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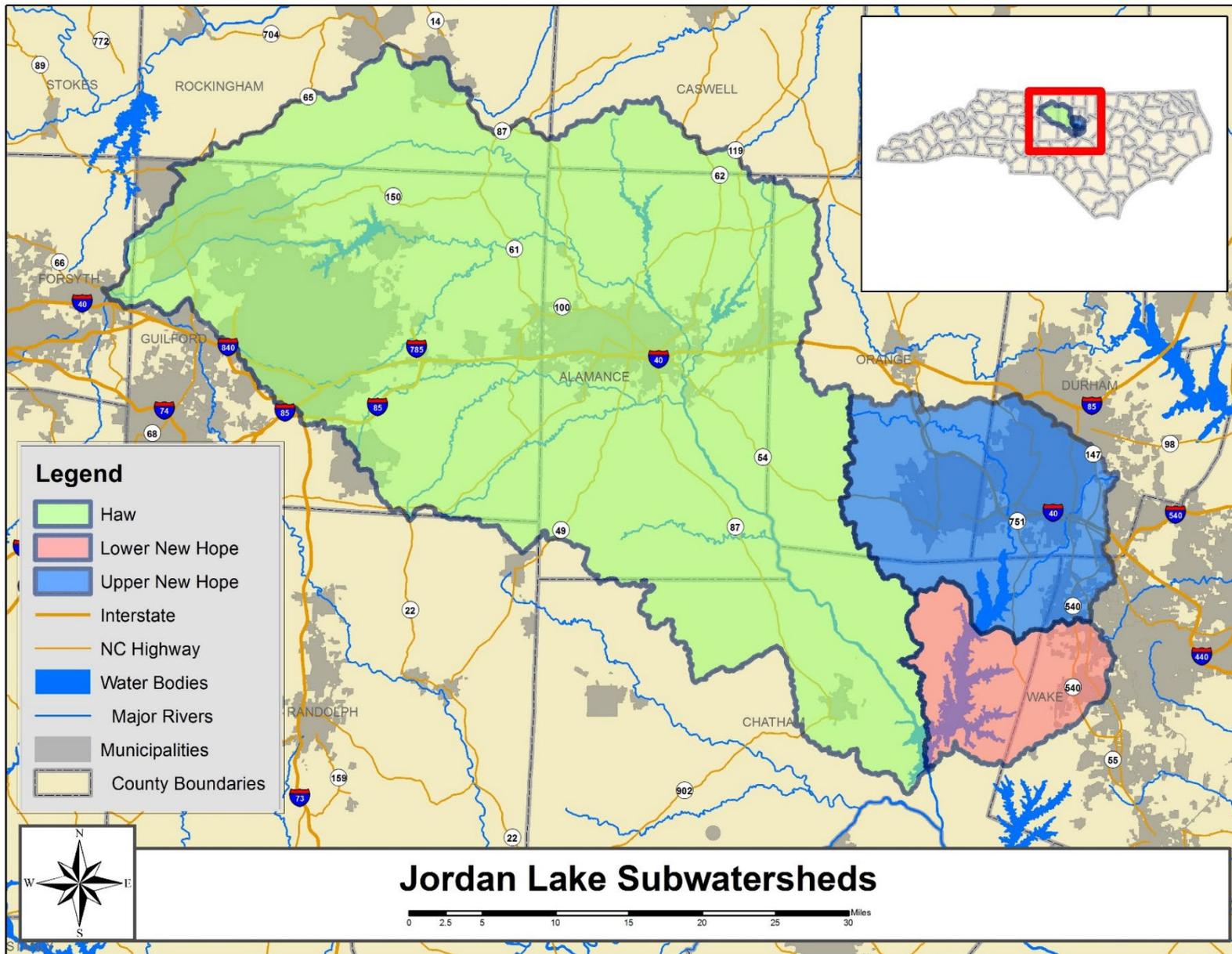
# 2026 Annual Progress Report for the Jordan Lake Agriculture Rule (15A NCAC 02B.0264) for the Baseline Period (1997-2001) for Crop Year 2024

A Report to the Division of Water Resources from the Jordan Lake Watershed  
Oversight Committee: Crop Year 2024

*Date approved by Jordan Lake Watershed Oversight Committee: 2/26/26*  
*Date submitted to NC Division of Water Resources: 2/27/26*

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## Summary

This report provides an assessment of collective progress made by the agricultural community in the Jordan Lake watershed to reduce nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) losses toward compliance with the Jordan Lake Agriculture Rule (15A NCAC 02B.0264). In this report the Jordan Lake Watershed Oversight Committee (WOC), to the extent possible given current agriculture data availability, has implemented the accounting methods approved by the Environmental Management Commission’s Water Quality Committee in July 2011. These accounting methods estimate changes in nitrogen loss and the phosphorus loss trends in the three Jordan Lake subwatersheds (Haw, Upper New Hope, and Lower New Hope) for the period between the strategy baseline (1997-2001) and Crop Year (CY) 2024.<sup>1</sup> This report provides progress updates in three categories: cropland nitrogen, pasture nitrogen, and agricultural phosphorus. To produce this report, Division of Soil and Water Conservation staff received, processed and compiled available data from agricultural staff in eight counties, and the WOC reviewed and approved this report. Refer to the map on page three for the location of the Jordan Lake watershed, including the three subwatersheds affected by this Rule.

The cropland nitrogen portion of the report demonstrates agriculture’s collective compliance with the Jordan Agriculture Rule and estimates progress made by agriculture in the watershed to decrease the amount of nitrogen lost from agricultural management units. Agriculture has been successfully decreasing cropland nitrogen and phosphorus losses in each of the Jordan Lake subwatersheds through a variety of methods, especially crop shifts and reduction in nitrogen application rates for most major crops.

Cropland nitrogen reduction percentages since strategy baseline (1997-2001) and Rule implementation have been estimated annually for each Jordan Lake subwatershed. However, in 2019, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) discontinued annual county crop acreage estimates for hay and tobacco. At the time, this data availability change created a significant issue for estimating cropland nitrogen reduction from the strategy baseline (1997-2001). Hay constitutes the largest acreage crop across all three Jordan Lake subwatersheds and exerts a disproportionately significant influence on annual cropland nitrogen reduction.

### **Jordan Lake Watershed Oversight Committee Composition, Jordan Agriculture Rule:**

1. NC Division of Soil & Water Conservation
2. USDA-NRCS
3. NCDA&CS
4. NC Cooperative Extension Service
5. NC Division of Water Resources
6. Watershed Environmental Interest
7. Watershed Environmental Interest
8. Environmental Interest
9. General Farming Interest
10. Pasture-based Livestock Interest
11. Equine Livestock Interest
12. Cropland Farming Interest
13. Scientific Community

Ongoing NASS data availability issues have continued to impact annual cropland nitrogen reduction accounting. For the 2024 crop season, annual county estimates published by NASS excluded hay, tobacco, and wheat. Annual county wheat estimates are expected to resume for the 2025 crop season, but only corn and soybean acreage were able to be included in CY2024 Jordan Lake watershed reporting. While annual crop data published by the NASS remains the primary cropland acreage data source for nutrient accounting in the Jordan watershed because it was used to establish baseline, FSA crop acreage data and Agriculture Census data were consulted to assist with conducting comparisons between crop years. Methodology adjustments resulting from NASS data availability changes are detailed in the “Scope of Report and

<sup>1</sup> The focus of this report is on the 2024 Crop Year (CY), which began October 1, 2023 and ended September 30, 2024.

Methodology” section of this document. More methodology adjustments are expected in the following years as the Jordan Water Supply Nutrient Strategy undergoes re-adoption and as the NASS undergoes staffing and reporting changes.

Although continued NASS data availability issues have complicated cropland nitrogen reduction accounting for agriculture in the Jordan Lake watershed, annual progress continues to be monitored, and current trends indicate that agriculture continues to meet reduction requirements established in the Jordan Water Supply Nutrient Strategy. As of CY2018, the last year annual NASS survey crop data was available for all reported commodities (corn, hay, soybeans, tobacco, and wheat), agriculture collectively met cropland nitrogen loss reduction goals for each of the three Jordan Lake subwatersheds, achieving a 33% reduction in the Haw, a 57% reduction in the Upper New Hope, and a 78% reduction in the Lower New Hope. Additionally, in CY2023, with the availability of 2022 Agriculture Census data for hay and tobacco, cropland nitrogen reduction estimates confirmed that agriculture met the nitrogen loss reduction goals for each Jordan Lake subwatershed. Collective CY2024 agricultural nitrogen reduction from cropland in each Jordan Lake subwatershed has likely not fluctuated significantly from the estimates reported in CY2018 or CY2023.

Pasture nitrogen loss estimated in this annual report is based on the total number of pasture acres, pastured livestock, and implemented livestock exclusion systems in the watershed. Pasture nitrogen loss reduction was last calculated in CY2023 reporting using 2022 Agriculture Census data and state and federal BMP implementation data from 2017 to 2022. In this last cycle of pastureland accounting (2022), all three subwatersheds met their pastureland nitrogen loss reduction goal from baseline, with the Upper New Hope subwatershed reporting a 52% reduction, the Lower New Hope subwatershed reporting a 40% reduction, and the Haw River subwatershed reporting a 56% reduction.

