ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OF WILMINGTON AND NEW HANOVER COUNTY WATERSHEDS, 2011

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Michael A. Mallin, Elizabeth A. Steffy, Matthew R. McIver and Elizabeth Clay

CMS Report 12-01
Center for Marine Science
University of North Carolina Wilmington
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www.uncw.edu/cms/aelab/

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Executive Summary

This report represents combined results of Year 13 of the Wilmington Watersheds Project. Water quality data are presented from a watershed perspective, regardless of political boundaries. The 2011 program involved 8 watersheds and 22 sampling stations. In this summary we first present brief water quality overviews for each watershed from data collected between January and December 2011.

Barnards Creek – Barnards Creek drains into the Cape Fear River Estuary. It drains a 4,161 acre watershed that consists of about 17% impervious surface coverage, and a population of approximately 12,200. Water column sampling was not funded during 2011. However, Barnards Creek sediments were sampled for metals and toxic compounds at three sites on June 16. Metals were not problematic in the sediments of this creek. However, at one site a toxic compound, the polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH) Benzo(a)pyrene, was elevated to levels known to impact the health of benthic aquatic organisms.

Bradley Creek – Bradley Creek drains a watershed of 4,631 acres, including much of the UNCW campus, into the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway (ICW). The watershed contains about 23% impervious surface coverage, with a population of about 16,470. Three sites were sampled, all from shore. In 2011 there were two significant algal blooms recorded in the south branch of the creek on Wrightsville Avenue (BC-SB). Average dissolved oxygen was fair to poor at the three sites. All three sites sampled were rated poor due to high fecal coliform bacteria, with the south branch site BC-SB and the College Acres station BC-CA both having especially high counts.

We collected sediment samples on May 31 throughout Bradley Creek for analysis of sediment metals and toxic compounds including polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Two tributary sites, BC-NBU (upper north branch) and BC-CA (creek passing under College Acres Ave.) had excessive concentrations of total PAHs, consisting mainly of Fluoranthene, Phenanthrene, Pyrene, Benzo(a)anthracene, and Chrysene. Metals were not at high concentrations in Bradley Creek sediments except for the marina site BC-76, where arsenic and copper were both at levels known to potentially cause problems to benthic organisms.

Burnt Mill Creek – Burnt Mill Creek drains a 4,252 acre watershed which is extensively urbanized (36% impervious surface coverage) into Smith Creek. Three locations were sampled during 2011. This creek had very poor water quality, with algal blooms occurring on several occasions at two of the three sites sampled, and high fecal coliform counts, with two of the three sites exceeding the human contact standard > 60% of occasions sampled. These levels of pollution have characterized the system for the past several years. Dissolved oxygen concentrations were fair in 2011.

The effectiveness of Ann McCrary wet detention pond on Randall Parkway as a pollution control device for upper Burnt Mill Creek was mixed for 2011. Comparing inflows to outflows, there was a significant increase in dissolved oxygen and pH, and significant decreases in conductivity and nitrate concentrations. Several water quality parameters showed a worsening in pollutant levels along the creek from where it exited

the detention pond to the downstream Princess Place sampling station, including dissolved oxygen, fecal coliform bacteria, nitrogen and phosphorus.

Futch Creek – Futch Creek is situated on the New Hanover-Pender County line and drains a 3,106 acre watershed into the ICW. UNC Wilmington was not funded to regularly sample this creek in 2011. The County employed a consulting firm to sample this creek and data are available on the County website.

Greenfield Lake – This lake drains a watershed of 2,551 acres, covered by about 36% impervious surface area with a population of about 10,630. This urban lake has, over the years, suffered from low dissolved oxygen, algal blooms, periodic fish kills and high fecal bacteria counts. The lake was sampled for physical parameters at three tributary sites and for all parameters at three in-lake sites. The three tributaries of Greenfield Lake (near Lake Branch Drive, Jumping Run Branch, and Lakeshore Commons Apartments) all suffered from low dissolved oxygen problems.

From 2005 to 2011 several steps were taken by the City of Wilmington to restore viability to the lake. Sterile grass carp were introduced to the lake to control (by grazing) the overabundant aquatic macrophytes, and four SolarBee water circulation systems were installed in the lake to improve circulation and force dissolved oxygen from the surface downward toward the bottom. Also, on many occasions a contract firm and City staff applied herbicides to further reduce the amount of aquatic macrophytes. These actions led to a major reduction in aquatic macrophytes lake wide. In 2011 there was good to fair dissolved oxygen at two of the lake stations (especially nearest the SolarBees), but low dissolved oxygen concentrations were common at GL-2340, in the upper lake.

Algal blooms are periodically problematic in Greenfield Lake, and have occurred during all seasons, but are primarily a problem in spring and summer. In 2011 algal blooms did occur in the lake and increased over 2010, with a large blue-green algal bloom persisting for a number of weeks in mid-summer.

In the period 2007-2011 there was a statistically significant relationship within the lake between chlorophyll *a* and BOD5, meaning that the algal blooms are likely an important cause of low dissolved oxygen in this lake, along with stormwater runoff of BOD materials into the streams feeding the lake. Thus, a challenge for Greenfield Lake is to continue to reduce the frequency and magnitude of the algal blooms, which will lead to continuing dissolved oxygen improvements. High fecal coliform counts continue to periodically impact the lake, although average fecal coliform counts in 2010 were lower than in the previous two years. Non-point source pollution control should be targeted to reduce nitrogen, suspended materials and fecal bacteria to the lake.

Hewletts Creek – Hewletts Creek drains a large (7,435 acre) watershed into the Intracoastal Waterway. This watershed has about 19% impervious surface coverage with a population of about 20,210. In recent years this system has been plagued by a number of sewage spills. In 2011 the creek was sampled at four tidal sites and one non-tidal freshwater site. Incidents of severe hypoxia did not occur in 2011 as no concentrations sampled were below 4.0 mg/L. Turbidity was low and only one major algal bloom was seen in 2011 (at NB-GLR, the north branch at Greenville Loop Rd.). In 2011 fecal coliform bacteria counts were high in all areas of the creek. Counts exceeded State standards 29% of the time at SB-PGR (south branch at Pine Grove Rd.), 57% of the time sampled at MB-PGR (middle branch at Pine Grove Rd.), 71% of the time at NB-GLR and 100% of the time at PVGC-9, draining the Pine Valley Golf Club. The geometric mean at PVGC-9 doubled over 2010. There was a large rain event in April that led to NB-GLR, SB-PGR and PVGC-9 all having excessive counts that month.

During 2007 the 7.6 acre JEL Wade wetland (located at the end of Bethel Road) was constructed to treat stormwater runoff from a 589 acre watershed within the Hewletts Creek drainage. Drainage for this wetland enters the south branch of the creek, upstream of the SB-PGR sampling site. A rain event sampling program was carried out in 2009-2010 to evaluate the efficacy of the wetland in reducing pollutant loads from the stormwater runoff passing through the wetland. High removal rates of fecal coliform bacteria were achieved (based on “first flush”), with an average load reduction of 99% and overall concentration reduction of > 90%. Particularly high (>90%) load reductions of ammonium and orthophosphate loads also occurred, and lesser but still substantial reductions of total phosphorus (89%) and TSS loads (88%) were achieved. Removal of nitrate was seasonally dependent, with lower removal occurring in cold weather and high percentage (90%+) nitrate load removal occurring in the growing season when water temperatures exceeded 15^{o}C. Since the principal source of impairment in Hewletts Creek is fecal bacteria contamination, and a secondary source is algal blooms (caused by nitrogen loading), this constructed wetland appears to be very successful in reducing both concentrations and loads of polluting substances to the receiving waters. Additionally, sampling data collected downstream of the wetland at Station SB-PGR showed a statistically significant decline in ammonium, nitrate and fecal coliform bacteria after completion of the wetland, demonstrating the wetland’s benefits to the creek system as a whole.

Howe Creek – Howe Creek drains a 3,518 acre watershed into the ICW. This watershed hosts a population of approximately 6,460 with about 19% impervious surface coverage. Three stations were sampled in Howe Creek in 2011. Only one major algal bloom was seen, at the uppermost station HW-DT. Both upper stations, HW-DT and HW-GP were rated poor for high fecal coliform bacteria counts, exceeding the state standard on 71% and 29% of the times sampled, respectively. The lower station HW-FP was rated good, not exceeding the standard in 2011. Dissolved oxygen concentrations were fair on average in Howe Creek in 2011. Since wetland enhancement was performed in 1998 above Graham Pond the creek below the pond at Station HW-GP has had fewer and smaller algal blooms than before the enhancement.

Motts Creek – Motts Creek drains a watershed of 3,328 acres into the Cape Fear River Estuary with a population of about 9,530. This creek was not sampled by UNCW in 2011.

Pages Creek – Pages Creek drains a 3,039 acre watershed into the ICW. UNC Wilmington was not funded to sample this creek from 2008-2010. The County employed a private firm to sample this creek and data are available on the County website.

Smith Creek – Smith Creek drains into the lower Northeast Cape Fear River just upstream of where it merges with the Cape Fear River. It has a watershed of 13,896 acres that has about 28% impervious surface coverage, with a population of about 26,000. One estuarine site on Smith Creek, SC-CH, was sampled by UNCW under the auspices of the Lower Cape Fear River Program (LCFRP) 2011. Water quality at this site was poor in 2011, with the dissolved oxygen standard of 4.0 mg/L and the turbidity standard of 25 NTU both violated on 29% of occasions sampled. Fecal bacteria pollution worsened over 2010, violating the contact standard 57% of occasions sampled in 2011.

Whiskey Creek – Whiskey Creek is the southernmost large tidal creek in New Hanover County that drains into the ICW. It has a watershed of 2,095 acres, a population of about 8,000, and is covered by approximately 19% impervious surface area. One station, on Masonboro Loop Road, was sampled from shore along this creek in 2011. This site had low to moderate nutrient concentrations and no algal bloom problems. Dissolved oxygen was substandard (below 5.0 mg/L) on two of seven occasions sampled, whereas fecal coliform bacteria counts were below standard only once out of seven occasions in 2011.

Water Quality Station Ratings – The UNC Wilmington Aquatic Ecology Laboratory utilizes a quantitative system with four parameters (dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll *a*, turbidity, and fecal coliform bacteria) to rate water quality at our sampling sites. If a site exceeds the North Carolina water quality standard for a parameter less than 10% of the time sampled, it is rated Good; if it exceeds the standard 10-25% of the time it is rated Fair, and if it exceeds the standard > 25% of the time it is rated Poor for that parameter. We applied these numerical standards to the water bodies described in this report, based on 2011 data, and have designated each station as good, fair, and poor accordingly (Appendix B).

Fecal coliform bacterial conditions for the entire Wilmington City and New Hanover County Watersheds system (19 sites sampled for fecal coliforms) showed 11% to be in good condition, 16% in fair condition, but **73%** in poor condition, considerably worse than in 2010. Dissolved oxygen conditions system-wide (22 sites) showed 23% of the sites were in good condition, 32% were in fair condition, and 45% were in poor condition, a worse showing than in 2010. For algal bloom presence, measured as chlorophyll *a*, 56% of the 18 stations sampled were rated as good, 17% as fair and 28% as poor (mainly sites in Greenfield Lake, Burnt Mill Creek, and Bradley Creek). In terms of turbidity all 100% of the 22 sites sampled were rated as good. It is important to note that the two water bodies with the worst water quality in the system also have the most developed watersheds with the highest impervious surface coverage; Burnt Mill Creek – 36% impervious coverage; Greenfield Lake – 36% impervious coverage.

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Plate 1. Wilmington and New Hanover County watersheds (map by M. Hayes, Wilmington Stormwater Services).

1.0 Introduction

In 1993 scientists at the UNC Wilmington Center for Marine Science Research began studying five tidal creeks in New Hanover County. This project, funded by New Hanover County, the Northeast New Hanover Conservancy, and UNCW, yielded a comprehensive report detailing important findings from 1993-1997, and produced a set of management recommendations for improving creek water quality (Mallin et al. 1998a). Data from that report were later published in the peer-reviewed literature (Mallin et al. 2000a; Mallin et al. 2001) and were used 2006-2009 by the N.C. General Assembly (Senate Bill 1967) as the scientific basis to redefine low density coastal areas as 12% impervious surface coverage instead of the previously used 25% impervious cover. In 1999-2000 Whiskey Creek was added to the matrix of tidal creek watersheds analyzed in our program.

In October 1997 the Center for Marine Science began a project (funded by the City of Wilmington Engineering Department) with the goal of assessing water quality in Wilmington City watersheds under base flow conditions. Also, certain sites were analyzed for sediment heavy metals concentrations (EPA Priority Pollutants). In the past thirteen years we have produced several combined Tidal Creeks – Wilmington City Watersheds reports (Mallin et al. 1998b; 1999; 2000b; 2002a; 2003; 2004; 2006a; 2007; 2008) In fall 2007 New Hanover County decided to stop funding UNCW sampling on the tidal creeks and UNCW has subsequently produced several reports largely focused on City watersheds (2009a; 2010; 2011). In the present report we present results of sampling conducted during 2011, with principal funding by the City of Wilmington. In fall 2008 we were pleased to obtain funding from a private company dedicated to environmentally sound development, the Newland Corporation. The Newland Corporation is designing and building a large residential project called River Lights along River Road between Barnards and Motts Creeks. Through this funding we reinitiated sampling of Motts and Barnards Creeks along River Road. This sampling continued until July 2010, when plans for development of the site were delayed due to the economic slowdown and funding was suspended. As such, there has been no construction near either creek as of yet related to this project.

Water quality parameters analyzed in these nine watersheds include water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, salinity/conductivity, turbidity, total suspended solids (TSS), nitrate, ammonium, total Kjeldahl nitrogen (TKN), total nitrogen (TN), orthophosphate, total phosphorus (TP), chlorophyll *a* and fecal coliform bacteria. Biochemical oxygen demand (BOD5) is measured at selected sites. In 2010, a suite of metals, PAHs and PCBs were assessed in the sediments of Burnt Mill Creek and Hewletts Creeks, and in 2011 the sediments of Barnards and Bradley creeks were sampled for those parameters.

In 2010 Wilmington Stormwater Services also began a collaboration with UNCW to investigate potential sewage spills and leaks and illicit sanitary connections potentially polluting city waterways. The results of samples collected under that effort are also presented.

1.1 Water Quality Methods

Samples were collected on seven occasions at 22 locations within the Wilmington City watersheds between January and December 2011. Field parameters were measured at each site using a YSI 6920 Multiparameter Water Quality Probe (sonde) linked to a YSI 650 MDS display unit. Individual probes within the instrument measured water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, salinity, and conductivity. YSI Model 85 and 55 dissolved oxygen meters were available as back-up meters. The YSI 6920 was calibrated prior to each sampling trip to ensure accurate measurements. The UNCW Aquatic Ecology laboratory is State-Certified for field measurements (temperature, conductivity, dissolved oxygen and pH). At 19 locations samples were collected on-site for laboratory analysis of ammonium, nitrate+nitrite (referred to within as nitrate), total Kjeldahl nitrogen (TKN), orthophosphate, total phosphorus, total suspended solids (TSS), fecal coliform bacteria, and chlorophyll *a*.

The analytical method used by the UNCW Aquatic Ecology Laboratory to measure chlorophyll *a* (EPA Method 445.0) is based on Welschmeyer (1994) and US EPA (1997). Chlorophyll *a* concentrations were determined from the 0.7 micrometer glass fiber filters used for filtering samples for nitrate+nitrite and orthophosphate analyses. All filters were wrapped individually in aluminum foil, placed in an airtight container and stored in a freezer. During the analytical process, the glass filters were separately immersed in 10 ml of a 90% acetone solution and allowed to extract the chlorophyll from the material for three hours; filters were ground using a Teflon grinder prior to extraction. The solution containing the extracted chlorophyll was then analyzed for chlorophyll *a* concentration using a Turner AU-10 fluorometer. This method uses an optimal combination of excitation and emission bandwidths that reduces errors in the acidification technique. UNCW Aquatic Ecology Laboratory is State-certified for laboratory chlorophyll *a* measurements.

Nutrients (nitrate, ammonium, total Kjeldahl nitrogen, total nitrogen, orthophosphate, and total phosphorus) and total suspended solids (TSS) were analyzed by a state-certified contract laboratory using EPA and APHA techniques. We also computed inorganic nitrogen to phosphorus molar ratios for relevant sites (N/P). Fecal coliform concentrations were determined using a membrane filtration (mFC) method (APHA 1995).

For a large wet detention pond (Ann McCrary Pond on Burnt Mill Creek) we collected data from input and outfall stations. We used these data to test for statistically significant differences in pollutant concentrations between pond input and output stations. The data were first tested for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Normally distributed data parameters were tested using the paired-difference t-test, and non-normally distributed data parameters were tested using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. Statistical analyses were conducted using SAS (Schlotzhauer and Littell 1997).

For comparative purposes, North Carolina water quality standards are listed in Appendix A.

2.0 Barnards Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 4,161 acres (1,684 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 17%
Watershed population: Approximately 12,200
Overall water quality: not measured in 2011

The water quality of lower Barnard's Creek is an important issue as single family and multifamily housing construction has occurred upstream of Carolina Beach Rd. in the St. Andrews Dr. area and along Independence Boulevard near the Cape Fear River. Another major housing development (River Lights) is planned for the area east of River Road and between Barnards and Motts Creeks, although no project construction has yet occurred near Barnards Creek. In 2011 UNCW was not funded for water quality studies on lower Barnards Creek. We do have extensive data for this site under a previous funding arrangement from 1999 – 2007 (see the following website for reports on-line: http://www.uncw.edu/cms/aelab/.

Sediment Metals and Chemical Toxins in Barnards Creek

Wilmington Stormwater Services and UNCW are interested in potential toxicants buried in or adhering to the creek sediments in City watersheds. Thus, we collected sediment samples on one occasion throughout Barnards Creek for analysis of sediment metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) as well some basic chemical parameters including total nitrogen, total phosphorus and total organic carbon. The State of North Carolina has no official guidelines for sediment concentrations of metals and organic pollutants in reference to protection of invertebrates, fish and wildlife. However, academic researchers (Long et al. 1995) have produced guidelines (Table 2.2) based on extensive field and laboratory testing that are used by the US Environmental Protection Agency in their National Coastal Condition Report II (US EPA 2004).

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are organic compounds with a fused ring structure. PAHs with two to five rings are of considerable environmental concern. They are compounds of crude and refined petroleum products and coal and are also produced by incomplete combustion of organic materials (US EPA 2000). They are characteristic of urban runoff as they derive from tire wear, automobile oil and exhaust particles, and leaching of asphalt roads. Other sources include domestic and industrial waste discharge, atmospheric deposition, and spilled fossil fuels. They are carcinogenic to humans, and bioconcentrate in aquatic animals. In these organisms they form carcinogenic and mutagenic intermediaries and cause tumors in fish (US EPA 2000).

Table 2.2. Guideline values for sediment metals and organic pollutant concentrations potentially harmful to aquatic life (Long et al. 1995; U.S. EPA 2004). ERL = (Effects range low). Concentrations below the ERL are those in which harmful effects on aquatic communities are rarely observed. ERM = (Effects range median). Concentrations above the ERM are those in which harmful effects would frequently occur. Concentrations between the ERL and ERM are those in which harmful effects occasionally occur.

Metal	ERL	ERM
Dry wt., ppm = µg/g = mg/kg		
Arsenic (As)	8.2	70.0
Cadmium (Cd)	1.2	9.6
Chromium (Cr)	81.0	370.0
Copper (Cu)	34.0	270.0
Lead (Pb)	46.7	218.0
Mercury (Hg)	0.15	0.71
Nickel (Ni)	20.9	51.6
Silver (Ag)	1.0	3.7
Zinc (Zn)	150.0	410.0
Dry wt., ppb = ng/g = µg/kg		
Total PCBs	22.7	180.0
Total DDT	1.6	46.1
Total PAHs	4,020	44,800
Phenanthrene	240	1,500
Pyrene	665	2,600
Flouranthene	600	5,100
Benzo(a)pyrene	430	1,600
B(a)anthracene	261	1,600
Chrysene	384	2,800

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) have been banned for use in the United States since 1979. They are closely related to many chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides, and were used industrially as insulating fluids, heat transfer fluids, plasicizers, lubricants and hydraulic fluids (US EPA 2000). They are persistent in the environment and bioaccumulate in the food chain, and individual PCBs cause health problems including developmental impacts in children, hepatotoxicity, neurotoxicity and carcinogenicity (US EPA 2000).

