

The Rocky River is a public trust

To be managed for the benefit of all citizens ... including Siler City

By Sonny Keisler

In May, *Chatham County Line* printed an editorial written by Mary Bastin entitled "Whose River Is It Anyway?". The editorial focused on the April 17 public hearing held by the N.C. Division of Water Quality (DWQ) to consider a new Siler City wastewater discharge permit that would lead to improved water quality in the Rocky River.

The editorial contained inaccuracies and questioned the integrity of the Friends of the Rocky River and the Rocky River Heritage Foundation leadership. So as to correct these shortcomings, the Board of Directors of both organizations highlight below (1) the goals and activities of the two organizations and (2) key inaccuracies. For information about the Rocky River itself please visit www.rockyriverchatham.org and click on the icon "Discover The Rocky River."



Goals of the Friends of the Rocky River & the Rocky River Heritage Foundation

1 One goal is to improve water quality throughout the Rocky River including the Siler City reservoir which often is so contaminated by phosphorus and nitrogen that it becomes eutrophic and a more expensive and unhealthy source of drinking water. Both organizations think all parties will benefit if the river no longer is managed primarily as a low-cost water and wastewater resource that is allowed to be polluted primarily for the benefit of dying, low-wage industries in Siler City.

2 A second goal is to protect wildlife, recreational and property values. If achieved, this goal will help increase property values along the river by tens of millions of dollars and produce millions in additional tax revenues.

Activities of the Friends of the Rocky River (FORR) and the Rocky River Heritage Foundation (RRHF)

1 One effort is the state-level Rocky River Management Task Force involving the NC Division of Water Quality, Siler City and FORR. Meetings focus on ways to improve water quality in the river including the Siler City reservoir.

2 A second effort is the Rocky River Stakeholders Group authorized by the Chatham County Board of Commissioners. FORR and the RRHF hoped that meetings involving Siler City, Chatham County and river side land owners would (a) promote better water quality monitoring, and (b) help procure state and federal funding that could help upgrade the Siler City Wastewater Treatment Plant. Although the Siler City Board of Commissioners withdrew

from the group, the effort has resulted in a \$300,000+ grant request that, if funded, will help clean up the Rocky River.

3 A third effort is a \$25,000 river corridor planning program that will help procure state funds to preserve key natural heritage areas in the Rocky River watershed.

4 A fourth effort is a \$37,500 water quality monitoring program funded by Chatham County involving science students at the three Chatham County high schools and river front land owners. This program will improve science education in the high schools and water quality monitoring in the Rocky River.

Journalistic Inaccuracies

1 Request for the hearing: The hearing was requested by many organizations including the Chatham County Board of Commissioners and not just the Friends of the Rocky River.

2 Dr. John Fountain's testimony: Dr. Fountain is the Chair of the NCSU Department of Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, not the "head of the Department of Environmental Sciences" as described in the editorial. Also, Dr. Fountain did not say, "Data does not exist that would identify the source of the contaminants in the river." He did say the N.C. Division of Water Quality needs better temporal and spatial data concerning pollution so that regulators

can better determine the exact amount of pollution coming from Siler City.

3 "...Water quality can never be restored": There was no agreement at the hearing that water quality in the Rocky River cannot be "restored."

4 Downstream land owners ignore... "wider community needs": Various speakers at the hearing emphasized (a) the right of the Siler City Board of Commissioners to use the Rocky River and (b) its failure to protect the wider interests of all Chatham citizens.

21st Century Leadership

Given the reality of climate change and other environmental problems, it is important to have 21st century leaders who will abandon 20th century notions that we can pollute our way to prosperity. The book *Plan B-3.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization* by Lester Brown emphasizes this point. This message also is being pushed by evangelical and traditional churches including the Roman Catholic Church which recently stated polluting the environment is a "sin". Ms Bastin ignores this imperative by failing to clearly say ... we must stop polluting what is left of "God's Creation" ... including the Rocky River. The end result is a well meaning but deficient editorial.

Sonny Keisler is President of the Friends of the Rocky River and board member of the Rocky River Heritage Foundation. This article was authorized and endorsed by The Boards of Directors of both organizations.

Trouble on the by-pass

It has not been a good year for the Herald-Sun newspaper in Durham. Circulation dropped another 15 percent this past year and the only thing the newspaper can brag about is it has the largest printing press on the Highway 15-501 by-pass.

Watching the once respected newspaper spinning in a nose-dive is tragic to see and almost impossible to believe. Even in a time when lots of newspapers are losing circulation by bits and pieces the losses are awful. The H-S seems to have opened its own floodgates.

It is such sad story because The Durham Morning Herald and The Durham Sun not too long ago had a combined circulation of about 70,000 papers. Last month, it had dropped to only about 27,000 papers, down from 32,000 last year. The bloody reality is Durham's population of living, breathing and reading people has almost doubled.

Media Meditations

by R.L. Taylor



This information comes from Publishers Statements that are filed with the government. The numbers are a little tricky and to be perfectly fair the 27,000 figure is for Saturday circulation only. The average Monday through Friday count is actually 32,000, which was also down by 15 per cent from last year.

The Saturday blip of 27,000 simply reveals the company provides about 5,000 papers for its Newspaper in Education service. The Audit Bureau of Circulation allows that as paid circulation.

Using the highest figures possible, the Paxton Company out of Paducah, KY, bought the paper three years ago when it sold 52,000 papers every day. The company has lost 20,000 readers in only three years.

On the very first day of ownership, Paxton had good reason to cut management costs that were simply out of control and saved themselves a million bucks a year for releasing several layers of executives who were not needed. That was the only good move the new company made.

Instead of putting the million dollars in their pockets and bearing down to put out a better product, the Paxton people continued their butchery. Some of the best read, most solid—and entertaining—newsmen in North Carolina were summarily dismissed. The purpose was to save money.

Circulation began to drop immediately. Unfortunately at about the same time, the Duke lacrosse rape case exploded and the Herald-Sun rushed to the support of tainted DA Mike Nifong. It remained glued to that spot as the case against the Duke students melted in public view.

And the Herald-Sun continued to embrace Nifong, its credibility dying almost on a daily basis. It was very sad for the owners and for the newspaper's staff but it was tragic for the public. A once-trusted voice of reason was gone.

The MBA geniuses always say they can run any business anywhere at anytime—even newspapers. That is quite true. A newspaper is much like a pots and pans company. If the pots and pans leak, customers don't buy. If there is no news in a newspaper, the same rule applies.

R.L. Taylor is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He has been a newspaperman for more than 50 years, working as a reporter, editor and publisher. He served as Director of Special Projects for the Durham Herald Company from 1981 to 1992. He has also been an advisor to newspapers in Slovakia, Romania and Russia.

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