Celebrating 35 Years of Working with Communities for Justice!!

In July of 1984, a group of volunteers committed to working with communities to protect them from toxic threats and to making the state’s environmental policies more just and inclusive, met around a kitchen table in Charlotte and formed Clean Water Fund of North Carolina, with our lead office in Asheville. In the early 2000s, we changed our name to Clean Water for North Carolina, and opened an office in Durham. Thanks to all of you who have supported our work, volunteered for our outreach and advocacy and worked to make us a stronger, organization. WE CELEBRATE YOU!! Here are just a few snapshots from our 35 year history:

1991—Rally to support survivors of a Hamlet chicken packing plant fire that killed 25 Latino and African American women, and demand accountability for the plant’s owners, who had locked workers in... From the beginning, we were committed to working at the intersection of social and environmental justice.

2003—When Rev. Jerry Price (above, watching the removal of a nearby business’s leaking underground waste tank) and the legislator for his southeast Raleigh district, Rep. Bernard Allen, heard that nearly 20 wells in their neighborhood were contaminated, they contacted CWFNC. This led to years of advocacy for statewide county well protection programs, inspections and testing for new wells, and an Emergency Drinking Water Fund for replacement safe water.

2006 - 2008, Clean Water for NC’s Durham and Asheville offices hosted “Water and Energy for Justice” Youth teams, providing paid jobs for the summer break. Local high school youth from low income areas learned about energy efficiency, climate change, and restoring degraded streams, and skills to improve their homes and neighborhoods.

2011 – 2015 The fight against “fracking.” CWFNC Staff, volunteers and allies gave many presentations to civic groups, churches and local governments on fracking and the impacts it would have on communities. We formed the FrackFreeNC Alliance, with over 35 member groups, most of them rural. Above, hundreds march to the NC legislature to stop a “rush to frack,” allowing time to develop strong regulations. Since 2014, we’ve worked with allies and impacted communities to resist building the huge, fracked gas Atlantic Coast Pipeline through African-American and Native American areas.
Clean Water for North Carolina

A Fond Farewell to Xavier Boatright

When Xavier first came to Clean Water for NC, he told us he knew very little about how coal ash was affecting communities around the state. Those who have worked with him in recent years for EJ justice probably find that hard to believe. Over his 3 ½ years with CWFNC, Xavier became someone that many allies and community members could turn to for his technical and community-based knowledge of coal ash impacts, as well as organizing on several Environmental Justice threats in western NC. He played an important role with the grassroots Alliance of Carolinians Together (ACT) Against Coal Ash, facilitating many of the weekly calls between impacted community members and non-profit allies to stand together in organizing for complete excavation and safe water.

We celebrate the time we’ve had working with Xavier, with thanks for the research he has provided us, as well as the warm relationships he had with various communities. He has contributed to many program efforts at this organization, and always brought a fervor for justice and a gracious, positive attitude. We will sorely miss having him with us, and we wish him all the best as he continues in his new job, working with impacted communities in South Carolina and beyond.

Your Giving Makes All Our Work Possible!

As a grassroots non-profit organization, we rely on the gracious donations of our new and recurring members! Without this support, we wouldn’t be able to work with communities fighting environmental injustices, such as Duke Energy’s coal ash pits and fracked gas Atlantic Coast Pipeline, unregulated animal operations, and corporate takeover of water utilities. Any amount can have a big effect for our grassroots work. Whether it’s a one-time gift, or a monthly contribution of $10, you’ll help us to partner with communities, assist in advocacy and even publish educational materials, like this newsletter!

Making a donation to CWFNC is easy! Just visit www.cwfnc.org and click the “Donate Now” button on the left to make a secure contribution through Keela. You can also donate by check mailed to Clean Water for NC, 1070 Tunnel Rd. Bldg., 4, Suite 1, Asheville, NC 28805. Your support helps us work towards Environmental Justice for all North Carolinians – thank YOU!

Volunteer Spotlight—Thanks, Trinity!

Trinity Brown is a student at Mars Hill University with a focus on environmental studies. She grew up in Richmond County, spending a great deal of time on her family’s poultry farm and has been a valuable resource to CWFNC, contributing to staff research on the impacts of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs). She recently donated her time to greet guests at our 35th Anniversary Meeting. Clean Water for NC thanks Trinity and all of our volunteers who have contributed their time and efforts in the past year!