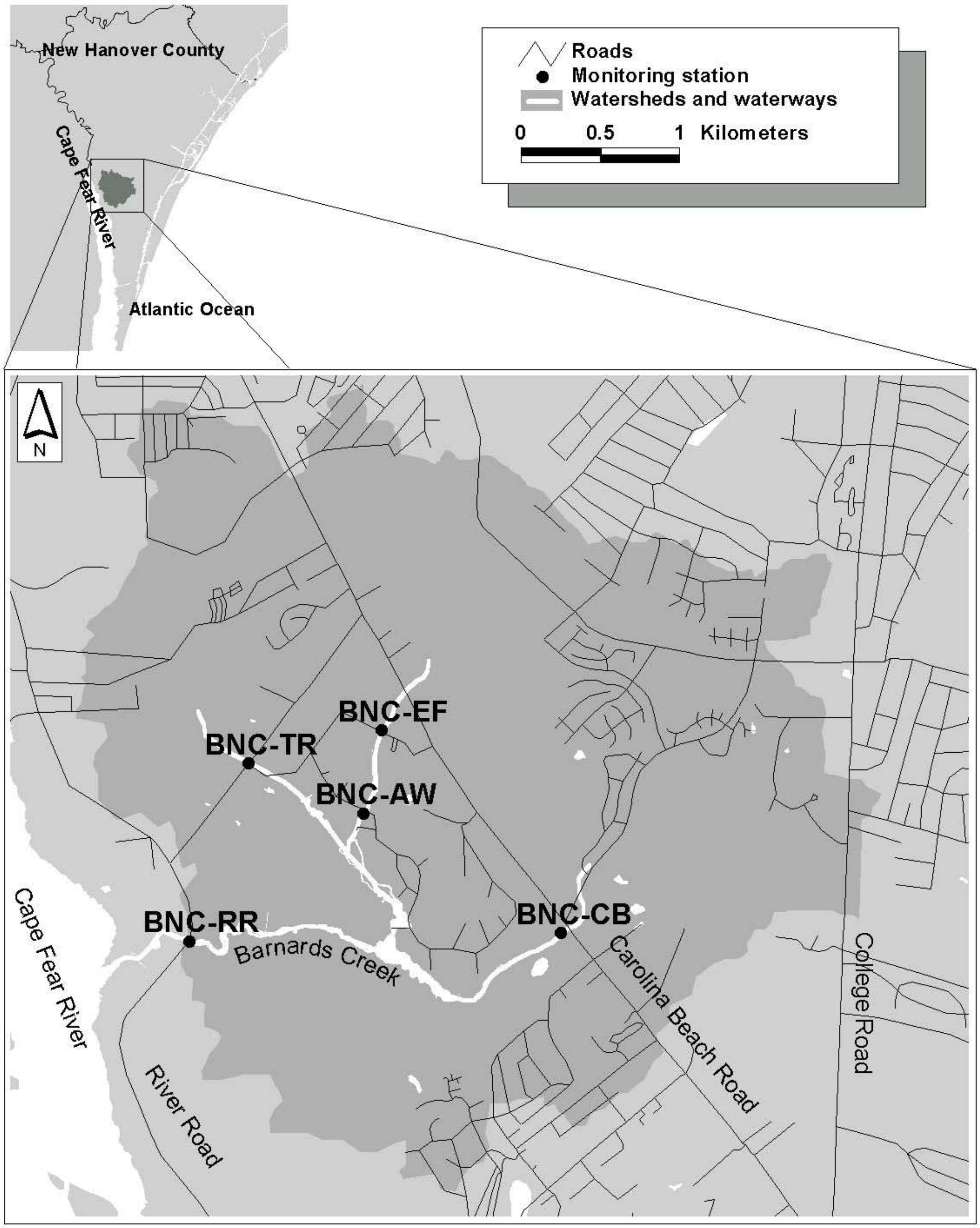
Barnards Creek sediments were sampled at three sites on June 16. Metals were not problematic, although at one site (River Road) the PAH Benzo(a)pyrene was elevated above the Effects Range Low (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3. Concentrations of sediment metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in Barnards Creek, 2011. Concentrations in bold type exceed the level at which harmful effects to benthic organisms may occur according to Long et al. (1995).

Parameter	BNC-CB	BNC-EF	BNC-RR
	Dry wt., ppm = µg/g = mg/kg		
Antimony	<0.131	<0.142	<0.276
Arsenic	<0.131	<0.142	<0.276
Beryllium	<0.131	<0.142	0.587
Cadmium	<0.131	<0.142	<0.276
Chromium	0.832	1.30	31.1
Copper	0.670	12.5	3.63
Lead	3.57	5.24	9.22
Mercury	<0.003	0.0040	0.0200
Nickel	0.294	0.572	6.40
Selenium	<0.131	<0.142	<0.276
Silver	<0.131	<0.142	<0.276
Thallium	<0.131	<0.142	<0.276
Zinc	6.35	35.2	16.8
	Dry wt., ppb = ng/g = µg/kg		
Total PAH	BDL	BDL	618
Phenanthrene	BDL	BDL	BDL
Fluoranthene	BDL	BDL	BDL
Pyrene	BDL	BDL	BDL
B(a)anthracene	BDL	BDL	BDL
Chrysene	BDL	BDL	BDL
Benzo(b)fluoranthene	BDL	BDL	BDL
Benzo(a)pyrene	BDL	BDL	**618**
Total PCBs	BDL	BDL	BDL
TN	110.0	102.0	257.0
TP	14.9	27.1	36.0
TOC	73.1	69.8	34.4

BDL = below detection limit

Figure 2.1 Barnards Creek watershed



3.0 Bradley Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 4,631 acres (1,874 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 23%
Watershed population: Approximately 16,470
Overall water quality: fair-poor
Problematic pollutants: fecal bacteria, occasional low dissolved oxygen, occasional algal blooms

The Bradley Creek watershed has been a principal location for Clean Water Trust Fund mitigation activities, including the purchase and renovation of Airlie Gardens by the County. The ongoing redevelopment of the former Duck Haven property bordering Eastwood Road is of great concern in terms of its potential water quality impacts to the creek. This creek has been one of the most polluted in New Hanover County, particularly by fecal coliform bacteria (Mallin et al. 2000a). Three upstream stations (BC-SB, BC-NB and BC-CA) were sampled in the past year, both fresh and brackish (Fig. 3.1).

Turbidity was not a problem during 2011; the standard of 25 NTU was not exceeded on any sampling occasion (Table 3.1). Total suspended solids (TSS) were elevated on two occasions at BC-NB; in June when it was 24.9 mg/L and November when it was 37.4 mg/L. At BC-CA it was very high on one occasion; 49.2 mg/L in August (there are no NC ambient standards for TSS). There was a minor issue with low dissolved oxygen (hypoxia) upstream, with Station BC-NB having DO < 5.0 mg/L on two occasions during the seven sampling occasions (Appendix B).

Ammonium concentrations were low on all sampling occasions. Nitrate concentrations were highest at station BC-CA, and higher than the previous year especially at BC-CA (Table 3.1). Total nitrogen concentrations were low to moderate at all times sampled. Orthophosphate concentrations increased over 2010 in general, particularly at BC-CA; TP followed a similar pattern as orthophosphate. Bradley Creek station BC-SB hosted two significant algal blooms of 65 and 46 µg/L chlorophyll *a* in April and June, respectively. Nitrogen to phosphorus ratios at BC-NB and BC-SB were low (3-5) indicating that inputs of inorganic nitrogen are likely to stimulate the algal blooms.

Fecal coliform bacteria counts were excessive at all three stations sampled during 2011. The NC contact standard was exceeded on 100% of occasions sampled at BC-SB, 86% of occasions sampled at BC-CA, and 29% of occasions sampled at BC-NB. The geometric means of the fecal coliform counts ranged from under the standard (189 CFU/100 mL at BC-NB) to >7X the standard (1,477 CFU/100 mL at BC-CA, Table 3.1). Fecal coliform contamination in 2011 was worse than the previous year.

Table 3.1 Water quality parameter concentrations at Bradley Creek sampling stations, 2011. Data as mean (SD) / range, N/P ratio as mean/median, fecal coliform bacteria as geometric mean / range, n = 7 months.

Station	BC-CA	BC-NB	BC-SB
Salinity (ppt)	0.1 (0.0) 0.1-0.3	23.4 (9.8) 11.0-32.5	11.7 (8.4) 2.0-20.4
Dissolved Oxygen (mg/L)	6.5 (1.5) 4.0-8.0	6.0 (1.6) 4.1-8.6	7.1 (2.4) 4.0-10.1
Turbidity (NTU)	2 (1) 1-3	8 (2) 5-11	8 (3) 5-13
TSS (mg/L)	9.3 (17.7) 1.4-49.2	21.6 (8.0) 13.2-37.4	15.8 (5.9) 8.0-24.5
Nitrate (mg/L)	0.214 (0.173) 0.070-0.570	0.020 (0.017) 0.010-0.050	0.021 (0.020) 0.010-0.060
Ammonium (mg/L)	0.039 (0.024) 0.010-0.070	0.010 (0.005) 0.005-0.020	0.021 (0.032) 0.005-0.090
TN (mg/L)	0.454 (0.290) 0.050-0.970	0.370 (0.181) 0.050-0.600	0.416 (0.301) 0.050-1.000
Orthophosphate (mg/L)	0.069 (0.060) 0.010-0.170	0.023 (0.013) 0.010-0.040	0.026 (0.014) 0.010-0.050
TP (mg/L)	0.084 (0.057) 0.010-0.180	0.029 (0.011) 0.010-0.040	0.050 (0.026) 0.030-0.100
N/P	21.3 7.8	3.7 3.3	4.7 3.0
Chlorophyll *a* (µg/L)	5 (7) 0-21	8 (4) 2-15	20 (25) 2-65
Fecal coliforms (CFU/100 mL)	1,477 172-5,300	189 55-2,700	940 310-3,100

Sediment Metals and Chemical Toxins

We collected sediment samples on May 31 throughout Bradley Creek for analysis of sediment metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) as well some basic chemical parameters including total nitrogen, total phosphorus and total organic carbon. Discussion of the importance of these parameters and what their concentrations mean is in the previous chapter on Barnards Creek.

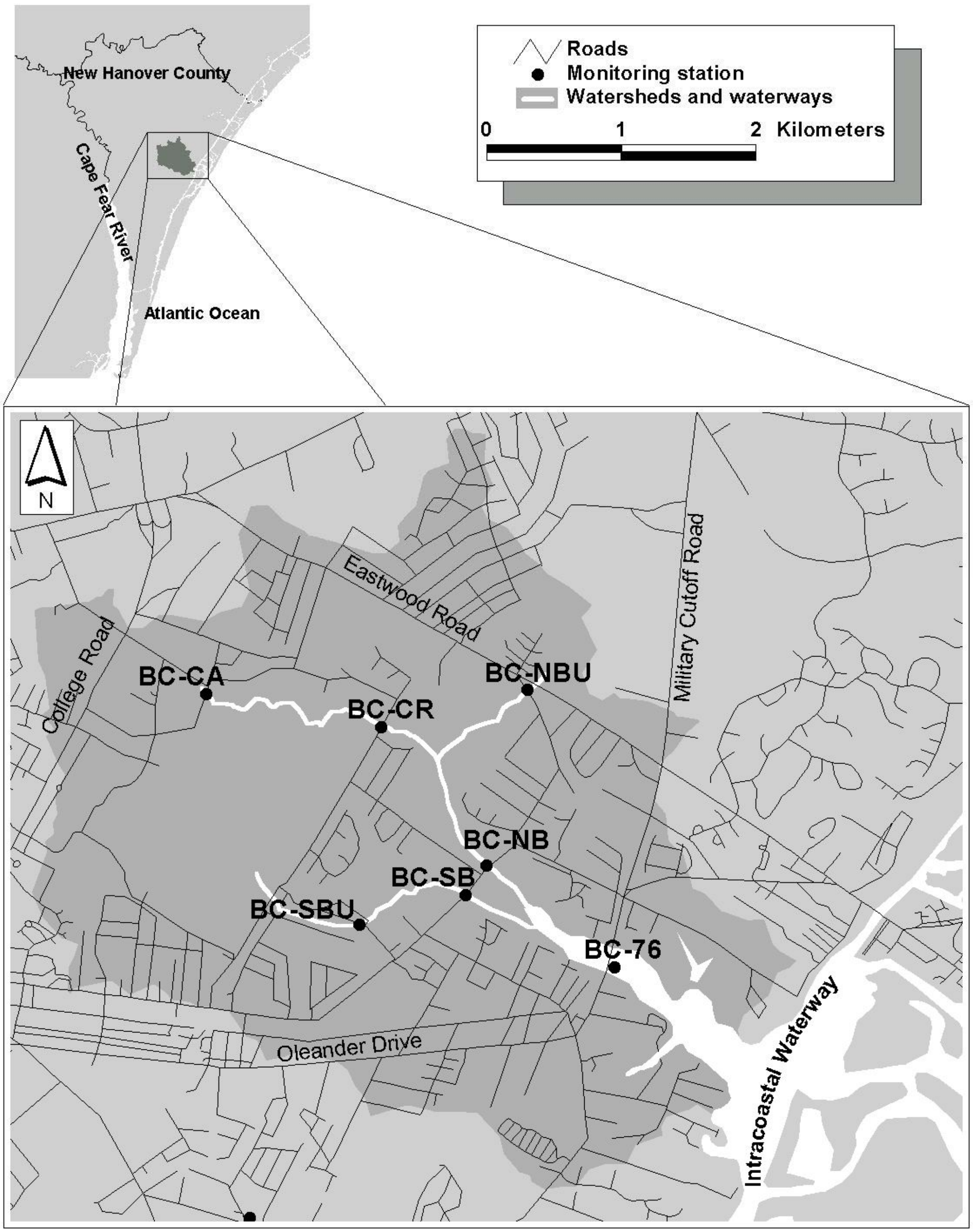
Results (Table 3.2) showed that two tributary sites, BC-NBU (upper north branch) and BC-CA (creek passing under College Acres Ave.) had excessive concentrations of total PAHs, consisting mainly of Fluoranthene, Phenanthrene, Pyrene, Benzo(a)anthracene, and Chrysene. Metals were not problematic in Bradley Creek sediments except for the marina site BC-76, where arsenic and copper were both at problematic levels, exceeding the Effects Range Low (Long 1995).

Table 3.2. Concentrations of sediment metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in Bradley Creek, 2011. Concentrations in bold type exceed the level at which harmful effects to benthic organisms may occur according to Long et al. (1995).

Parameter	BC-76	BC-NBU	BC-NB	BC-SBU	BC-SB	BC-CA	BC-CR
			Dry wt., ppm = µg/g = mg/kg				
Antimony	<8.47	<3.05	<3.32	<3.02	<4.12	<2.71	<2.80
Arsenic	**14.0**	<3.05	<3.32	<3.02	5.07	<2.71	<2.80
Beryllium	<8.47	<3.05	<3.32	<3.02	<4.12	<2.71	<2.80
Cadmium	<8.47	<3.05	<3.32	<3.02	<4.12	<2.71	<2.80
Chromium	40.4	<3.05	5.15	<3.02	6.60	<2.71	<2.80
Copper	**71.0**	<3.05	7.45	<3.02	9.87	<2.71	<2.80
Lead	20.7	<3.05	8.93	**<**3.02	7.97	<2.71	<2.80
Mercury	0.0550	0.0030	0.0050	0.0030	0.0150	0.0030	<0.0030
Nickel	11.2	<3.05	<3.32	<3.02	<4.12	<2.71	<2.80
Selenium	<8.47	<3.05	<3.32	<3.02	<4.12	<2.71	<2.80
Silver	<8.47	<3.05	<3.32	<3.02	<4.12	<2.71	<2.80
Thallium	<8.47	<3.05	<3.32	<3.02	<4.12	<2.71	<2.80
Zinc	113.0	12.1	13.4	6.23	29.6	16.3	3.13
			Dry wt., ppb = ng/g = µg/kg				
Total PAH	BDL	**4,896**	BDL	BDL	BDL	**5,082**	BDL
Phenanthrene	BDL	**332**	BDL	BDL	BDL	**306**	BDL
Fluoranthene	BDL	**1,170**	BDL	BDL	BDL	**1,120**	BDL
Pyrene	BDL	**877**	BDL	BDL	BDL	**961**	BDL
B(a)anthracene	BDL	**500**	BDL	BDL	BDL	**366**	BDL
Chrysene	BDL	**309**	BDL	BDL	BDL	**396**	BDL
B(a)pyrene	BDL	**324**	BDL	BDL	BDL	**397**	BDL
Total PCBs	BDL	BDL	BDL	BDL	BDL	BDL	BDL
TN	208.0	13.4	50.1	39.5	45.5	9.87	2.65
TP	80.8	29.6	69.3	31.0	57.9	65.5	25.2
TOC	52.2	38.3	23.9	45.6	70.6	24.1	33.2

BDL = below detection limit

Figure 3.1. Bradley Creek watershed and sampling sites.



4.0 Burnt Mill Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 4,252 acres (1,721 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 36%
Watershed population: Approximately 23,700
Overall water quality: poor
Problematic pollutants: Fecal bacteria, algal blooms, some low dissolved oxygen, high sediment PAH, lead, zinc and mercury concentrations

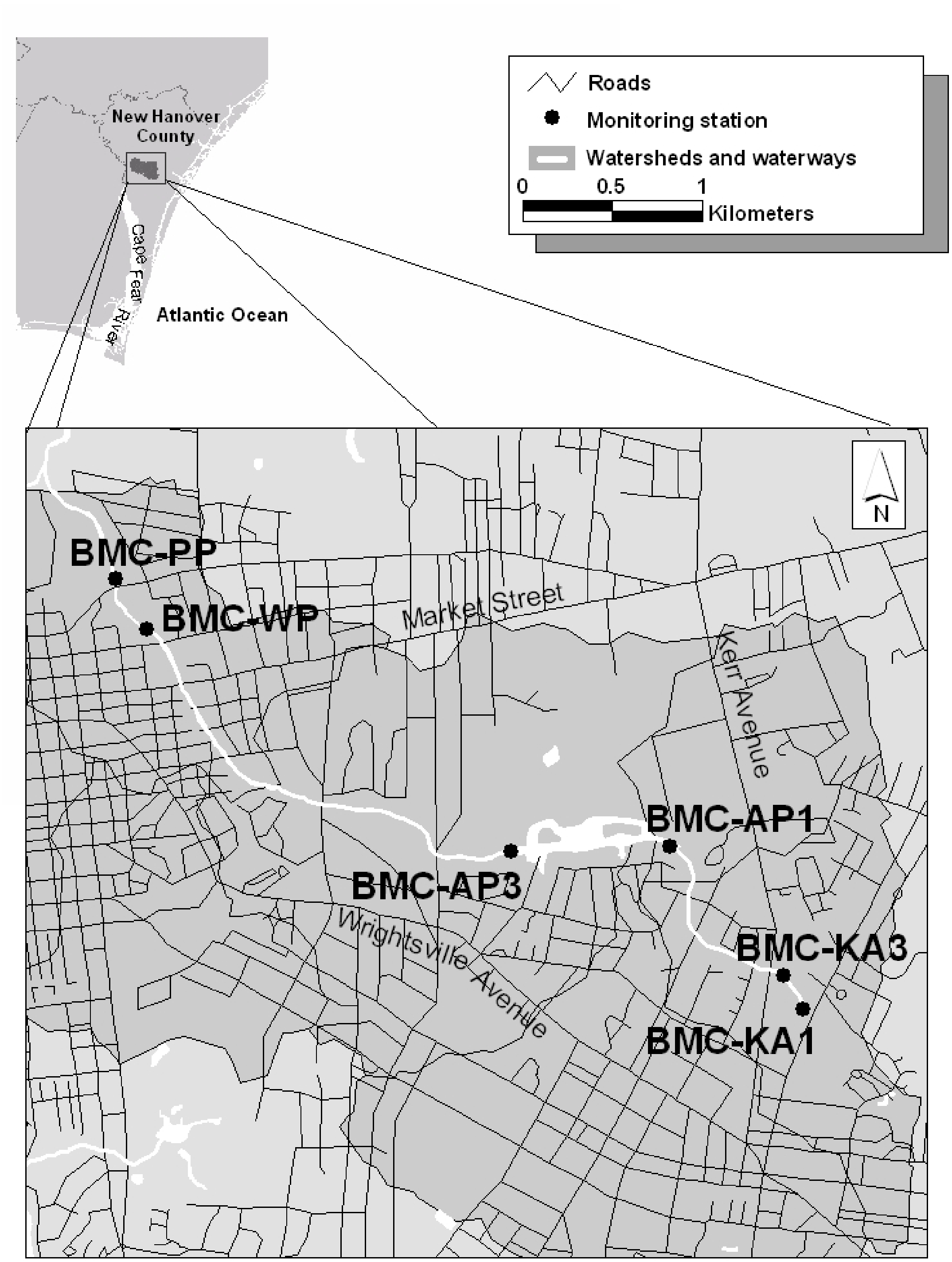
Introduction

A prominent feature in the Burnt Mill Creek watershed (Fig. 4.1) is the Ann McCrary Pond, which is a large (28.8 acres) regional wet detention pond draining 1,785 acres, with a large apartment complex (Mill Creek Apts.) at the upper end. The pond itself has periodically hosted thick growths of submersed aquatic vegetation, with *Hydrilla verticillata, Egeria densa, Alternanthera philoxeroides, Ceratophyllum demersum* and *Valliseneria americana* having been common at times. There have been efforts to control this growth, including addition of triploid grass carp as grazers. The ability of this detention pond to reduce suspended sediments and fecal coliform bacteria, and its failure to reduce nutrient concentrations, was detailed in a scientific journal article (Mallin et al. 2002b). Numerous waterfowl utilize this pond as well. Burnt Mill Creek has been studied by a number of researchers, and recent water quality results of these continuing studies have been published in technical reports and scientific journals (Perrin et al. 2008; Mallin et al. 2009a; Mallin et al. 2009b; Mallin et al. 2010; 2011).

Methods

<u>Sampling Sites</u>: During 2011 samples were collected from three stations on the creek (Fig. 4.1). In the upper creek Ann McCrary Pond, a large regional wet detention pond on Randall Parkway was sampled just upstream (BMC-AP1) and about 40 m downstream (BMC-AP3) of the pond (Fig. 4.1). Several km downstream of Ann McCrary Pond is Station BMC-PP, located at the Princess Place bridge over the creek, respectively (Fig. 4.1). This is a main stem station in what is considered to be the mid-to-lower portion of Burnt Mill Creek, in a mixed residential and retail area.

Figure 4.1. Burnt Mill Creek watershed and water quality sampling sites.