Lastly, most of the monitored qualitative phosphorus indicators demonstrate that there is no increased risk of phosphorus loss from agricultural land in the watershed. Primary factors contributing to this trend include a reduction in tobacco acres, a decrease in the amount of animal waste phosphorus, and wide adoption and implementation of conservation tillage on cropland in the watershed since baseline.

**Jordan Water Supply Nutrient Strategy:**

The Environmental Management Commission (EMC) adopted the Jordan Water Supply Nutrient Strategy in 2008. The strategy endeavors to reduce the average annual load of nitrogen and phosphorus from each of its subwatersheds to Jordan Lake from baseline levels (1997-2001). In addition to point source Rules, mandatory controls were applied to address non-point source pollution in agriculture, nutrient management, riparian buffer protection, and urban stormwater. The management strategy built upon efforts in the the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico River Basins.

**Rule Requirements and Compliance**

Effective August 2009, the Agriculture Rule (15A NCAC 02B.0264) within the Jordan Water Supply Nutrient Strategy provides for a collective strategy for farmers to meet nitrogen loss reduction goals within six to nine years. The goals for this nutrient strategy are specified at the subwatershed level and baseline conditions are specified as average conditions between 1997 and 2001. The Lower New Hope subwatershed has a goal of no increase in nitrogen or phosphorus loss. The Upper New Hope subwatershed has a goal of 35% nitrogen loss reduction and 5% phosphorus loss reduction. And finally, the Haw River subwatershed has a goal of 8% nitrogen loss reduction and 5% phosphorus loss reduction. All the reductions detailed above are

required for both cropland and pastureland, which are calculated separately. A Watershed Oversight Committee (WOC) was established to implement the Rule and to assist farmers in complying with the Rule.

The Jordan Agriculture Rule also stipulated that if the initial accounting completed for CY2010 found that a nitrogen goal had not been achieved in a subwatershed, then Local Advisory Committees were to be formed in that subwatershed and farmers were to register their operations with the committees. Based on the success of cropland nitrogen reductions relative to the strategy goals estimated in initial reports, the WOC found that these actions were not required. However, cooperation and communication with agricultural agency staff at all levels (local, state, and federal) is critical for completion of required annual progress reporting. By August 2025, all staff based in or covering all counties impacted by the Jordan Water Supply Nutrient Strategy provided local information and feedback for inclusion in this annual report.

For reasons discussed in greater detail in the “Scope of Report and Methodology” section, cropland nitrogen loss reductions for each subwatershed (Upper New Hope, Lower New Hope, and Haw River) were not estimated for Crop Year 2024. Only general cropping trends were delineated for the Jordan Lake watershed in this report based on available acreage data from NASS and the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). Comparisons of total corn and soybean acreage using 2022 Agriculture Census and annual CY2023 and CY2024 NASS county estimates show similar overall totals but indicate that corn acreage increased in CY2024 while soybean acreage declined. This pattern aligns with FSA data for CY2023 and CY2024, which also reflects a rise in corn and a decrease in soybeans within the watershed. For tobacco, hay, and wheat, crop year comparisons are more challenging because CY2023 and CY2024 NASS annual estimates are not available. The CY2023 and CY2024 FSA data suggest that hay acreage is increasing, while tobacco and wheat acreage are declining. When comparing FSA CY2024 data to 2022 Agriculture Census totals, tobacco and wheat trends remain consistent with the observations seen in the yearly FSA data. However, hay acreage trends are not discernible when comparing agency datasets because FSA annually reports ungrazed hay acreage in the Jordan Lake watershed at roughly one-third of the acreage reported in the 2022 Agriculture Census.

Each subwatershed is also meeting their pastureland nitrogen loss reduction goals as of the latest 2022 accounting cycle. The 2022 pasture accounting cycle found that the Upper New Hope Watershed achieved a 52% reduction, the Lower New Hope Watershed a 40% reduction, and the Haw River Watershed a 56% reduction. These reductions were achieved primarily by reduced nitrogen application rates and an overall reduction in pasture acres. Pastureland nitrogen loss is calculated on a 5-year cycle based on Agriculture Census data availability, and will next be calculated when the 2027 Agriculture Census is published. A summary of the 2022 pasture accounting cycle is included in the “Pasture Accounting” section of this document, but additional detail can be found in the [CY2023 report](#).

## Scope of Report and Methodology

Nitrogen reduction estimates provided in this report represent whole-county scale calculations of nitrogen loss from cropland and pastureland agriculture in the watershed using the ‘aggregate’ version of a nutrient accounting tool called the Nitrogen Loss Estimation Worksheet, or NLEW. The NLEW is an accounting tool developed to meet the specifications of the Neuse Agriculture Rule and approved by the Water Quality Committee of the Environmental Management Commission (EMC) for use in the Jordan Lake watershed. The development team included interagency technical representatives of the NC Division of Water Resources (DWR), NC Division of Soil and Water Conservation (DSWC), USDA-NRCS and was led by NC State University Soil Science Department faculty. A qualitative assessment method was developed and approved by the Water Quality Committee of the EMC for phosphorus and is described later in the report.

The NLEW was developed to estimate baseline nitrogen loading and subsequent percent nitrogen reductions. The NLEW is an “edge-of-management unit” tool which estimates changes in nitrogen loss from

cropland and pastureland but does not estimate changes in nitrogen loading to surface waters. The NLEW is designed to capture changes in agricultural nitrogen resulting from fertilizer management, conservation practice implementation, cropping shifts, and loss of agricultural lands. Both inorganic and animal waste sources of fertilizer to cropland and pastureland are accounted for in NLEW.

Over time the NLEW tool has been updated to incorporate new data. In 2015, a web-based version of NLEW (v6.0) was created on NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services servers. Revised realistic yield and nitrogen use efficiency data from NCSU were incorporated, and some minor calculation errors were corrected for field corn, sweet potatoes, and sweet corn. The modernized web-based NLEW software (v6.0) was updated to pull revised realistic yield and nitrogen use efficiency data from the North Carolina Realistic Yield Database.<sup>2</sup>

For NLEW to generate percent nitrogen reductions, crop and pasture acreage data added into the tool must be available. Unfortunately, there have been several NASS data availability challenges to navigate since CY2019 reporting. In 2019, the NASS discontinued annual county acreage estimates for hay and tobacco. This presents a significant issue in calculating cropland nitrogen reductions annually because hay constitutes the largest acreage crop grown in all three Jordan Lake subwatersheds. In April 2024, the NASS published a notice that it would discontinue all county estimates for crops and livestock beginning with the 2024 production year due to existing budget levels. In March 2025 a follow up NASS notice was published announcing the reinstatement of annual county estimates for livestock and certain row crops for the 2024 crop season. Reinstated annual row crop estimates did not include hay, tobacco, or wheat. Annual wheat estimates for counties are expected to resume for the 2025 crop season, but for CY2024 reporting, the only new crop acreage published by NASS was for corn and soybeans. One county in the Jordan Lake watershed (Caswell) did not have any corn or soybean acreages estimated in CY2024. Three counties (Durham, Orange and Rockingham) only had acreage for one crop (corn or soybeans) estimated in CY2024.

The WOC's handling of these data availability challenges has evolved overtime. For CY2019 and CY2020 annual progress reports, hay and tobacco acreages in each county were estimated to remain at the acreage levels reported in CY2018, due to lack of recent data and not because of supplemental rationale or calculations. When it became apparent that there would not be a reversal of the discontinuance of hay and tobacco annual county estimates, the WOC, with concurrence from the DWR, made reporting adjustments. This was done in recognition that using merged datasets may misrepresent total cropland acres in production and impact annual nitrogen reduction estimates from baseline; particularly as the time between the last year of available data and the current crop year increased.

For CY2021, CY2022, and for this report (CY2024), the WOC, with concurrence from the DWR, did not attempt to estimate cropland nitrogen reduction from baseline due to the ongoing data availability changes. Instead, Best Management Practice (BMP) implementation and fertilization management updates were included along with a general discussion on cropping trends based on review of available crop acreage data from the NASS and the FSA.

