

House Bill 1094 Pilot Project



2007 Annual Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

Terry L. Pierce, Director | Division of Environmental Health

Background

- Several counties experienced backlogs
- Increase in development – “building boom” – lead to favorable conditions for backlogs
- Cherokee County had largest backlog for Improvement Permits
 - 6 to 8 months waiting period
- Several solutions considered to address backlog
 - One proposed solution
 - Using licensed soil scientists to assist with permitting process

Proposal

- “Establish[ed] a pilot program to streamline the process for the issuance of an improvement permit or an authorization to construct for an on-site subsurface wastewater system in certain counties by authorizing local health departments, authorized agents of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and **licensed soil scientist to complete soil and site evaluations** in the participating counties.”

Criteria for Selection

- A county must meet three criteria to participate in the pilot program:
 1. The population of the county must not exceed 25,000 according to the most recent federal decennial census.
 2. The county must have more than 900 applications for improvement permits or authorizations to construct that are pending before the local health department on the effective date of this act.
 3. The board of county commissioners and the local board of health for the county must both approve a resolution requesting to participate in the pilot program.

Process

- Cherokee County request for Pilot Project
 - Resolutions by local boards in August 2006
- DEH staff provided:
 - Technical assistance
 - Orientation
 - Interpretation
- Licensed Soil Scientists (LSSs) required to:
 - Register with the health department
 - Provide proof of liability insurance