Climate Justice IS Environmental Justice!

Climate Justice is about creating an equitable and sustainable world for all. It is rooted in the understanding that addressing the root causes of climate change requires a holistic approach that addresses systemic injustice and works towards a just and sustainable future for all. CWFNC realizes it’s urgent to broaden our “EJ perspective” to include the ever-more-critical challenges of climate change. Danielle Purifoy, (photo center) post-doctoral fellow in Geography at UNC-Chapel Hill, gave a key presentation to our 35th Anniversary meeting, opening our eyes to how climate change is related to and worsens the kind of EJ threats we generally think about.

Environmental justice, Dr. Purifoy pointed out, is about the racial politics of development, not only with the disproportionate impact of a particular facility on a community, but also with the color or low income. Issues of resource extraction and distribution (including fracking, pipelines and siting of energy facilities), the value of land proposed for a new project, and the political power of people who live there will all have a major impact on whether a project is built and allowed to start operations. If residents of an area are mostly people of color or low income, it’s probably because the land and real estate values are relatively low. This creates a continuing cycle of disproportionate impacts, lower land values, and increased vulnerability to environmentally degrading projects.

Facilities which cause adverse health impacts also emit large quantities of climate forcing gases known as “greenhouse gases.” Carbon dioxide is released in vehicle emissions, coal and gas fired power plants, and even in home energy use. Methane is emitted by Captured Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and routine operations of fracked gas pipelines. Nitrous oxide is released by applying nitrogen fertilizer in industrial agriculture, as well as some factory emissions. Such facilities are more likely to be located in communities of color or low income, and the regional climate change they worsen only increases the impacts of emissions on the health and quality of life of residents. Dr. Purifoy recommends approaches to reducing disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities:

- Targeted investments in communities of color, avoiding displacement
- Comprehensive equity and risk assessments and long-term monitoring, with enforcement through federal Civil Rights cases
- Implementing plans to reduce risks and inequities over time, with independent evaluation
- Ending laws and policies which perpetuate harm

Estimating Methane Emissions, Climate Impact of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) would be a huge fracked gas pipeline that would run 190 miles through 8 North Carolina counties. Originally estimated to cost $5.1 billion, legal problems from hastily drafted permits have increased costs to over $7.5 B. Critically, the route would put Native American and African-American residents at disproportionate risk of fire and explosions, and there was no attempt to assess the climate impact of the ACP! Federal agencies claimed that there’s no methodology to assess a pipeline’s methane emissions and climate impacts, but Maria Delgado, (photo left) our 2019 Duke Univ. Stanback Intern, decided to undertake such an assessment, with guidance on where emissions could occur from Prof. Anthony Ingraffea, an expert on fracking, pipelines, methane emissions and climate.

Methane is far more efficient at trapping radiation than CO2, with a Global Warming Potential 86 times that of carbon dioxide in a 20-year time frame. Methane affects the atmosphere for a shorter period than CO2, but during that period, the effect is much larger. Maria added together likely methane emissions from upstream “fracking”, routine leaks and releases during pipeline operations, accidents, and downstream releases where the methane is burned for homes and industry. The result? Operation of the ACP could raise atmospheric methane emissions above EPA’s estimate for all US gas infrastructure by almost 14%—a major contribution to climate impacts.

Belinda Joyner, Concerned Citizens of Northampton County, speaks out on major impacts of the ACP at the Tri-State Pipeline Strike in Roanoke in September.
North Carolina has an unpleasant history of impacting communities with the waste of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs). Infamously known are the hog farms of eastern NC, whose waste-filled lagoons are pumped and sprayed onto fields unbearably close to residents. But a shocking 2019 report called “Under the Radar,” from the Environmental Working Group and Waterkeeper Alliance has revealed that poultry operations are now the greatest source of livestock pollution to NC waterways, and the state environmental agency isn’t even keeping track. While CAFOs that store wet waste are required to obtain a permit from the state, dry waste poultry operations are “deemed permitted,” meaning no permit application is needed for construction or operation. As a result, the state has essentially no record of the number of barns or animals, or even the location of each operation. It was only through the research of environmental groups that we now have a more accurate picture of massive expansion.