Cropland nitrogen reduction estimates were last estimated for CY2023 reporting using 2023 annual NASS survey data for corn, soybeans, wheat and sweet potatoes and 2022 Agriculture Census data for hay and

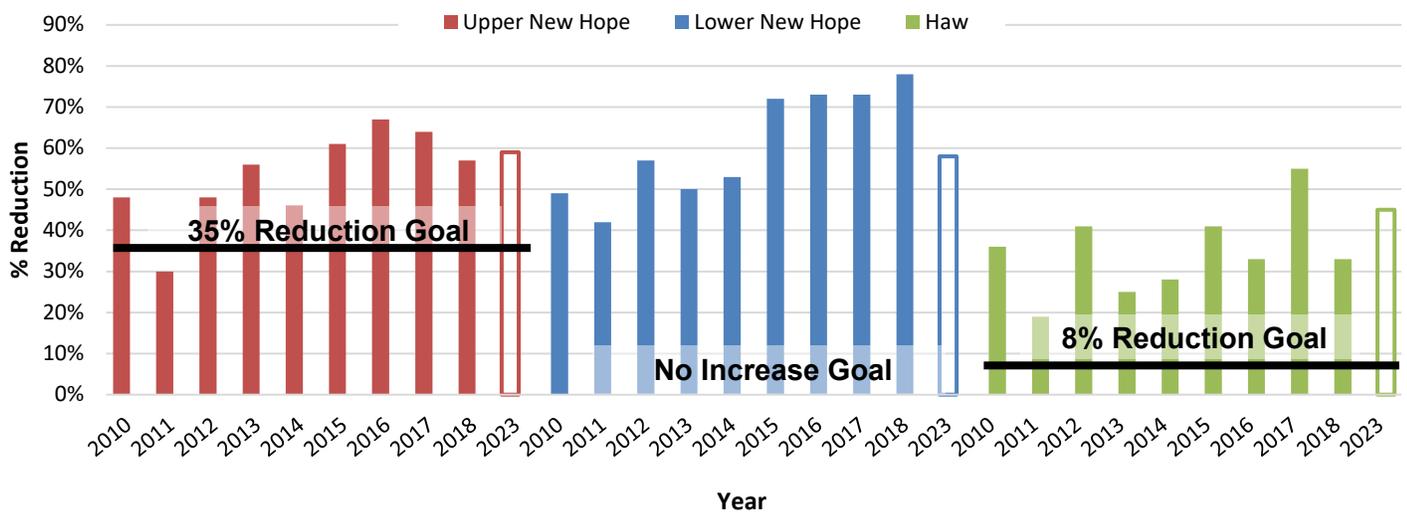
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<sup>2</sup> The North Carolina Realistic Yield Database is the product of an extensive data gathering and review process conducted by many state and federal partners. The North Carolina Realistic Yield Database is maintained and updated by North Carolina State University.

tobacco. This approach, of reporting cropland nitrogen reduction estimates on a five-year cycle to include Agriculture Census data for row crops for which NASS has discontinued annual estimates, was considered the most practical interim solution by the WOC and the DWR until the Jordan Lake strategy readoption process concludes and reporting requirements are revised. This approach will fulfill progress reporting requirements for agriculture with minimal distortion while data availability issues persist and as new reporting requirements are finalized. Methodology adjustments are expected to continue and will be detailed in future reports.

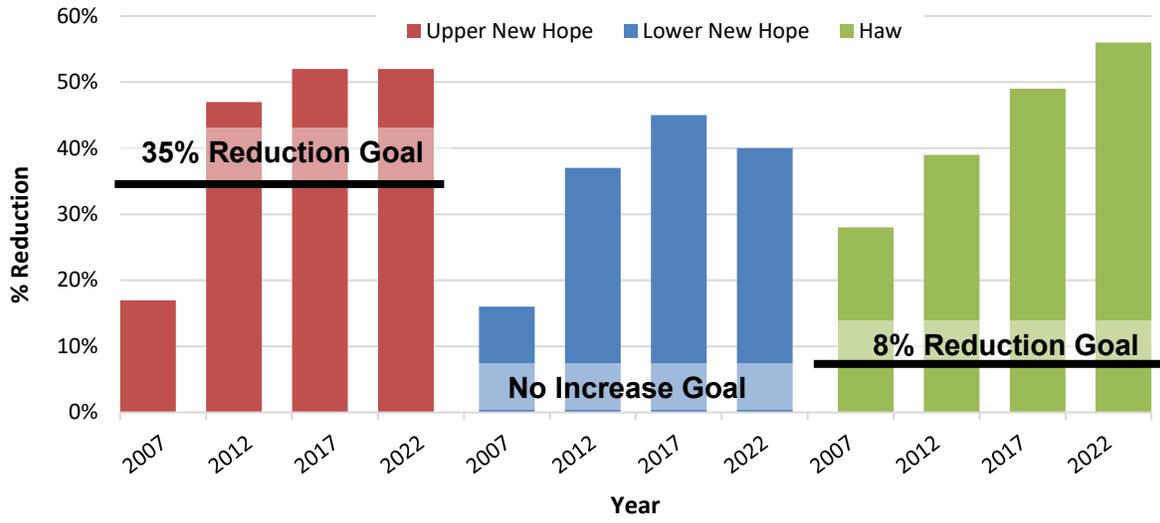
Despite recent data availability changes, the agriculture community continues to demonstrate the significant progress made to date in achieving nitrogen loss reduction from baseline for both cropland and pastureland. Figure 1 displays the annual cropland percent nitrogen loss reductions from 2010 to 2018 in addition to the 2023 reductions estimated using the merged dataset of annual survey data and 2022 Agriculture Census data from NASS. Figure 2 represents the annual pastureland nitrogen loss reduction from the 2007 cycle to the most recent 2022 cycle.

**Figure 1. Collective Cropland Nitrogen Loss Reduction Percent by Jordan Lake subwatershed 2010 to 2018 and 2023, Based on NLEW Results\***



\* NASS discontinued reporting annual hay and tobacco acres starting in 2019, which means 2018 is the last year that annual NASS survey data was fully available for all crops. The 2023 cropland nitrogen loss reduction percentage was estimated using a merged dataset consisting of 2023 NASS annual survey data for corn, soybeans, sweet potatoes, and wheat and 2022 Agriculture Census data for hay and tobacco.

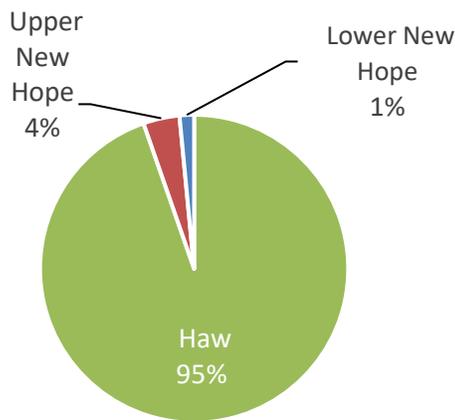
**Figure 2. Collective Pastureland Nitrogen Loss Reduction Percent by Jordan Lake subwatershed 2007 to 2022 Based on NLEW Results**



## Nitrogen Reduction from Cropland from Baseline for CY2024

The Jordan Lake watershed encompasses just over 1,000,000 acres, of which approximately a tenth is generally planted in cropping systems. The Haw River subwatershed grows 95% of crop acreage, followed by the Upper New Hope (4%), and Lower New Hope (1%). Figure 3 shows a breakdown of typical cropland acres by subwatershed.

**Figure 3: Typical cropland acres grown by subwatershed in the Jordan Lake Watershed**



No cropland nitrogen loss (lbs/yr) or cropland nitrogen loss percent reductions from baseline values were calculated through NLEW for CY2024 due to NASS data availability changes. Table 1 lists each county's cropland nitrogen loss (lbs/yr) at baseline, in CY2018, and CY2023, along with estimated nitrogen loss percent reductions from baseline. This data was included to demonstrate progress from baseline in meeting nutrient reduction mandates based on the latest year of comprehensive crop data (2018) and the latest year of crop data from two recently released NASS datasets (2023). Cropland BMPs continued to be implemented in the Jordan Lake watershed in CY2024.

In CY2024, there were no notable increases or decreases in buffer or cover crop implementation in Jordan Lake subwatersheds from CY2023 totals. Fertilization rates for major commodity crops in each of the three subwatersheds largely remained consistent (+/- 10 lbs N/ac) with rates reported in CY2023. The largest fluctuation was a 9 lb N/ac drop for corn fertilization in the Upper New Hope subwatershed. This fluctuation was likely due to no corn acreage reported by NASS for Orange County in CY2024, since Orange reports a much higher fertilization rate for corn than other counties (Chatham, Durham and Wake) in the Upper New Hope subwatershed. General cropping shift trends were delineated based on available acreage data through NASS and the FSA. Based on review of these datasets, between CY2023 and CY2024 the Jordan Lake watershed likely experienced an increase in corn and a decrease in soybean, tobacco, and wheat acreage.

### Data Changes in CY2024 and Impact on Nitrogen Reduction Estimates from Baseline

Since 2019, limitations in NASS data have complicated annual calculations of cropland nitrogen reduction estimates for the Jordan Lake watershed. The discontinuation of county-level estimates for hay and tobacco—hay being the largest acreage crop in the watershed—has been a major challenge. In 2024, NASS suspended all annual county crop and livestock estimates. Although some estimates were later reinstated, hay, tobacco, and wheat were excluded from the annual NASS data release covering the 2024 crop season. The Jordan Lake WOC, with concurrence from the DWR, has adapted its reporting approach in response to these data gaps. For CY2019 and CY2020 annual progress reports, hay and tobacco acreages in each county were held at CY2018 levels due to the absence of updated data. However, concerns about relying on increasingly outdated, merged datasets led the WOC to limit calculating nitrogen loss reduction estimates to years when new Census of Agriculture data could be incorporated. Consequently, reports for CY2021, CY2022, and CY2024 focus on BMP implementation, fertilization management and general cropping trends. The CY2023 report was an exception as county totals for hay and tobacco from the 2022 Agriculture Census were able to be incorporated, so nitrogen reduction estimates for Jordan Lake subwatersheds were able to be calculated and included. This approach of reporting cropland nitrogen reduction estimates on a five-year cycle to include Census data was considered the most practical interim solution by the WOC and the DWR until the Jordan Lake strategy readoption process concludes and reporting requirements are revised.

