

# State Blames River Pollution On Septic Tanks And Runoff

BY DOUG RUTTER

Septic tanks and stormwater runoff are the most probable sources of pollution in Lockwood Folly River, says a state report on water quality.

A major finding of the report is that most soils in the river basin have severe restrictions for septic tanks either due to a high water table or poor filtering ability.

Cooperation among town, county and state officials will be needed to clear bacteria from the sensitive river, according to the N.C. Division of Environmental Management (DEM) study released last week.

Since last August, approximately 600 acres in Lockwood Folly have been closed to shellfishing because of unsafe bacteria levels. The river historical-

ly provides about 40 percent of Brunswick County's oysters and clams. But pollution is now threatening the resource-rich river and the livelihoods of dozens of local fishermen.

Other possible sources of pollution listed in the report are surface water discharges, animal waste, sediment and influx from the waterway. Each of those, however, is discounted in the report as having a minor impact on the river's growing battle with fecal coliform bacteria. The presence of high levels of fecal coliform prevent shellfish from being harvested.

DEM's study and report stem from a public meeting held in October 1988 at Bolivia. It was there that local residents requested help from state agencies in determining sources of pollution in the river and

proposing solutions.

The meeting came just two months after the state had closed about 153 acres of shellfishing waters in the river because of high bacteria counts. Later in 1988, another 450 acres of oyster and clam beds were closed to harvesting. At year's end a total of 1,171 acres, or 71 percent of the available shellfishing acres in the river, had been shut down.

A preliminary version of the state report released in March said septic tanks were the most likely source of pollution. However, Environmental Management officials are now saying they cannot determine whether septic tanks or runoff is the more probable source.

DEM spokesman Jim Sheppard said the final

draft incorporates the findings of another state agency, Shellfish Sanitation, a branch of the N.C. Division of Health Services, conducted a survey of septic tanks along the Lockwood Folly River in January and concluded that stormwater runoff was the most likely source of bacterial pollution.

"There's nothing that says both can't be contributing to the problem," Sheppard said Tuesday. "It's another idea worth considering."

The Lockwood Folly River Basin, the focus of the DEM study, covers 138 square miles with the majority of the land classified forest or wetland. Twelve percent of the basin is tied up in agricultural uses and only two percent is urban.

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STAFF PHOTO BY RAHN ADAMS

## Thank You, Dragon Lady

Three-year-old John Sorrell of Charlotte takes a toy from the "Dragon Lady" at Saturday morning's meeting of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association. The boy attended the meeting with his grandmother, Ann Sorrell of Sunset Beach.

## AT SUNSET BEACH

# 'Save Our Bridge' Supporters May Augment T-Shirts With Legal Briefs

BY RAHN ADAMS

With more than half of the crowd sporting "Save Our Bridge" T-shirts, members of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association made history on several counts Saturday as they stepped up their opposition to a proposed high-rise bridge at Sunset Beach.

A record crowd of 250 members and guests packed the Sunset Beach Volunteer Fire Department Saturday morning to attend the SBTA's first rally. The two-hour event included musical entertainment by the Vocal Arts Quartet from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, a costumed "Dragon Lady" mascot who handed out toys to children, a slide presentation on Sunset Beach by SBTA President Al Wells and a talk by Duke University professor and author Orrin Pilkey, one of the country's leading marine geologists.

Those activities themselves were firsts for the association, but the real history-maker for the group was its apparent decision to take legal action against the State of North Carolina, if necessary, to keep Sunset Beach's 28-year-old pontoon swing bridge—the last of its kind on the East Coast—from being replaced by a modern high-rise fixed span similar to those at Ocean Isle Beach and Holden Beach.

"The time for talking is gone," SBTA official Warren "Bud" Knapp told the *Beacon* after the rally. "The time for action is here...Our only alternative now is the courts to protect our heritage." He also indicated that if the SBTA takes any legal action concerning the bridge, the case probably will be handled in federal court.

Knapp's comments were based on a favorable response to a proposed resolution recommended by the association's board of directors and read to the gathering for the first time Saturday. However, under its bylaws, the SBTA could not officially vote on the resolution at the meeting.

The board was scheduled to meet Tuesday afternoon to prepare ballots that will be mailed to SBTA members. A two-thirds majority of the membership must approve the resolution for it to be adopted.

