

# WALNUT CREEK WATERSHED LEARNING NETWORK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



WCWLN participants and Big Sweep Volunteers at the Walnut Creek Wetland Center.

## Introduction

November 20, 2021 marked the completion of PEJ's second Watershed Learning Network at the Walnut Creek Wetland Center. The Walnut Creek Watershed Learning Network (WCWLN) is a six-week community education and empowerment initiative that PEJ first implemented in Spring 2021 based on the innovative [Atlanta Watershed Learning Network](#) with the primary objectives of: 1.) educating participants about various topics such as stormwater management, green infrastructure and environmental justice; 2.) making connections about why these topics are important to them and their communities, and 3.) providing participants with the resources to become more engaged stakeholders and be empowered to take action in protecting the integrity of their communities.

As was done previously, community outreach was focused in the flood-sensitive communities within the Walnut Creek Watershed.

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Lauren Daniel mentoring participants on the capabilities of the community-based water quality monitoring application.

## Collaborative Funding & Partners

The WCWLN could not have been successfully implemented without the support of PEJ's community partners. The Town of Cary provided PEJ with a significant amount of funding through a Southeast Sustainable Communities Grant they received. The City of Raleigh provided PEJ with funding through a National League of Cities grant they received. Through these grants, PEJ was able to provide compensation for contractual services, participant stipends, course printing materials, compensation of WCWLN coordinators, and compensation for the salaries of two new PEJ staff members.

PEJ contracted with the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association's former Community Engagement Specialist, and creator of the [Durham Watershed Academy](#), to coordinate and implement the WCWLN. PEJ contracted with Bourne To Film to videotape each module, create an educational video and to produce a multimedia marketing video. Environmental professionals from nonprofit organizations, state and local government, and NC State University generously donated their time and resources. Staff from the Warren County Environmental Action Team, City of Raleigh, Triangle J Council of Governments, NC Division of Water Resources and NC Cooperative Extension shared their expertise with the WCWLN participants about session topics found in the outline below.

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## WCWLN Outline

The WCWLN curriculum was divided into six modules, all of which were held in person at the Walnut Creek Wetland Center in Raleigh, North Carolina. Sessions were principally facilitated by the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association’s former Community Relations Director and assisted by PEJ’s Program Director. Mentors for the WCWLN participants included staff from the NC Division of Water Resources, NC State University’s Water Resources Research Institute and a Spring 2021 Raleigh Watershed Learning Network graduate. The outline of the Fall 2021 WCWLN is below.

Session	Dates	Session Topic
Module 1	9/11/2021	Program Overview - Purpose, Goals, Expectations
		Communication and Negotiation: Leadership Skills for Community and Home
		Community Watershed Stewardship
Module 2	9/25/2021	Community Science Mobile Tool Prep
		Wake County Big Sweep
Module 3	10/9/2021	Watershed Basics & Urbanization
		Floodplain Management Strategies
		Green Infrastructure Overview & Tour
Module 4	10/23/2021	Policies and Regulations Governing Watersheds
		Raleigh Climate Plan and Current Projects
		Warren County Environmental Justice Movement
		Equity and Environmental Justice (Remote)
Module 5	11/6/2021	Overview of Planning, Design, and Implementation of Various Scales of GSI
		NC Cooperative Extension Workshops
		City of Raleigh Stormwater Innovation & Financing (Remote)
Module 6	11/20/2021	Individual Project Presentations and Testimonials
		Program Trivia
		Individual and Group Action
		Participants Receive Graduation Certificates

***“There are lots of great programs/people in place to help better the environment. Many groups are very passionate about keeping the environment clean and have been super successful about implementing sustainable systems just like the WCWLN”.***

***- Participant, Module 2***

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Fall 2021 WCWLN Graduates (1 participant not included).

## Community Projects

The WCWLN participants were able to apply what they learned from each session to their community projects, which included the following:

- Creation of a mobile application, Gaia Raleigh, to execute community involvement in environmental awareness and local resources in Raleigh.
- Initiation of a one-year stream monitoring of Little Rock Creek, which has been known to be polluted due to the city's runoff.
- Provided a “do it yourself” disconnection of a downspout, while finding multiple uses for the collected runoff.
- Management and organization of a Wake County Big Sweep in the Hedingham community of Raleigh, involving 12 volunteers who collected 16 bags of trash.
- Hosting of a litter clean-up and a watershed educational exchange along the Rocky Branch Creek beside North Carolina State University’s Campus, a project two participants designed and implemented together

***“I noticed that all of the presenters were very involved in the information they presented, showing that they truly care about the topics”. - Participants, Module 4***

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Amin Davis (right) explaining the green infrastructure practices outside of the Walnut Creek Wetland Center.

## Conclusion

The WCWLN, along with the Durham Watershed Academy, are truly unique outreach programs to the Triangle area. Six participants successfully completed the Fall 2021 WCWLN and were eligible to receive a \$400 stipend or their participation. Participants developed community projects to address issues in their neighborhoods and conducted a presentation about their project during the final 'graduation' session of the WCWLN.

PEJ is pleased with the outcome of this Fall 2021 WCWLN and hopes to host another version of the WCWLN in 2022. For more information about the WCWLN, visit PEJ's website:  
<https://www.pejraleighnc.org/wcwnl>.

***"Seeing all of the completed projects motivates me. It makes me want to start a new project. It's encouraging since it shows all of the success others have had and how easy it is to implement the plans once you have the work force and tools". - Participant, Module 5***