**Table 1. Estimated reductions in agricultural nitrogen loss (cropland) from baseline (1997-2001), CY2018, and CY2023, Jordan Lake Watershed †**

County	Baseline Nitrogen Loss (lb)†	CY2018 Nitrogen Loss (lb)†*	CY2018 N Loss Reduction (%)‡*	CY2023 Nitrogen Loss (lb)†	CY2023 N Loss Reduction (%)‡
<b>Upper New Hope subwatershed: Goal of 35% nitrogen loss reduction (4% of total Jordan Lake Watershed cropland)</b>					
Chatham	43,063	7,996	81%	13,448	69%
Durham	37,618	15,565	59%	17,775	53%
Orange	68,632	43,039	37%	29,136	58%
Wake	9,694	2,175	78%	5,592	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>159,007</b>	<b>68,774</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>65,951</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Lower New Hope subwatershed: Goal of no increase in nitrogen loss (1% of total Jordan Lake Watershed cropland)</b>					
Chatham	56,632	11,858	79%	19,967	65%
Wake	38,362	8,626	78%	20,366	47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94,994</b>	<b>20,483</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>40,333</b>	<b>58%</b>
<b>Haw subwatershed: Goal of 8% nitrogen loss reduction (95% of total Jordan Lake Watershed cropland)</b>					
Alamance	697,634	458,154	34%	392,813	44%
Caswell	260,254	126,569	51%	92,428	64%
Chatham	245,458	55,704	77%	94,351	62%
Guilford	1,393,551	1,101,023	21%	827,716	41%
Orange	231,272	137,983	40%	94,436	59%
Rockingham	169,080	127,705	24%	148,358	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,997,249</b>	<b>2,007,138</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>1,650,103</b>	<b>45%</b>

† Nitrogen loss values are for comparative purposes. These are produced via NLEW calculations and based on best available nitrogen application rates to cropland in the watershed. Loss totals represent nitrogen neither used by crops nor intercepted by BMPs in a Soil Management Group. This is not an in-stream loading value.

‡ Total reduction percentages are calculated by comparing current nitrogen loss to baseline nitrogen loss. Individual county totals contribute proportionally, and so smaller watershed trends tend to be more volatile than large watershed trends.

\*Some CY2018 Nitrogen Loss and Reduction values may have changed since originally reported to fix an acreage error.

## Best Management Practice Implementation

Agriculture is credited with different nitrogen reduction efficiencies, expressed as percentages, for riparian buffer practice installation widths ranging from 20 feet to 100 feet. The NLEW for Jordan Lake provides the percent nitrogen reduction efficiencies for buffer practice installation widths on cropland as displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Nitrogen loss reduction percentages by buffer practice installation width**

Buffer width	Nitrogen loss reduction percentage
20 feet minimum	20%
30 feet minimum	25%
50 feet minimum	30%
100 feet minimum	35%

Riparian buffers have many important functions beyond being effective in reducing nitrogen. Research has shown that upwards of 75% of sediment from agricultural sources is from stream banks and that riparian buffers are important for reducing this sediment.<sup>3</sup> In addition, riparian buffers can reduce phosphorus and sediment in runoff as it moves through the buffer and provide other critically important functions. According to a report completed in 2007, *Delineating Agriculture in the Lake Jordan River Basin*, most agricultural land in the Jordan Lake watershed is already buffered. This study found that six counties within the watershed had more than 75% of their agricultural land buffered, and that the average buffer width was greater than 50 feet.<sup>4</sup> Due to data availability and staffing limitations, a decision was made to utilize GIS technology and aerial photography for baseline BMP totals. Baseline acreage of riparian buffers on cropland among the different widths for which agriculture receives reductions was obtained through this process first in 1998 and then again in 2010. Overall, total acres of buffers slightly decreased between 1998 and 2010 because of decreased overall agricultural production acres during the same time period. This is also reflected in the reported buffer acres included in the first annual progress report (CY2010), which were noticeably lower than baseline totals. Since the CY2010 report, total buffer acreage has been obtained through individual contracts implemented through state and federal cost share contracts, and buffer acres are added after each project's completion.

Since the baseline, some buffer practices have been installed in the Jordan Lake watershed through the Division of Mitigation Services (DMS). The DMS has completed 64 projects in the watershed from the baseline through 2024, and at least six private mitigation banks from which DMS purchases credits are currently operating in the watershed. The DMS project data is not tracked either for previous land use or for the area of buffer restored in conjunction with stream restoration projects. Because DMS funded buffers for compensatory mitigation for stream or buffer permitted losses are also occurring in the watershed, they are not eligible to be counted for reductions under the Rule, even if they are located on agricultural lands. Thus, DMS buffer restoration projects are not included in the totals provided in this report. As DMS continues to

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<sup>3</sup> Osmond, D., Meals, D., Hoag, D., & Arabi, M. (2012). How to build better agricultural conservation programs to protect water quality: The NIFA-CEAP experience. Soil and Water Conservation Society.

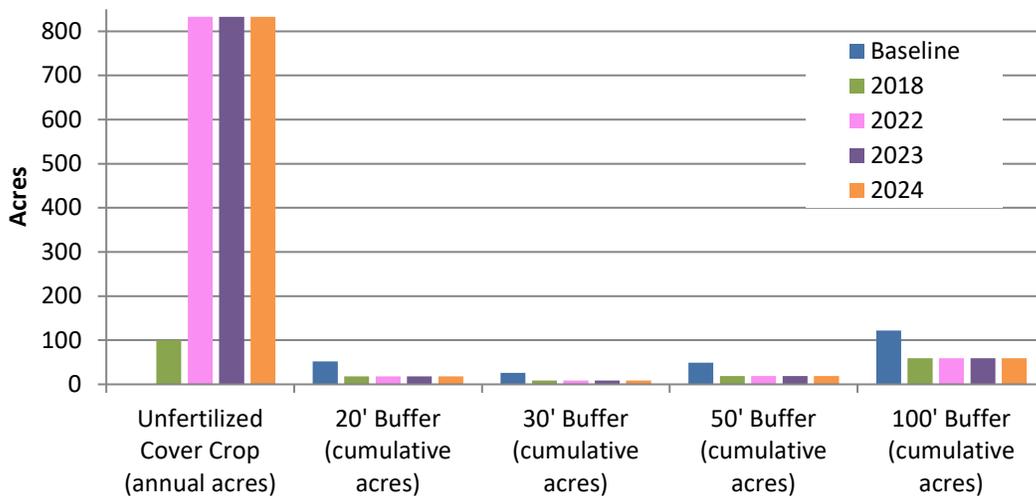
<sup>4</sup> Osmond, D. L. (2007, November 9). *Final report for the Sampling analysis: Delineating agriculture in the Lake Jordan River Basin* (Final report, Department of Soil Science, North Carolina State University). North Carolina Digital Collections. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/delineating-agriculture-in-the-lake-jordan-river-basin-final-report-for-the-sampling-analysis-delineating-agriculture-in-the-lake-jordan-river-basin/2558005>

install buffers adjacent to and purchase credits generated on agricultural land, this decreases the possibility for buffers to be installed for credit under Rule progress reporting.

In the Lower New Hope subwatershed, as of 2010, 144 acres (57%) of the buffers in the subwatershed still exist but are no longer eligible for accounting under the Rule because adjacent cropland acres have been taken out of agricultural production. This subwatershed experienced a decrease of 12% of cropland with wide riparian buffers from 1998 to 2010. In the Upper New Hope subwatershed, 531 acres (39%) of baseline buffers still exist but are no longer eligible for accounting under the Rule, also because adjacent cropland acres have been taken out of agricultural production. This subwatershed experienced a decrease of 21% of cropland from 1998 to 2010. For these two watersheds, the limited number of cropland acres greatly increases the effect of any change in agricultural operation land use on overall nitrogen loss reduction percentage. The Haw River subwatershed only saw a decrease of 1% of buffer acres in the watershed from 1998 to 2010. This is to be expected, since the subwatershed did not lose any cropland acres from 1998 to 2010. Detailed information regarding buffer acreages implemented by subwatershed in baseline (1998) and crop years 2018, and 2022 through 2024 is displayed in Figures 4, 5, and 6. The Lower New Hope subwatershed continued to see high implementation of unfertilized cover crop acreage compared to baseline because of National Fish and Wildlife funding obtained by Wake SWCD which financed additional unfertilized cover crop implementation in the county.

**Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 1% are in the Lower New Hope subwatershed.**

**Figure 4. Nitrogen Reducing BMPs installed on Croplands from Baseline (1998), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Lower New Hope subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed \***

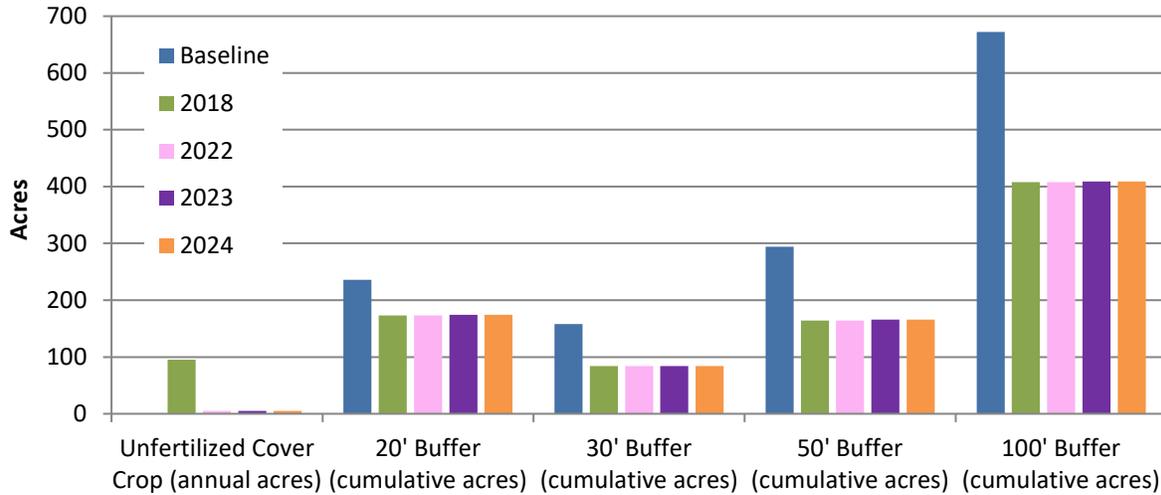


\* The acres of buffers listed include estimated acres from GIS analysis from 1998 and 2010 aerial photography and acres implemented through cost share programs since baseline. Cropland acres affected by the buffer could be 5 to 10 times larger than the acreage shown above.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bruton, J. G. (2005). *Headwater catchments: Estimating surface drainage extent across North Carolina and correlations between landuse, near stream, and water quality indicators in the Piedmont physiographic region* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources, North Carolina State University). NC State University Repository. <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/resolver/1840.16/4306>

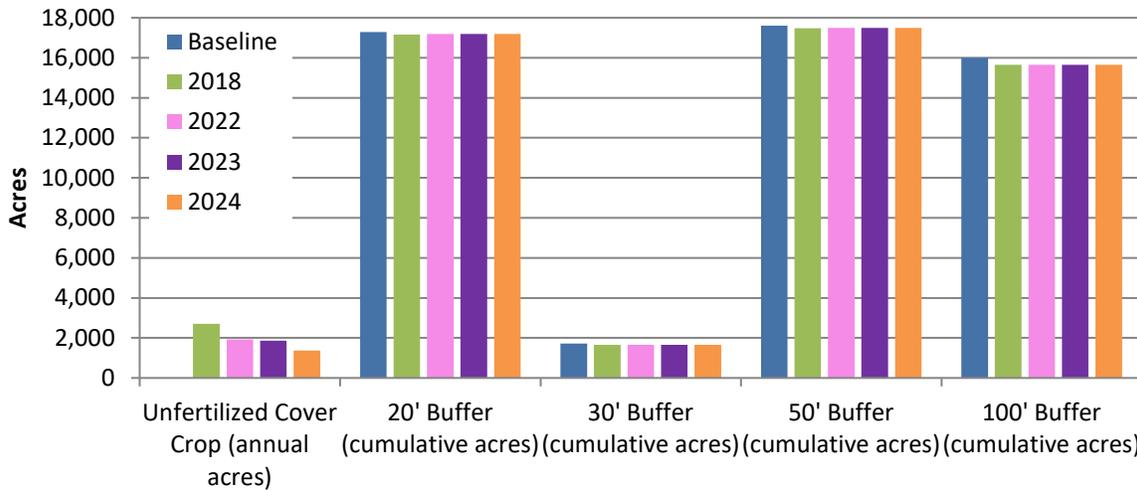
Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 4% are in the Upper New Hope subwatershed.

**Figure 5. Nitrogen Reducing BMPs installed on Croplands from Baseline (1998), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Upper New Hope subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\***



Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 95% are in the Haw subwatershed.

**Figure 6. Nitrogen Reducing BMPs installed on Croplands from Baseline (1998), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Haw subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\***



\* The acres of buffers listed include estimated acres from GIS analysis from 1998 and 2010 aerial photography and acres implemented through cost share programs since baseline. Cropland acres affected by the buffer could be 5 to 10 times larger than the acreage shown above.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Bruton, J. G. (2005). *Headwater catchments: Estimating surface drainage extent across North Carolina and correlations between landuse, near stream, and water quality indicators in the Piedmont physiographic region* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources, North Carolina State University). NC State University Repository. <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/resolver/1840.16/4306>

## Fertilization Management

Fertilization rates are revisited annually by counties using data from farmers, commercial applicators and state and federal agencies' professional estimates. Total nitrogen application rates include both organic (waste) and inorganic (commercial fertilizer) sources, even in situations where a producer applies some of both to the same crop. In the Jordan Lake watershed, crops are largely fertilized at recommended agronomic rates or under fertilized to reduce costs.

Typically, nitrogen application rates for major commodity crops in each Jordan Lake subwatershed are approximated through NLEW by taking a weighted average of fertilization rates. In this calculation, each county's reported fertilization rate for a specific crop is weighted by the crop acreage associated with that rate. Prior to data availability issues beginning in 2019, annual NASS crop estimates were used to inform county acreage amounts in weighted average calculations of fertilization rates. Since no county acreage estimates were published by NASS for hay, tobacco, and wheat acreages in CY2024, weighted averages of nitrogen fertilization rates for these crops were estimated using 2022 Agriculture Census acreage totals. Corn and soybean nitrogen fertilization rate weighted averages were calculated using 2024 NASS county acreage estimates as normal.

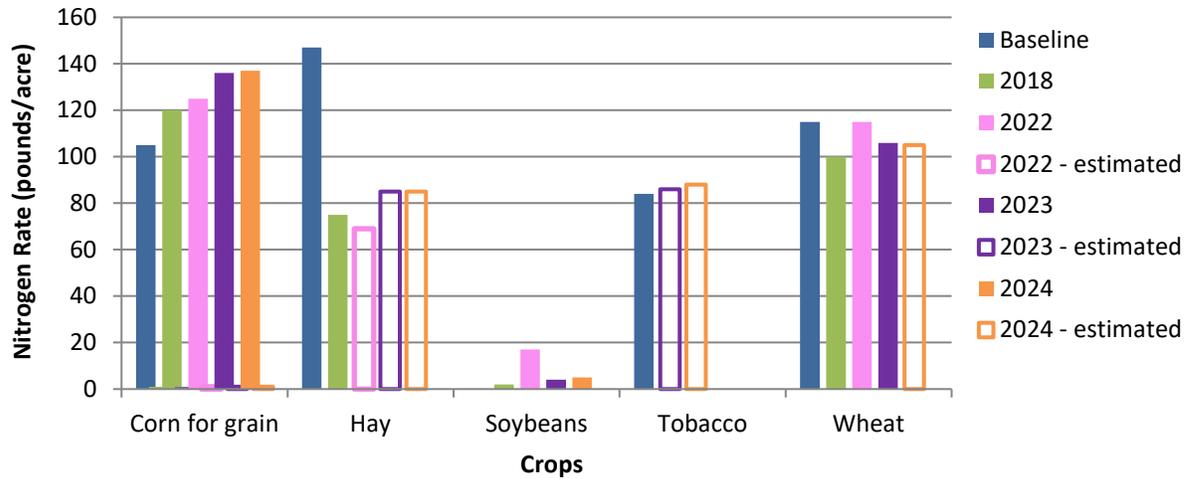
In CY2024, fertilization rates for major commodity crops in each of the three subwatersheds largely remained consistent (+/- 10 lbs N/ac) with rates reported in CY2023. The largest fluctuation was a 9 lb N/ac drop in corn fertilization in the Upper New Hope subwatershed. This fluctuation was likely due to no corn acreage reported by NASS for Orange County in CY2024, since Orange reports a much higher fertilization rate for corn than other counties in the Upper New Hope subwatershed (Chatham, Durham, and Wake).

Figures 7, 8, and 9 display the nitrogen fertilization rates in pounds per acre (lbs N/acre) for the major crops in the watershed. Fertilization rate estimates that used data from the 2022 Agriculture Census are displayed with no fill in these figures. For many of the high acreage crops in the Jordan Lake watershed, farmers have reduced nitrogen fertilization rates from baseline levels. Corn fertilization rates have increased from baseline levels, although there have been slight decreases in application rates for corn in the Haw subwatershed, which grows approximately 95% of the corn acreage in the Jordan Lake watershed. Since baseline, hay acreage has remained largely under fertilized in the Jordan Lake watershed. There is less annual cropland nitrogen loss from under fertilized hay acreage than if such acreage were fertilized at recommended agronomic rates.

Figures 10, 11, and 12 depict the total annual nitrogen (in pounds) applied to cropland during the baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024 to show the impact of fertilization rates related to crops that are grown in each subwatershed. Total annual applied nitrogen estimates that use merged datasets (either 2018 annual county estimates or 2022 Agriculture Census totals) are displayed with no fill in these figures. Due to the small size of the subwatersheds in Jordan Lake, minor changes in nitrogen fertilization rates result in significant effects on the reported nitrogen reductions on cropland. The total amount of nitrogen lost in each of these subwatersheds is a function of the fertilization rate for each crop and the number of acres planted, which means that the largest nitrogen fluxes in the Jordan Lake watershed occur on hay, wheat, and corn acres in the Haw subwatershed. Of all crops grown in the Jordan Lake watershed, hay acres grown in the Haw subwatershed encompass most of the nitrogen applied to cropland.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 1% are in the Lower New Hope subwatershed.