The proposed resolution would empower the board of directors "to

investigate other alternatives, to require a thoughtful and constructive consideration of the need for a high-rise bridge at Sunset Beach, (with) such action including the possibility of investigating and engaging legal counsel to take such legal actions as may be ultimately approved by the membership of this association..."

Near the close of the rally, Knapp's request for the group to voice its "verbal support" of the resolution was answered with a resounding chorus of "yca!" Although Knapp did not give opponents equal opportunity to express their views, no public comments were made in support of a high-rise bridge at any point during the meeting.

According to the N.C. Department of Transportation, the new bridge is now in the design stage; last month the state Board of Transportation awarded a \$470,598 design contract to a Raleigh engineering firm. The state has received all necessary permits for construction and expects to receive bids on the project in September 1990.

The proposed fixed span over the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway will allow simultaneous boating and vehicular traffic, which is not possible now with the pontoon bridge. The new bridge's estimated cost is \$6.9 million, with another \$1 million having been spent for right-of-way acquisition.

Plans call for the state to cover 20 percent of the bridge's cost; the balance would come from a federal fund for replacing bridges on the federal aid system.

However, the SBTA contends that the new bridge's price tag is too high, both in terms of tax money and in increased development that the association feels will occur if the bridge is built.

The SBTA is no stranger to the courts. For the past several years, it has been involved in a legal fight with the local development firm, Sunset Beach & Twin Lakes Inc., over ownership of "Lot 1-A," an oceanfront lot at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Main Street.

After a September 1987 trial in Brunswick County Superior Civil Court, Judge Bruce Briggs of Madison County ruled in the SBTA's favor and found that the lot is a



*"Remember you can only lose this battle once. Once the bridge is built, the battle is lost."*

Orrin Pilkey  
Marine Geologist

public right-of-way for beach access. The case is under appeal and is scheduled to be heard by the N.C. Court of Appeals on Sept. 20 in Raleigh.

Durham attorney Jim Maxwell, who represents the SBTA in the Lot 1-A suit, spoke to the association Saturday about the possible implications of a high-rise bridge at Sunset Beach and the span's relation to Lot 1-A.

"I dare suggest that shortly after the bridge would be constructed, you will find a water and/or sewer line being run over to the island," Maxwell said. "The major halt to (commercial) development on this island to date has been the lack of...sewer, specifically."

"You need to know that in the Lot 1-A fight...if we are unsuccessful in that, (Lot 1-A and adjacent property) is presently zoned commercial. Hotels, motels, restaurants, shopping centers could, in fact, go if sewer is there to support it and if Lot 1-A is allowed to be converted back into a buildable lot."

Maxwell also suggested the possibility that a high-rise bridge and the commercial development it

would foster might require additional parking facilities on the western end of Sunset Beach and might result in a bridge eventually being built to Bird Island, a presently undeveloped island immediately west of Sunset Beach and privately owned.

The attorney noted that his firm has researched legal fights to stop bridge construction projects in other parts of the country. He added that all of the lawsuits he reviewed failed to keep bridges from being built. However, he stated, "I am not totally diminished nor restrained from whatever legal action can be taken, simply because it has not ever been successful."

In his comments to the group, Pilkey observed that a high-rise bridge would increase development pressure at Sunset Beach. "Sometimes it's hard to sort out the different things that affect development, and development is increasing on our barrier islands in any event, with or without bridges," he said, "but there's no question, in my opinion, that building a better bridge...will increase the density of development and will begin to bring in pressure for high-rises (buildings) and so forth on this island."

Pilkey said his main concern with high-density development is that an on-going rise in the sea level—estimated at one foot per century—and the resulting shoreline erosion eventually will affect more property owners than with low-density development. Increased development also would damage the environment and diminish the natural beauty of the island, he added.

"I would urge you to fight 'homogenization'—cloning—of our islands," Pilkey said. "Don't accept change as inevitable, and don't accept change as progress...The direction for the public good is clear, and the direction for the public good is for keeping this bridge as it is or at least not building a major high-rise, concrete bridge over to this island."

"Remember you can only lose this battle once. Once this bridge is built, the battle is lost...I think this is great what you're trying to do. I don't know whether you'll win the battle, but I support you in this and I urge you to stick by your guns and define progress in your own way..."

