety authority.
- 3) Water supply needs should be studied to determine our current and future needs. How much groundwater do we have? What impact will drilling of new wells have on current users, on streams? Should we have a building moratorium on future developments until we understand how much supply we have? Should we require all large developments employ low impact design and other water conservation measures?

PROTECT OUR OPEN SPACE

North Carolina loses 400 acres to development *every* day. Farmland has disappeared in our county at an alarming rate as have hardwood forests, wetlands and undeveloped ridge tops. Protecting our rural character has more than an aesthetic value. Our county counts on tourist dollars (over \$200 million annually.) Overdevelopment could turn us into "Charlotte with hills" if we let it. On the other side, moving from rural to suburban to urban comes at a substantial cost to water supply, loss of local foods, and destruction of indigenous habitats.

The best way to preserve open space is to concentrate growth where population density already exists. On average, each new home costs taxpayers \$20-30,000 in public services. By using good planning principles that cut down on sprawl, everyone saves by limiting infrastructure costs to service new homes. Furthermore, by encouraging conservation design as the primary approach, open space is protected by clustering lots in one area of the land, thereby maintaining green corridors for wildlife and people to enjoy, plus protecting prime farmland.

What initiatives do we need in 2009?

- 1) Require all developments of 10 lots or more to follow conservation subdivision standards. Make developments using the old sprawl-based model a special use only.
- 2) Require the county to follow the Comprehensive Plan's Growth Management Strategy, i.e. minimal infrastructure and public water extensions in rural communities.
- 3) Encourage Limited Development Ventures that maximize open space.
- 4) Encourage Purchase or Transfer of Development Rights that offer developers bonus density credits when they purchase development rights from rural land owners.

If this sounds good to you, consider joining ECO's Green Infrastructure Committee as your New Year's resolution to help make these initiatives a reality. The committee's next meeting is this Thursday, January 15th at 4:00 PM at the ECO office.

David Weintraub is Executive Director of ECO, the Environmental and Conservation Organization, which is dedicated to protecting the mountain region's natural heritage. ECO can be reached at (828) 692-0385 or online at www.eco-wnc.org.