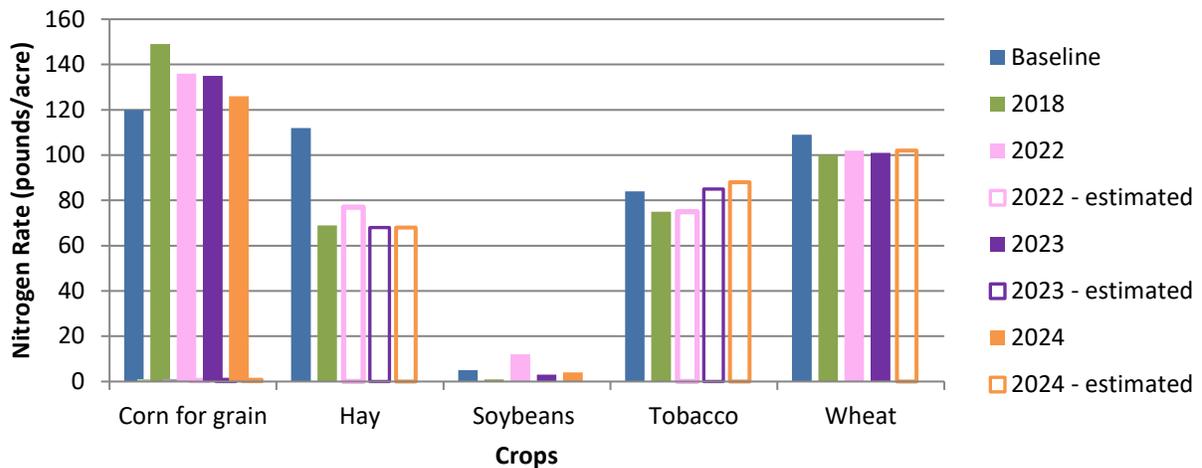
Figure 7. Average annual nitrogen fertilization rate (lb/ac) on cropland for the baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Lower New Hope subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\*



\* The CY2022 fertilization rate above for hay was estimated by taking the weighted average of county hay fertilization rates using hay acreage estimated by NASS in 2018. The CY2023 and CY2024 fertilization rates for hay, tobacco, and wheat were estimated by taking the weighted average of county fertilization rates using 2022 Agriculture Census data for these crops.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 4% are in the Upper New Hope subwatershed.

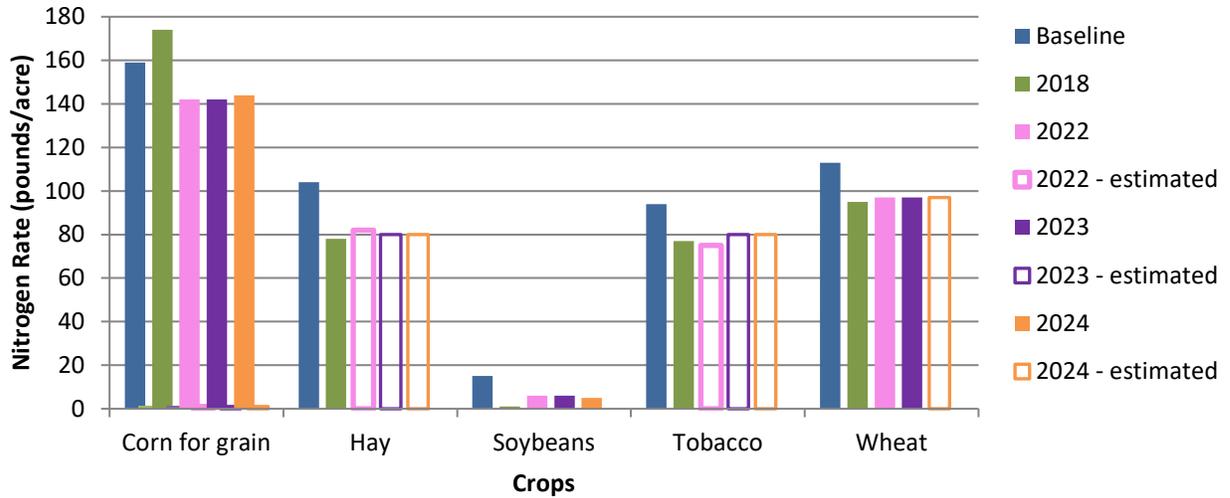
Figure 8. Average annual nitrogen fertilization rate (lb/ac) on cropland for the baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Upper New Hope subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\*



\* The CY2022 fertilization rates above for hay and tobacco were estimated by taking the weighted average of county fertilization rates using acreage estimated by NASS in 2018 for these crops. The CY2023 and CY2024 fertilization rates for hay, tobacco, and wheat were estimated by taking the weighted average of county fertilization rates using 2022 Agriculture Census data for these crops.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 95% are in the Haw subwatershed.

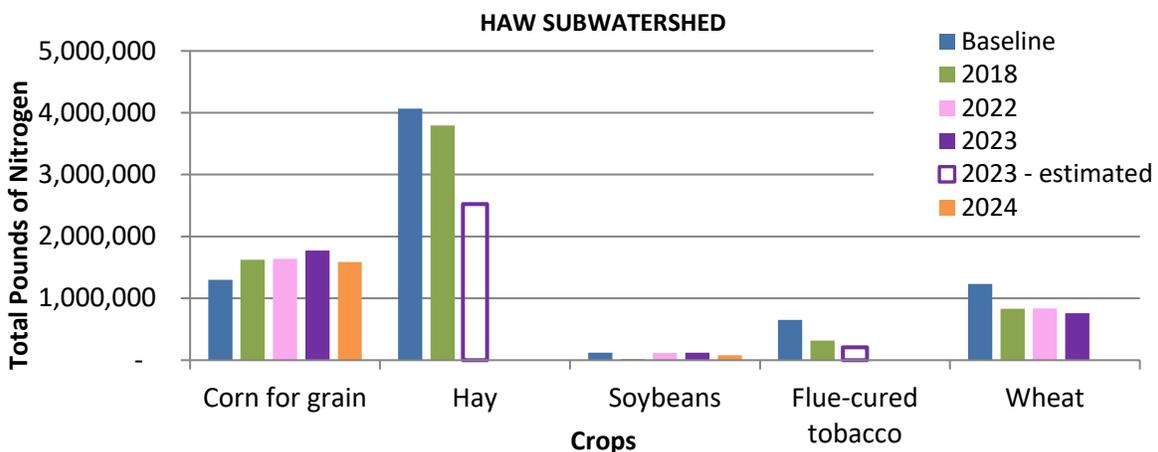
Figure 9. Average annual nitrogen fertilization rate (lb/ac) on cropland for the baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Haw subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\*



\* The CY2022 fertilization rates above for hay and tobacco were estimated by taking the weighted average of county fertilization rates using acreage estimated by NASS in 2018 for these crops. The CY2023 and CY2024 fertilization rates for hay, tobacco, and wheat were estimated by taking the weighted average of county fertilization rates using 2022 Agriculture Census data for these crops.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 95% are in the Haw subwatershed.

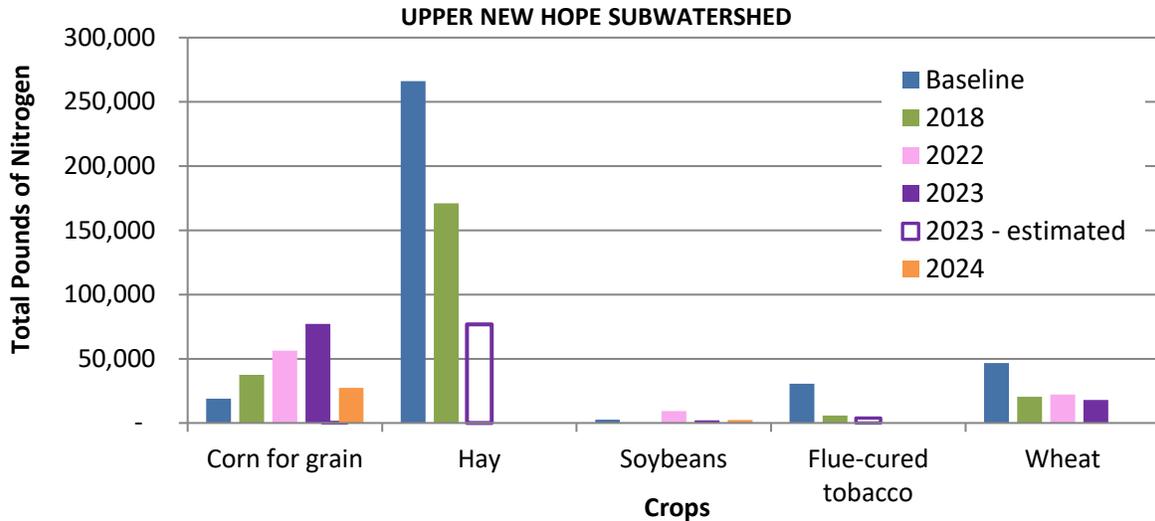
Figure 10. Total annual nitrogen (lbs) applied annually to cropland for the baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Haw subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\*



\*Total pounds of nitrogen for tobacco and hay were not estimated for CY2022 and CY2024, and for wheat for CY2024, because the NASS discontinued reporting annual acreages for those crops. Estimates for hay and tobacco were calculated for CY2023 using 2022 Agriculture Census data.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 4% are in the Upper New Hope subwatershed.