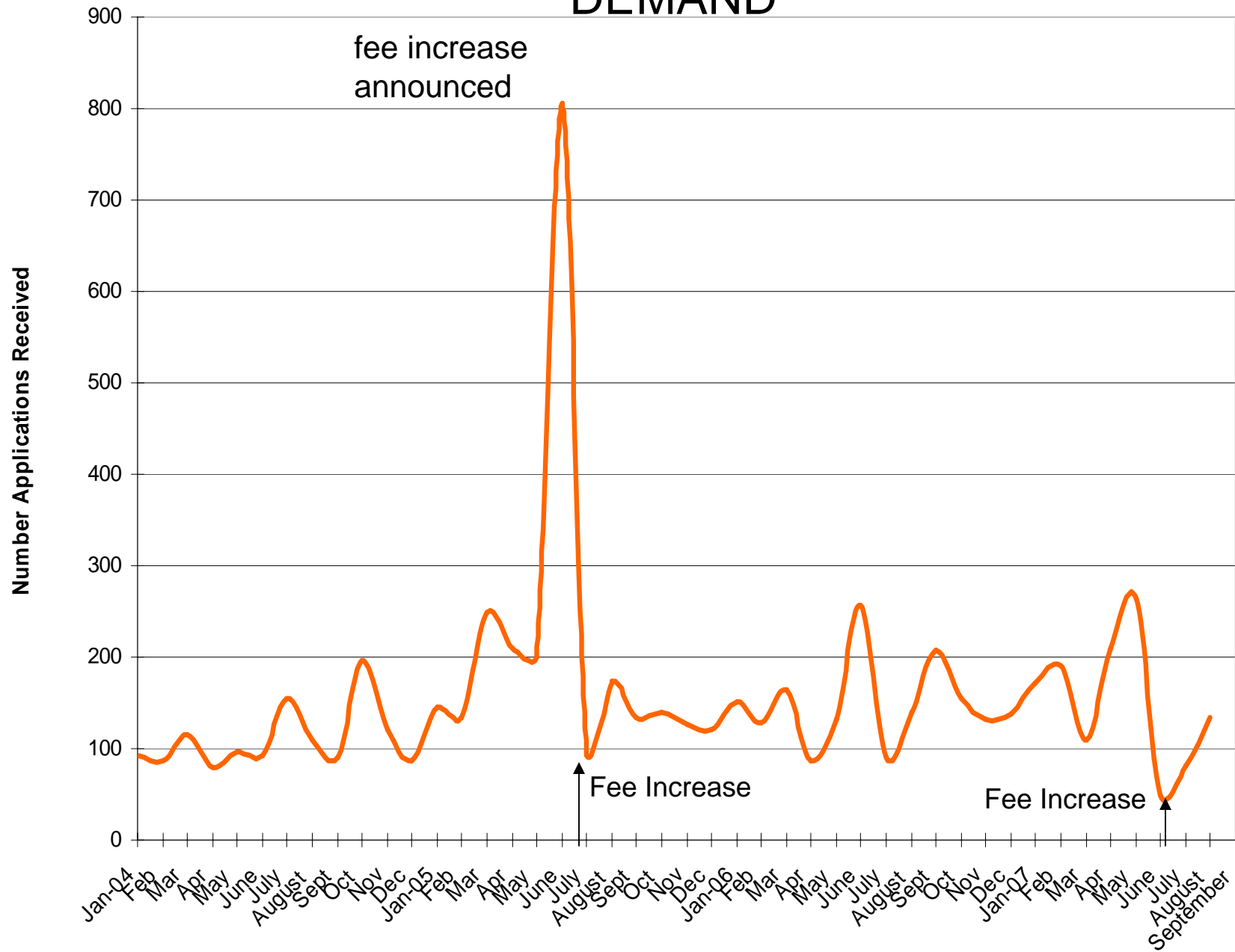
Process

- Approved LSS may submit a completed soil and site evaluation to the health department.
- After determining the site review to be complete, the health department will issue an Improvement Permit (IP).
- The LSS must supply the appropriate information for an IP, and it must be signed and sealed by a licensed soil scientist.
- Upon review of application package for accuracy/completeness, the LHD issued an IP.

