

NAME OF BOARD/COMMISSION: Commission for the Environment

Report Period: 2013 - 2014

**ORANGE COUNTY ADVISORY BOARDS & COMMISSIONS
ANNUAL REPORT / WORK PLAN FOR THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

The Board of Commissioners welcomes input from various advisory boards and commissions in preparation for its annual planning retreat. Please complete the following information, limited to the front and back of this form. Other background materials may be provided as a supplement to, but not as a substitute for, this form.

Board/Commission Name: Commission for the Environment

Persons to address BOCC at work session and contact information:

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|-------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Chair: | David Neal | 919-732-2156 | David.L.Neal@gmail.com |
| Vice-Chair: | Jan Sassaman | 919-933-1609 | jan.sassaman@gmail.com |

Primary County Staff Contact:

Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks and Recreation
Rich Shaw (Land Conservation Manager) 245-2514 rshaw@orangecountync.gov
Tom Davis (Water Resources Coordinator) 245-2513 tdavis@orangecountync.gov

How many times per month does this commission meet, including any special meetings and sub-committee meetings?

One meeting per month (2nd Monday); committees as needed during regular meeting

Brief Statement of Commission's Assigned Charge and Responsibilities.

Purpose: to advise the BOCC on matters affecting the environment, with particular emphasis on environmental protection and enhancement. Other duties include:

- Perform special studies/projects on environmental issues as requested by BOCC
- Recommend environmental initiatives to the BOCC, especially of local importance
- Study changes in environmental science and environmental regulations in the pursuit of the CFE's duties
- Educate the public and local officials on environmental issues

What are your Commission's most important accomplishments?

- Published the Orange County State of the Environment reports (2000, 2002, 2004, 2009); and will complete an updated SOE report in early 2014
- Convened Orange Co. Environmental Summit in 2005, 2009, and planning for 2014
- Hosted a Solid Waste Forum with the Chapel Hill Sustainability Committee (2013)
- Advised the BOCC to expand the County's commercial food waste pickup and composting services, thereby reducing food waste in the solid waste stream (2013)
- Co-sponsored the annual *Nature of Orange* photography contest (2012-13)
- Advocated for ½ cent sales tax referendum for Triangle Region public transit (2012)
- Advised the BOCC to protect public health and sensitive lands from fracking (2012)
- Compiled annotated bibliography of the effects of forestry on water quality (2012)
- Initiated project to identify native plant habitat along roadways for protection from

- herbicides in collaboration with NC Botanical Garden, NCDOT, utility providers (2012)
- Provided comments on draft UDO amendments for permitting solar arrays (2012)
- Advised BOCC to preserve areas in developments for solar energy production (2012)
- Initiated effort to create incentives for energy efficient construction/renovation (2012)
- Developed a Sustainable Landscaping Policy for County-owned facilities (2010)
- Developed a Forest Management Policy for County properties (2010)
- Assisted County staff in completing the Natural and Cultural Systems Element of the Orange County Comprehensive Plan (2008)
- Helped draft Environmental Responsibility in County Gov't. Goal (2005)
- Worked with Board of Health and staff on determining best ways to implement the Water Resources Initiative (adopted in principle by BOCC in 2005)
- Assisted with County's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Inventory (2005)
- Worked with Orange County Schools to introduce local environmental indicators/ trends and issues into middle and high school science curriculum (SOE 2004, 2009)

List of Specific Tasks, Events, or Functions Performed or Sponsored Annually.

- Review and comment on environmental issues (e.g., fracking, biosolids application, water pollution, air quality, forest mgmt..) and other issues assigned by the BOCC
- Identify priorities for the Lands Legacy Action Plan (natural areas and wildlife habitat)
- Conduct special studies pertaining to Orange County environment (e.g., energy efficiency/sustainability, forestry effects on water quality, herbicides and native flora)
- Develop recommendations on implementation of ground water studies of the 1990s and the integration of ground water and surface water quality and quantity
- Conduct environmental education outreach at events (e.g., Last Fridays, Festifall)

Describe this commission's activities/accomplishments in carrying out BOCC goals/priorities, if applicable.

BOCC Goal Five: Create, preserve, and protect a natural environment that includes clean water, clean air, wildlife, important natural lands and sustainable energy for present and future generations.

- Presented findings and recommendations to BOCC on selected environmental issues: effects of forest mgmt. on water quality; effects of herbicides on roadside native plant habitat; potential effects of hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") in Orange County; problems caused by hydrilla in the Eno River (BOCC Priorities #1 and #12)
- Stayed abreast of ongoing and developing env. issues of importance to the County, such as Falls & Jordan Lake nutrient mgmt. rules, permitting of biosolids on farmland, and reducing commercial food waste in solid waste stream (Priorities #12 and #16)
- Provides comments on proposed master plans for future parks/preserves

If your commission played the role of an Element Lead Advisory Board involved in the 2030 Comprehensive Plan preparation process, please indicate your activities/accomplishments as they may relate to the Comprehensive Plan's goals or objectives. *(Element Lead Advisory Boards include: Planning Board, Commission for the Environment, Historic Preservation Commission, Agriculture Pres. Board, and Parks & Recreation Council)*

- The CFE provided extensive input into DEAPR staff development of the *Natural and Cultural Systems Element* of the Comprehensive Plan—specifically the chapters on Air and Energy Resources, Water Resources, and Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitat

Objective AE-1:

Assess and implement the current countywide greenhouse gas emissions inventory and action plan target reductions.

