

Cape Fear River Watch: Protecting Source Water through Advocacy and Action

Cape Fear River Watch (CFRW) has been at the forefront of source water protection efforts in North Carolina, employing a multifaceted approach to safeguard drinking water quality for communities relying on the Cape Fear River. Through advocacy, community engagement, and hands-on environmental initiatives, CFRW exemplifies the mission of the NC Source Water Collaborative to protect drinking water at its source.

One of CFRW's signature efforts has been its unwavering advocacy to limit per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination in the Cape Fear River, a critical drinking water source for over 1.5 million residents. PFAS, often referred to as "forever chemicals," pose significant risks to human health and the environment. CFRW has worked tirelessly to hold industrial polluters accountable and to push for stronger regulatory measures. Partnering with scientific experts, local governments, and advocacy groups, CFRW has provided critical input during regulatory hearings, supported litigation efforts, and raised public awareness about the dangers of PFAS contamination. Their advocacy has led to tangible progress, including state-level policy changes and increased investment in water treatment technologies designed to reduce PFAS levels.

Complementing its advocacy work, CFRW has implemented a highly successful litter cleanup program, directly addressing nonpoint source pollution that threatens the Cape Fear River and its tributaries. Through monthly community cleanups, CFRW has mobilized thousands of volunteers to remove over 200,000 pounds of litter from waterways, riverbanks, and surrounding areas. These cleanups not only enhance water quality but also foster a culture of environmental stewardship, connecting community members with the importance of protecting their local water resources.

CFRW's efforts align directly with source water protection goals by addressing both chemical and physical threats to drinking water quality. Their PFAS advocacy tackles industrial pollutants at the source, ensuring cleaner water upstream, while their litter cleanups mitigate downstream pollution risks and improve aquatic ecosystems. Furthermore, CFRW's extensive public outreach and education programs amplify their impact, equipping residents with the knowledge and tools to advocate for source water protection in their own communities.

By combining policy advocacy with grassroots action, Cape Fear River Watch has made a measurable impact on the health of the Cape Fear River and the communities that depend on it. Their work embodies the collaborative, proactive approach celebrated by the NC Source Water Collaborative's Source Water Protection Award.