

# CHOWAN EDENTON ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

*Annual Report 2015*

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## *Annual Report 2015*

The Chowan Edenton Environmental Group (CEEG) recognizes the unique natural resources of Northeastern North Carolina including the estuarine and riverine habitats that support species diversity, the rich soils essential for agriculture and substantial forests, and the abundance of water in many forms. The CEEG works toward engaging local citizens in public purpose projects and action planning to maintain the quality of our environment. Our vision for current and future community involvement is focused on citizen engagement at the grassroots level as we prepare for a changing planet in and around the Albemarle Sound. One of the primary missions of the Chowan Edenton Environmental Group (CEEG) is educating our community about environmental issues through special programming and sustained partnerships. CEEG activities for the 2015 year are aligned with our educational mission and our community engagement goals.

The Chowan Edenton Environmental Group relies on feedback from our community to guide our programming. We are responsive to natural change in our land and water resources that may indicate potential threats to these ecosystems. We seek experts to share their knowledge with Chowan County citizens to inform planning and actions in regards to our valuable Northeastern North Carolina environment. The CEEG works diligently to form partnerships with state and federal agencies, local businesses and foundations, and local government. Our talented board members bring their working knowledge and skills in education, fisheries biology, information technology and program planning to carry out the mission of the Chowan Edenton Environmental Group.

In 2014, the CEEG adopted the theme “*Making Plans for a Changing Planet*” for our biennial Green Fair. The Green Fair is a CEEG signature event since 2007, but in 2014 we focused our choice of exhibitors to highlight this new theme. For the 2014 Green Fair program, we added special speakers to the Green Fair offerings – experts who volunteered to share a 20-minute talk about issues impacting our changing environment (climate change adaptation plans, seawater intrusion into our coastal plain habitats, threats to bees, invasive species issues, etc.). The mini-lectures were attended by only a handful of Green Fair participants, and feedback that we received from participant surveys indicated that most would have liked to hear the speakers, but there were too many other things to do and see at the Green Fair. The CEEG made the decision to develop community programs in 2015 that would complement the “*Making Plans for a Changing Planet*” theme with time to explore extended information about environmental topics.

## 2015 SPECIAL PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

### “KUDZU’S KOUSINS” – APRIL 11<sup>TH</sup>, 2015

One side benefit from our work with NC Sea Grant on the issue of noxious aquatic weeds invading the Chowan River was an increased awareness of terrestrial invasive plants. We launched our first “*Making Plans for a Changing Planet*” program for the community in April 2015 with a collective focus on regional climate anomalies that may be supportive of opportunistic non-native species. Our keynote speaker, Adrienne Wootten, from the State Climate office, shared data analysis about regional climates across North Carolina, particularly the microclimate characteristics of this region. We combined the NC State Climate Office presentation with Dr. Bridget Lassiter’s report (from the NC Department of Agriculture, Plant Protection Section, Weed Regulatory Division) about those plants that are a serious threat to our county, and with Katy Shook’s (NC Cooperative Extension horticulture specialist) presentation, “Plant This, not That” guiding landscaping options with native plantings. Participants were able to talk to other plant specialists about wildflower planting programs, wetland plants and conservation planting choices. This special event was held at the Agricultural Extension Building in Edenton and was attended by approximately 40 people. The program agenda is below (Fig.1) – PDF copies of the NC Department of Agriculture and the Cooperative Extension Service presentations are available from the CEEG on request.

Fig. 1

**Round “About” Tables**



- **Dr. Ellen Colodney** – Wetland plants
- **Pat Mansfield** – NCDOT wildflowers and protection of our environment
- **Kathy Mitchell** – Conservation plantings and other native choices
- **NC Department of Agriculture** – Information about invasive plants
- **State Climate Office** – Weather reporting
- **Master Gardeners** – Planting in your neighborhood

**AGENDA**

10:00 – Welcome and Program Overview

10:10 – 10:45 – Keynote Speakers

- Adrienne Wootten, NC State Climate Office – “*The Climate of North Carolina: What makes us unique?*”
- Dr. Bridget Lassiter, NC Dept. of Agriculture – “*Updates on Invasive Plants in North Carolina*”
- Katy Shook, NC Cooperative Extension – “*Plant This, Not That*”

