“We need our wetlands.” This was the main message promoted by the Carolina Wetlands Association at multiple outreach events in 2017 and 2018. We have been spreading the word to high school students, summer campers, conservation group members, water resource professionals, and museum goers. New website content focuses on wetland functions, along with information on types of wetlands that can be found in the Carolinas. We have created posters that we display at events, associating wetlands with the benefits they provide humans and nature.

The Carolina Wetlands Association has had a presence, as a sponsor or presenter, at the Reptile and Amphibian Day (NC Museum of Natural Science), Duke University’s Think Blue water event, Town of Cary’s (NC) Arbor Day, Mud Day (Raleigh’s Walnut Creek Wetland Park), and at a NC Water Resources Research Institute conference. We taught classes to local high school students on wetland amphibians and reptiles, values of wetlands to society, wetland plant identification, and rapid assessment for determining wetland condition. We also helped facilitate an educational forum in Wilmington, NC about the wood pellets industry, where we emphasized the severe impacts of this logging on our mature hardwood swamps.

In November 2018, Carolina Wetlands Association organized a “Wetlands Matter” event in Raleigh, which drew over 100 people. We are working hard to get the message out to as many people as possible, that we need our wetlands and they need us.

Key Ecosystem Services our Wetlands Provide

- Flood Control
- Water Quality
- Recreation
- Biodiversity
- Climate Regulation
Our Wetland Treasures Program continues to be very popular. At the close of 2018, the Carolina Wetlands Association had designated 15 wetland sites across the Carolinas as Wetland Treasures of the Carolinas. These Wetland Treasures range across North and South Carolina, and highlight special wetlands that provide our communities with valuable functions and services, including recreational and educational opportunities. The program is designed to encourage continued local stewardship and pride in these wetlands that have regional, national, and even international importance.

When our Wetland Treasure sites are announced in May during American Wetlands Month, the Carolina Wetlands Association organizes tours of each new Wetland Treasure. All tours have been well attended, sometimes with a wait list, and they are always enjoyed by participants. We are planning more tours of non-designated wetlands, such as constructed and restored wetlands. These are a great way to get people out into our wetlands and educate them about why they are so special.

As part of our annual giving campaign, we created a 2019 wall calendar featuring all 15 of our Wetland Treasures, including information about ecosystem services they provide. A factsheet for each Wetland Treasure site is available at our website, www.carolinawetlands.org.

Wetland Treasures

North Carolina
- Antioch Bay
- Black River Swamp
- Green Swamp
- Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve
- Kanuga Bog
- Mason Farms Biological Reserve
- Phelps Lake Shoreline
- Pink Beds
- Robertson Millpond Preserve
- Scuppernong Swamp

South Carolina
- Congaree National Park
- Francis Beidler Forest
- Hobcaw Barony Wetlands
- Lewis Ocean Bay Heritage Preserve
- Sparkleberry Swamp

Our First "Wetlands Matter" Event

At our November 2018 "Wetlands Matter" event, we had over 100 enthusiastic wetland supporters attend to hear presentations about what the organization is doing. Our keynote speaker was Derb Carter of the Southern Environmental Law Center, who spoke about the Waters of the US rule and how the current federal administration (US EPA) is rewriting the rules such that potentially more than half of our wetlands and streams will no longer be protected by the federal government. That would leave it up to the states for protection, but as Mr. Carter pointed out, in NC the legislature has passed legislation that NC cannot offer more protection than the federal government! We will be watching the situation closely in North and South Carolina. Carolina Wetlands Association will work to keep our wetlands and waters safe!
Working with Other Organizations to Accomplish Our Mission

The Carolina Wetlands Association partners with several other organizations to further the cause of wetlands and their value.

We worked together with the Dogwood Alliance and several other organizations (Sierra Club, Clean Air NC) to put on an educational forum in Wilmington, NC on the wood pellet industry in September 2017. The Dogwood Alliance has begun a Stand4Forests campaign and invited Carolina Wetlands to make a statement about wetland forests at a press conference announcing the campaign at the legislative building in Raleigh.