Results and Discussion

The Upper Creek

About one km downstream from Kerr Avenue along Randall Parkway is the large regional wet detention pond known as Ann McCrary Pond. Data were collected at the input (BMC-AP1) and outflow (BMC-AP3) stations on seven occasions in 2011. Dissolved oxygen concentrations fell below the State standard of 5.0 mg/L on two occasions at BMC-AP1. The State standard for turbidity in freshwater is 50 NTU; there were no exceedences of this value in our 2011 samples. Suspended solids concentrations were not unusually high on any sampling occasion at either BMC-AP1 or at BMC-AP3 leaving this large regional pond; there was no statistical difference between inflow and outflow (Table 4.1). Fecal coliform concentrations entering Ann McCrary Pond at BMC-AP1 were relatively high (Table 4.1), possibly a result of pet waste (very visible to the observer) runoff from the Mill Creek apartment complex and runoff from urban upstream areas (including the Kerr Avenue wetland). Over the sampling period four of the seven samples collected at BMC-AP1 had counts exceeding 200 CFU/100 mL, whereas two of the samples from BMC-AP3 exceeded the standard. This did not result in a statistically significant decrease, though, due to the high variability (Table 4.1).

There were no major algal blooms at BMC-AP1 that exceeded the North Carolina water quality standard of 40 µg/L during the study, whereas at BMC AP-3 there was one bloom that exceeded the State standard (87 µg/L in August), and one lesser bloom of 32 µg/L in March. Statistically, there were no significant differences in chlorophyll *a* concentrations exiting the pond compared with entering the pond (Table 4.1). Concentrations of ammonium, total nitrogen, orthophosphate and total phosphorus did not significantly differ between entering and exiting the pond. However, nitrate concentrations showed a statistically significant decrease in passage through the pond (Table 4.1). Average dissolved oxygen significantly increased through the pond (nearly doubling), probably because of in-pond photosynthesis and aeration by passage over the final dam at the outfall. There was a significant increase in pH, probably due to utilization of CO_2 during photosynthesis in the pond.

Lower Burnt Mill Creek: The Princess Place location (BMC-PP) was the only lower creek station sampled in 2011. One parameter that is key to aquatic life health is dissolved oxygen. Dissolved oxygen at BMC-PP in 2011 was substandard on two occasions, in August and September. Turbidity concentrations at BMC-PP did not exceed the State standard on any of our sampling occasions. Total suspended solids (TSS) concentrations have no ambient state standard. Based on our long term observances in the lower Cape Fear River area, for the lower Coastal Plain a reasonable TSS “interest concentration” is 25 mg/L. In June 2011 this location registered TSS of 58.5 mg/L, and in July 23.5 mg/L.

In 2011 BMC-PP showed two major algal blooms well exceeding the North Carolina water quality standard for chlorophyll *a* of 40 µg/L. In June chlorophyll a was 382 µg/L and in July it was 127 µg/L (Table 4.1). Algal blooms can cause disruptions in the food web, depending upon the species present (Burkholder 2001).

An important question is what drives algal bloom formation in Burnt Mill Creek? Nitrate concentrations were somewhat elevated at BMC-PP, while phosphorus concentrations were low. Examination of inorganic nitrogen to phosphorus ratios (Table 4.1) shows that median N/P ratios were 10.6 and mean ratios were 16.1. In waters where the N/P ratio is well below 16 (the Redfield Ratio for algal nutrient composition) it is generally considered that algal production is limited by the availability of nitrogen (i.e. phosphorus levels are sufficient); where N/P ratios are well above 16, additions of phosphate should encourage algal blooms. If such values are near the Redfield Ratio, as at BMC-PP, inputs of either N or P could drive an algal bloom. Thus, there is a need for control of inputs of both N and P to help reduce algal blooms in lower Burnt Mill Creek.

Table 4.1. Water quality data in Burnt Mill Creek, 2011, as mean (standard deviation)/range. Fecal coliforms as geometric mean; N/P as mean/median.

Parameter	BMC-AP1	BMC-AP3	BMC-PP
DO (mg/L)	5.8 (2.0) 3.2-9.2	10.3 (1.4)** 8.4-12.4	5.6 (1.2) 3.9-7.5
Cond. (μS/cm)	292 (18) 267-316	230 (36)** 179-285	860 (830) 351-2,195
pH	7.1 (0.1) 6.9-7.2	8.2 (0.5)** 7.7-9.0	7.3 (0.2) 7.2-7.6
Turbidity (NTU)	5 (3) 2-9	6 (5) 3-16	5 (3) 2-9
TSS (mg/L)	4.2 (3.8) 1.4-10.4	7.5 (5.4) 1.4-18.0	14.0 (21.1) 1.3-58.5
Nitrate (mg/L)	0.104 (0.070) 0.010-0.180	0.023 (0.02)* 0.010-0.070	0.159 (0.075) 0.040-0.230
Ammonium (mg/L)	0.031 (0.025) 0.010-0.070	0.021 (0.020) 0.010-0.060	0.046 (0.026) 0.010-0.090
TN (mg/L)	0.387 (0.208) 0.150-0.680	0.351 (0.327) 0.050-0.900	1.316 (1.884) 0.160-5.440
OrthoPhos. (mg/L)	0.013 (0.008) 0.010-0.030	0.011 (0.004) 0.010-0.020	0.051 (0.028) 0.010-0.090
TP (mg/L)	0.019 (0.015) 0.010-0.050	0.039 (0.027) 0.010-0.090	0.171 (0.229) 0.030-0.680
N/P molar ratio	29.6 33.2	9.5 4.4	16.1 10.6
Chlor. *a* (μg/L)	9 (11) 1-32	26 (29) 1-87	77 (142) 1-382
FC (CFU/100 mL)	371 28-56,000	69 10-400	505 19-18,000

* Statistically significant difference between inflow and outflow at p<0.05; ** p < 0.01.

Important from a public health perspective are the excessive fecal coliform bacteria counts, which maintained geometric means at BMC-PP well in excess of the State standard for human contact waters (200 CFU/100 mL). Fecal coliform counts were greater than the State standard on 71% of occasions sampled at Princess Place. It is notable that fecal coliform bacteria counts increased along the passage from BMC-AP3 (geometric mean 69 CFU/100 mL) to the Princess Place location (geometric mean 505 CFU/100 mL; Fig. 4.2), as in previous years. It is likewise notable that nutrient concentrations increased from the outflow from Ann McCrary Pond downstream to the lower main stem station (Table 4.1; Fig. 4.3).

Figure 4.2. Fecal coliform bacteria geometric means for Burnt Mill Creek, 2011

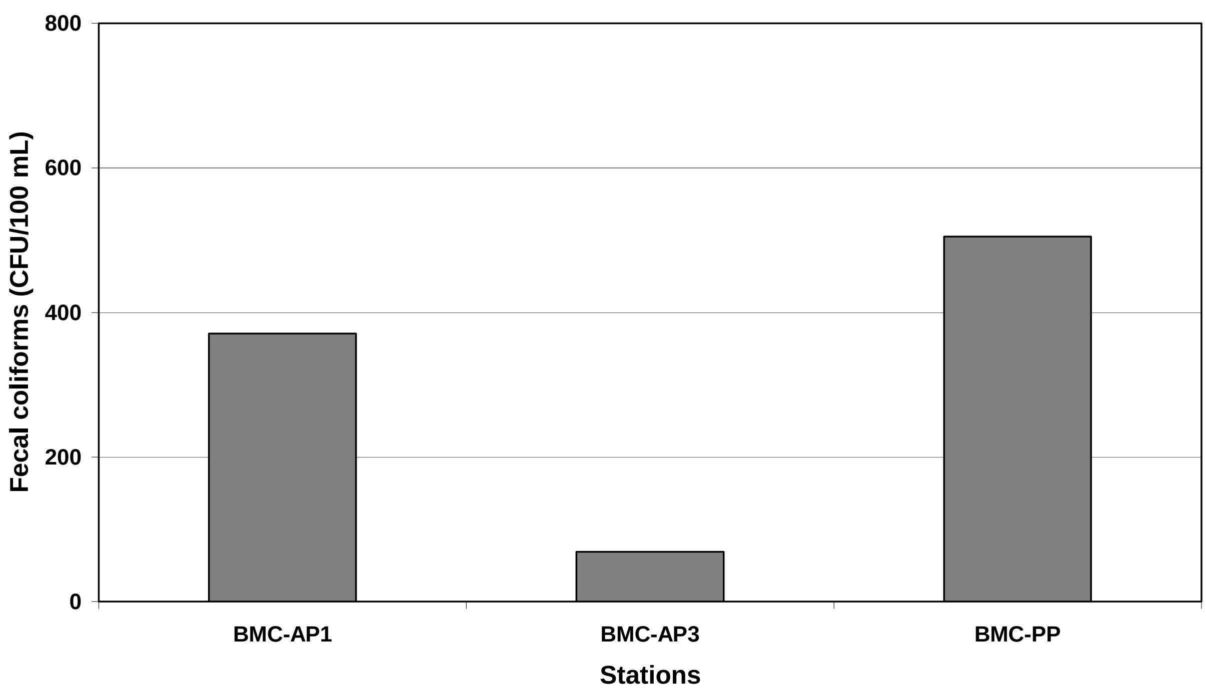
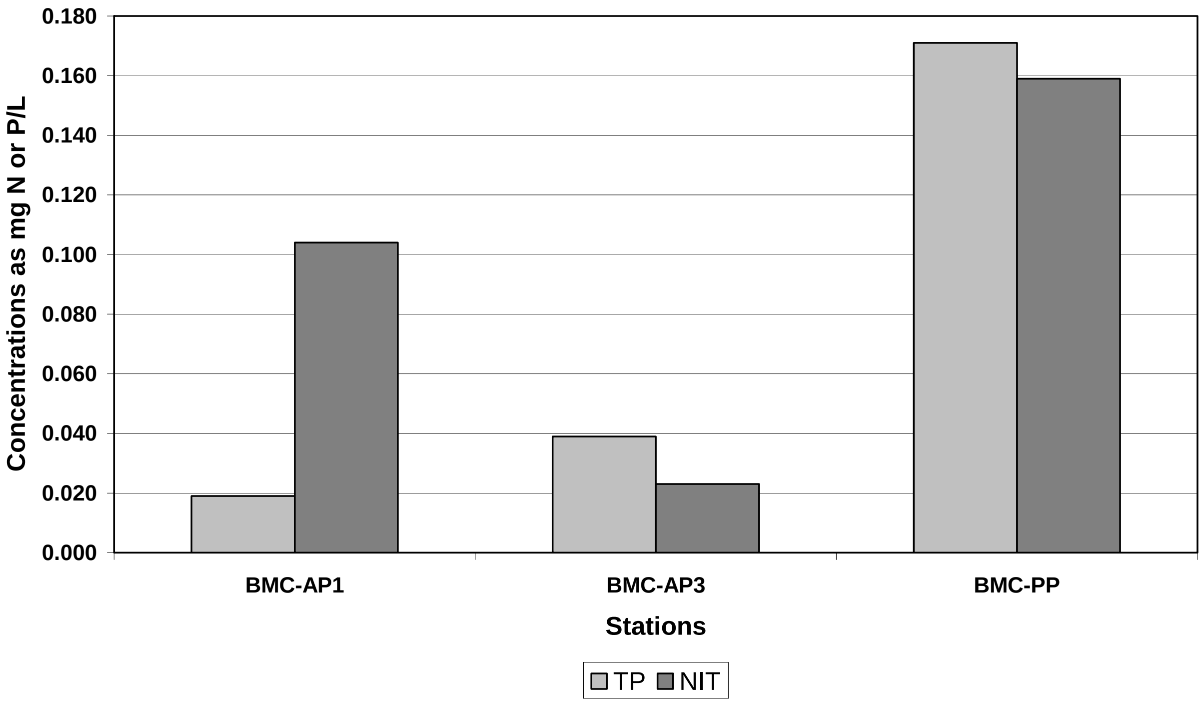


Figure 4.3. Average total phosphorus and nitrate concentrations by station for Burnt Mill Creek, 2011



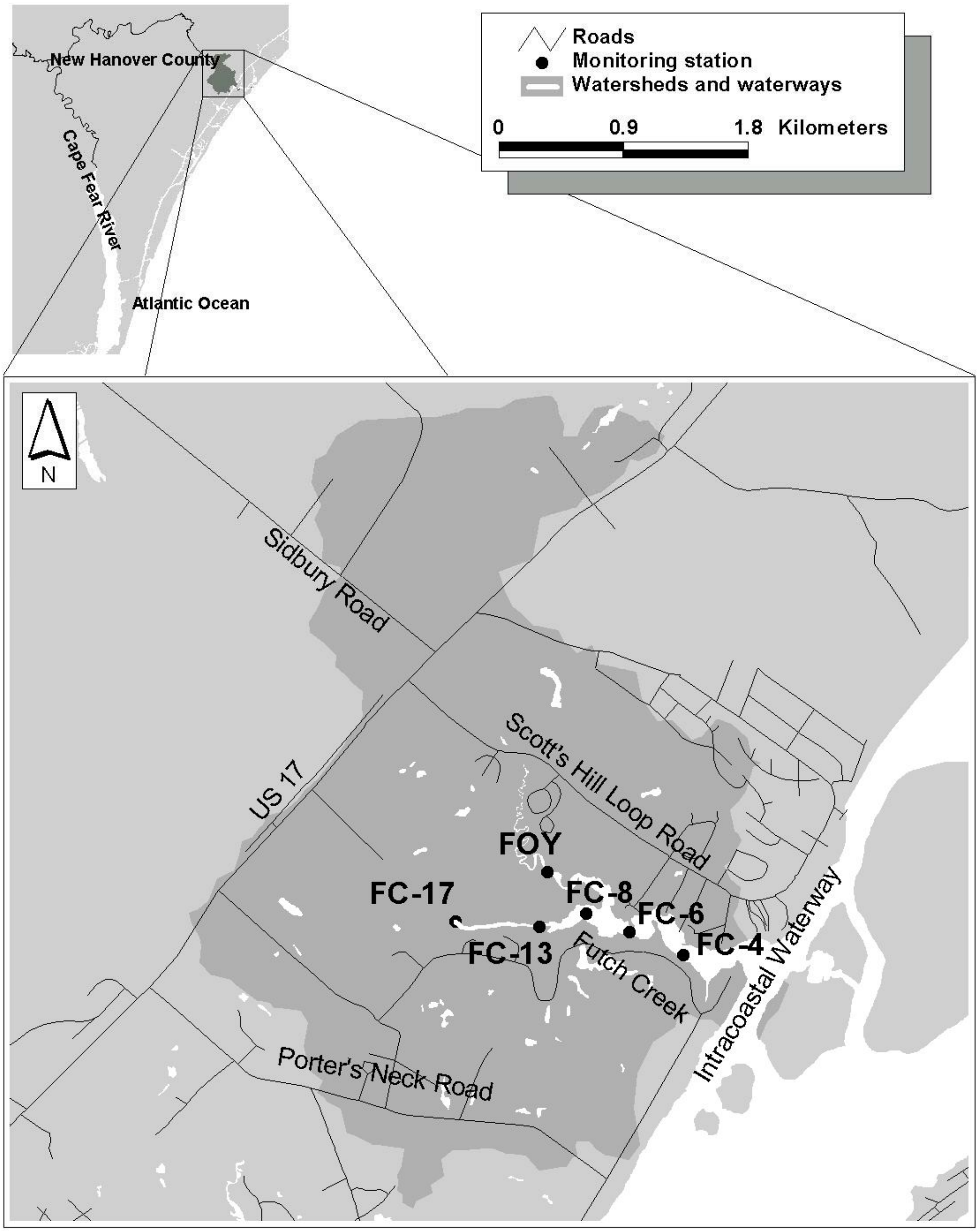
To summarize, in most years Burnt Mill Creek has problems with low dissolved oxygen (hypoxia) at some of the stations. Algal blooms remained a problem in the creek during 2011. The N/P ratios in the creek indicate that inputs of either nitrogen or phosphorus are likely to stimulate algal bloom formation, depending upon season and inputs. It is notable that nutrient concentrations increase from the lower portion of the regional Ann McCrary wet detention pond as one moves downstream toward the lower creek. An important human health issue is the high fecal bacteria counts found at most sampling stations, with the exception of BMC-AP3 below the detention pond. As NPDES point source discharges are not directed into this creek, the fecal bacteria (and nutrient) loading appears to be caused either by non-point source stormwater runoff, illegal discharges, or leakage from sanitary sewer lines. We note that strong statistical correlations between fecal coliform counts, TSS, BOD and rainfall have been demonstrated for this creek (Mallin et al. 2009b). As this is one of the most heavily-developed creeks in the Wilmington area, it also remains one of the most polluted.

5.0 Futch Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 3,247 acres (1,314 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: >11%
Watershed population: 3,670

Six stations were sampled by the University of North Carolina Wilmington in Futch Creek from 1993 through 2007. UNCW was not funded by the County to sample Futch Creek in 2011. We present the above information and map below purely for informational purposes. Water quality information for 2008-2011 is available on the County Planning Department website: http://www.nhcgov.com/AgnAndDpt/PLNG/Pages/WaterQualityMonitoring.aspx.

Figure 5.1. Futch Creek watershed and sampling sites.



6.0 Greenfield Lake Water Quality

Snapshot
Watershed area: 2,551 acres (1,032 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 36%
Watershed population: 10,630
Overall water quality: Poor
Problematic pollutants: Fecal bacteria, low dissolved oxygen in tributaries and the upper lake, high BOD, algal blooms

Three tributaries of Greenfield Lake were sampled only for physical field parameters in 2011 (Table 6.1, Fig. 6.1). All three tributaries suffered from hypoxia, as all three sites, GL-LB (creek at Lake Branch Drive), GL-LC (creek beside Lakeshore Commons) and GL-JRB (Jumping Run Branch) showed average dissolved oxygen concentrations below the state standard (DO < 5.0 mg/L). Dissolved oxygen levels were below the state standard of 5.0 mg/L on seven of seven occasions at GL-LB, five of seven occasions at GL-LC, and on four of seven occasions at Jumping Run Branch GL-JRB (Table 6.1; Appendix B). Turbidity concentrations were generally low in the tributary stations, with no violations of the freshwater standard of 50 NTU (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Mean and (standard deviation) / range of selected field water quality parameters in tributary stations of Greenfield Lake, 2011. n = 7.

Parameter	GL-JRB	GL-LB	GL-LC
DO (mg/L)	4.7 (3.3) 1.4-9.9	1.4 (1.4) 0.5-4.4	3.5 (2.4) 0.9-6.8
Turbidity (NTU)	3 (3) 1-9	2 (1) 1-4	3 (1) 2-5

Three in-lake stations were sampled (Table 6.2). Station GL-2340 represents an area receiving a considerable influx of urban/suburban runoff, GL-YD is downstream and receives some outside impacts, and GL-P is at Greenfield Lake Park, away from inflowing streams but in a high-use waterfowl area (Fig. 6.1). Low dissolved oxygen was only a problem at GL-2340, with concentrations below the state standard of 5.0 mg/L on two of seven occasions, and DO was below standard on one occasion at GL-P (see also Section 6.1). Turbidity was below the state standard on all sampling occasions. However, total suspended solids were high (>25 mg/L) on several occasions from June to September, usually coinciding with algal blooms. Fecal coliform concentrations were improved from 2010 and only problematic at GL-2340 where they exceeded the State standard on two of seven sampling occasions; there was only one violation each in 2011 at GL-P and GL-YD.

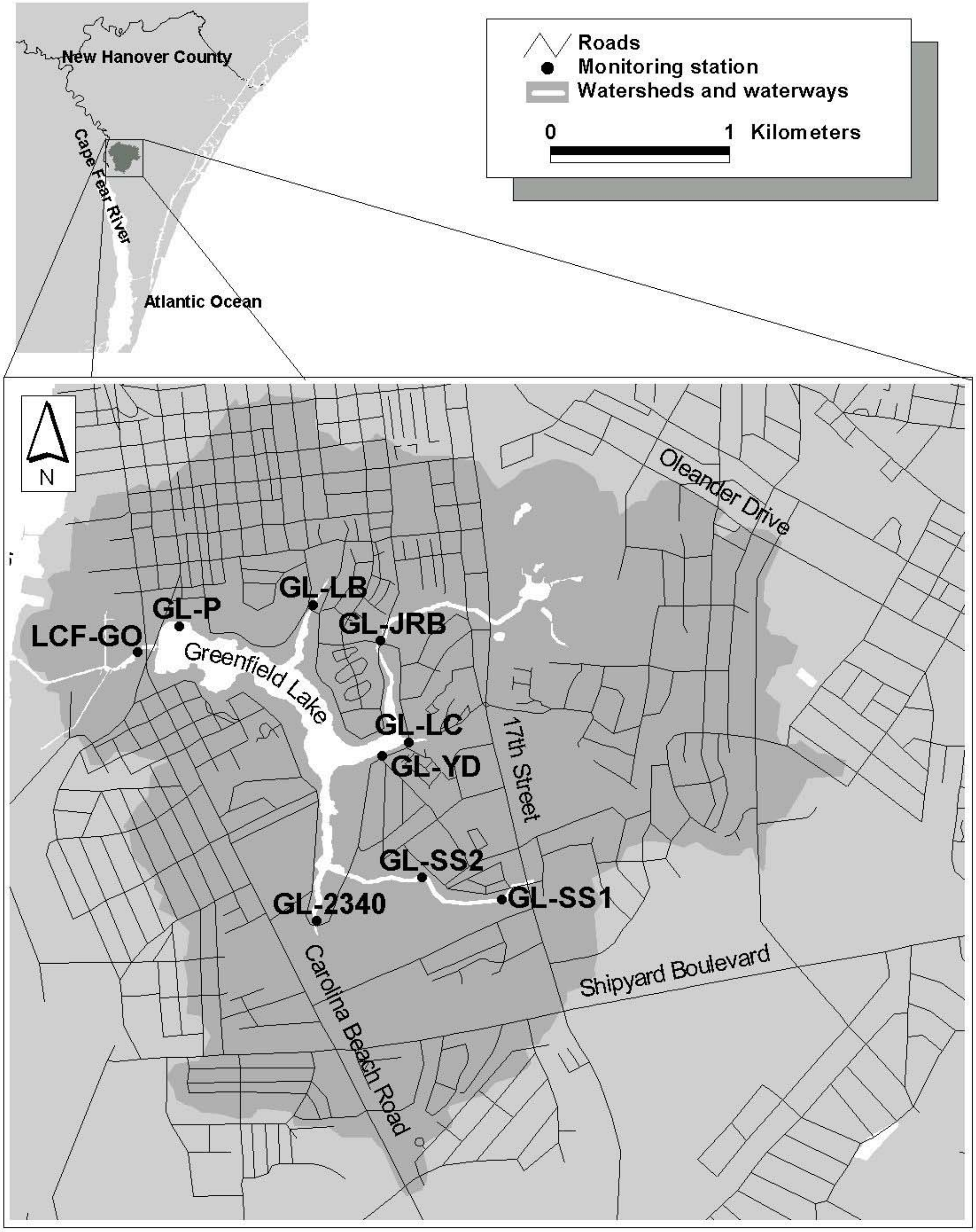
Total nitrogen (TN) concentrations as well as concentrations of inorganic nitrogen (nitrate and ammonium) were highest at the upstream station GL-2340, which receives input from tributaries. Ammonium levels in the lake were generally low, as were nitrate concentrations. Total phosphorus (TP) concentrations were highest at GL-2340 among stations, although none of the TP values were remarkable, and orthophosphate was generally low (Table 6.2). Inorganic N/P molar ratios can be computed from ammonium, nitrate, and orthophosphate data and can help determine what the potential limiting nutrient can be in a water body. Ratios well below 16 (the Redfield ratio) can indicate potential nitrogen limitation, and ratios well above 16 can indicate potential phosphorus limitation (Hecky and Kilham 1988). Based on the low mean and median N/P ratios (Table 6.2), phytoplankton growth in Greenfield Lake was limited by nitrogen (i.e. inputs of nitrogen can cause algal blooms) except in the uppermost station GL-2340. Our previous bioassay experiments indicated that nitrogen was usually the limiting nutrient in this lake (Mallin et al. 1999).

