

**Annual Report to the
North Carolina General Assembly**

***Surface Water Identification and Training
Certification Course***

October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021

Division of Water Resources

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Surface Water Identification and Training Certification Course Annual Report – 2021

In accordance with G.S. 143-214.25A

Background: The Surface Water Identification Training and Certification (SWITC) Course is offered by the Division of Water Resources, Water Quality Programs (formerly known as the Division of Water Quality prior to August 1, 2013, and hereinafter referred to as “DWR”) to comply with N.C. General Statute 143-214.25A. This statute requires DWR to train and certify staff within the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS), local governments with delegated riparian buffer programs, and DWR. This training certification is required to determine where surface waters are present and thus where the riparian buffer rules apply.

Courses: Between October 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021, DWR offered two SWITC training courses. Both courses were adjusted to include virtual components, modified field portions and smaller class sizes due to COVID restrictions. One course took place across multiple dates and locations: October 6-7 (virtually), November 10 (in-person field instruction in Raleigh), and November 17-18, 2020 (in-person field instruction and testing in Washington, NC). The other class took place June 7-11, 2021 at NCSU’s Weaver Labs and at established field locations in and near Raleigh. Due to lack of funding for these courses, DWR has partnered with NC State University to offer classes. Below is the summary of the courses.

October / November 2020: 8 participants attended. All were DWR staff, 4 from the Washington Regional Office and 4 from the Wilmington Regional Office.

June 2021: 21 participants attended, 7 of whom were DWR employees (1 representing Asheville Regional Office, 1 from Mooresville Regional Office, 2 from Raleigh Regional Office, 2 from Winston-Salem Regional Office, and 1 from Central Office Transportation Permitting Branch). In addition, 2 NCFS staff, 5 local government representatives (3 of which were from delegated/ designated communities), and 7 employed by private consulting firms attended the course.

Certifications: DWR issued 8 new certifications in October/November 2020 and 12 new certifications in June 2021 to DWR staff, NCFS staff, and delegated local government staff as a result of these courses. These 20 individuals are certified to determine where surface waters are present and thus where the riparian buffer rules apply. DWR also issued 8 training certificates in June 2021 to other individuals that successfully completed the course. These 28 individuals are not eligible to be officially certified because they do not meet the certification criteria in G.S. 143-214.25A.

Effectiveness: DWR consistently receives positive feedback about this course. The class also fills quickly upon opening of registration and consistently carries a waitlist. DWR asked the participants to rate their level of knowledge before the course (on a scale of 1-5). The average was 1.9 in November 2020 and 2.6 in June 2021. DWR asked the participants to rate their level of knowledge again after the course, and the average was 3.8 in November 2020 and 4.6 in June 2021.

Recommendations: DWR always reviews the course evaluations completed by the students and makes adjustments to the course as needed based on that feedback. DWR will continue to solicit feedback and make improvements to future courses.