

NC CONSERVATION BRIEF



Division of Soil & Water Conservation
NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services



Growing Innovation in Chatham County

In Chatham County, Truffletopia is cultivating something truly unique—a 1-acre loblolly pine system inoculated with truffles, blending forestry and specialty agriculture. While the young pines require minimal irrigation now, long-term success depends on reliable water access.

Through AgWRAP's regional application process, an Agricultural Water Storage Tank is being installed to support the site during severe drought

conditions, supplementing a limited on-site well.

With plans to expand acreage and develop future agri-tourism experiences—including tours and hands-on classes—Truffletopia is laying the groundwork for a resilient and innovative agricultural venture.

For more information on the practice, visit the [website](#) or contact Lorien Deaton, AgWRAP Coordinator, lorien.deaton@ncagr.gov.



Photo of Truffletopia in Chatham County, North Carolina.

Item Due	Due Date
Strategic Plans, TA Requests	June 1st, 2026
Spot Check Form	June 1st, 2026
RFPs to be paid by June 30th	June 1st, 2026
Extension Requests, RFPs for expiring contracts	June 30th, 2026
Submit FY26 contracts in CS2 to encumber funds	June 30th, 2026

DSWC EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



MEET SAM ALLBEE!

What are you looking forward to in your new role?

I am mostly looking forward to seeing what conservation projects come from districts and getting to work with them as they develop.

If you were not working in agriculture, what's another career do you think you would enjoy?

I enjoy creating stories from data, so that I would like any data analytics role in the environmental field.

If you were given a superpower, what would it be and why?

I would definitely pick the ability to talk to animals. I love reading about animal behavior and it would be amazing to actually communicate with them.

Sam is the new Conservation Program Coordinator and works on the CCAP Projects.

Turning Storm Debris into Soil Recovery: Biochar in Western North Carolina



Division staff visited partners from the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture and the Tennessee Natural Resources Conservation Service at a Nolichucky River restoration site, where researchers are testing vegetation and stabilization methods—including the use of biochar to enhance bank stability and plant growth—as part of a growing collaborative partnership supporting Helene recovery efforts.

After major storms, fallen trees and woody debris are often burned, mulched, or sent to landfills. In Western North Carolina, conservation staff, researchers, and producers are working together to turn this material into biochar, creating a new tool for soil recovery and long-term resilience.

Biochar is a charcoal-like material made from woody biomass that can improve water holding capacity, nutrient retention, and overall soil health when added to soil. The Division of Soil and Water Conservation is also pursuing state-level grant

opportunities to expand biochar implementation and make it more accessible for conservation projects across North Carolina.

Over the past year, the Division, working with USDA, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and producers, has expanded production capacity across the region.

Two production hubs now have biochar available, and producers are beginning to apply it through NRCS EQIP cost-share programs. Warren Wilson College in Buncombe County

was the first farm in the region to apply biochar through EQIP, with additional farms preparing for implementation.

As the program grows, partners continue exploring new conservation uses while building the framework for broader adoption. Biochar is not a single solution, but it is proving to be a valuable way to turn storm debris into long-term soil and water benefits.

For more information about the Division's biochar work, contact Soil Scientist Dalton Buchanan, Dalton.buchanan@ncagr.gov.

NCDA&CS EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH & DSWC EMPLOYEE MILESTONES



Rick McSwain, DSWC Regional Coordinator

Rick and his family, with Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler at the NCDA&CS award ceremony in February 2026. Congratulations Rick!

1-Year: Pabitra Aryal, Matthew Berens, Sam Just & Taryn Thompson

15 Years: Josh Vetter

20 Years: Kristina Fischer

25 Years: Tinesha McNeil & Jennifer Roach



PROTECT YOURSELF!

Pesky Little Critters!

It's getting warm; the ticks are out.

- ☒ Shower and check for ticks after working outside.
- ☒ Run your clothes through the dryer... ticks don't like being hot.
- ☒ Consider pre-treating your clothes with permethrin BEFORE you put them on.
- ☒ And don't forget your pets... you could be the one exposing your pet... check them often.

SWCC JAA Granted in past 12 months	
NAME	# of JAA
Aaron Franks	3
Alex Hooks	1
Amy Cook	1
Blaire King	1
Brandi Talton	3
Brody Brown	2
Byron Currin	1
Cameron Knudsen	2
Chuckie Bass	1
Colin Hall	1
Darren Layton	3
Dillan Howard	1
Dustin Brewer	1
Elizabeth Spence	2
Elton Wilson	2
Emily Bateman	1
Joe Trimnal	2
Jonathon Russell	3
Mikey Woodie	1
Morgan Hayes	2
Nicole Warren	2
Payton Lane	1
Rodney Wright	1
Shannon Biddy	1
Thomas Murphrey	1
Tyler Hodge	1

Visit the [Job Approval Authority \(JAA\) website](#) for more information.



From First Day to Confident Professional: The Power of Mentorship

Starting a new job can be exciting and overwhelming at the same time, but having someone that will help guide you along the way will make a huge impact on your career.

The first training I attended was at Wayne SWCD for the Critical Area and Grade Stabilization. I didn't know anyone there until I heard someone say my name. From that day on, Brandi Talton took me under her wing.

Our mentorship started long before we enrolled into the New Employee Onboarding Pilot Program (NEOPP). Through NEOPP, we set goals and a timeline for us to follow that helped further my knowledge and skill sets.



Through Brandi's experience working as a technician, we were able to set goals that were both realistic and achievable.

Brandi has taught me a lot through this mentorship, and no matter what, she always took the time to go through every step with me to make sure I understood everything. Whether surveying a diversion while hog sludge was being spread on the field or laughing at the jokes I added into presentations, I couldn't have asked for a better mentor!

Written by: Elizabeth Spence, District Conservation Technician at Lenior SWCD.

ABOUT BRANDI

Elizabeth and her mentor, Brandi Talton from Wayne SWCD, finished the **3-month Growing Together Mentorship**. Brandi led a multi-day Critical Area Planting and Grade Stabilization training, presented several times at CET, holds Job Approval Authority (JAA) in six practices and serves on the DSWC JAA Committee.