Phytoplankton blooms are periodically problematic in Greenfield Lake (Table 6.1), and usually consist of green or blue-green algal species, or both together. These blooms have occurred during all seasons, but are primarily a problem in spring and summer. Four blooms exceeding the North Carolina water quality standard of 40 μg/L of chlorophyll *a* occurred at GL-YD, three at GL-P, and two at GL-2340 in 2011, which is an increase from 2010. Average biochemical oxygen demand (BOD5) for 2011 was high (3.9-5.1) among the three sites sampled (Table 6.1), which was higher compared to the elevated BOD concentrations found last year. As phytoplankton (floating algae) are easily-decomposed sources of BOD, the blooms in this lake continue to be a periodic source of low dissolved oxygen.

Table 6.2. Mean and (standard deviation) / range of water quality parameters in Greenfield Lake sampling stations, 2011. Fecal coliforms given as geometric mean, N/P ratio as mean / median; n = 7 samples collected.

Parameter	GL-2340	GL-YD	GL-P
DO (mg/L)	6.4 (2.6) 3.2-11.3	8.0 (1.7) 5.7-10.0	9.0 (3.0) 4.8-12.7
Turbidity (NTU)	5 (5) 1-14	5 (5) 1-15	7 (9) 2-27
TSS (mg/L)	29.1 (29.7) 1.3-76.5	8.7 (8.0) 1.4-22.5	13.3 (16.1) 1.4-45.0
Nitrate (mg/L)	0.17 (0.17) 0.01-0.41	0.02 (0.01) 0.01-0.04	0.01 (0.00) 0.01-0.01
Ammonium (mg/L)	0.03 (0.03) 0.03-0.08	0.01 (0.01) 0.01-0.01	0.01 (0.01) 0.01-0.02
TN (mg/L)	1.47 (1.66) 0.26-5.10	0.65 (0.44) 0.10-1.30	0.90 (0.82) 0.20-2.60
Orthophosphate (mg/L)	0.02 (0.01) 0.01-0.04	0.03 (0.02) 0.01-0.05	0.03 (0.03) 0.01-0.09
TP (mg/L)	0.16 (0.14) 0.01-0.39	0.09 (0.04) 0.04-0.14	0.12 (0.06) 0.07-0.23
N/P molar ratio	38.9 24.4	4.1 1.5	2.9 1.7
Fec. col. (CFU/100 mL)	71 5-550	25 5-3,400	81 19-1,000
Chlor. *a* (μg/L)	43 (49) 1-130	43 (28) 6-71	38 (30) 5-91
BOD5	3.9 (3.3) 1.0-8.0	4.6 (1.9) 2.2-7.0	5.1 (5.1) 1.0-16.0

Figure 6.1 Greenfield Lake watershed



6.1 A Continuing Assessment of the Efficacy of the 2005-2011 Greenfield Lake Restoration Measures

Introduction

Greenfield Lake is a 37 ha blackwater system located in the City of Wilmington, North Carolina. It was first dammed and filled as a millpond in 1750, and purchased for a city park in 1925. It has an average depth of 1.2-1.5 m, it is about 8,530 m around the shoreline, and its watershed drains approximately 1,032 ha (2,551 acres). The lake has one outfall, but is fed by six perennial inflowing streams (as well as intermittent ditches). The lake is surrounded by a watershed that is comprised mainly of residential, office, institutional and commercial areas, with an overall watershed impervious surface coverage of 36%.

In recent decades a number of water quality problems have become chronic within the lake, including high fecal coliform bacterial counts, low dissolved oxygen problems, nuisance aquatic macrophyte growths, algal blooms and fish kills. Some of these problems are typically related to eutrophication, a process driven by loading of excessive nutrients to a body of water. The State of North Carolina Division of Water Quality has considered the lake to have a problem with aquatic weeds (NCDENR 2005). Periodic phytoplankton blooms have occurred in spring, summer and fall. Some of the bloom forming taxa are the cyanobacterium *Anabaena cylindrica* and the chlorophytes *Spirogyra* and *Mougeotia* spp. The free-floating macrophyte *Lemna* sp. (duckweed) is frequently observed on the surface, and below a massive *Lemna* bloom in summer 2004 dissolved oxygen concentrations at the park station were nearly anoxic. In-situ monitoring instruments have demonstrated that dissolved oxygen concentrations can decrease by as much as 45% at night compared with daytime DO measurements.

Beginning in 2005 several steps were taken by the City of Wilmington to restore viability to the lake (David Mayes, City of Wilmington Stormwater Services, personal communication). During February one thousand sterile grass carp were introduced to the lake to control (by grazing) the overabundant aquatic macrophytes. During that same month four SolarBee water circulation systems were installed in the lake to improve circulation and force dissolved oxygen from the surface downward toward the bottom. Finally, from April through June 2005 a contract firm applied the herbicide Sonar to further reduce the amount of aquatic macrophytes. On March 29-31 2006 City crews applied 35 gallons of K-Tea algaecide and on July 18 applied 6.3 gallons of habitat aquatic herbicide. A contract firm stocked the lake with 500 additional grass carp on April 4, 2006 and applied 40 gallons of Nautique aquatic herbicide on April 25, and treated the lake with Nautique again on July 31, 2007. The firm also added 200 more grass carp March 28, 2007, but no further fish were added in 2008. City crews added spot applications of herbicide in April, September, October and November 2007 and April, May and June 2008. Herbicide was also added in March, April, July, August and September 2009 in various locations, the herbicide sonar was added in June 2010, several herbicides were added on various occasions from April – June 2011, and some again in September 2011.

Since 1998 the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Aquatic Ecology Laboratory, located at the Center for Marine Science, has been performing water quality sampling and associated experiments on Greenfield Lake. The City of Wilmington Stormwater Services has funded this effort. Monitoring of various physical, chemical, and biological parameters has occurred monthly. These data allow us to perform assessments of the effectiveness of the City's lake restoration efforts by comparing summer data from 2003 and 2004 (before restoration efforts) with data from the summers of 2005 through 2011 (after restoration efforts have been underway).

Results

To assess the results so far we have chosen several parameters to examine over time. One parameter that is only estimated visually is surface coverage by nuisance macrophyte vegetation. In the summers of 2003 and 2004 extensive mats of duckweed (*Lemna* sp.), mixed with algae and other vegetation covered large areas of the lake's surface, with visible estimates for some coves exceeding 95% coverage. In summer of 2005 surface coverage was minimal; with most lake areas 95% clear of surface mats. Some coverage returned in 2006 and some coverage, particularly in backwater areas has been seen in 2007 through 2011. Coverage is currently being monitored by Cape Fear River Watch.

<u>Dissolved oxygen (DO)</u>: During 2003 and 2004 hypoxia (DO < 4.0 mg/L) was common in surface waters. Areas beneath thick *Lemna* mats were anoxic (DO of zero) or nearly so, especially at GL-P, the main Park area (Fig. 6.1). Following the onset of herbicide addition in April 2005, the May DO (mean of the three in-lake stations) showed a distinct decrease; however, it subsequently rose in June and remained at or above the State standard of 5 mg/L through the rest of the summer of 2005 (Fig. 6.2). In summer of 2006 the average lake DO levels decreased compared with 2005, but were still higher than in 2003 and 2004 (Fig. 6.2). This was because Station GL-2340 experienced low DO levels from 1.2 to 3.8 mg/L from July through September, although the other two in-lake stations (GL-P and GL-YD) maintained good DO levels. In 2007 through 2009 GL-2340 continued to have substandard dissolved oxygen problems and the other two in-lake stations had generally good dissolved oxygen (Table 6.2). In 2010 average DO conditions were below standard in August (the warmest month) but well above standard the rest of the year, whereas in 2011 average DO conditions were lowest in August and September (Fig. 6.2).

<u>Turbidity</u>: Turbidity was not excessive in the lake during the two years prior to restoration efforts (Mallin et al. 2006a). It has remained low (well below the North Carolina standard) following these efforts throughout 2011 (Table 6.2).

<u>Ammonium</u>: Ammonia, or ammonium is a common degradation product of organic material, and is an excretory product of fish and other organisms. The addition of grass carp and the herbicide usage did not raise ammonium concentrations in the lake for several years (Fig. 6.3). However, in early 2008 there was a large increase in average ammonium lake-wide, which decreased in late spring (Fig. 6.3). There were no herbicide sprayings immediately before this pulse, and no fish kills, so the reason for this remains unknown. In 2009 there were generally low ammonium levels except for

an unusually large peak in July, which subsequently decreased (Fig. 6.3). There was no herbicide application within three months prior to this 2009 ammonium peak. In 2010 average ammonium concentrations were low, with a minor increase in December, whereas in 2011 ammonium concentrations were low all year (Fig. 6.3).

Nitrate: Nitrate is an inorganic form of nitrogen that is known to enter the lake during rainfall and runoff periods (Mallin et al. 2002). The concentration of nitrate in the lake does not appear to have been influenced by the restoration efforts (Table 6.2). Nitrate concentrations are generally impacted by stormwater runoff, and the low rainfall in 2007 likely provided minimal nutrient inputs to the lake. During 2008 there was a sharp increase in nitrate concentrations, especially in the upper and middle lake stations, which we suspect was largely stormwater runoff-driven. Concentrations in 2009 through 2011 were elevated at GL-2340 but low at the other two sites (Table 6.2). Pulses of nitrate within stormwater runoff likely cause the elevated concentrations at GL-2340.

Total nitrogen: Total nitrogen (TN) is a combination of all inorganic and organic forms of nitrogen. Average lake concentrations and concentrations at individual stations appeared to show no overall trend over time, although there was an unusually large peak in May of 2009 (Table 6.2; Fig. 6.4). In 2010 TN concentrations were among the lowest seen in the past seven years. Concentrations of TN jumped considerably in summer 2011; since inorganic N was low this was likely organic nitrogen in the form of phytoplankton during the large summer algal bloom (Fig. 6.4).

Orthophosphate: Orthophosphate is the most common inorganic form of phosphorus, and is utilized as a key nutrient by aquatic macrophytes and phytoplankton. Orthophosphate concentrations have not experienced any major changes in the water column either before (Mallin et al. 2006a) or after the restoration effort (Table 6.2). Earlier research found that a significant quantity of phosphorus in the lake is contributed by waterfowl through excretion.

Total phosphorus: Total phosphorus (TP) is a combination of all organic and inorganic forms of phosphorus in the water. Although pulses of TP occurred in summer 2005 and spring 2006, they were similar in magnitude to pulses of TP seen in 2003 and 2004 (Fig. 6.5). Pulses in 2007 were smaller than the previous years (Figure 6.5). In 2008 there was a jump in TP, which may in part by caused by high phytoplankton biomass and the phosphorus locked up as cell tissue (see next section). Another reason may include increased runoff of phosphorus into the lake with increased rainfall. In 2009 there was decreased TP compared with 2008, although it was not as low as in 2007. In 2010 TP concentrations were lower than both 2008 and 2009. In 2011 there was a large peak in TP that consisted of organic phosphorus tied up in phytoplankton biomass during the summer algal bloom in the lake (Fig. 6.5).

Chlorophyll *a*: Chlorophyll *a* is the principal measure used to estimate phytoplankton biomass (algal bloom strength) in water bodies. As mentioned above, algal blooms have been a common occurrence in this lake. They are generally patchy in space, usually occurring at one or two stations at a time. However, in summer 2005 extensive phytoplankton blooms occurred at all three in-lake stations, with levels well exceeding the State standard of 40 μg/L (Fig. 6.6). Blooms continued throughout 2006 as well

(Fig. 6.6). The overall reduction in macrophyte coverage may also encourage phytoplankton growth because there is less competition for nutrients, and less shading of the water column by the macrophytes cover. A positive signal was that blooms within the lake in 2007 were fewer than in previous years (Fig. 6.6), either because of continuing restoration efforts or lower stormwater driven inputs of nitrate to feed the blooms. Unfortunately the latter was the likely explanation, as in 2008 the blooms returned in force (Fig. 6.6; also see previous section). In 2009 several blooms exceeding the state standard occurred (at GL-P and GL-YD); however, on average, overall bloom activity in the lake showed a slight decrease from 2008 (Fig. 6.6). There were some blooms in 2010 but on average the chlorophyll *a* abundance was low relative to the previous two years. In 2011 there was a large blue-green algal bloom that was present from July through September (Fig. 6.6; see also report cover photos). As noted above, this bloom also accounted for the high TN and TP concentrations during this period.

Algal blooms are the result of nutrient inputs, either from outside the lake or from release from decaying material. Algal blooms, when they die, cause a BOD (biochemical oxygen demand) load (Mallin et al. 2006b). This is organic material that natural lake bacteria feed on and multiply, using up dissolved oxygen in the lake as they do so. We performed regression analysis on our 2007 chlorophyll *a* concentrations with the corresponding BOD concentrations for the three in-lake stations, and found that, statistically speaking, approximately 40% of the variability in Greenfield Lake BOD was caused by algal blooms. We performed similar analysis using our 2008 and 2009 chlorophyll *a* and BOD data. The results showed significant positive correlations between the two parameters, although regression analysis indicated that only 26% and 31% of the variability in dissolved oxygen was accounted for by chlorophyll *a* in 2008 and 2009, respectively. In 2010 there was an extremely strong regression ($p<0.0001$) with chlorophyll *a* explaining 77% of the variability in BOD5; and in 2011 chlorophyll a explained 50% of the variability in BOD5 (Fig. 6.7). Thus, the algal blooms can lead to low dissolved oxygen in the lake, but there are other factors that contribute as well. Research conducted on Burnt Mill Creek, Smith Creek, and Prince Georges Creek (Mallin et al. 2009b) showed that BOD was also strongly correlated with watershed rainfall and TSS concentrations, indicating that runoff of oxygen-demanding materials (organic waste, debris, various chemicals) can make a significant contribution to reducing dissolved oxygen in aquatic systems.

Fecal coliform bacteria: Fecal coliform bacteria are commonly used to provide an estimate of the human or animal derived microbial pollution in a water body. Greenfield Lake is chronically polluted by high fecal coliform counts, well exceeding the state standard of 200 CFU/100 mL during many months (Table 6.2; Fig. 6.8). In summer 2005 there were particularly large fecal coliform counts at each in-lake station, though the individual stations did not have pulses during the same months. Excessive fecal coliform counts occurred to a lesser degree in 2006 in the lake, mainly at GL-2340 (Table 6.2). In 2007 high fecal coliform counts occurred within the lake on about 43% of the occasions sampled (Fig. 6.8). In 2008 the lake was highly polluted by fecal coliforms (Fig. 6.8), with stormwater runoff likely the principal source. In September 2008 at the upper station, GL-2340, there was a high concentration (60,000 CFU/100 mL) of fecal coliform bacteria. City staff was unaware of any sewage spills in that area, so the source remains unknown. In 2009 there were again high counts (Table 6.2) especially for July (Fig. 6.8) with other months not unusually high. In 2010 average fecal coliform counts were low in comparison to 2008 and 2009; whereas in 2011 counts were not high with the exception of a large lakewide pulse in August (Fig. 6.8). We note that fecal coliform counts were not targeted by the type of restoration efforts currently ongoing in the lake. Efforts to reduce runoff into tributary streams would likely have a positive benefit in reducing fecal bacteria counts.

Discussion

A risk that is taken when applying herbicides to lakes is the creation of biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) from decomposing organic matter that is a product of dead or dying plant material. As mentioned above, this would serve to drive the lake DO concentrations downward. DO levels in summer 2005 were nearly twice what they were during summers of 2003 and 2004, and DO levels in 2006 were also higher than 2003 and 2004. It is very likely that the use of the SolarBee circulation systems maintained elevated DO even when there was an obvious BOD source. The in-lake station with lowest DO levels in 2006 was GL-2340, which is located quite a distance from the SolarBees. This pattern has continued from 2007-2011. We note that DO in the lake overall remains considerably better than the period before restoration efforts began (Fig. 6.2).

Water column nutrient concentrations did not appear to change notably after the introduction of grass carp or use of herbicide. Certainly ammonium, an excretory and decomposition product would be expected to rise following the consumption and death of large quantities of plant material. Likewise phosphorus did not increase, although it is a common excretory product. However, ammonium (like orthophosphate) is readily used as a primary nutrient by phytoplankton. Nutrient addition bioassay experiments have demonstrated that phytoplankton growth in this lake is limited by nitrogen (Mallin et al. 1999). It is likely that ammonium produced by fish excretion or dying plant material was utilized by phytoplankton to produce the excessive algal blooms that characterized the lake in 2005 and 2006. The phytoplankton blooms were dominated by blue green algae (cyanobacteria) including species containing heterocytes (formerly called heterocysts). These species have the added ability to utilize these structures to fix atmospheric nitrogen into a useable form when phosphorus is replete. Thus, while large amounts of macrophyte material disappeared from the lake, some of the resultant nutrients were utilized by phytoplankton to produce the blooms in the two years after the largest treatments. Since herbicides were used to control macrophytes on several occasions from April – June 2011, it is possible that the July – September blue-green algal bloom was fueled by nutrients from decomposing macrophytes.

The continuing problems with high fecal coliform bacteria do not appear to be related to any of the restoration activities. Fecal coliform bacteria enter the environment from the feces of warm blooded animals, so it is possible that increases in waterfowl, or dogs brought to the lake by their owners, or feral cats could lead to increased fecal coliform bacteria counts, but we have no data to support this speculation either way. Likewise on rare occasions large pulses of fecal bacteria have appeared in the lake or tributaries, potentially related to either sewage leaks or spills, or illicit connections. We do reemphasize that fecal coliform counts in 2010 were the lowest in several years. In 2011 Greenfield Lake had generally low fecal coliform counts except for a large peak in August (Fig. 6.8).

Figure 6.2. Average dissolved oxygen concentrations in Greenfield Lake, 2003-2011.

