



Regional Focus

Cape Fear River Watch's (CFRW) focus is on protecting and improving water quality for the 1 in 5 North Carolinians who live in the Cape Fear River Basin, North Carolina's largest watershed.

Implicit in our commitment to protecting water quality for all people in our watershed is the understanding that environmental injustice is real, and that communities of color and low income communities frequently are not afforded the same protections from environmental hazards, or given the same access to the benefits of a safe, healthy, and beautiful environment.

CFRW's work has a regional focus. The Cape Fear Watershed courses through the heart of North Carolina. The basin stretches from the coast to the Piedmont, including major urban areas like Wilmington, Fayetteville, and significant parts of the Triangle and the Triad. The basin also includes some of the state's most rural counties including Duplin, Pender, Bladen, and Sampson Counties.

Unfortunately, injuries to the environment in general and water quality in particular are widespread throughout the Cape Fear Basin. These injuries are frequently the result of irresponsible industries that choose to use public waterways to cheaply dispose of their waste. This practice shifts the costs of dealing with waste-streams, hazardous to human health and the environment, from the producers of those waste-streams to the people of North Carolina. Those costs frequently include negative health impacts, decreased property values, degraded quality of life, reduced economic opportunity, and broken communities.

Two of the biggest industries we're fighting now are hog and poultry Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOS) like Smithfield Farms and chemical manufacturers, like Chemours, the Dupont subsidiary, who dumped toxic GenX and dozens of other chemicals like it (termed PFAS) into the Cape Fear for 40 years. These industries epitomize reckless profit before people mindsets that are endangering human health and the environment in the Cape Fear Basin, and beyond. For a deeper dive into these issues, please visit archives of the Cape Fear River Watch, [Clean Water Matters blog](#).

Exacerbating the issue of industry choosing to shift the costs of waste management onto the backs of North Carolinians, is the undue influence that industry has over decision makers in local, state, and federal governments. There has been a concerted effort by industry to use this influence to put in place policies and laws that reduce the protections and rights of citizens in favor of protecting industry. This "polluters over people" trend is especially evident recently in the NC General Assembly.

CFRW focuses on combating industrial pollution through our robust advocacy work. Over the course of the next three years, this work will focus on three issue areas: 1) combating pollution from swine and poultry industrial agriculture, 2) addressing emerging chemical contaminants like PFAS and 1-4 dioxane, and 3) responding to threats yet unknown, but inevitable.

Our advocacy work focuses on five strategies:

1) legal challenges supported by rigorous field work to stop unlawful pollution from industry,



- 2) legal challenges to short-sighted and ill-conceived environmental policies and laws at the local, state, and national levels,
- 3) policy and legislative work at the local, state, and national level to pressure lawmakers to put people over polluters by enacting common sense protections for public health and the environment,
- 4) rigorous review of industrial permits and activities, followed up by science based comments designed to reduce pollution and protect people, and
- 5) educating and organizing our members, empowering them to demand change from decision makers where it is needed.

Our advocacy work is supported by our [education](#) and [action](#) programs. Our action programs get people involved and connected. Whether it's participating in a clean-up, attending a seminar, or writing a letter to a legislator, when our members do something to protect and improve the river they are more likely to continue and increase their efforts to make a difference. Our education programs are aimed at changing the future, whether the future is next week on a crucial vote at the NC General Assembly or eight years from now when one of our scholarship summer campers chooses to major in environmental science and use her degree to protect and improve the river.