

Development, Flooding and the Water Cycle in Eastern North Carolina: What's the Connection? Oral History Transcripts

I. “Five-Hundred Year Flood Event” – Billy Ray Hall (floydwatercycle_hall.mp3)

Introduction: Bill Ray Hall is the president of the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center and was active in the efforts to rebuild after Hurricane Floyd. In his oral history, Hall emphasizes the need for smarter planning in Eastern North Carolina to improve not only the environmental issues facing the region, but also social and economic issues. In this excerpt, Hall discusses the lack of current flood plain maps. These maps are outdated due to the increase in development in the area and a resulting increase in water runoff and flood-prone areas. He also stresses the need for developers to avoid building in flood plains. The term “five hundred-year flood” refers to scientists’ initial assertion that the Floyd flood was one that would statistically only happen once every 500 years.

“And so, I think, whether it's looking at infrastructure and planning for the development of a community, this time have the benefit of, hopefully, to lead opportunities or lead in terms of the growth of the area with a lot better knowledge. It also pointed out some problems. For example local governments, like a lot of us, when it's not a problem you really don't pay a lot of attention to it. Most of our flood plain maps that drive the discussion locally about what you should and shouldn't do, are over twenty years old. And you got a twenty-year-old flood plain map—the guy builds his house with good intentions, he's not in a flood plain, he's not required to have insurance, so I don't have insurance—I bet you don't. A five hundred year flood comes along it not only gets his house, it gets the guy's a half-mile away higher—because this was a five hundred year flood. Had it been a hundred-year flood though it still would have got those houses, because they probably weren't drawn correctly.

You pour as much cement in Wake County and Durham and Johnston County as we've poured in the last ten years, and I'll guarantee you there's a lot more water hitting the Neuse river right now than there was ten years ago. Now, thankfully, we've got the Falls of the Neuse, but still a five-hundred year flood event made it very clear—Falls of the Neuse will not stop a twenty inch rain storm from flooding huge areas of eastern North Carolina.”

(1 min 18 sec)

Discussion Questions:

- What does Hall say about the use of outdated flood plain maps? What were the consequences of using them for development?
- What is one factor Hall believes led to the flooding of the Neuse River after Hurricane Floyd?

II. “More Development” – Steve Holland (floydwatercycle_holland.mp3)

Introduction: Steve Holland is a businessman who owns a popular store and restaurant and also a county commissioner in Pender County, one of the largest counties in Eastern North Carolina. In this excerpt, he talks about the rapid increase in development in his county, and the need for more careful planning.

“More and more people want space, which means we're doing more developments. Which is, we're killing our watersheds. What we really need to do in Pender County is get a lot more serious over having more planned development and have better green spaces, better watersheds, where they have to come up with the plans before they are allowed to build. And we're seeing the damage that's happening by not having long-range planning. We keep talking about it, and we keep working at it, but it's grown so fast that it's hard to beat it.”
(43 sec)

Discussion Questions:

- Do you think Holland would support more restrictions for development?
- What are some disadvantages of the rapid development Holland mentions happening in Pender County?

III. “Long-Range Planning” – Steve Holland (floydwatercycle_holland2.mp3)

Introduction: In this excerpt, Holland discusses changes he would like to make as a county commissioner. He felt that Eastern North Carolina was so eager for development due to economic factors that they loosened restrictions meant to protect the environment, and the area is now facing the consequences of that development.

“Well, we just need long-range planning. There's nothing wrong with development, but make sure that they leave plenty of green areas. They have to come up with a drainage plan before we give them any permits. Not give them a permit and then say, "Oh, okay. Well, that's not any big deal." We need to have stricter regulations, where we don't pollute our creeks, our waters, and our oyster areas. And I guess we were so happy to see people come here, because farming has gone down hill so far. We were losing our tax base is what happened. And so, consequently, our past commissioners, a lot of them, just kind of said, "Oh, well, this development is more important than worrying about that creek out there." Well, he's biting his own tail in the long run. Well, just long-range planning is the most important step.” (55 sec)

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the benefits of the “green areas” Holland wants to protect?
- Do you feel the county commissioners in Pender County should support economic development over environmental protection, or vice versa? What are the benefits of both development and the environment for the residents of Pender County?