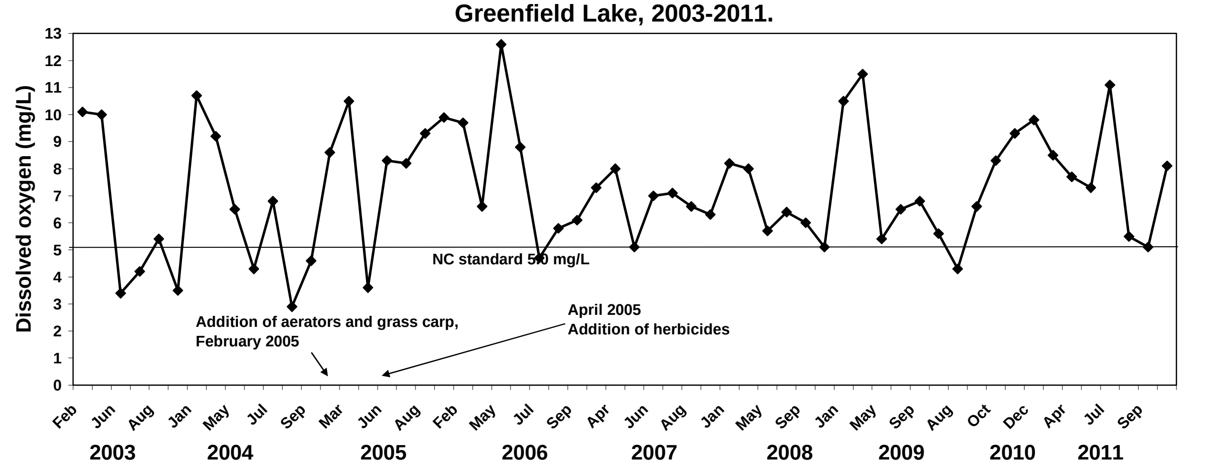


Figure 6.3. Average ammonium concentrations for Greenfield Lake, 2003-2011

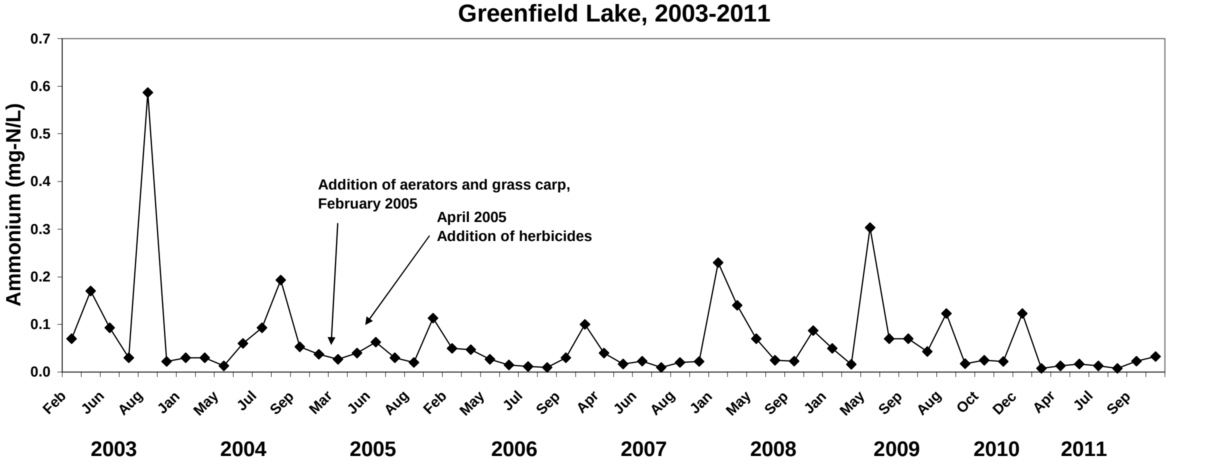


Figure 6.4. Average total nitrogen (TN) concentrations in Greenfield Lake, 2003-2011

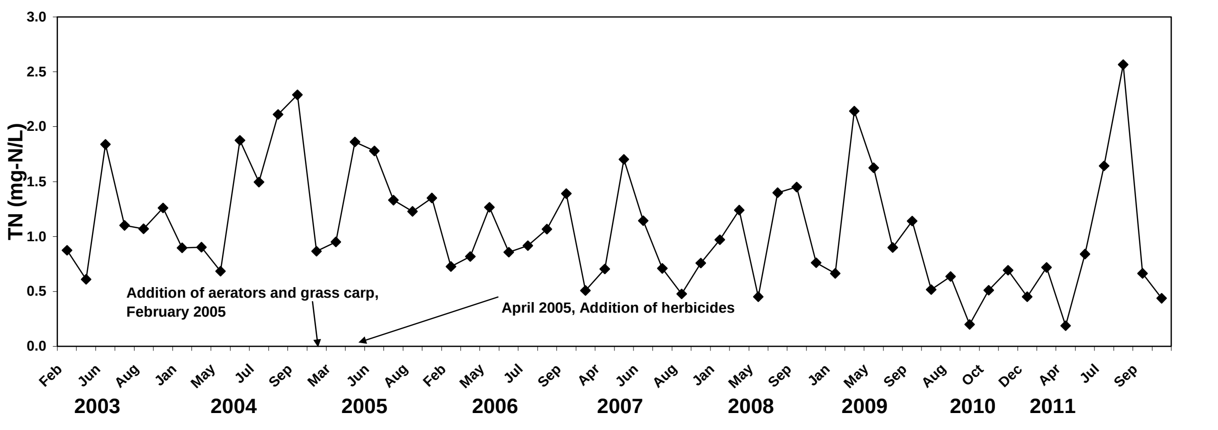


Figure 6.5. Average total phosphorus (TP) concentrations for Greenfield Lake, 2003-2011

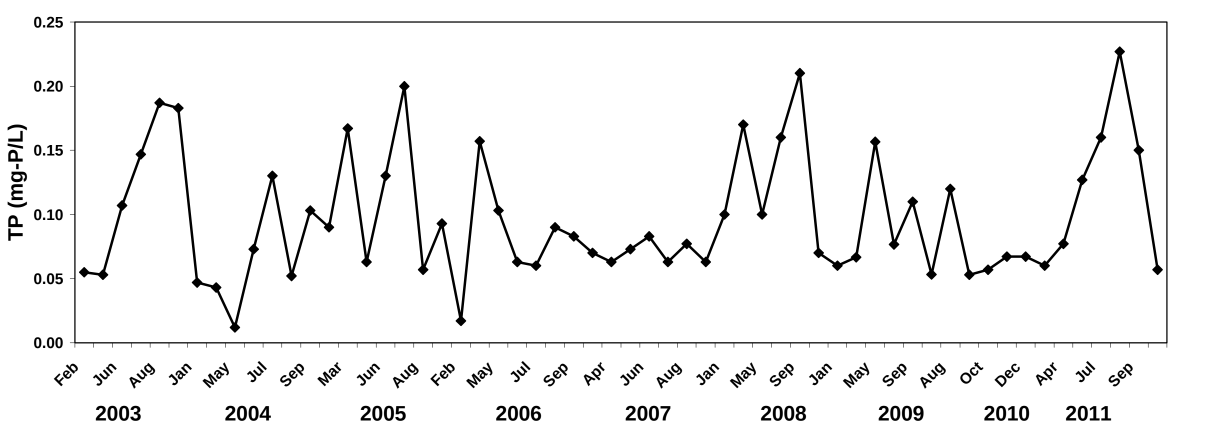


Figure 6.6. Average chlorophyll *a* values in Greenfield Lake, 2003-2011

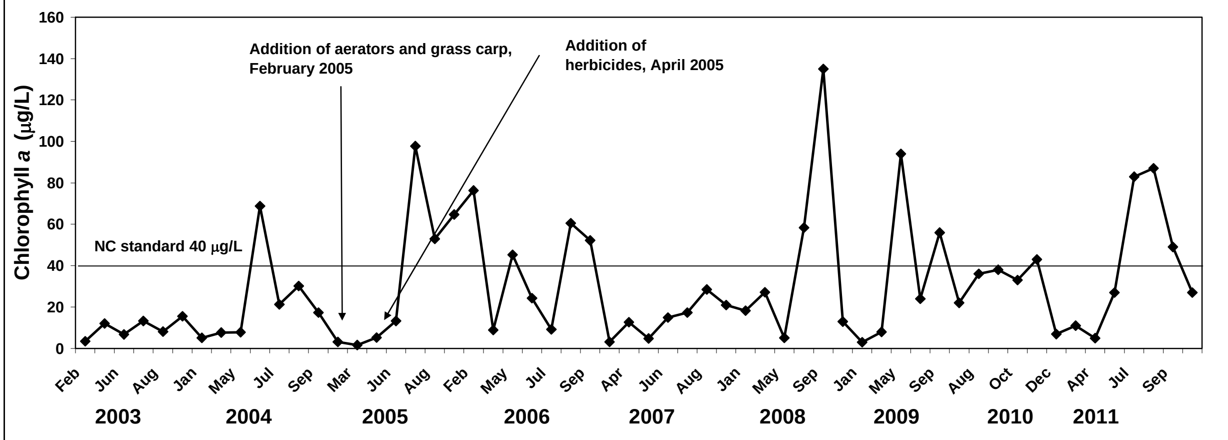
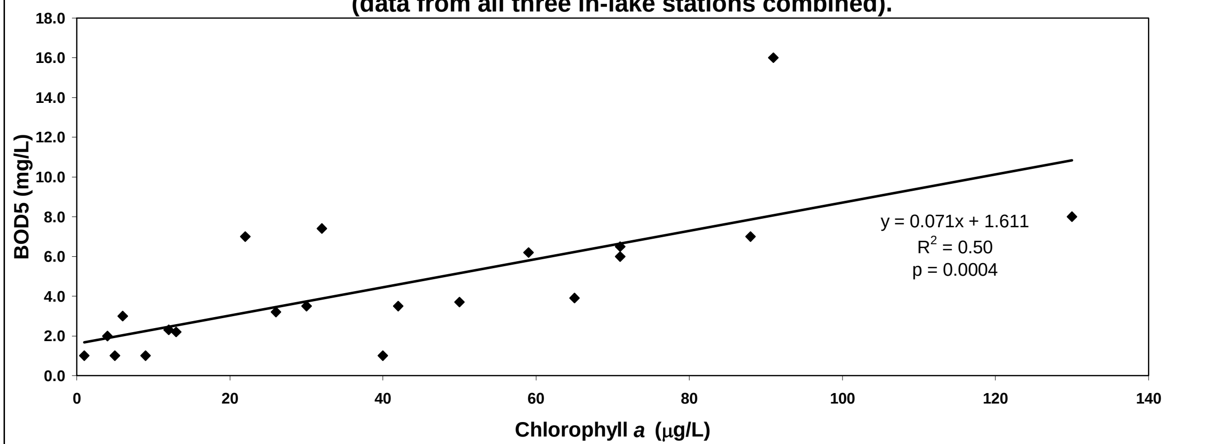


Figure 6.7. BOD5 as a function of chlorophyll *a* in Greenfield Lake, 2011 (data from all three in-lake stations combined).



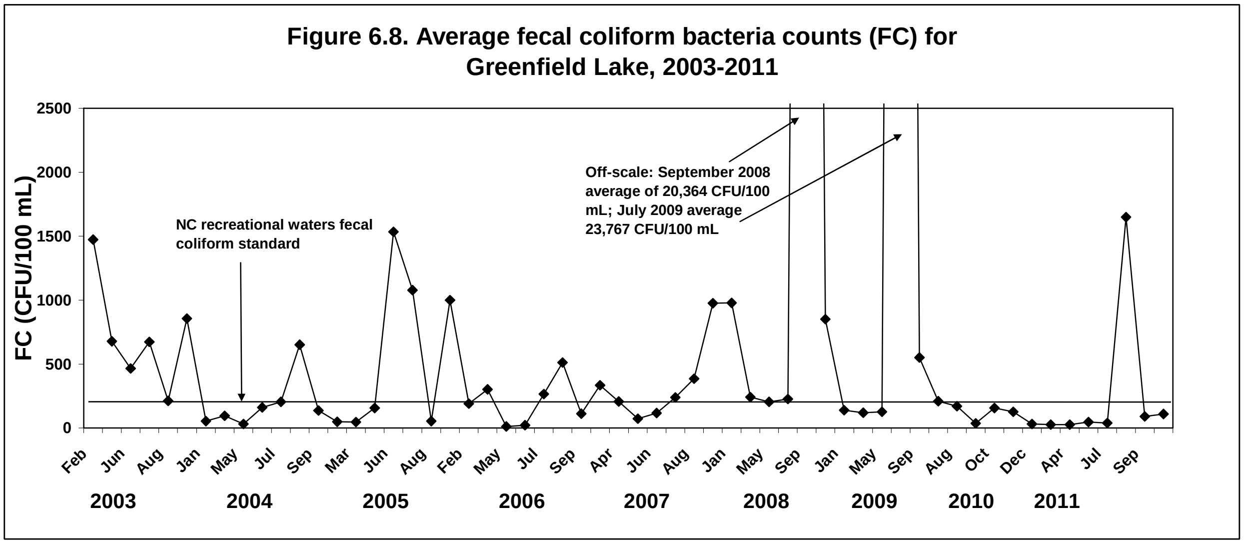


Figure 6.8. Average fecal coliform bacteria counts (FC) for
Greenfield Lake, 2003-2011
FC (CFU/100 mL)
2500
2000
1500
1000
500
0
NC recreational waters fecal
coliform standard
Off-scale: September 2008
average of 20,364 CFU/100
mL; July 2009 average
23,767 CFU/100 mL
Feb
Jun
Aug
Jan
May
Jul
Sep
Mar
Jun
Aug
Feb
May
Jul
Sep
Apr
Jun
Aug
Jan
May
Sep
Jan
May
Sep
Aug
Oct
Dec
Apr
Jul
Sep
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011

7.0 Hewletts Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 7,435 acres (3,009 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 19%
Watershed population: Approximately 20,200
Overall water quality: Fair
Problematic pollutants: high fecal bacteria, minor dissolved oxygen issues, occasional algal blooms

Hewletts Creek was sampled at four tidally-influenced areas (HC-3, NB-GLR, MB-PGR and SB-PGR) and a freshwater stream station draining Pine Valley Country Club (PVGC-9 - Fig. 7.1). At all sites the physical data indicated that turbidity was well within State standards during this sampling period during all sampling events, and TSS levels were below 25 mg/L at all times sampled (Table 7.2). Hypoxia occurred two of seven occasions at NB-GLR and on one occasion each at PVGC-9 and SB-PGR, although not severely. Nitrate concentrations were elevated leaving the golf course at PVGC-9 relative to the other stations (Tables 7.1 and 7.2). From there the next station is MB-PGR, which also receives inputs from the Wilmington Municipal Golf Courses (Fig. 7.1; Mallin and Wheeler 2000). Nitrate was somewhat elevated at MB-PGR; however, none of the other stations had elevated nitrate concentrations. In general nitrate concentrations creek-wide were less than in 2010. Ammonium concentrations were low at all sites. Orthophosphate concentrations were low, as were total phosphorus concentrations. The N/P ratios were low at the lower creek sites indicating that inputs of inorganic nitrogen could cause algal blooms; however, as mentioned nitrate and ammonium were low in the lower creek areas in 2011. The chlorophyll *a* data (Tables 7.1 and 7.2) showed that the Hewletts Creek samples were free of major algal blooms in 2011, with the exception of one major bloom in April at NB-GLR of 51 µg/L chlorophyll *a*. This is positive news as algal blooms have been common in upper Hewletts Creek in the past (Mallin et al. 1998a; 1999; 2002a; 2004; 2005; 2006a; 2008).

Fecal coliform bacteria counts were high in three areas of the creek. Counts exceeded State standards 29% of the time at SB-PGR, 57% of the time sampled at MB-PGR, 71% of the time at NB-GLR and 100% of the time at PVGC-9 (Tables 7.1 and 7.2). The geometric mean at PVGC-9 doubled over 2010. There was an excessive rain event in April that led to NB-GLR, SB-PGR and PVGC-9 all having excessive counts that month.

Figure 7.1 Hewletts Creek watershed

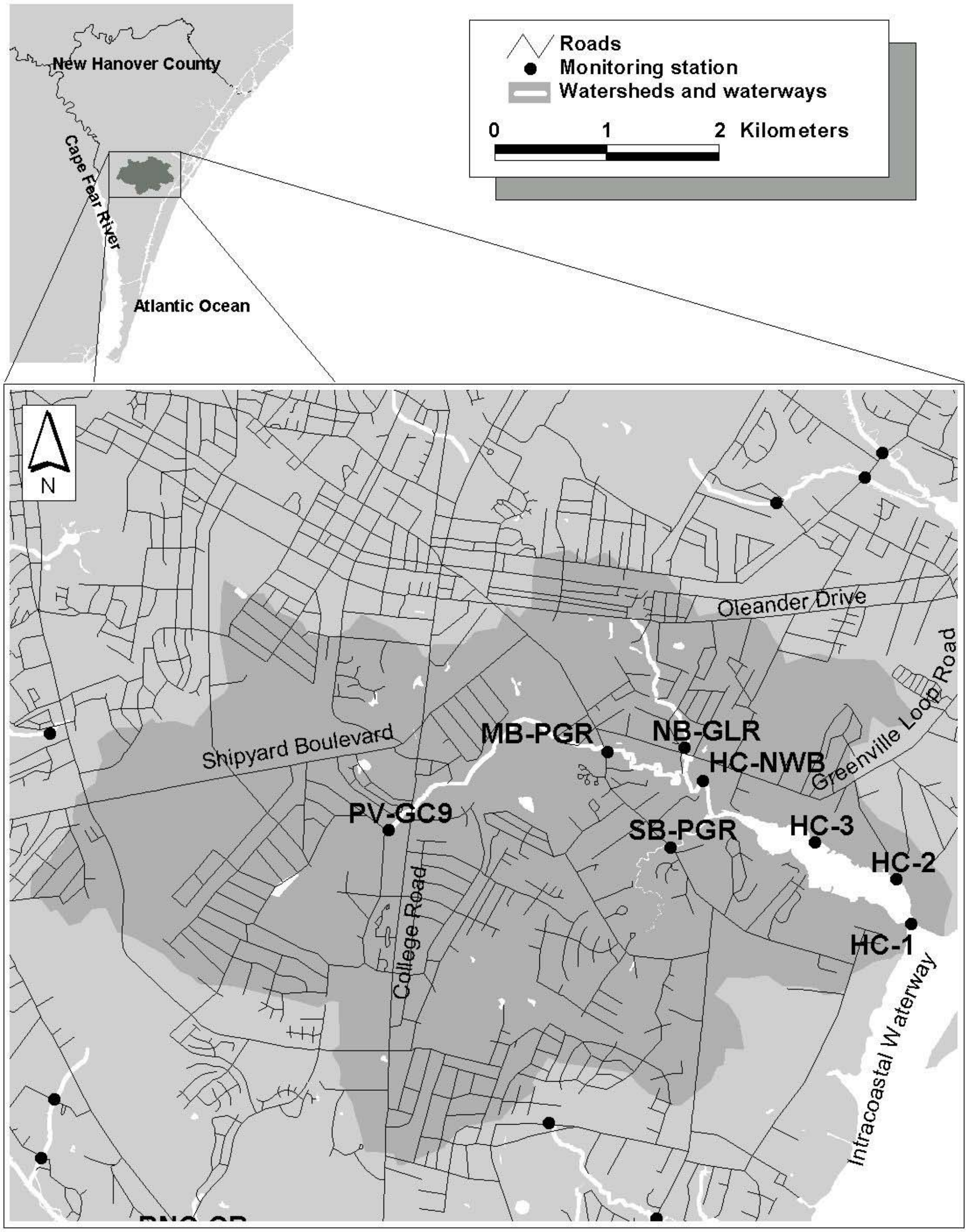


Table 7.1. Selected water quality parameters at upper and middle creek stations in Hewletts Creek watershed 2011 as mean (standard deviation) / range, N/P ratios as mean / median, fecal coliform bacteria presented as geometric mean / range.

Parameter	PVGC-9	MB-PGR
Salinity (ppt)	0.1 (0) 0.1-0.1	0.3 (0.2) 0.1-0.7
Turbidity (NTU)	2 (1) 1-4	3 (1) 1-5
TSS (mg/L)	1.4 (0.0) 1.3-1.4	2.7 (2.0) 1.3-6.7
DO (mg/L)	6.0 (1.4) 4.6-8.5	6.9 (0.7) 6.2-8.3
Nitrate (mg/L)	0.624 (0.193) 0.310-0.860	0.177 (0.062) 0.110-0.290
Ammonium (mg/L)	0.021 (0.015) 0.010-0.050	0.014 (0.009) 0.005-0.030
TN (mg/L)	0.867 (0.365) 0.310-1.480	0.434 (0.304) 0.180-1.090
Orthophosphate (mg/L)	0.017 (0.008) 0.010-0.030	0.024 (0.014) 0.010-0.050
TP (mg/L)	0.026 (0.030) 0.010-0.090	0.021 (0.012) 0.010-0.040
N/P	105.3 91.9	26.9 21.0
Chlorophyll *a* (µg/L)	1 (0) 1-2	3 (3) 0-10
Fecal col. (CFU/100 mL)	1,063 230-46,000	417 100-1,910

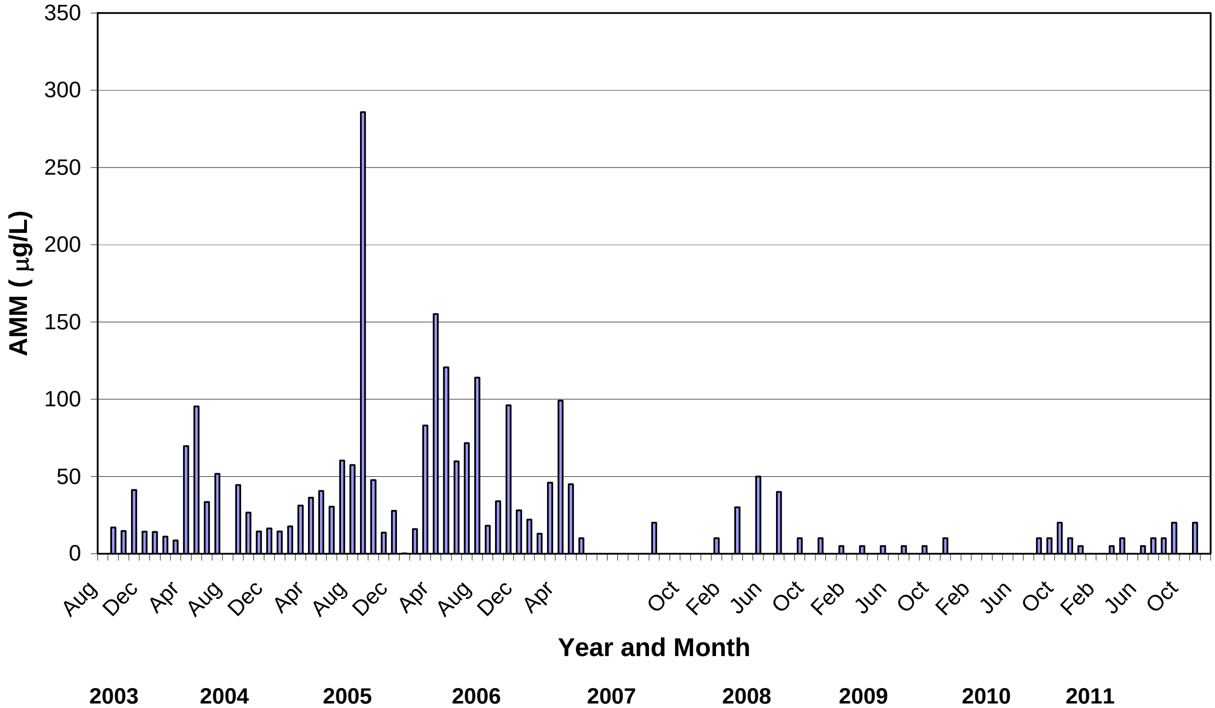
Table 7.2. Selected water quality parameters at stations in Hewletts Creek watershed, 2011, as mean (standard deviation) / range, fecal coliforms as geometric mean / range, n = 7 months.