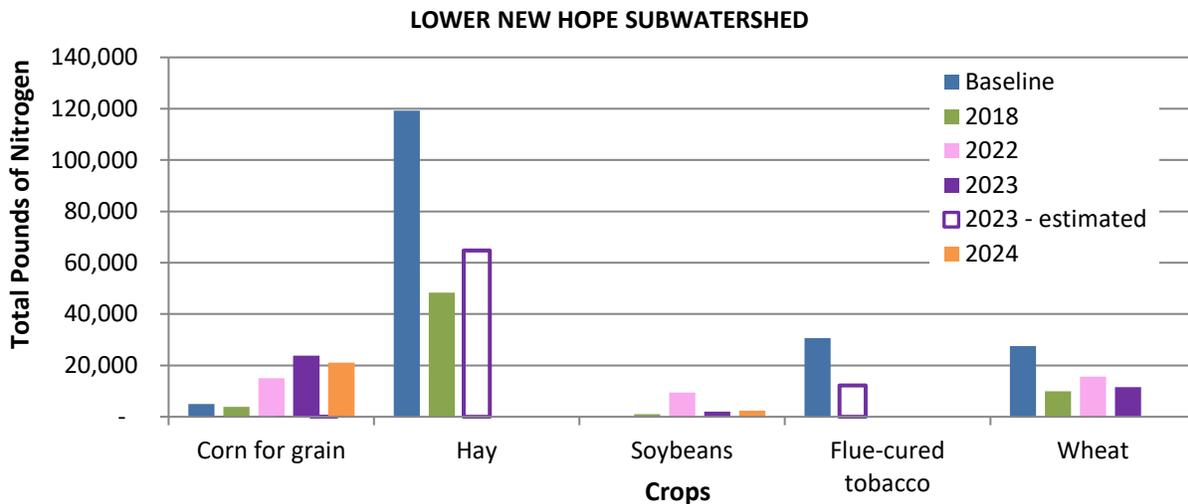
Figure 11. Total annual nitrogen (lbs) applied annually to cropland for the baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Upper New Hope subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\*



\* Total pounds of nitrogen for tobacco and hay were not estimated for CY2022 and CY2024, and for wheat for CY2024, because the NASS discontinued reporting annual acreages for those crops. Estimates for hay and tobacco were calculated for CY2023 using 2022 Agriculture Census data.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 1% are in the Lower New Hope subwatershed.

Figure 12. Total annual nitrogen (lbs) applied annually to cropland for the baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Lower New Hope subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\*



\* Total pounds of nitrogen for tobacco and hay were not estimated for CY2022 and CY2024, and for wheat for CY2024, because the NASS discontinued reporting annual acreages for those crops. Estimates for hay and tobacco were calculated for CY2023 using 2022 Agriculture Census data.

## Cropping Shifts

A host of factors from individual choice to global markets determine crop selections. As a result, crop acreages in the Jordan Lake watershed fluctuate annually. Because distinct crops require different amounts of nitrogen and use applied nitrogen with varying efficiency, changes in the mix of crops grown can have a significant impact on the cumulative yearly nitrogen loss reductions in Jordan Lake subwatersheds. For nutrient accounting in baseline and since, North Carolina crop data captured by the NASS in cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) has been reported for counties with acreage in Jordan Lake subwatersheds.

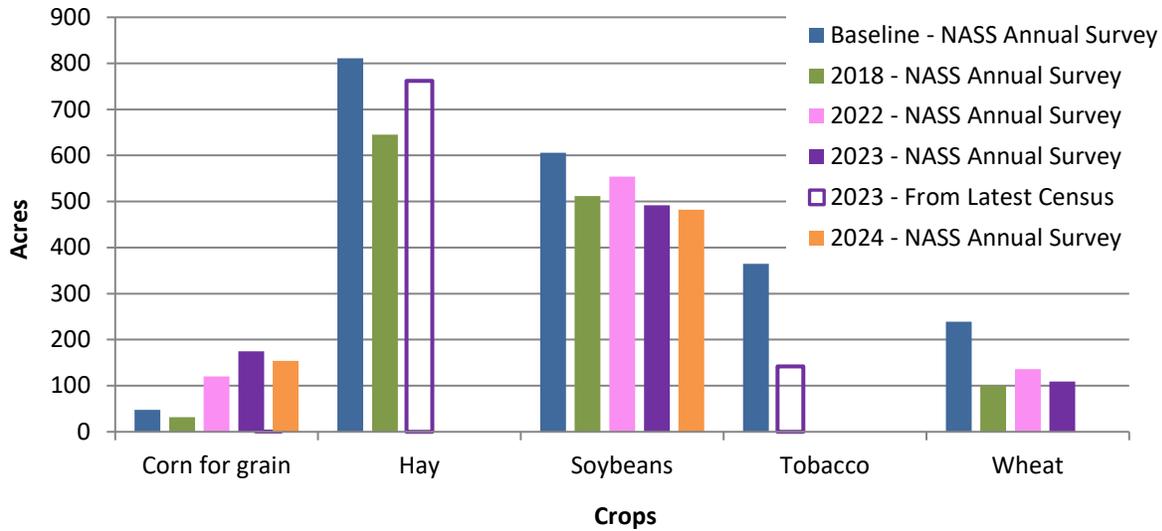
In annual survey datasets, the NASS only reports select major commodity crops, which means that smaller acreages of vegetable produce and specialty crops are not included in annual data releases. In addition, the NASS does not report planted or harvested acreage for any crop where fewer than 500 acres were grown or where fewer than 3 individual producers reported growing a specific crop. In 2019, NASS discontinued annual county acreage estimates for hay and tobacco. This data availability change causes challenges with assessing annual cropping shifts in the Jordan Lake watershed on a year-to-year basis because agricultural activity in the watershed is pasture dominated; greater than 60% of agricultural land acreage in the watershed is estimated to be used for pasture or hay production.

For the 2024 crop season, annual estimates published by NASS also did not include wheat. Annual wheat estimates for counties are expected to resume for the 2025 crop season, but because of these data availability issues, the only crop acreages estimated for all 8 counties in the Jordan Lake watershed for CY2024 were for corn and soybeans. It is important to note that one county in the Jordan Lake watershed (Caswell) did not have any corn or soybean acreages estimated for CY2024 and three counties (Durham, Orange and Rockingham) only had acreage for one crop (corn or soybeans) estimated. While annual crop data published by the NASS remains the primary cropland acreage data source for nutrient accounting in the Jordan Lake watershed since it was used to establish baseline, it has become impractical to conduct baseline and between crop year comparisons on an annual basis using NASS data alone.

To delineate general cropping shift trends between CY2023 and CY2024, available annual and Agriculture Census crop data from NASS and annual crop data from FSA was consulted and compared. Comparisons of total corn and soybean acreage using 2022 Agriculture Census and NASS annual estimates from CY2023 and CY2024 show similar overall totals but indicate that corn acreage increased in CY2024 while soybean acreage declined. This pattern aligns with comparison of FSA data for CY2023 and CY2024, which also reflects a rise in corn (+189 acres) and a decrease in soybeans (-250 acres) within the watershed. For tobacco, hay, and wheat, FSA data between CY2023 and CY2024 suggest hay acreage is increasing (+92 acres), while tobacco and wheat acreage are declining (-282 acres and -319 acres respectively). When comparing FSA CY2024 data to 2022 Agriculture Census totals, tobacco and wheat trends remain consistent with these observations, but the hay acreage trend is less clear. The FSA annually reports ungrazed hay acreage in the Jordan Lake watershed at roughly one-third of the acreage reported in the 2022 Agriculture Census (summed totals of irrigated and nonirrigated harvested hay acres excluding alfalfa). Because of this discrepancy between agency datasets, it is not possible to identify positive or negative trends for hay in CY2024. Figures 13, 14, and 15 show the NASS reported crop acres and shifts for the baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024 for all three subwatersheds. In these figures hay and tobacco acreages for CY2023 utilizing 2022 Agriculture Census data are displayed differently from the acreages reported using CY2023 NASS annual survey data. No hay, tobacco and wheat acreages are graphed for CY2024.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 1% are in the Lower New Hope subwatershed.

