

Environmental sustainability in your backyard



Amy Mead

Thirteen years ago, my husband and I moved to Wilmington from Miami, Fla., with our toddler and new baby in tow. Having lived amid the hustle and bustle of South Florida, the prospect of a smaller university town at the beach with friendly people was very enticing. We fell in love with the beautiful white sand beaches and gorgeous coastal waters for fishing, swimming, and surfing.

The Cape Fear region has been attracting an increasing number of folks, whether they are escaping the cold northern weather or looking for a smaller town feel, population growth is booming. Pender County has been ranked among the fastest growing counties in North Carolina increasing its population by over 15% since 1990. New Hanover County went from a sleepy beach county of 50,000 residents in 1950 to over 230,000 today. Brunswick County has consistently topped the chart as the fastest growing NC county with an estimated 32% growth rate from 2010-2019. With rampant growth and development comes many challenges. Impermeable surfaces are



Smooth Cordgrass *sporobolus alterniflorus* provides habitat for birds and fish and acts as a living buffer to protect shorelines from erosion. [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]

increasing, natural habitats are shrinking and there is a larger strain on our infrastructure and natural resources. The question is: How do we balance growth and economic prosperity while maintaining the quality of the environment that draws us all to live here?

As the new Area Natural Resources Agent for Pender, Brunswick, and New Hanover counties, my program will focus water quality issues and environmental sustainability, bringing research-based solutions from

NC State to our county residents. The concept of sustainability is based on the fact that everything humans need to survive is based either directly or indirectly on our natural environment. Sustainability looks to the future and asks; how do we fulfill our needs now and ensure that the needs of our children and grandchildren will be met? The United States committed to sustainability with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, declaring it a national policy "to create and maintain conditions under which

humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations." This is a laudable and ultimately essential goal to work towards.

Here on the coast, we want to ensure that our descendants have clean water to drink, healthy waterways for fishing and recreation, habitat for birds and other animals, and pollinators to support agriculture. There are wonderful examples of communities collaborating to

improve and protect our natural environment. For example, the NC Wildlife Federation, in partnership with the Town of Carolina Beach, NC Cooperative Extension, Plastic Ocean Project, and the Island Wildlife Chapter have undertaken restoration of a portion of the Carolina Beach Lake shoreline. The addition of coir matting to stabilize the bank along with new native trees and grasses will improve water quality by filtering stormwater runoff and have the co-benefit of providing habitat for our native birds and insects.

If you are interested to learn how you can make a difference, the NC Cooperative Extension will host a Backyard Sustainability Series this spring. These classes will cover stormwater solutions for homeowners, native plants for wildlife, planting trees for resiliency, composting and recycling, urban wildlife, pollinators and more. These classes will help residents learn skills to live in harmony with their natural environment and help to preserve our natural resources for future generations to enjoy.

The Arboretum is free and open to the public every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is located at 6206 Oleander Drive in Wilmington.

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