Parameter	NB-GLR	SB-PGR	HC-3
Salinity (ppt)	17.9 (8.8) 5.2-27.2	27.6 (5.7) 19.9-33.2	33.8 (1.5) 32.0-35.7
Turbidity (NTU)	7 (4) 3-13	6 (3) 4-13	5 (2) 4-8
TSS (mg/L)	15.3(4.8) 7.5-21.6	18.7 (4.6) 11.3-23.6	18.6(2.3) 15.0-22.1
DO (mg/L)	6.3 (1.6) 4.4-8.7	5.9 (1.5) 4.1-8.5	6.7 (1.3) 5.0-9.0
Nitrate (mg/L)	0.029 (0.024) 0.010-0.060	0.019 (0.015) 0.010-0.040	0.014 (0.008) 0.010-0.030
Ammonium (mg/L)	0.009 (0.002) 0.005-0.010	0.011 (0.006) 0.005-0.020	0.006 (0.002) 0.005-0.010
TN (mg/L)	0.436 (0.207) 0.050-0.700	0.440 (0.186) 0.140-0.700	0.397 (0.226) 0.050-0.700
Orthophosphate (mg/L)	0.024 (0.010) 0.010-0.040	0.019 (0.009) 0.010-0.030	0.011 (0.004) 0.010-0.020
TP (mg/L)	0.043 (0.019) 0.010-0.040	0.026 (0.017) 0.010-0.060	0.010 (0.000) 0.010-0.010
Mean N/P ratio Median	4.4 2.2	4.1 3.3	4.2 3.3
Chlor *a* (µg/L)	15 (17) 2-51	7 (4) 1-14	3 (1) 1-5
Fecal coliforms (CFU/100 mL)	427 91-2,364	50 10-1,270	11 5-55

Dobo Property/Bethel Rd./JEL Wade Park constructed wetland: The New Hanover County Tidal Creeks Advisory Board, using funds from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund, purchased a former industrial area owned by the Dobo family in August 2002. This property was bought to be used as a passive treatment facility for the improvement of non-point source runoff drainage water before it enters Hewletts Creek. As such, the City of Wilmington contracted with outside consultants to create a wetland on the property for this purpose. Thus, during 2007 the 7.6 acre JEL Wade wetland was constructed to treat stormwater runoff from a 589 acre watershed within the Hewletts Creek drainage; we note that due to droughts the vegetation did not reach near-full coverage until spring 2010. A rain event sampling program was carried out in 2009-2010 by UNCW to evaluate the efficacy of the wetland in reducing pollutant loads (fecal bacteria, nutrients, suspended solids and metals) from the stormwater runoff passing through the wetland. During the eight storms sampled, the wetland served to greatly moderate the stream hydrograph, retaining and/or removing 50-75% of the inflowing stormwater volume within the wetland. High removal rates of fecal coliform bacteria were achieved (based on "first flush"), with an average load reduction of 99% and overall concentration reduction of > 90%. Particularly high (>90%) load reductions of ammonium and orthophosphate loads also occurred, and lesser but still substantial reductions of total phosphorus (89%) and TSS loads (88%) were achieved. Removal of nitrate was seasonally dependent, with lower removal occurring in cold weather and high percentage (90%+) nitrate load removal occurring in the growing season when water temperatures exceeded 15^{o}C. Since the principal source of impairment in Hewletts Creek is fecal bacteria contamination, and a secondary source of impairment is algal blooms (caused by nitrogen loading in this system), this constructed wetland appears to be very successful in reducing both concentrations and loads of polluting substances to the receiving waters. Details on the wetland and on the sampling results are presented in a technical report (Mallin et al. 2010b).

Continued monitoring of Hewletts Creek indicates that the wetland is having a positive influence on the main creek. The outflow from JEL Wade wetland enters Hewletts Creek upstream of our Station SB-PGR, so we examined some water quality parameters there for which there are available before-and-after data (Figure 7.2-7.6). Data were log-transformed and t-tests were performed to test for differences between pre-and-post July 2007 data (i.e. 2003-July 2007 vs. August 2007- November 2011) with a probability (p) value of < 0.05 used for significance. Ammonium showed a significant ($p < 0.01$) mean decrease of 83% following the wetland completion (Figure 7.2). The high ammonium peaks seen in earlier years have not been present in our samples since 2007.

Figure 7.2 Ammonium concentrations over time at south branch Station SB-PGR in Hewletts Creek



From spring 2009 on, creek nitrate concentrations showed peak concentrations that were generally lower than previous to wetland construction (Figure 7.3). There was a statistically-significant ($p < 0.01$) mean decrease in nitrate concentrations of 45% between pre-and-post wetland construction (July 2007). Orthophosphate concentrations were generally low before wetland construction, with no significant change in creek orthophosphate concentrations after wetland construction (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.3 Nitrate concentration changes over time at south branch Station SB-PGR in Hewletts Creek

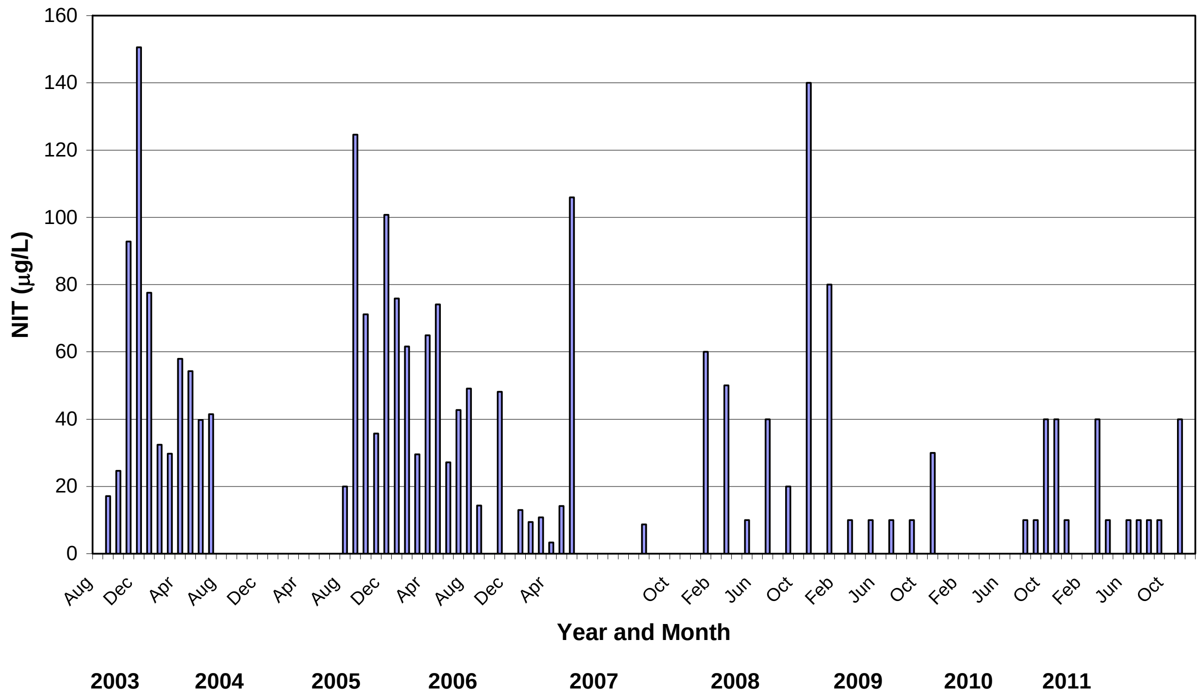
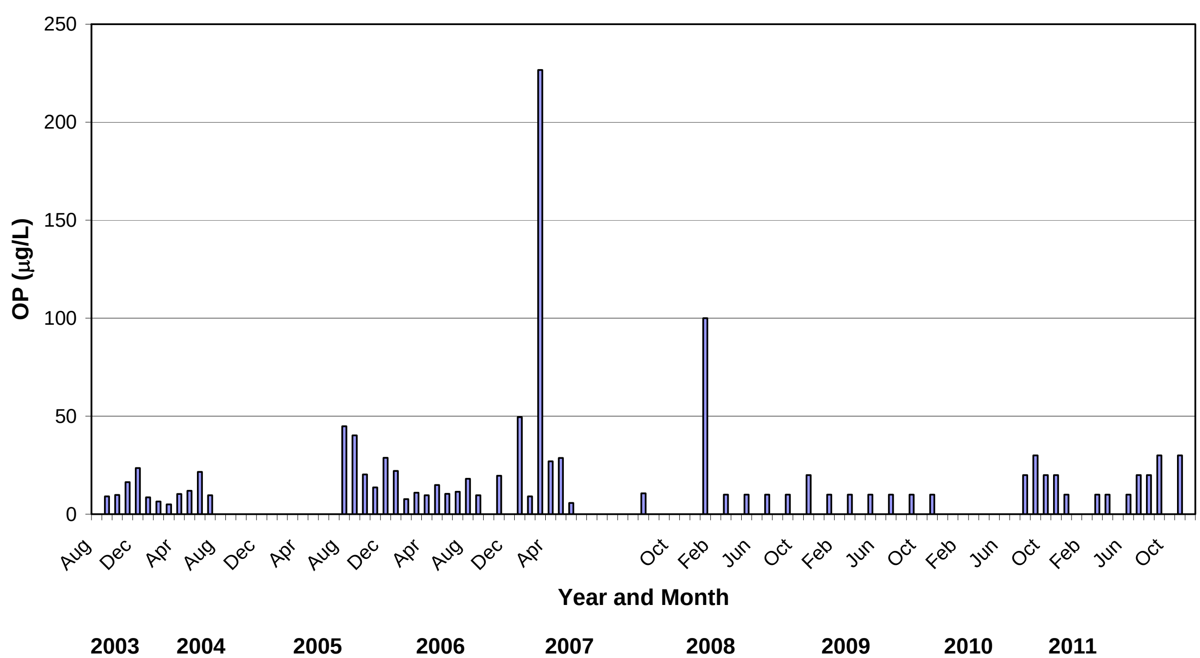
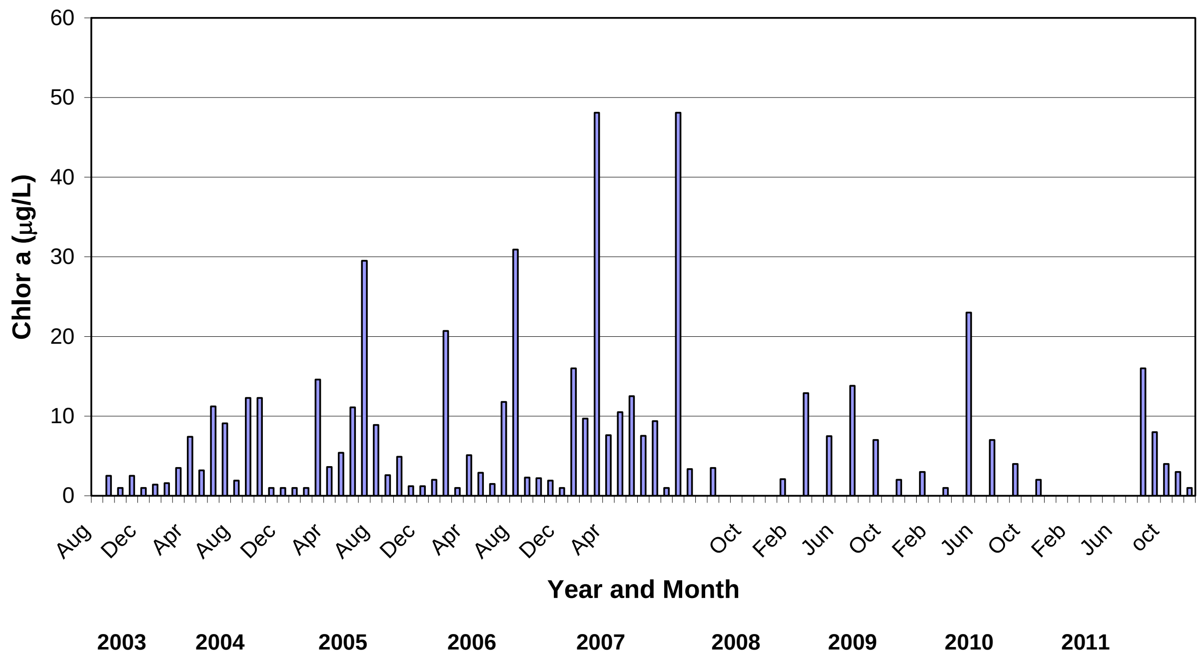


Figure 7.4 Orthophosphate concentration changes over time at south branch Station SB-PGR in Hewletts Creek



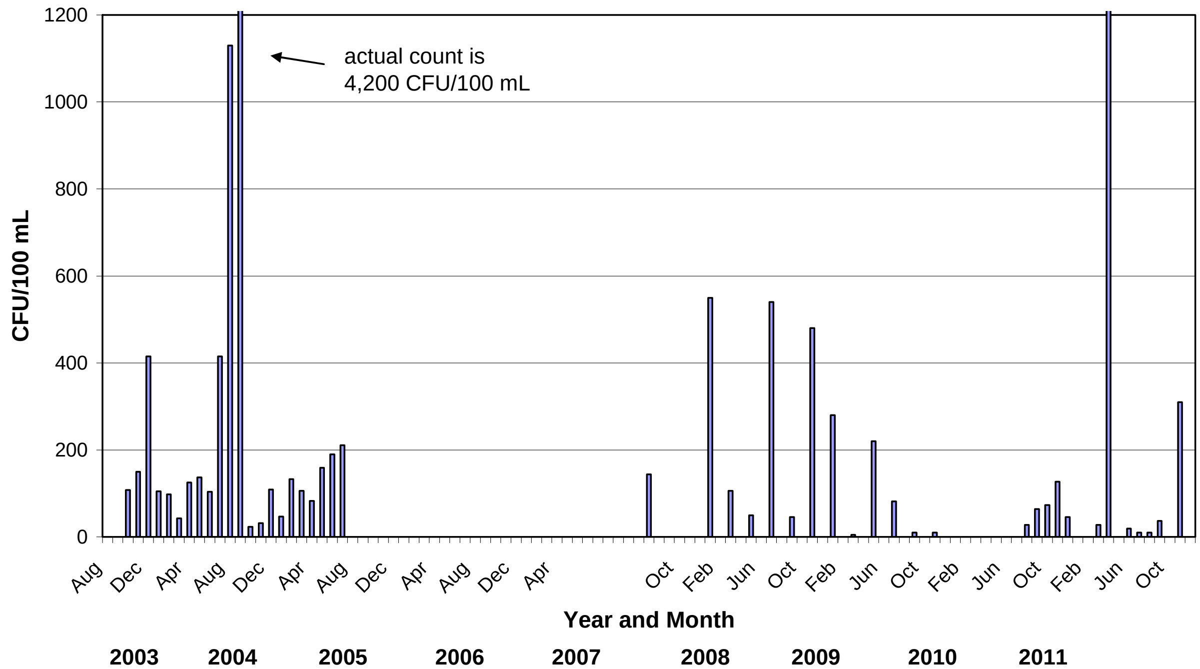
Algal blooms, represented by chlorophyll *a* concentrations, show fewer and smaller peaks in the south branch of Hewletts Creek than prior to wetland construction, but the reductions were not statistically significantly, ($p > 0.05$) (Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5 Chlorophyll *a* concentration changes over time at south branch Station SB-PGR in Hewletts Creek



Fecal coliform bacteria concentrations showed some moderately high peaks in the south branch of Hewletts Creek during early wetland operation (2008) but appear to have stabilized at much lower concentrations since summer 2009 with the exception of a sharp peak of 1,273 during an extreme weather event in spring 2011 (Figure 7.6). Fecal coliform bacterial counts were significantly ($p < 0.05$) reduced (geometric mean by 60%) in the downstream receiving waters. Thus, the JEL Wade wetland is both effective in treatment of pollutants entering the wetland, and also having a measurable positive effect on tidal creek water quality downstream as well.

Figure 7.6 Fecal coliform bacteria concentrations over time at south branch Station SB-PGR in Hewletts Creek



8.0 Howe Creek Water Quality

Snapshot
Watershed area: 3,518 acres (1,424 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 19%
Watershed population: Approximately 6,460
Overall water quality: Fair
Problematic pollutants: Fecal coliform bacteria, some algal blooms, some low DO

Howe Creek was sampled for physical parameters, nutrients, chlorophyll *a*, and fecal coliform bacteria at three locations on seven occasions during 2011 (HW-FP, HW-GP and HW-DT- Fig. 8.1). Turbidity was generally low and did not exceed the North Carolina water quality standard of 25 NTU (Table 8.1; Appendix B). Dissolved oxygen concentrations were good at HW-FP, fair at HW-DT, and poor at HW-GP, which was below the standard of 5.0 mg/L on two of seven occasions (Appendix B). Nitrate and ammonium concentrations were low in 2011 (Table 8.2). Orthophosphate was also low at the three sites.

Mean and median inorganic molar N/P ratios were very low, indicating that nitrogen was probably the principal nutrient limiting phytoplankton growth at all stations. Previously Mallin et al. (2004) demonstrated that nitrogen was the primary limiting nutrient in Howe Creek. There was one substantial algal bloom of 66 μg/L as chlorophyll *a* at HW-DT, but the lower two stations did not experience algal bloom problems in 2011 (Table 8.2). Since wetland enhancement was performed in 1998 above Graham Pond the creek below the pond at HW-GP has had fewer and smaller algal blooms than before the enhancement (Fig. 8.2). For fecal coliform bacteria, the creek ranged from no exceedences of the water contact standard of 200 CFU/100 mL at the lower station HW-FP to 29% exceedence at HW-GP, to 71% exceedences at the upper station HW-DT, where the geometric mean of 536 CFU/100 mL was more than double the NC standard (Table 8.1). The fecal coliform counts were a worsening from the previous year (Fig. 8.3).

Table 8.1. Water quality summary statistics for Howe Creek, 2011, as mean (st. dev.) / range. Fecal coliform bacteria as geometric mean / range.

Parameter	HW-FP	HW-GP	HW-DT
Salinity (ppt)	35.9(1.0) 34.7-37.1	26.9(10.3) 13.4-36.1	14.6(11.9) 1.0-30.7
Dissolved oxygen (mg/L)	6.6(1.1) 5.7-8.3	5.6(1.3) 4.3-7.9	6.6(1.8) 4.2-8.7
Turbidity (NTU)	5(2) 3-9	9(5) 5-20	11(6) 6-20
TSS (mg/L)	16.5(8.1) 5.8-25.9	18.1(8.4) 8.8-32.8	16.7(9.1) 4.8-32.8
Chlor *a* (μg/L)	3(1) 1-4	10(7) 5-24	26(20) 5-66
Fecal coliforms (CFU/100 mL)	8 5-28	94 10-2,300	536 140-17,000

Figure 8.1. Howe Creek watershed and sampling sites used in various years.

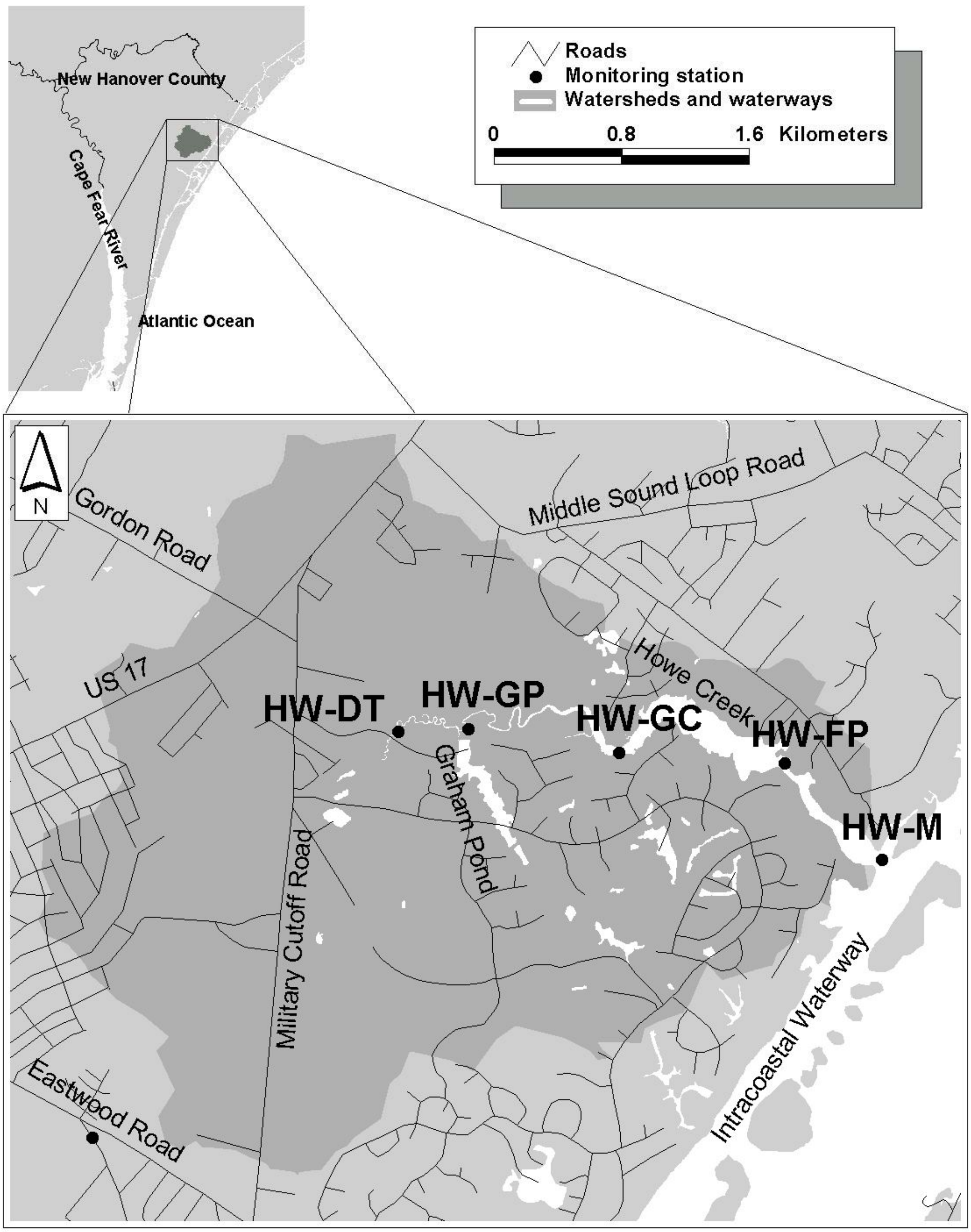


Figure 8.2. Chlorophyll *a* concentrations (algal blooms) in Howe Creek below Graham Pond before and after 1998 wetland enhancement in upper Graham Pond, 1993-2011.