Transition to Demonstration and Displays

10:50 – 11:15 – Round “About”

11:20 – 11:30 – **EDDMapS in your future?** by Dr. Bridget Lassiter

[www.chowanedentonenvironmentalgroup.org](http://www.chowanedentonenvironmentalgroup.org)



## “PROTECT OUR POLLINATOR SERIES” - SEPT. 12<sup>TH</sup>, SEPT. 26<sup>TH</sup>, AND OCT. 10<sup>TH</sup>, 2015

The Chowan Edenton Environmental Group had multiple requests for programs about bees, particularly to address the decline in the bee population. The CEEG Board wanted to revisit the “coffee shop venue” with a more informal series of programs about our valuable pollinators. With gracious assistance from Patrick and Belinda Flynn at Edenton Coffee House, we were able to set times and a location for a series of three special talks about the birds, the bees and of course, the butterflies.

Halifax County experts, Christina Gregory and Jean Carter, kicked off the Pollinator series with a humorous and factual account of their efforts in their county to restore habitat for monarch butterflies. These dynamic ladies are true examples of citizen scientists as they learned how to grow native milkweed from seed (not so easy), and then recruited hundreds of community members to help them plant the seedlings. They spent hours watering and nurturing these native plants, creating new sites for the migrating monarch butterflies to lay their eggs on Halifax County milkweed.

Our bee specialist, Betty Onufrak, is a local bee keeper who has learned about bee behavior through direct observation. She is an advocate for preserving our native bees for the future. Betty shared her extensive knowledge about bee reproduction, pesticide threats and even honey flavors with the attendees. This program initiated much discussion about how to set up a hive, what courses are needed to become a beekeeper, uses for honey, etc.

The hummingbird lady, Susan Campbell, journeyed from Southern Pines to excite the group about hummers on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Susan is an independent hummingbird researcher, affiliated with the NC Museum of Natural Sciences, who studies migration pathways for these birds. We learned that many hummers fly by our coastal microclimate zones over the winter and need food to increase their energy for their continued flight. Susan tags hummingbirds using a special technique so when and if the bird is recaptured, she will understand more about the distance and pathway this bird has travelled. Susan has created an Adopt-A-Hummingbird program. Consider adopting one of the hummingbirds banded by Susan for a \$20 donation. You will receive a certificate of adoption for your bird along with a photo. Should the

Contact Susan Campbell:  
PO Box 1443  
Southern Pines, NC  
28388

bird be recaptured, you will be notified and provided with the details of the exciting event. The CEEG has adopted a hummer, and we follow the website about winter migration in the Carolinas. If you are a birder, you may enjoy the information at:

<https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/misc/hummingbirds/winterhummingbirds.html>

The “Protect Our Pollinators” programs were well attended with participants filling most tables at the coffee shop. The audience had many questions and our presenters were well informed about their subjects. In many respects, this is a topic that should be repeated yearly since our agricultural and horticultural community is dependent on successful pollination for our crops and home gardens.

### *2015 PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT CITIZEN SCIENCE*

The citizens of Chowan County live in a region that is characterized by much variation in local weather patterns as well as extremes in rainfall, drought and temperatures. One of our partners, the NC State Climate Office (NCSCO), has kept us informed about long-term trends in this region as well as about the importance of our unique microclimate system. The CEEG, with help from the NCSCO, supported the CoCoRaHS program (Community Collaborative Rain, Hail, & Snow Network) with training for volunteers to install rain gauges at their location and to report online the amount of daily rainfall. We have several CoCoRaHS citizen scientists in Chowan County who are diligent about reporting. This information is invaluable to the state climatologists as they use current and historical data to better understand the subtle differences in regional climate. What could be more important to an agrarian community! In 2016, the CEEG will provide additional CoCoRaHS training for dedicated Chowan County volunteers to continue supporting rainfall data collection.

