

The Best Environmental and Economical Solution to Meet the Region's Increasing Capacity Needs

Ensuring adequate water and wastewater treatment capacity are in place while also protecting the environment is the responsibility of and a challenge for governments. Towns in western Wake County will require more capacity over the long-term even with slow to moderate growth. Jobs cannot be created unless existing and future businesses have capacity.

Apex, Cary, and Morrisville are working as partners to meet this challenge through the construction of regional wastewater management facilities. Regional wastewater management facilities are encouraged by state agencies in that they offer a more economical, environmentally-sensitive solution than if towns were to try to go it alone. The site of these facilities must take into account state mandates for interbasin transfer, which looks at the long-term balance of water supplies.

The state of North Carolina requires a certificate to take water out of one river basin and return it to a different river basin. The towns of Apex, Cary, and Morrisville and the southern portion of Research Triangle Park all get their drinking water from Jordan Lake, which is in the Cape Fear Basin, but they currently discharge it as treated wastewater into the Neuse River Basin. As part of the Partners certificate to transfer water, the State has said that they must begin returning some of that water to the Cape Fear River Basin. This is the big reason why the western facility - which will go a long way towards meeting that requirement - is being built so far south in Wake County with an underground pipeline through a portion of Chatham County.

The highly treated wastewater from the western facility will replenish the Cape Fear River for use by communities downstream. Without these facilities, Sanford, Fayetteville, Wilmington, and others along the Cape Fear won't have tens of millions of gallons of water each day for drinking, manufacturing, construction, cooling, and processing. There won't be additional water for new businesses in RTP South and little to no expansion of existing ones. The same is true in Morrisville, Cary (including the part that's in Chatham County), and Apex, the latter of which is out of sewer capacity. When businesses can't expand, they leave and take their jobs with them.

The addition of the Partners' regional wastewater facilities will bring relief in the form of clean water and working sewer to dozens who live near the plant site and have failed wells and septic tanks. Given the significance of the project, since 2007 the United States Army Corps of Engineers led an exhaustive, transparent, and collaborative process to fairly apply the National Environmental Policy Act's requirements to the project. Scientists, engineers, and just regular folks from New Hill, Chatham County, EPA, the State, and the Partners raised and turned every issue and alternative inside out and upside down. As many as 20 round-table meetings and public hearings took place; thousands of pages of studies and findings were generated covering a long list of topics including discharging into Jordan/Harris lakes instead of directly into the Cape Fear River, groundwater, wetlands, farmlands, wildlife, air quality, odor, noise, traffic, light spill, hazardous substances, global climate change, archaeological and historic properties, property values, low-income and minority communities, and safety. At the end of it all, the Corps reached its independent Record of Decision that the site in the New Hill area of Apex, commonly referred to as Site 14, is the overall best alternative since it has the least impacts.

The Western Wake Water Reclamation Facilities are located north of US 1 and just south of Old US 1, bordered by New Hill Holleman Road to the east, and Shearon Harris Road to the west. The entire wastewater facilities site will be surrounded by approximately 200 feet of forested buffer to minimize any impacts to nearby residents, and to provide an aesthetically pleasing site. The Town of Apex's ordinances will be applied to all activities, before and after the plant's opening, including times for construction activities and limits to noise levels.