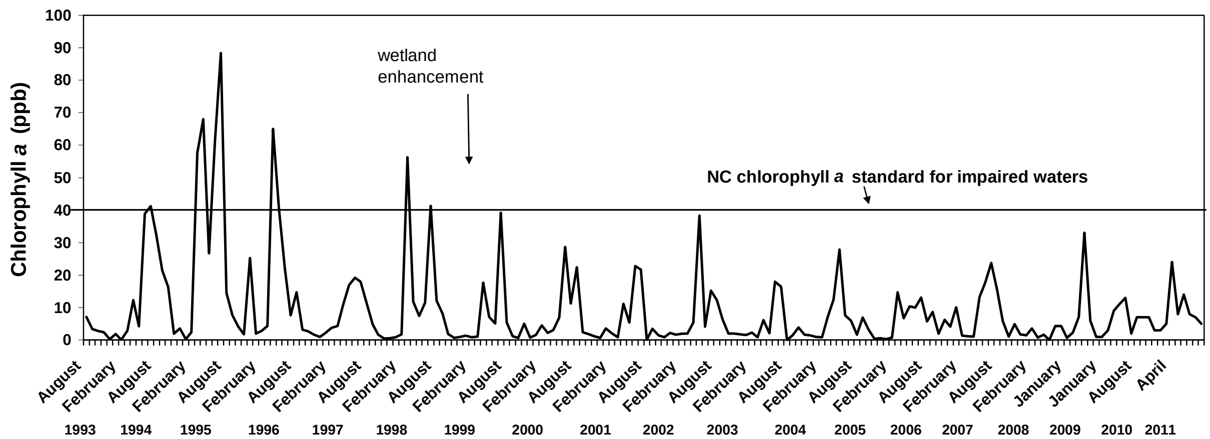
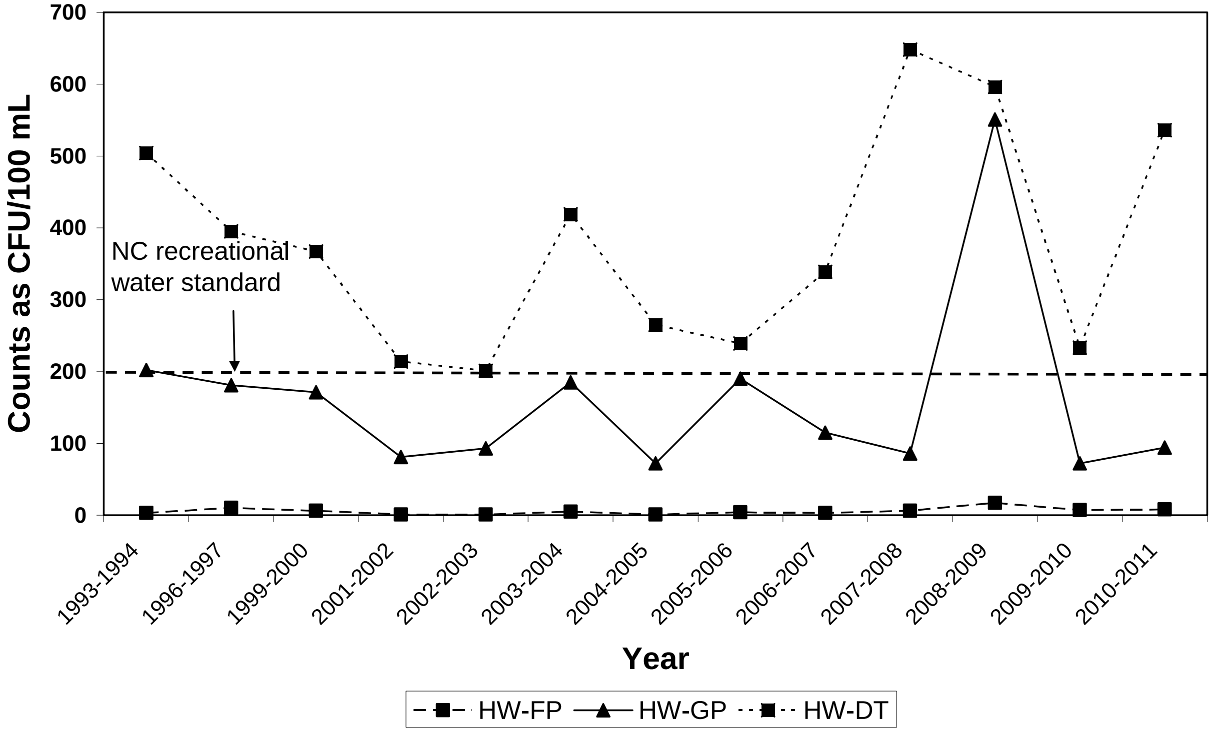


Table 8.2. Inorganic nutrient concentration summary statistics for Howe Creek, 2011, as mean (standard deviation) / range, N/P ratio as mean / median.

Parameter	HW-FP	HW-GP	HW-DT
Nitrate (mg/L)	0.010(0.000) 0.010-0.010	0.010(0.000) 0.010-0.010	0.017(0.013) 0.010-0.040
Ammonium (mg/L)	0.007(0.003) 0.005-0.010	0.009(0.009) 0.005-0.030	0.011(0.009) 0.005-0.030
Orthophosphate (mg/L)	0.010(0.004) 0.010-0.020	0.017(0.008) 0.010-0.030	0.026(0.008) 0.010-0.030
Molar N/P ratio	3.5 3.3	2.8 3.3	2.7 1.5

Figure 8.3. Geometric mean fecal coliform counts over time for three Howe Creek stations, 1993-2011.

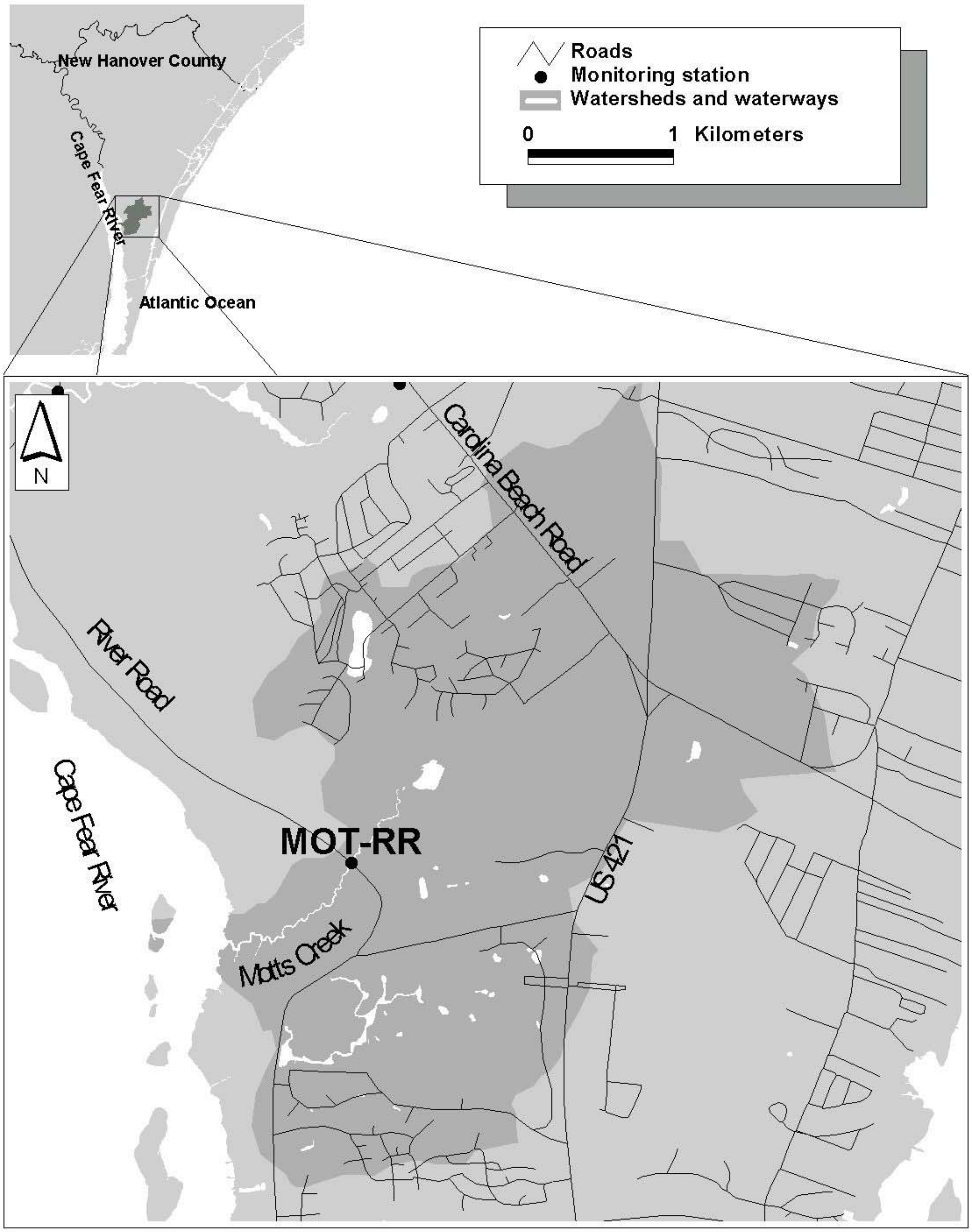


9.0 Motts Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 3,328 acres (1,347 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 14%
Watershed population: 9,530
Overall water quality: poor
Problematic pollutants: Periodic algal blooms; high fecal coliform bacteria

Motts Creek drains into the Cape Fear River Estuary (Fig. 9.1), and the creek area near River Road has been classified by the State of North Carolina as a Natural Heritage Site because of the area's biological attributes. These include the pure stand wetland communities, including a well-developed sawgrass community and unusually large flats dominated by *Lilaeopsis chinensis* and spider lily, with large cypress in the swamp forest. During 2011 UNCW was not funded to sample water quality in lower Motts Creek. New Hanover County sponsors some water quality sampling in areas of upper Motts Creek, collected by Coastal Planning & Engineering of North Carolina, Inc.

Figure 9.1 Motts Creeks watershed

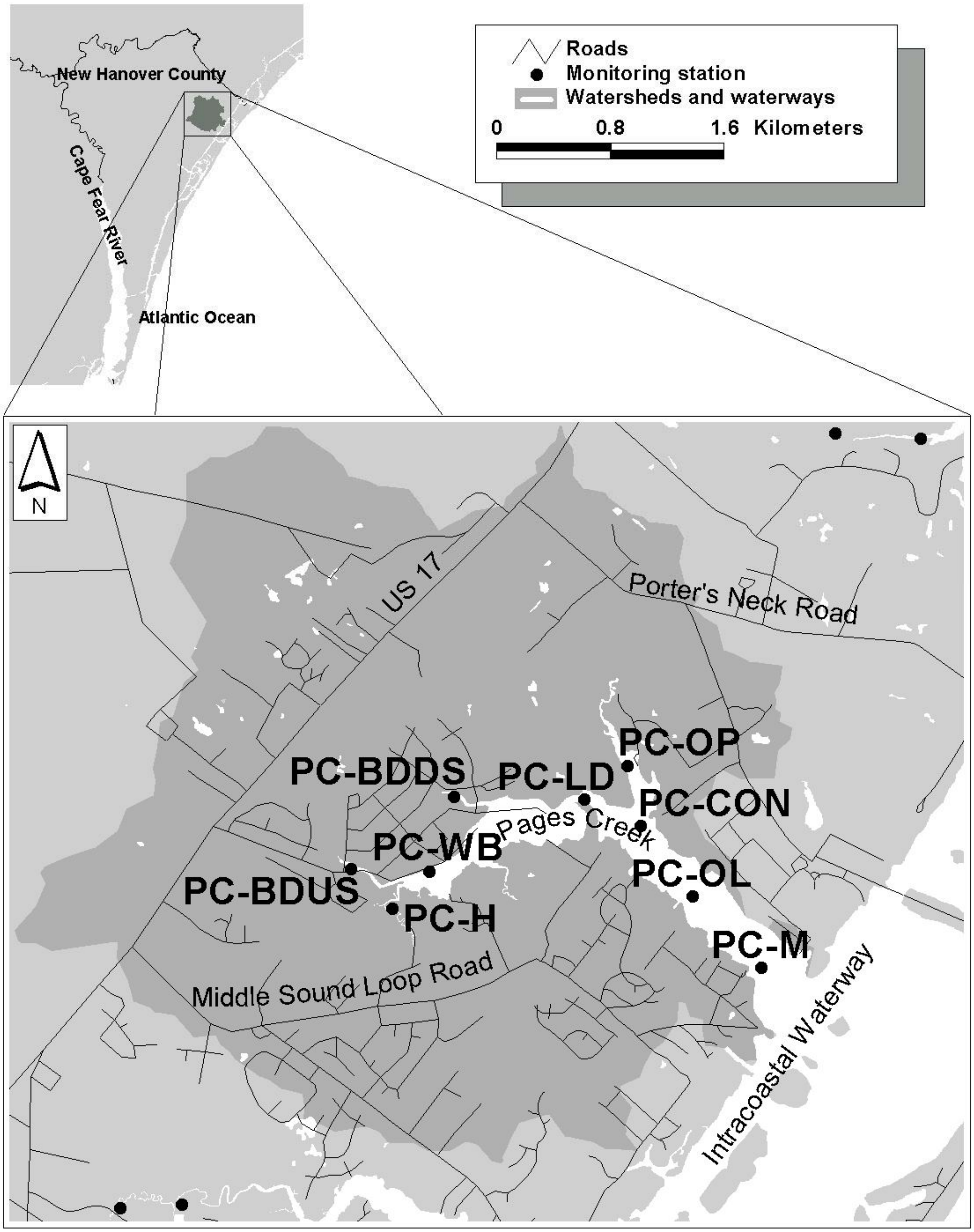


10.0 Pages Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 4,100 acres (1,659 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: >13%
Watershed population: Approximately 8,390

The University of North Carolina Wilmington was not funded by the County in 2011 to sample Pages Creek. Subsequent County-sponsored sampling of this creek was performed by Coastal Planning & Engineering of North Carolina, Inc., with data and information for this creek available on the County Planning Department website: http://www.nhcgov.com/AgnAndDpt/PLNG/Pages/WaterQualityMonitoring.aspx.

Figure 10.1. Pages Creek watershed and sampling sites.



11.0 Smith Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 13,896 acres (5,624 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 28%
Watershed population: 31,780
Overall water quality: Fair-Poor
Problematic pollutants: some turbidity and low dissolved oxygen, fecal coliform pollution

Smith Creek drains into the lower Northeast Cape Fear River just before it joins with the mainstem Cape Fear River at Wilmington (Fig. 11.1). One location on Smith Creek, SC-CH at Castle Hayne Road (Fig. 11.1) is sampled monthly by UNCW under the auspices of the Lower Cape Fear River Program for selected parameters (field physical parameters and fecal coliform bacteria) and these data are shown below (Table 11.1).

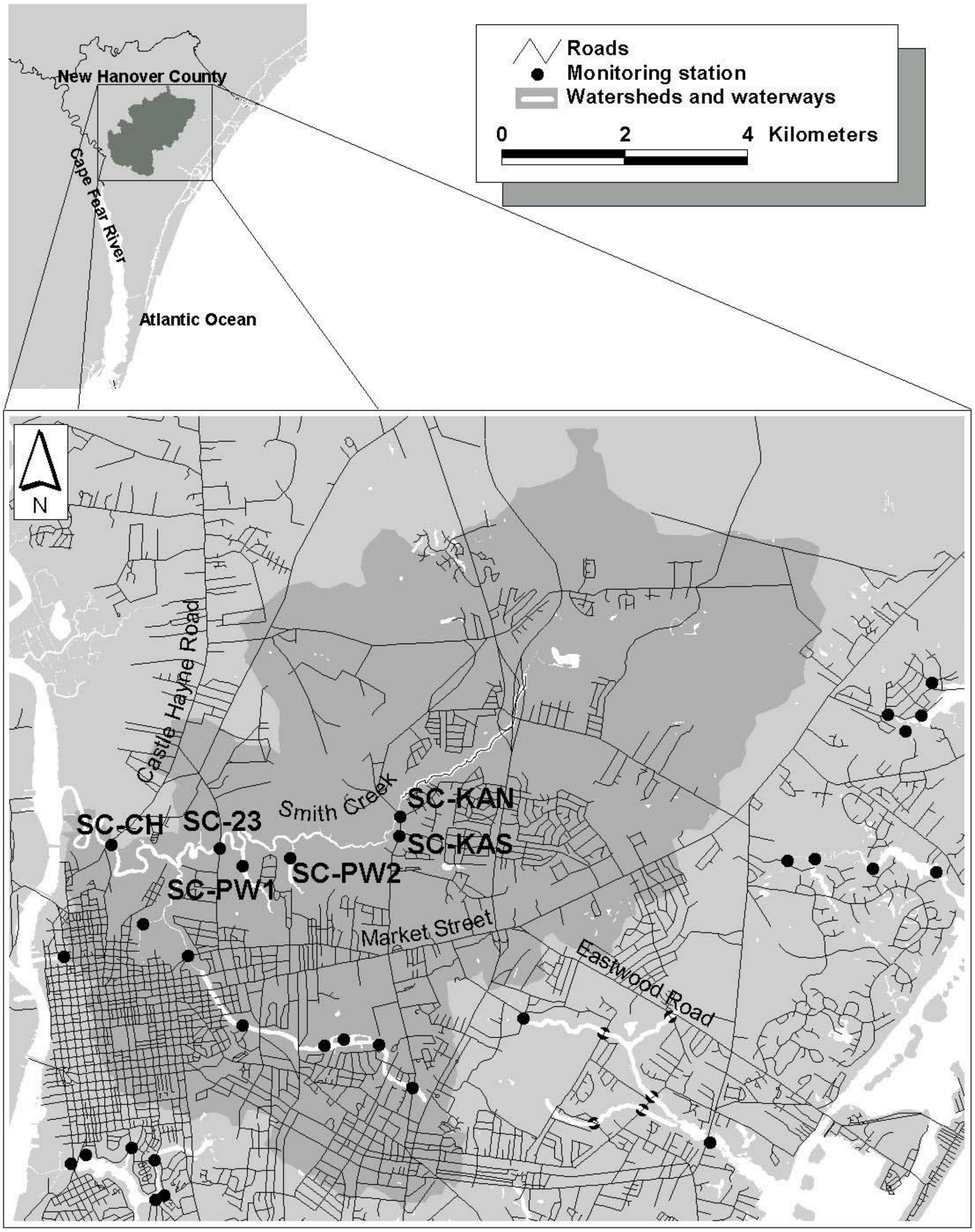
The dissolved oxygen standard for Smith Creek, which is rated as C Sw waters is 4.0 mg/L, which was violated twice in our 2011 samples. The North Carolina turbidity standard for estuarine waters (25 NTU) was exceeded two of seven sampling occasions.

Fecal coliform bacterial pollution increased over 2010. Concentrations exceeded 200 CFU/100 mL on four sampling occasions at SC-CH in 2011, for a Poor rating; one exceedence was high 5,300 CFU/100 mL (Table 11.1).

Table 11.1. Selected water quality parameters in Smith Creek watershed as mean (standard deviation) / range, 2011, n = 12 months.

Parameter	SC-CH	
	Mean (SD)	Range
Salinity (ppt)	5.5 (6.2)	0.3-18.5
Dissolved oxygen (mg/L)	6.5 (2.4)	3.2-10.1
Turbidity (NTU)	16 (8)	7-33
Fecal col. /100 mL (geomean / range)	143	37-5,300

Figure 11.1 Smith Creek watershed



12.0 Whiskey Creek

Snapshot
Watershed area: 2,095 acres (848 ha)
Impervious surface coverage: 19%
Watershed population: 7,980
Overall Water Quality: Good
Problematic pollutants: Low dissolved oxygen on occasion

Whiskey Creek drains into the ICW. Sampling of this creek began in August 1999, at five stations. One station was dropped due to access issues in 2005; four stations were sampled until and including 2007; in 2008 this was reduced to one station, WC-MLR (from the bridge at Masonboro Loop Road – Fig. 12.1). In 2011 salinity at this station was relatively high, what scientists consider euhaline, ranging from 27 – 34 ppt and averaging about 31 ppt (Table 12.1).