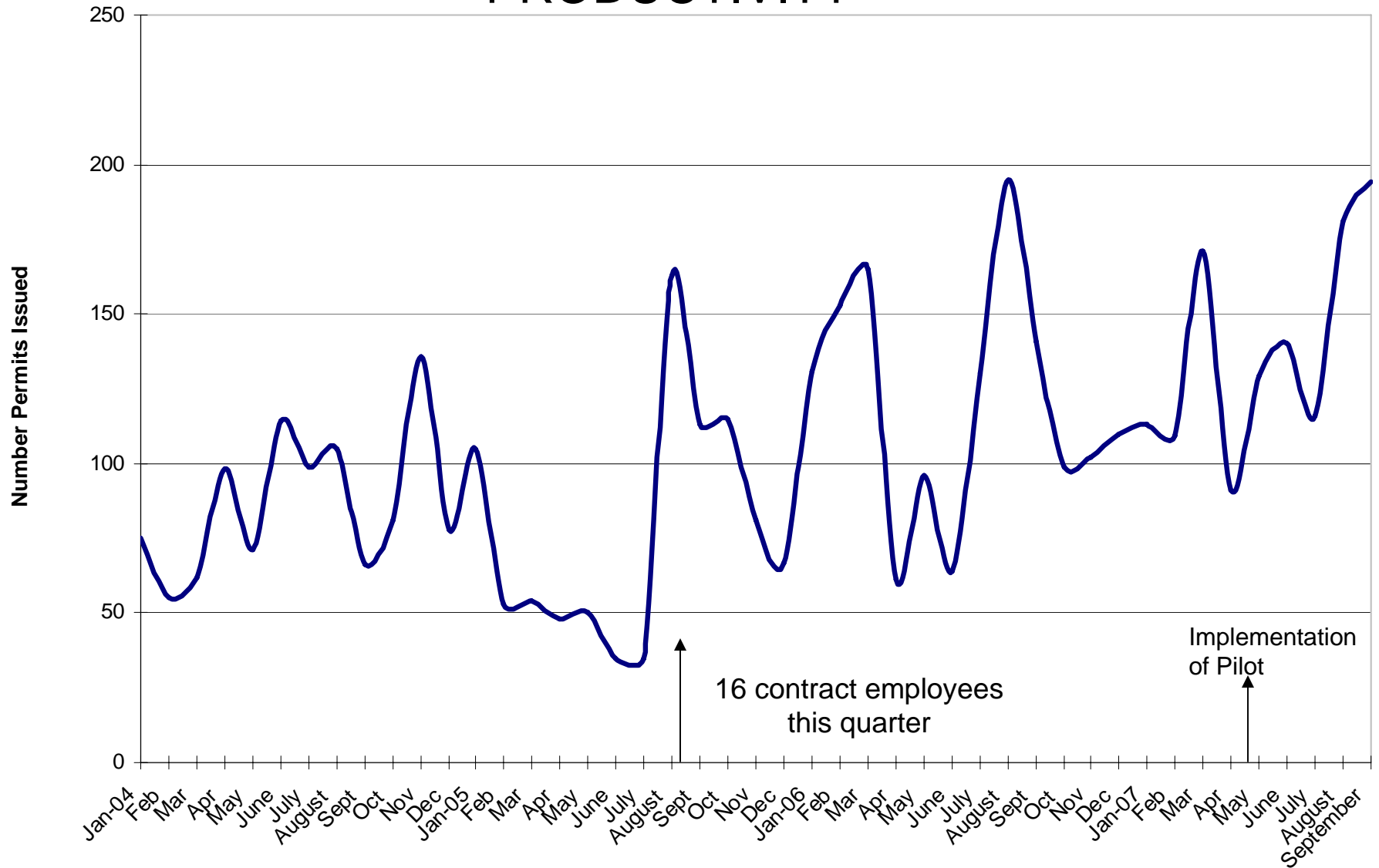
Findings

- Current backlog of applications for improvement permits = 450.
- Full-time Cherokee County employees assigned to on-site wastewater activities increased from three in 2004 to nine in 2007.
- The number of applications peaked in the first quarter of 2005 resulting in a dramatic backlog.
- The number of applications for improvement permits has dropped significantly during the summer of 2007.

