



Restoring Bradley & Hewletts Creeks

For years, poor water quality, shellfish harvest closures, and recreational swimming advisories have plagued area waterways. The Heal Our Waterways (HOW) Program is a collaboration of local and state governments, non-profits, commercial businesses, and residents to implement the Bradley and Hewletts Creek Watershed Restoration Plan. The goal of the plan, approved by Wilmington City Council in 2012, is designed to drastically reduce the amount of polluted runoff entering these creeks, thereby improving water quality.

Hewletts and Bradley Creeks are both impacted by polluted stormwater runoff, particularly fecal coliform bacteria. It is a common misperception that past sewage spills into these creeks are the main reason for the bacterial pollution and shellfish closures; it is actually polluted stormwater runoff that is the primary, recurring cause of poor water quality and shellfish closures in these creeks.

Hewletts Creek can be re-opened to shellfishing if water quality in the creek improves over time. Hewletts Creek is classified by the State for “shellfish harvest”, but due to fecal bacterial pollution, it is currently 100% closed to shellfishing. Since the creek is too polluted to meet the criteria of its classification, it is considered an “impaired water” by the State and listed on the NC Division of Water Resources 303(d) List of Impaired Waters. The main stem of Bradley Creek is not classified by the State for shellfish harvest. However, the entire creek impacts shellfishing waters near the mouth of the creek, as well as recreational waters near Wrightsville Beach, where swimming advisories have become common in the warmer months. Improving water quality, restoring shellfish harvests, and reducing swimming advisories are the ultimate goals of the Heal Our Waterways program.

By reducing polluted runoff, Hewletts and Bradley Creeks can be restored to runoff volumes of the past, before increased development and impervious (hard) surfaces led to more runoff and poor water quality. To do this, the HOW Program encourages the installation of stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs), on public and private lands. BMPs intercept, capture, and naturally filter polluted runoff, which would otherwise drain to the creeks. Common BMPs include rain gardens, rain barrels, vegetated buffers, permeable pavement, and rerouting downspouts away from hard surfaces.

The Heal Our Waterways Program is a purely voluntary effort and its success requires the participation of Bradley Creek and Hewletts Creek Watershed residents and businesses. Small changes on individual properties can accumulate into positive changes for water quality when people act together to make a difference.

If you are interested in learning more about the Heal Our Waterways Program or BMP projects, contact the Watershed Coordinator at 910.341.5892 or healourwaterways@wilmingtonnc.gov or visit our website at www.healourwaterways.org