Dissolved oxygen concentrations were below the State standard on two of seven sampling occasions at WC-MLR (Table 12.1). Turbidity was within state standards for tidal waters on all sampling occasions (Table 12.1; Appendix B). Algal blooms are relatively rare in this creek and there were no blooms detected in our 2011 sampling (Table 12.1). Nutrient concentrations were generally low at this station, particularly inorganic nitrogen (ammonium and nitrate). Total nitrogen increased somewhat over 2010 while total phosphorus decreased slightly.

Fecal coliform bacteria were acceptable for human contact at this site and below the North Carolina standard of 200 CFU/100 mL on six of seven occasions sampled; the one exceedence was slight (210 CFU/100 mL). Whiskey Creek is presently closed to shellfishing by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries.

We note that our previous sampling showed that most water quality problems occurred near the headwaters of the creek rather than the middle section we currently sample.

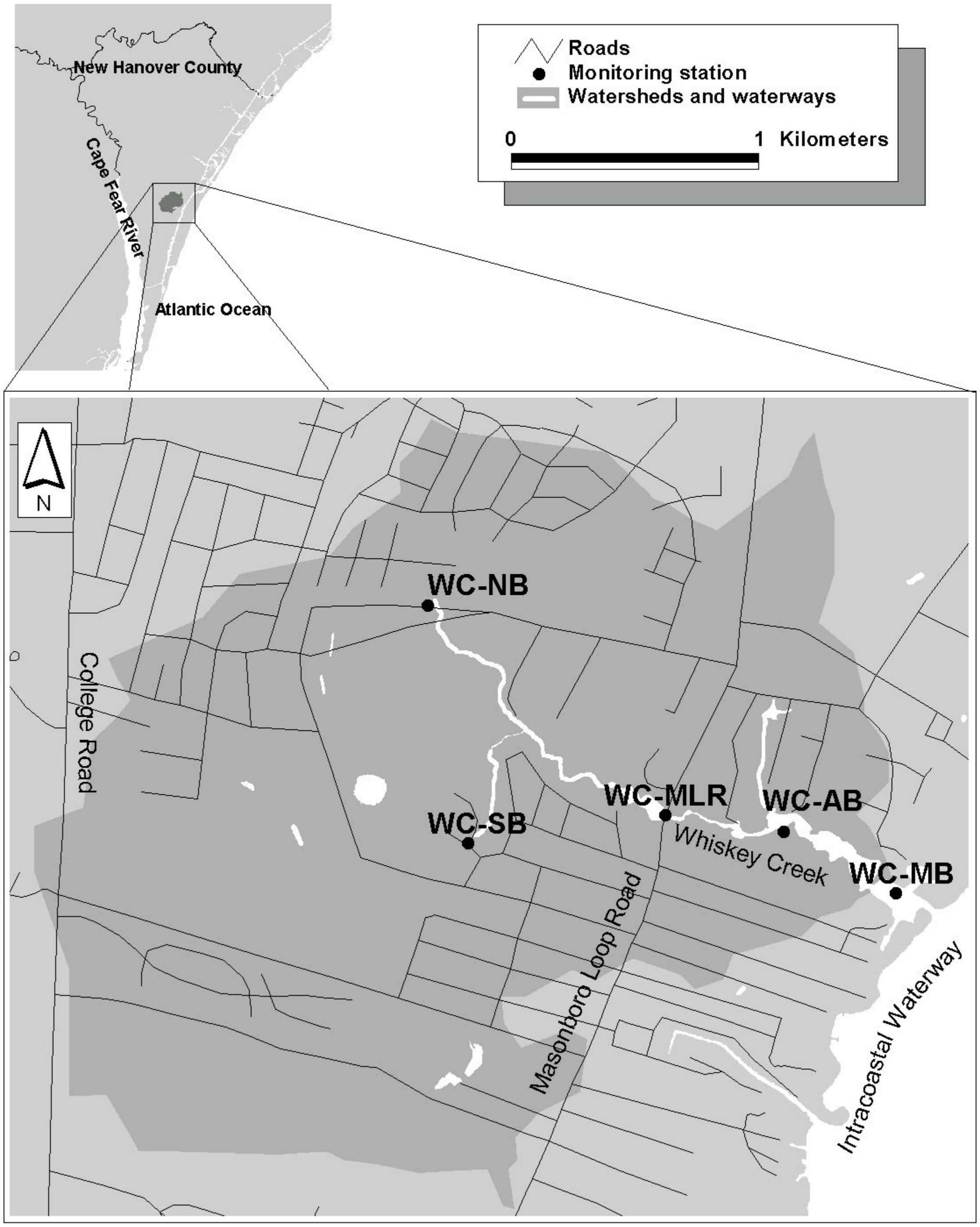
Table 12.1. Water quality summary statistics for Whiskey Creek, 2011, presented as mean (standard deviation) / range, fecal coliforms as geometric mean / range.

	Salinity (ppt)	DO (mg/L)	Turbidity (NTU)	TSS (mg/L)	Chlor *a* (μg/L)	FC CFU/100 mL
WC-MLR	30.9 (2.9)	5.9 (1.6)	6 (2)	16.4 (8.1)	6 (4)	34
	26.9-34.4	3.9-8.6	3-9	1.4-24.5	1-12	5-210

Table 12.2. Nutrient concentration summary statistics for Whiskey Creek, 2011, as mean (standard deviation) / range, N/P ratio as mean / median.

	Nitrate (mg/L)	Ammonium (mg/L)	TN (mg/L)	Phosphate (mg/L)	TP (mg/L)	N/P ratio
WC-MLR	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	0.47 (0.22)	0.02 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	6.0
	0.01-0.06	0.01-0.04	0.05-0.75	0.01-0.03	0.03-0.04	3.7

Figure 12.1. Whiskey Creek. Watershed and sampling sites.



13.0 Special Pollution Investigations

Periodically the City Stormwater Services and UNCW collaborate on special investigations to further assess deliberate or accidental sewage discharges, stormwater problems, or other pollution incidents.

On May 19, 2011 Dr. Mallin and Mr. Matthew McIver (at request of Ms. Beth Nunnally) collected samples at five sites along upper Burnt Mill Creek in and near Mill Creek Apartments to investigate potential sewage spills or leaks. Samples were taken for fecal coliform bacteria and optical brighteners (Table 13.1). Fecal coliforms were enumerated by a State-certified contract laboratory and optical brighteners were analyzed fluorometrically at the UNCW Center for Marine Science as in Tavares (2008).

Table 13.1. Results of May 19, 2011 special sampling in Burnt Mill Creek near Mill Creek Apartments.

Site	fecal coliforms (CFU/100 mL)	optical brighteners
WV1 (branch at Varsity and Wilshire)	637	13
Kerr-BC (stream beside Bishop Carpet)	1,091	10
MC Apts at footbridge upstream	1,000	13
MC Apts in stream below vehicle bridge	1,182	13
MC Apts pipe entering water at v. bridge	73	13

Fecal coliform counts were high at all locations except the pipe entering the stream. Investigations in 2010 showed problematic levels of pollution coming from this pipe. City staff followed up on the problem and the system was repaired. The lack of high optical brightener concentrations in this sampling tends to indicate a stormwater runoff problem affecting Burnt Mill Creek and tributaries during the May 2011 sampling, rather than sewage.

On September 9, 2011 Dr. Mallin and Mr. Matthew McIver (at request of Ms. Beth Nunnally) collected samples at five sites along upper Burnt Mill creek to investigate potential sewage spills or leaks. Samples were taken for fecal coliform bacteria and optical brighteners.

Samples were taken at streams entering and leaving the Kerr Avenue Wetland (KA1 and KA3); at AP1 farther downstream just above Anne McCrary regional detention pond; at the branch behind Varsity and Wilshire (WV1); and at a branch passing under Randall Parkway flowing toward Ann McCrary Pond (NB1). At KA1, the head of the Kerr Avenue wetland there was a heavy turbidity plume (1,367 NTU – maximum scale on our meter) at 2:00 pm. We followed the ditch upstream to College Rd. where we met several fellows from CFPUA investigating the plume. We followed the plume farther upstream to MacCallister's Deli and it appeared to go even farther upstream, possibly across College Road. We reported it to Stormwater Services who subsequently investigated. Note that the plume was slow moving, and had not made it into the middle of the Kerr Avenue wetland by 2:30 pm; turbidity at KA-3 was only 2 NTU. Fecal coliform data showed the following (Table 13.2):

Table 13.2. Results of September 9, 2011 special sampling in Burnt Mill Creek.

Site	fecal coliforms (CFU/100 mL)	optical brighteners
KA-1 (entering Kerr wetland)	10,000	14.1
KA-3 (exiting Kerr wetland)	2,000	9.4
AP-1 (entering AP regional pond)	240	10.0
NB1 (branch into AP pond)	290	9.2
WV1 (branch at Varsity and Wilshire)	510	15.1

Fecal coliforms – whatever flowed into the Kerr Avenue wetland appeared to exacerbate fecal coliform counts as they were very high; they were still high exiting the wetland but well below what entered. The other sites were just above state standard except for WV1, where counts were above 500 CFU.
Optical brighteners - the readings did not indicate an active sewage pulse. According to our previous work on local streams (Tavares et al. 2008) readings up to the 20s are normal background levels.

To further investigate the fecal contamination of Burnt Mill Creek an intern in Dr. Mallin's laboratory, Ms. Elizabeth Clay, performed a special study sampling fecal coliforms and optical brighteners at several locations proposed by Berth Nunnally of Stormwater Services. This study was carried out in fall 2011. the stations were located on Burnt Mill creek at the following roads: Princess Place, Chestnut, Market St., Metts and Colonial.

Water samples were collected for fecal coliform analysis on six different occasions. Fecal coliform samples were collected using an acid washed, pre-autoclaved bottle from the shore. The fecal coliform samples were immediately filtered and processed using a standard membrane filtration method (mFC) (APHA 1995). Each sample was filtered with 10 mL and 100 mL of collected water. On every occasion the 10 mL sample was used, and afterwards multiplied by ten to obtain the CFU/100 mL count.

Optical brighteners were collected on the same six occasions as fecal coliform bacteria. They were collected on shore by submerging acid washed Nalgene Amber Narrow-Mouth Economy Environmental Sample Bottles 10 cm below the surface midstream, facing upstream. Samples were kept on ice, and immediately refrigerated upon arrival to the laboratory. The presence of optical brighteners was tested the following day, after the samples warmed to room temperature. Fluorometry was performed with a hand-held fluorometer. A blank was first determined using one hundred percent deionized water, as well as testing a sample from behind the Center for Marine Science building that was sure to contain little or no optical brighteners. Each sample was then measured in duplicate. The mean of each reading was used for the optical brightener measurement.

At each sample site, the water was tested for temperature, pH, conductivity, salinity, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, and percent saturation using a YSI 6920 (YSI, Incorporated, Cincinnati, OH).

After all data had been collected, it was normalized by log transformation and compiled to create a scatter plot to determine if there was a significant relationship between fecal coliform bacteria count and optical brighteners in Burnt Mill Creek.

Results

The fecal coliform data from all six sampling events in Burnt Mill Creek ranged from 130 to 930 CFU/100 ml (Table 13.3). The data from all five stations showed fecal coliform counts above the State contact standard of 200 CFU/100 mL. All samples were taken during periods with little rain fall. The last sample date, November 30, 2011, was the closest to a rain event, which occurred the day before. However, this did not create an unusual peak in fecal coliform levels. The lack of strong peaks > 1,000 CFU/100 mL indicates that sewage leaks were probably not present. Likewise, there were few major differences in counts across sites (Table 13.3).

Table 13.3. Fecal coliform bacteria counts from special sampling in Burnt Mill Creek in fall 2011, data from six collections.

Site	Median	Mean±st. dev	Geometric Mean	Min	Max
BMC-PP	310	307±87	294	160	410
BMC-CH	370	450±288	380	170	930
BMC-MKT	360	422±232	381	230	870
BMC-MTTS	345	365±132	345	200	530
BMC-COL	460	483±280	405	130	900

The optical brightener data from all sampling events in Burnt Mill Creek ranged from 6 to 12 (Table 13.4). There was little variance in the optical brightener data. Previous studies in New Hanover County tidal creeks showed that optical brightener concentrations below 20 were indicative of a lack of sewage influence (Tavares et al. 2008).

Table 13.4. Optical brightener concentrations from special sampling in Burnt Mill Creek in fall 2011, data from six collections.

Site	Median	Mean±St. Dev.	Min	Max
BMC-PP	7	7±1	6	7
BMC-CH	7	7±1	6	7
BMC-MKT	7	7±1	6	8
BMC-MTTS	7	7±0	7	8
BMC-COL	9	9+2	7	12

A regression analysis was performed on the fecal coliform and optical brightener data. This yielded a p value of 0.069, which indicates a non-significant relationship between the two parameters (Fig. 13.1). The $r^2 = 0.11$, which indicates a very weak relationship between the fecal coliform and optical brightener levels.

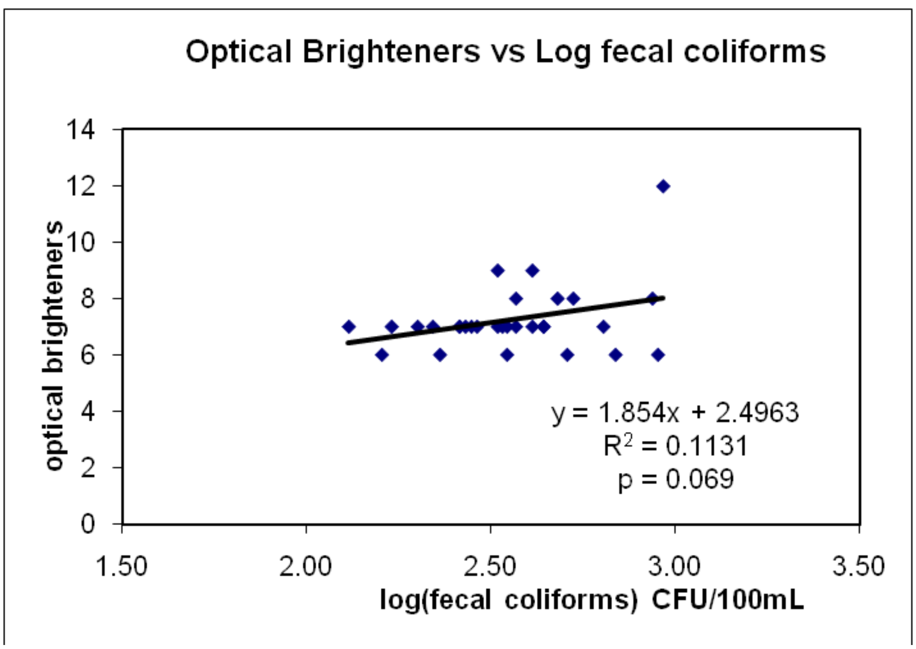


Fig.13.1. Scatter plot displaying the non-significant relationship between optical brighteners and fecal coliform bacteria at Burnt Mill Creek.

Discussion

There was a non-significant relationship between fecal coliform levels and optical brighteners in Burnt Mill Creek watershed. The consistently low levels of optical brighteners detected throughout sampling indicate that the source of fecal coliform bacteria is not from human related sewage leaks, nor were there large peaks that would indicate a sewage spill or leak. However, the fecal coliform counts were all well above the North Carolina Water Quality Standard of 14 CFU/100 ml for shellfishing waters, and all but four (out of thirty) samples were greater than the North Carolina Water Quality Standard of 200 CFU/ml for human contact waters. Thus, stormwater runoff appears to be the most consistent form of fecal contamination impacting lower Burnt Mill Creek.

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15.0 Acknowledgments

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16.0 Appendix A. North Carolina Water Quality standards for selected parameters (NCDEHNR 1996). We note that these standards are general, and differ with designated water body use. Details can be found at within the N.C. Division of Water quality website at: http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/csu/documents/ncactable290807.pdf

Parameter	Standard
Dissolved oxygen	5.0 ppm (mg/L)
Turbidity	25 NTU (tidal saltwater) 50 NTU (freshwater)
Fecal coliform counts	14 CFU/100 mL (shellfishing waters), and more than 10% of the samples cannot exceed 43 CFU/100 mL. 200 CFU/100 mL (human contact waters)
Chlorophyll *a*	40 ppb (μg/L)

CFU = colony-forming units
mg/L = milligrams per liter = parts per million
μg/L = micrograms per liter = parts per billion

17.0 Appendix B. UNCW ratings of sampling stations in Wilmington watersheds based on 2011, where available, for chlorophyll *a*, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, and fecal coliform bacteria (human contact standard) based on North Carolina state chemical standards for freshwater or tidal saltwater, *fecal coliform based on contact standard.

G (good quality) – state standard exceeded in ≤ 10% of the measurements
F (fair quality) – state standard exceeded in 11-25% of the measurements
P (poor quality) – state standard exceeded in >25% of the measurements

Watershed	Station	Chlor *a*	DO	Turbidity	Fecal coliforms*
Bradley Creek	BC-CA	G	F	G	P
	BC-SB	G	P	G	P
	BC-NB	P	F	G	P
Burnt Mill Creek	BMC-AP1	G	P	G	P
	BMC-AP3	F	G	G	P
	BMC-PP	P	P	G	P
Greenfield Lake	GL-LC	-	P	G	-
	GL-JRB	-	P	G	-
	GL-LB	-	P	G	-
	GL-2340	P	P	G	P
	GL-YD	P	G	G	F
	GL-P	P	F	G	F
Hewletts Creek	HC-3	G	G	G	G
	NB-GLR	F	P	G	P
	MB-PGR	G	G	G	P
	SB-PGR	G	F	G	P
	PVGC-9	G	F	G	P
Howe Creek	HW-FP	G	G	G	G
	HW-GP	G	P	G	P
	HW-DT	F	F	G	P
Smith Creek	SC-CH	-	F	P	P
Whiskey Creek	WC-MLR	G	P	G	F

18.0 Appendix C. GPS coordinates for the Wilmington Watersheds Project sampling stations used during various years.

Watershed	Station	GPS coordinates	
Barnard's Creek	BNC-RR	N 34.15873	W 77.93795
Bradley Creek	BC-CA	N 34.23257	W 77.86658
	BC-CR	N 34.23077	W 77.85235
	BC-SB	N 34.21977	W 77.84578
	BC-SBU	N 34.21725	W 77.85410
	BC-NB	N 34.22150	W 77.84405
	BC-NBU	N 34.23265	W 77.92362
	BC-76	N 34.21473	W 77.83357
Burnt Mill Creek	BMC-KA1	N 34.22207	W 77.88506
	BMC-KA3	N 34.22280	W 77.88601
	BMC-AP1	N 34.22927	W 77.86658
	BMC-AP2	N 34.22927	W 77.89792
	BMC-AP3	N 34.22927	W 77.90143
	BMC-WP	N 34.24083	W 77.92419
	BMC-PP	N 34.24252	W 77.92510
Futch Creek	FC-4	N 34.30127	W 77.74635
	FC-6	N 34.30298	W 77.75070
	FC-8	N 34.30423	W 77.75415
	FC-13	N 34.30352	W 77.75790
	FC-17	N 34.30378	W 77.76422
	FOY	N 34.30705	W 77.75707
Greenfield Lake	GL-SS1	N 34.19963	W 77.92447
	GL-SS2	N 34.20038	W 77.92952
	GL-LC	N 34.20752	W 77.92980
	GL-JRB	N 34.21260	W 77.93140
	GL-LB	N 34.21445	W 77.93553
	GL-2340	N 34.19857	W 77.93560
	GL-YD	N 34.20702	W 77.93120
	GL-P	N 34.21370	W 77.94362
Hewletts Creek	HC-M	N 34.18230	W 77.83888
	HC-2	N 34.18723	W 77.84307
	HC-3	N 34.19023	W 77.85083
	HC-NWB	N 34.19512	W 77.86155
	NB-GLR	N 34.19783	W 77.86317
	MB-PGR	N 34.19807	W 77.87088
	SB-PGR	N 34.19025	W 77.86472
	PVGC-9	N 34.19165	W 77.89175

Howe Creek	HW-M	N 34.24765	W 77.78718
	HW-FP	N 34.25443	W 77.79488
	HW-GC	N 34.25448	W 77.80512
	HW-GP	N 34.25545	W 77.81530
	HW-DT	N 34.25562	W 77.81952
Motts Creek	MOT-RR	N 34.15867	W 77.91605
Pages Creek	PC-M	N 34.27008	W 77.77133
	PC-OL	N 34.27450	W 77.77567
	PC-CON	N 34.27743	W 77.77763
	PC-OP	N 34.28292	W 77.78032
	PC-LD	N 34.28067	W 77.78495
	PC-BDDS	N 34.28143	W 77.79417
	PC-WB	N 34.27635	W 77.79582
	PC-BDUS	N 34.27732	W 77.80153
	PC-H	N 34.27508	W 77.79813
Smith Creek	SC-23	N 34.25795	W 77.91967
	SC-CH	N 34.25897	W 77.93872
Whiskey Creek	WC-NB	N 34.16803	W 77.87648
	WC-SB	N 34.15935	W 77.87470
	WC-MLR	N 34.16013	W 77.86633
	WC-AB	N 34.15967	W 77.86177
	WC-MB	N 34.15748	W 77.85640

18.0 Appendix D. University of North Carolina at Wilmington reports and papers concerning water quality in New Hanover County's tidal creeks.

Reports

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