The Dogwood Alliance created the Wetland Forest Initiative, which we have been involved with since 2015. The Wetland Forest Initiative promotes the conservation of wetland forests in 14 southeastern states. The mission of the initiative is “abundant wetland forests for healthy human and natural communities”. Carolina Wetlands Association Board President Rick Savage is co-chair of the Executive Committee of the Steering Committee, a large committee made up of about 20 organizations. We are working with the Wetland Forest Initiative to promote wetland forest conservation, landowner education, and to improve mitigation and restoration for wetland forests.

In 2018, work concerning the wood pellet industry spawned the Southern Forest Conservation Coalition. Carolina Wetlands Association is a member of the Coalition along with Clean Air NC, the Sierra Club, and the Southern Environmental Law Center. Its mission is to “work together for the responsible conservation of our Southern forests and the ecosystem services they provide; while opposing the industrial-scale wood pellet industry and other unsustainable logging practices”.

We are also building relationships with other organizations that have similar missions or that have wetlands protection and education as part of their mission including the NC Wildlife Federation, NC Conservation Network, Sound Rivers, Defenders of Wildlife, WakeNature Preserves Partnership, New River Conservancy, NC Watershed Stewardship Network (we are represented on their Steering Committee), Wildlands Network, SC Conservation Coalition, Hilton Head Land Trust, NC Coastal Federation, SC Coastal Conservation League, South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative, Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability, NC Sentinel Landscape.

Our most recent endeavor was as an invited participant in the Working and Natural Lands Workgroup to work on climate change mitigation. This workgroup was formed by the North Carolina’s Governor’s office and NC Department of Environmental Quality. There are several nonprofits/NGOs in the workgroup, as well as leading academicians and several federal agencies. This effort will involve forest and wetland restoration (pocosin restoration is a major effort) to absorb carbon and much coastal restoration (wetlands, estuarine areas) to help mitigate sea level rise and sequester carbon. Also included are riparian restoration, farmland restoration, avoiding forest conversion, and urban lands. This is part of the Governor Cooper’s climate initiative and is assisted by the US Climate Alliance.
Fiscal Report

During 2017 and 2018, we received $9,881 in donations, had $5,808 in expenses, and reached the end of 2018 with $6,815 in available funds. Nearly half of our expenses were mission related, and approximately one quarter went toward development and operations, and one quarter toward fundraising.

Vision for the Future

We have set some big goals for the Carolina Wetlands Association. For the most part, we are focusing on obtaining significant funding so we can hire a small part time staff to help with projects such as:

- Increasing the visibility of our wetland treasures and strengthening relationships with wetland treasure site owners;
- Issuing a State of the Wetlands report as a signature product of the organization;
- Creating strategy plans and business plans to direct the organization effectively;
- Soliciting corporate and business sponsors for the organization and for our events;
- Increasing “Wetlands Matter” events throughout the Carolinas to several each year;
- Continuing work on RAMSAR applications until we have all our wetlands of international significance accepted for designation by the RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands;
- Writing position papers and white papers about wetlands and their functions and values; and
- Increasing our educational presence with schools, summer camps, and with other organizations and with local and state agencies.

We also will be closely watching the coming changes to the Waters of the United States rules and how they will affect wetlands in our states. We will be looking for ways to educate our legislators and the public on the devastating effects, to ecosystems and therefore humans, of eliminating protection for so much of our wetlands and streams.

As an all-volunteer organization, the coming years will be a challenging time for the organization and we will need the support of even more of our volunteers to meet these challenges.

The mission of the Carolina Wetlands Association is to promote the understanding, protection, restoration, and enjoyment of North and South Carolina’s wetlands and associated ecosystems through science-based programs, education, and advocacy.

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram (carolina_wetlands_assoc), Twitter (@CarolinaWetland), and LinkedIn
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