Riverkeepers collected data from small aircraft documenting each poultry barn (housing 20,000-30,000 birds per barn). The stench was unavoidable, even from the air, as they recorded violations of waste piles being left uncovered and exposed to wind and rain for over 15 days (essentially the only citable regulation for dry waste operations). It is estimated that poultry waste produces 4.8 times as much nitrogen and 4.1 times as much phosphorus as the same weight of swine waste and is applied without regard to proximity to streams or wells.

Tallied data reveal the poultry industry has more than tripled in size over the last decade, swelling to over 200 million birds and rising. This growth is geographically unending burdening some communities more than others. Catawba Riverkeeper, Brandon Jones, (photo left) reports that in just five years, Alexander County poultry population grew from 2.7-9.1 million. To complicate matters, some counties are experiencing additive impacts. Sampson and Duplin Counties, already plagued by the greatest number of hog operations, are now the top two counties for poultry, with 93 percent within three miles of at least 20 other poultry or swine farms (Under the Radar).

It is clear that more research is needed, but it’s not too soon to push for regulating dry waste. More water testing is needed, of course, but questions about well water impacts are left completely unanswered due to the ambiguity of poultry waste land application records. Clean Water for NC will join other environmental groups and community members in revealing a more complete picture of the impacts of this sprawling industry and protect impacted communities.

Working for Coal Ash Justice: Celebrate, Prepare, Advocate

In April 2019, the people of NC had reason to celebrate. After hundreds showed up for public meetings near six coal ash sites, and thousands sent in action on coal ash disposal. If the DEQ order is overturned, advocates are depending on the outcome of the appeal, there are several avenues for securing future victories for all who are impacted. The Alliance of Carolinians Together (ACT) Against Coal Ash is gearing up to continue to work for protective state laws, and federal rollbacks on coal ash management are proposed, threatening communities facing similar threats. Many other states have less protective state laws, and federal rollbacks on coal ash management are proposed, threatening communities with open waste piles, unmonitored use of coal ash in construction projects, and reduction of groundwater monitoring protections. ACT is planning to bring folks together at a meeting in early 2020 to learn more about coal ash threats and solutions in the U.S. and abroad, and to work for securing future victories for all who are impacted.
Whistleblower Says PFAS Contamination Could Have Been Stopped!

Almost 15 years ago, SAFE worked with the Waterkeepers Alliance and the Steelworkers Union in the fight to control GenX. Later, SAFE supported worker exposure at DuPont-Fayetteville Works by C-8, a perfluorinated compound used in the production of Teflon, and stain resistant and non-stick products. 3M Company had stopped production years before because it viewed the compound as too toxic, too easily spread in the environment and too persistent. Within 2 years of starting production in Fayetteville, high levels of C8 in workers’ blood and groundwater were detected. However, SAFE’s continued outreach to the community and related PFAS compounds are: animal carcinogen, causes liver toxicity, raises cholesterol, and causes birth defects. After press conferences, and local community members confronting the CEO at shareholder meetings, DuPont finally agreed to a weak settlement agreement with EPA to phase out production of C-8. In 2016, a new generation of related chemicals, including GenX, began to build up in water and air, and even in drinking water sources.

Early this year, we learned that Tom McKinney (photo left), a former inspector who had worked in both the water and air quality branches of NC’s regulatory agency, had tried for years to get water and air regulators to talk to each other and eliminate the source of contamination from the Fayetteville production site, now under the ownership of Chemours. Tom spoke forcefully at our 35th Anniversary Meeting about “The Mysterious 15 Year DEQ Cover Up” and failure to stop contamination, even after it was documented.

He told of a 2005 “lockdown” of information by NC’s Air Quality Director, followed by “silos of” information and a misleading 2012 DEQ “memo and report” on conditions at the Chemours Fayetteville facility, ignoring the lack of PFAS compounds that would have caused the “nasty smell.” SAFE urged Chemours to remove PFAS compounds detected by air scrubbers before discharging water. Finally, DEQ hid critical information from the NC Science Advisory Board in 2018, preventing them from calling for action to prevent contamination. SAFE worked with McKinney for stronger regulatory attention to stop PFAS releases.

Clean Water for North Carolina

Thanks to Our Generous Foundations and Major Donors!

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35th Anniversary Issue!

Beautiful cake prepared for our 35th Annual Meeting by Karen Donatelli Bakery, Asheville NC