## Lawmen Find Marijuana In Shallotte, Supply Areas

Local and state lawmen confiscated 119 marijuana plants last Thursday in an air search of the Shallotte and Supply areas, according to Brunswick County Narcotics Division Officer Mike Speck.

No charges had been filed as of Tuesday in connection with the seizures. However, Speck said Tuesday that authorities were still investigating two locations where plants were found, and that arrests were anticipated.

The search utilized an SBI spotter plane and two ground crews composed of eight members of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, Shallotte Police Department and SBI.

The largest number of plants was found in the Sunset Harbor area, where 87 plants in seven patches were seized, Speck said. Thirteen

plants in two patches were discovered in the Shell Point area. Lawmen also confiscated 19 plants off Stone Chimney Road and 14 plants off N.C. 130 about two miles west of Shallotte.

The plants ranged in height from three feet to 18 feet, with most of them about 16 feet tall, Speck reported. Street value of the marijuana at maturity was estimated at more than \$190,400.

The officer noted that many of the plants found last week were of the "sensimilla" variety—a seedless type of marijuana that contains a higher concentration of THC, the active chemical in the controlled substance.

Speck indicated that the discovery of sensimilla plants was fairly uncommon in Brunswick County until this year.

## County School Officials Defend New Communication Skills Program

BY DOUG RUTTER

Union Primary School teachers and parents clashed with school system officials last week over a new communication skills program many feel is replacing a successful phonics-based approach to reading.

Teachers and parents packed the Union Primary School cafeteria during two separate meetings last Tuesday and Thursday. The meetings were called to present an integrated communications program being used countywide for the first time this year in kindergarten through third grades.

Brunswick County Schools Superintendent John Kaufhold chaired both meetings. Also attending were William Harrison, associate superintendent for curriculum, and Diane Paquin, elementary supervisor.

Union Primary School reading teacher Doris Wilson said there were "a lot of fireworks" Tuesday night when teachers and parents questioned school system officials about the role phonics would play in the new communications program.

Opening the meeting Thursday night, Kaufhold said he refused to debate about the ousted Spalding reading method. That method uses phonics—the study of sounds that make up words—to teach children to read.

"The time to debate the program is past," he said.



*"It's not something that I would put in if I didn't think it would work."*

—John Kaufhold  
Schools Superintendent

"We are going to use the new program, we are going to evaluate the new program and we are going to decide if the new program is successful."

Kaufhold urged parents to write him letters, call him on the telephone or visit him in person at the central office in Southport if they wish to complain.

Most of the parents attending last Thursday's session said their children have benefited from the phonics-based approach to reading. They pointed to better scores on the California Achievement Test in reading, language and math. Since 1987, the Spalding reading

method had been used in different areas of Brunswick County, but most intensively at Union Primary School.

While many parents like the controversial phonics-based method, others attending last Thursday's meeting said their children had difficulty learning that method. They are willing to give the new program a try.

School system officials also said the achievement test scores can be misleading because children may not be comprehending what they are reading. "High scores do not necessarily mean that our children are good readers," noted Harrison.

He said phonics will be a part of the new communications program. But he added that there will no longer be an intense teaching of the Spalding reading method. A draft of a school system handbook on the new communications program says that focusing on phonics instruction that stresses learning rules is an inappropriate practice.

A major key of the new program, said Harrison, will be an ongoing assessment of students by teachers. He said the achievement tests used in the past will no longer be used to determine the progress of children.

Kaufhold said the new integrated communication skills program was developed by teachers representing each school, principals and school system staff. It was

approved by the Brunswick County Board of Education in the spring.

He said the "literature-based approach to reading" is already used in school systems in Charlotte, Raleigh and Winston-Salem. Under the program, Kaufhold said students will use language rather than study language.

Also, reading will be taught in conjunction with writing throughout the curriculum. "They'll be reading the stories they have written," he said.

Following last Thursday's meeting, Kaufhold told a group of parents that some teachers oppose the new program because it is harder to teach than other methods. In the past, he said teachers have been able to rely on workbooks and ditto sheets. Under the new program, he said there will be more individualized teaching and that will demand more of the teachers.

He noted that he has four children in the school system and would not introduce a new program if he didn't believe in it. "It's not something that I would put in if I didn't think it would work."

Concerned parents had planned to meet Tuesday night to discuss the new reading program and grading system in the county's primary schools. The purpose of the meeting was to gather input from parents to present to the school board on Sept. 11.