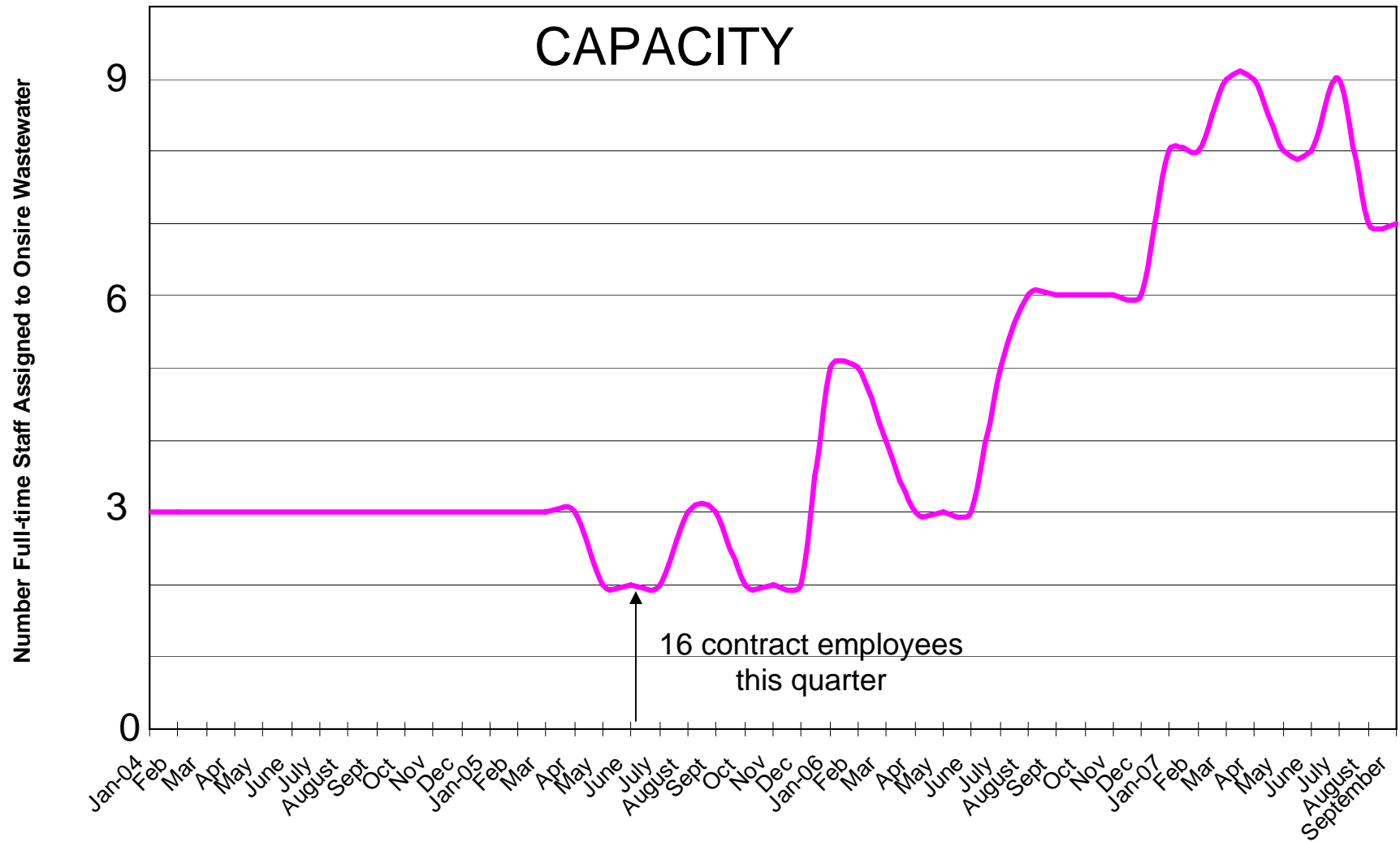
DEMAND



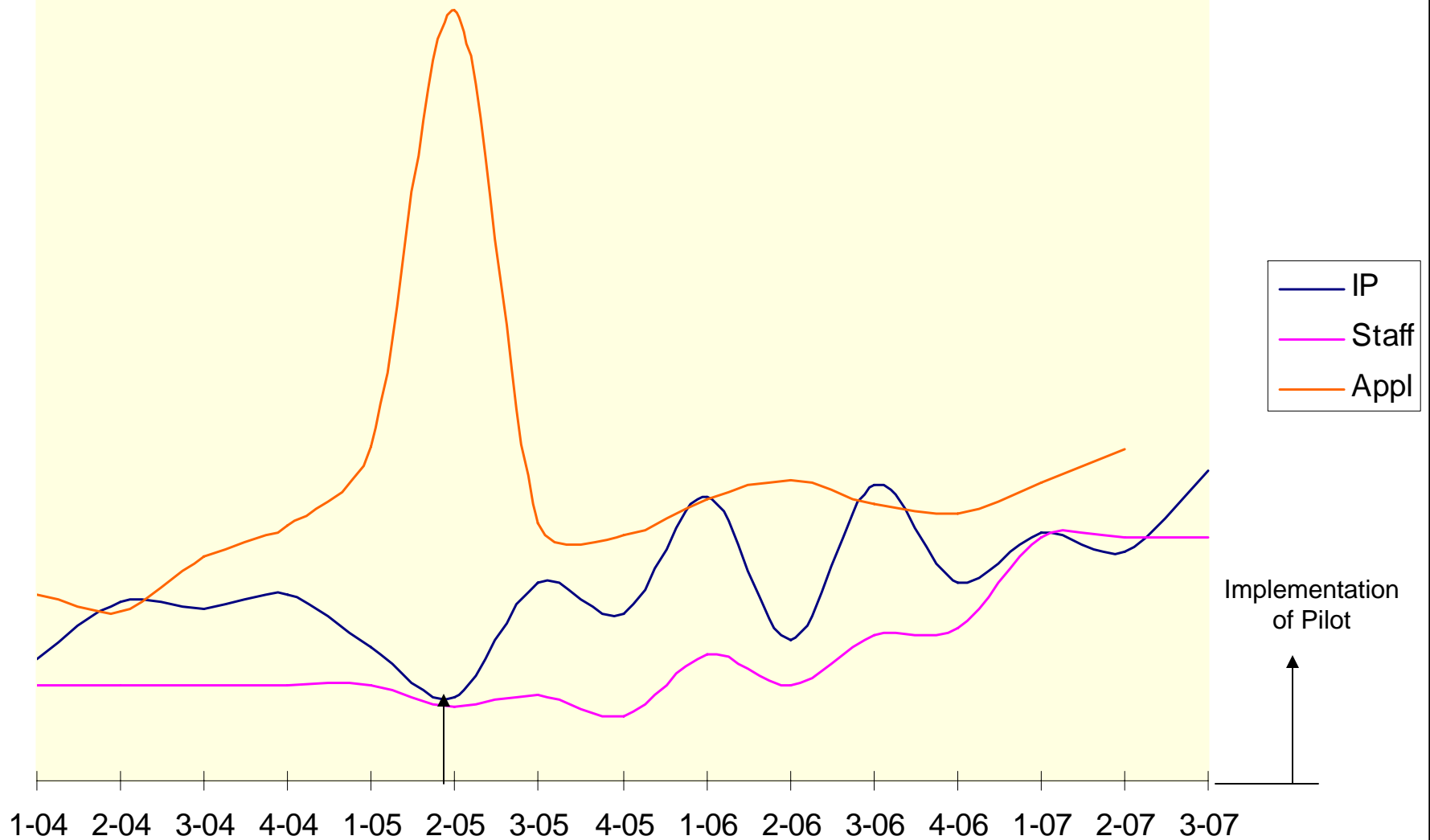
PRODUCTIVITY



Staffing Levels



TRENDS and OBSERVATIONS



Findings

Based on information provided by
Cherokee County Health Department

- A total of 117 proposals were received since May 17, 2007.
- 56 proposals were permitted for installation.
- Six proposals were reviewed and are awaiting further information from the consultant.
- Eight of the permits were installed and received operation permits.

Concerns

■ Staff limitations

- Number of proposals being submitted by the LSSs is steadily rising
- Only one health department LSS staffer was assigned to review work for pilot program

As the number of permits submitted by LSSs continues to rise, existing or new staff will be needed to review proposals for completion.

Evaluation – Criteria

- Three criteria (per legislation)

- i. “the program resulted in a reduction in the length of time improvement permits or authorizations to construct are pending in the participating counties;
- ii. the program resulted in increased system failures or other adverse impacts; and
- iii. the program resulted in new or increased environmental impacts.”

Evaluation – Results

- Very few of the systems permitted through this pilot program have been installed.
- The few systems that have been installed have not been in use for a period sufficient to assess any failures or environmental impacts.

Recommendations

- Comments received from Cherokee County government officials.
 - DEH staff have considered suggestions
 - Would like to reevaluate in 2008

Recommendations

- More time is needed to determine the effectiveness of the pilot program as designed in HB 1094.
 - Only four months of data was collected.
- Participating LSSs should receive specific training on how to design, install, inspect and maintain septic systems through the many sources that provide this type of training.

Summary

- Administrative issues
 - Implementation was delayed
 - Clarification on legislation requirements
- Limited data resulting from implementation process
 - Only four months of data was collected this first year.

Summary

- Unable to determine the extent of backlog reduction attributed to the use of private LSSs
- Recommend continuation as currently implemented for at least a full year to determine its effectiveness

Questions?

Terry L. Pierce

Director

Division of Environmental Health

Terry.Pierce@ncmail.net

(919) 733-2870