Increased understanding about our environment is the product of better information – additional and refined data collection, collaboration with experts to interpret data, and local citizen involvement. The Chowan Edenton Environmental Group has set the standard for the “citizen science” approach to local environmental issues. Our efforts to raise awareness and engage our community in finding solutions for environment challenges have resulted in strong collaboration with specific organizations. In 2014, the CEEG partnered with NC Sea Grant to collect information about the presence of *Hydrilla*

*verticillata*, an invasive water species, in the Chowan River. If left unchecked *Hydrilla* will eventually become the dominant species of local aquatic vegetation, taking over significant portions of the Chowan River and other streams that flow into the Albemarle Sound. The CEEG developed the *Hydrilla* Citizen Science Project, a model project that can be replicated by other rural counties bordering North Carolina's sounds and rivers. The project goals are to 1) increase awareness through education of aquatic invasive species (AIS), specifically *Hydrilla*, and 2) successfully engage local community in the monitoring and mapping of their local environment for specific invasive weeds to inform management decisions. Additional details about this project can be accessed at:

<http://ncseagrant.ncsu.edu/coastwatch/previous-issues/2015-2/spring-2015/naturalists-notebookevicting-an-invader-reducing-the-spread-of-hydrilla/>

As a result of the 2014-15 citizen science *Hydrilla* monitoring project, the CEEG is collaborating with many county and state agencies to create a regional task force for *Hydrilla* management. The CEEG is working with local high school students to assist in the *Hydrilla* awareness campaign and with the construction of boat ramp cleaning stations. We will support continued citizen monitoring and mapping with additional sampling refinements – our data is being shared with others in the region to encourage similar work in other counties.



The outcomes from this work are worthy to note. Local students have installed their first boat ramp cleaning station (with more to come), and NC Sea Grant is coordinating data received from other agencies sampling for the presence of *Hydrilla* in much of the Albemarle Sound, upriver areas in the Chowan watershed and in our small streams. The work of the Chowan County “*Hydrilla* Guerillas” is documented on NOAA’s website at:

<http://seagrant.noaa.gov/News/FeatureStories/TabId/268/ArtMID/715/ArticleID/547/North-Carolina-Coastal-Collaborations-Focus-on-Invasive-Hydrilla.aspx>

## *CEEG ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND “ON THE HORIZON”*

“It was a very good year”! The CEEG Board, program committees and special volunteers are actively shaping the future for this organization. We are rapidly realizing that our role in the community is one of significant importance – the Chowan Edenton Environmental Group, along with all of our supporters, are the environmental caretakers for our unique natural resources. We will continue to connect across the state with organizations and agencies that share a similar appreciation for our environment. Our thematic approach, “*Making Plans for a Changing Planet*”, has been helpful to the CEEG in securing funding from several local organizations during 2015 to support advertising, equipment purchase, and special program speakers. We thank our grantors for their generous funding – Roanoke Electric Care Trust and the Albemarle Community Trust.

### **Upcoming Events**

While it is still early in 2016, the CEEG has planned several events for our community. We hope that you will make time in your schedule to be a part of these activities.

**February 13<sup>th</sup>** – Special program about the state of the Chowan River – natural challenges that may contribute to changes in this system. Featured speakers include representatives from NCDEQ, an Algal Ecologist from the state, a local Riverkeeper and manager of special environmental projects, and others. This program will be at the Shepard-Pruden Library in Edenton at 10 am.

**March 19<sup>th</sup>** – The biennial CEEG “Green Fair” at the Old Edenton Armory – many exhibitors and updated information about Green Living. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> Green Fair for our community. We will continue our theme this year as “*Making Plans for a Changing Planet*” -- join us and be a part of these efforts. Time is 9 am – 1 pm.

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The Chowan Edenton Environment Group serves an important function for the community and region by connecting local leadership with research experts and environmental agencies across the state. We are a volunteer organization that developed from a civic passion to take positive and informed action about many of the environmental challenges that face our area.

It is our belief that the earth belongs to all of us -- we have a responsibility to deliver it safely to the next generation. Consider being an active volunteer on some of the special CEEG citizen science projects and/or a supporter of the CEEG through a yearly membership – details are on our website at [www.chowanedentonenvironmentalgroup.org](http://www.chowanedentonenvironmentalgroup.org).

With much admiration for the talents and devotion of the CEEG Board & Planning Committee members: Dennis Robison, Robbie Salak, Debbie Burroughs, Ronnie Smith, Kathy Hynes, all of our volunteer citizen scientists (students and adults), and our many community, state and national partners, I congratulate this organization for a job well done in 2015. My sincere thanks to all of you for your passion and your determined efforts.

Colleen Karl, Chair  
Chowan/Edenton Environmental Group  
January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016