

**Annual Report to the
North Carolina General Assembly**

***Surface Water Identification and Training
Certification Course***

October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025

Division of Water Resources

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Surface Water Identification and Training Certification Course Annual Report – 2024

In accordance with G.S. 143-214.25A

Background: The Surface Water Identification Training and Certification (SWITC) Course is offered by the Division of Water Resources, Water Quality Programs (formerly known as the Division of Water Quality prior to August 1, 2013, and hereinafter referred to as “DWR”) to comply with N.C. General Statute 143-214.25A. This statute requires DWR to train and certify staff within the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS), local governments with delegated riparian buffer programs, and DWR. This training certification is required to determine where surface waters are present and thus where the riparian buffer rules apply.

Courses: Between October 1, 2024, and September 30, 2025, DWR offered/will offer three SWITC training courses. The courses took place October 21-25, 2024, and May 5-9, 2025, and one will take place September 8-12, 2025, at NCSU’s McKimmon Center and at established field locations in and near Raleigh. Due to lack of funding for these courses, DWR has partnered with NC State University to offer classes. Below is the summary of the courses.

October 2024: 29 participants attended, 9 of whom were DWR employees (2 from Mooresville Regional Office, 1 from Asheville Regional Office, 1 from the Central Office, 3 from the Raleigh Regional Office and 1 from the Wilmington Regional office, and 1 from Winston-Salem Regional Office). In addition, 1 from NC DEQ Stewardship program, 1 from NCDEQ Division of Mitigation Services, 1 from NC DOT, 2 from local government representatives, and 15 employed by private consulting firms attended the course.

May 2025: 30 participants attended, 7 of whom were DWR employees (2 from the Raleigh Regional Office, 1 from the Asheville Regional Office, 1 from the Washington Regional Office, 1 from the Fayetteville Regional Office, 1 from the Winston-Salem Regional Office and 1 from the Wilmington Regional Office). In addition, 1 from NC DOT, 1 NCFS staff, 5 local government representatives (2 of whom were from delegated communities), 2 out of state agency representatives, and 14 employed by private consulting firms attended the course.

September 2025: This course is scheduled within the annual reporting window, but the data will not be processed before the report is due, so it will be included in the 2026 annual report.

Certifications: DWR issued 9 new certifications in October 2024 and 10 new certifications in May 2025 to DWR staff, NCFS staff, and delegated local government staff as a result of these courses. These 19 individuals are certified to determine where surface waters are present and thus where the riparian buffer rules apply. DWR also issued 20 training certificates in October 2024 and 19 in May 2025 to other individuals who successfully completed the course. These 39 individuals are not eligible to be officially certified because they do not meet the certification criteria in G.S. 143-214.25A.

Effectiveness: DWR consistently receives positive feedback about this course. The class also fills quickly upon opening of registration and consistently maintains a waitlist. DWR asked the participants to rate their level of knowledge before the course (on a scale of 1-5). The average was 2.4 in October 2024 and 2.2 in May 2025. DWR asked the participants to rate their level of knowledge again after the course, and the average was 4.4 in October 2024 and 4.3 in May 2025.

Recommendations: DWR always reviews the course evaluations completed by the students and makes adjustments to the course as needed based on that feedback. DWR will continue to solicit feedback and make improvements to future courses.