- The CFE helped to initiate a countywide inventory of greenhouse gas emissions (2005), and continues to advise on ways to reduce the County's "carbon footprint."

Objective AE-15:

Foster participation in green energy programs such as installation incentives for solar hot water/solar generation/solar tempering in residential or commercial construction. The County should develop programs that will link citizens and businesses with options for alternative and sustainable energy sources.

- The CFE's Air and Energy Resources Committee has developed proposals that address energy efficiency and renewable power issues, and will continue to expand its efforts in collaboration with other advisory boards and stakeholders.

Objective NA-3:

Develop a more detailed and consistent methodology for monitoring changes in forest cover throughout the County, and specifically the extent of mature hardwood forest.

- The CFE's State of the Environment 2014 will report on the significant reduction in mature hardwood forest that occurred from 2003-2012 and since 1988. Further refinements to the methodology are still needed for future applications.

Objective NA-11:

Develop a comprehensive conservation plan for achieving a network of protected open space throughout Orange County, which addresses 1) threats to important natural areas; 2) connectivity between protected areas; 3) coordination with neighboring counties; and 4) sustainable management of critical natural resources.

- The CFE's Biological Resources Committee prepared a draft scope of work and is considering how to proceed as follow up to the updated Parks & Rec Master Plan

Objective NA-16:

Create a system of public and private open space and conservation areas, including parks, nature preserves, and scenic vistas representative of Orange County landscape.

- The CFE advises County's Lands Legacy program in its efforts to protect the most important natural and cultural resource lands through a variety of means.
- The CFE's Biological Resources Committee prepared a draft scope of work and is considering how to proceed as follow up to the updated Parks & Rec Master Plan

Objective WR-5:

Promote and participate in regional efforts to plan for use of water supplies in the region in an equitable manner, including contingency planning for water supplies during droughts. [Also Objectives WR-9, WR-10, and WR-15]

- CFE is staying abreast of Jordan Lake Partnership and advising staff as needed
- CFE is advocating full implementation of the Water Resources Initiative to ensure planning for an adequate water supply for current and anticipated future needs

Objective WR-11:

Provide incentives and educational information to landowners to increase protection of watersheds and ground water supplies and their inter-relationships.

- The CFE distributes groundwater and surface water educational materials at Festifall and Last Fridays events and as part of its State of the Environment reports

Identify any activities this commission expects to carry out in 2014 as they relate to established BOCC goals and priorities. If applicable, is there a fiscal impact (i.e., funding, staff time, other resources) associated with these proposed activities (list).

- Complete the Orange County State of the Environment 2014 report
- Convene an Environmental Summit, showcasing findings from the SOE 2014
- Convene an Energy Task Force (or equivalent work group) to improve the County's ability to foster local sustainable energy production and energy efficiency strategies.
- Recommend ways to reduce the County's "carbon footprint" and implement the County's Environmental Responsibility Goal (BOCC Priority #10)
- Collaborate with others to identify significant roadside habitat for native plants; work with NCDOT and utilities to protect roadside habitats (BOCC Priority #1)
- Stay abreast of Jordan and Falls Lake nutrient reduction rules, and Jordan Lake Partnership (water supply allocations); advise County staff and BOCC as needed
- Develop surface water monitoring plan for county in coordination with other entities
- Continue to review/comment on plans to expand the Orange Well Net program
- Initiate efforts to create a detailed water budget for Orange County
- Advise County staff on implementing selected objectives of the Comprehensive Plan
- Help develop a comprehensive conservation plan for Orange Co (BOCC Priority #1)
- Co-sponsor the annual DEAPR photography contest: *The Nature of Orange*

What are the concerns or emerging issues your board has identified for the upcoming year that it plans to address, or wishes to bring to the Commissioners' attention?

- The CFE requests BOCC approval to convene Renewable Energy & Efficiency Work Group (or equivalent group) to improve the County's ability to foster local sustainable energy production and energy efficiency strategies [Jan. 2013 memo to BOCC]
- The CFE will advocate for an expansion of the County's commercial food waste pickup and composting services to reduce food waste in the solid waste stream
- The CFE remains interested in collaborating with the Planning Board and others (with appropriate direction from the BOCC) on developing new requirements or incentives for developers of residential and commercial properties to reserve areas for solar energy generation [Dec. 2011 memos to BOCC]
- The CFE remains interested in collaborating with the Planning Board (with appropriate direction from the BOCC) on developing incentives for increasing energy efficiency in all new construction [Jan. 2012 memo to Planning Board]
- The CFE recognizes the ongoing need to fully implement the Water Resources Initiative to ensure planning for an adequate water supply for current and anticipated future needs (e.g., expand the Orange Well Net groundwater monitoring program; initiate efforts to create a detailed Water Budget for the county.)
- The CFE will continue its collaboration with the NC Botanical Garden and others to identify significant roadside habitat for native plants and work with NCDOT and other utilities to protect those roadside habitats [authorized by BOCC June 2012]
- The US EPA is likely to revise Federal Air Quality standards for ozone and particulate matter in 2013. The CFE will stay up to date with any regulatory changes and advise the BOCC on any policy implications for Orange County's transportation planning.