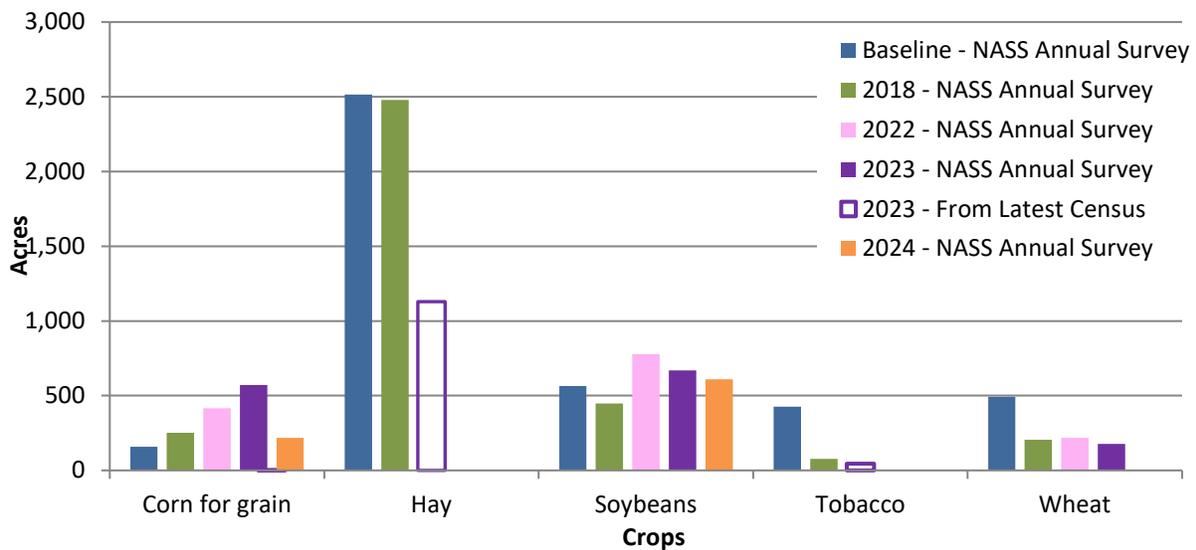
**Figure 13. Acreage of Major Crops for the Baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Lower New Hope subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\***



\*NASS discontinued reporting annual hay and tobacco acres starting in 2019 and in 2024 no wheat acreages were estimated. The hay and tobacco acreage graphed for CY2023 is utilizing 2022 Agriculture Census data; remaining commodities are utilizing NASS annual survey data.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 4% are in the Upper New Hope subwatershed.

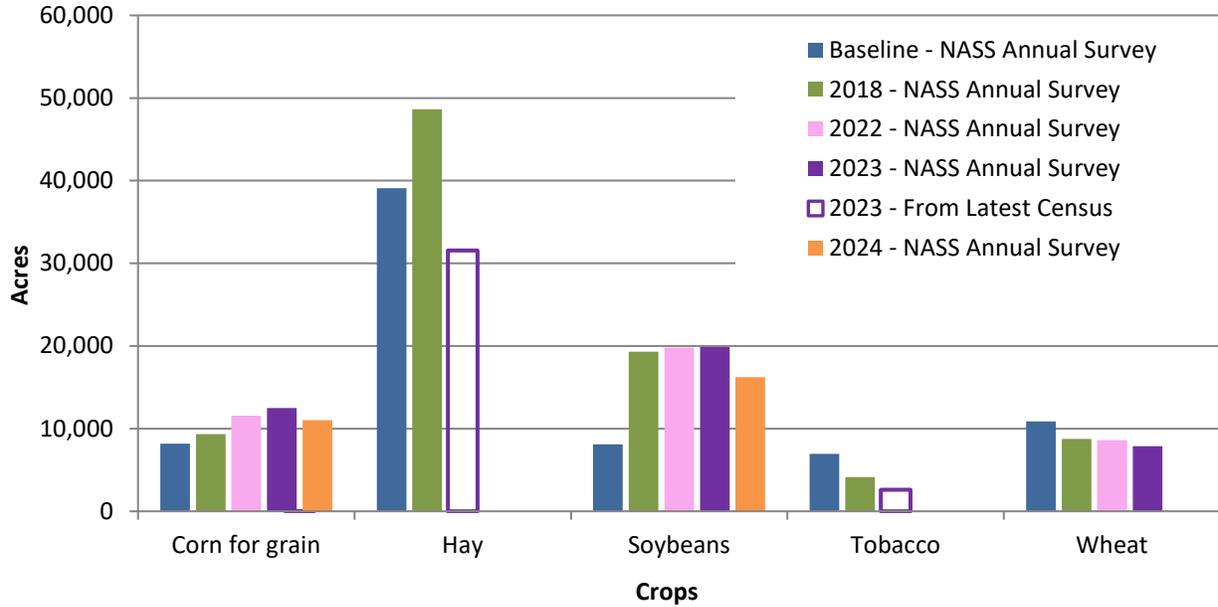
**Figure 14. Acreage of Major Crops for the Baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Upper New Hope subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\***



\*NASS discontinued reporting annual hay and tobacco acres starting in 2019 and in 2024 no wheat acreages were estimated. The hay and tobacco acreage graphed for CY2023 is utilizing 2022 Agriculture Census data; remaining commodities are utilizing NASS annual survey data.

Of the cropland acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, 95% are in the Haw subwatershed.

Figure 15. Acreage of Major Crops for the Baseline (1997-2001), 2018, and 2022 through 2024, Haw subwatershed, Jordan Lake Watershed\*

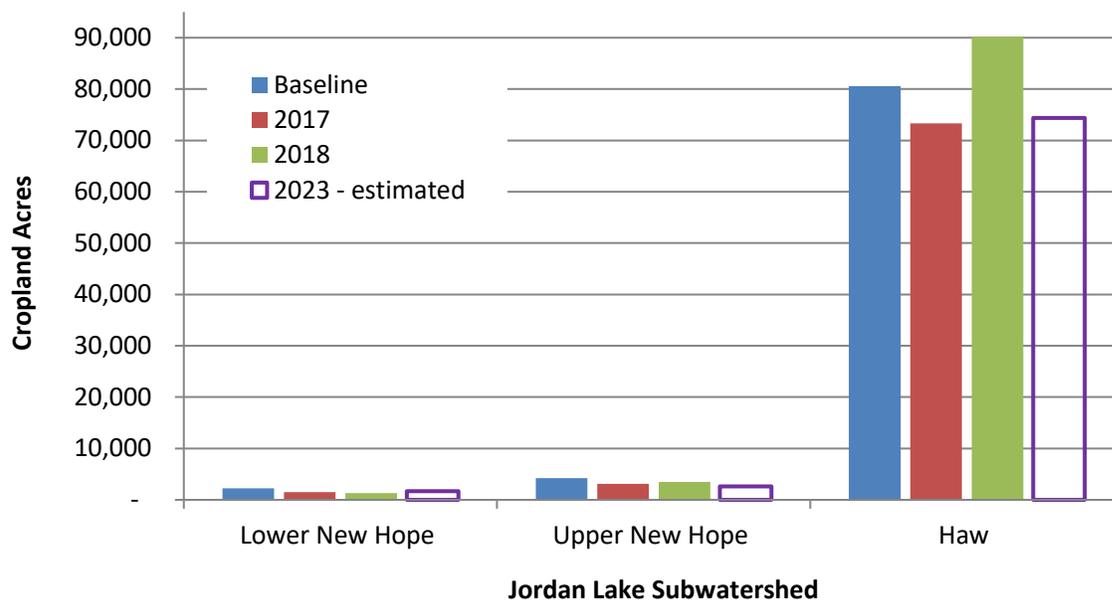


\*NASS discontinued reporting annual hay and tobacco acres starting in 2019 and in 2024 no wheat acreages were estimated. The hay and tobacco acreage graphed for CY2023 is utilizing 2022 Agriculture Census data; remaining commodities are utilizing NASS annual survey data.

## Land Use Change to Development and Cropland Conversion

Cropland acres fluctuate every year due to cropland conversion and development. Each year, some cropland is permanently lost to development and some is converted to grass or trees and likely to be ultimately lost from agricultural production. Agricultural acres lost permanently to development are also not reported due to the varying accounting methodologies counties and municipalities employ in documenting land use changes in their jurisdictions (if such information is collected at all). In addition to development, cropland can be converted to other uses. The WOC tracks the acres of cropland that are converted to grass or trees through state or federal cost share programs. Since the baseline, the following cropland acres in each subwatershed have been converted to grass or trees through state or federal cost share programs: 47 acres in the Lower New Hope subwatershed, none in the Upper New Hope subwatershed and 2,394 acres in the Haw subwatershed. Figure 16 displays the total cropland acres in the watershed in baseline and 2017, 2018, and 2023. In 2023, a merged dataset consisting of NASS annual survey data from CY2023 and 2022 Agriculture Census data was used to estimate total cropland acres in the Jordan Lake watershed and its subwatersheds.

**Figure 16. Total Cropland Acres in the Jordan Lake Watershed, Baseline (1997-2001) and 2017, 2018, and 2023\***



*\*For 2023, a merged dataset consisting of NASS annual survey data from CY2023 (corn, soybeans, wheat, and sweet potatoes acreage) and 2022 Agriculture Census data (hay and tobacco acreage) was used to estimate total cropland acres in the Jordan Lake watershed and its subwatersheds.*

## Pasture Accounting

Pasture nitrogen loss is also calculated using NLEW and is based on the total number of pasture acres, pastured livestock, and implemented livestock exclusion systems in the watershed. Reported pasture acreage and livestock totals are collected every 5 years from the USDA Census of Agriculture, and implementation data for exclusion systems is collected from local conservation staff in the watershed. The information included in Table 3 was last updated in the [CY2023 Annual Report](#) with pasture data from the 2022 Agriculture Census and livestock exclusion system implementation data from 2017 through 2022. As of the 2022 pasture reporting cycle all three Jordan Lake subwatersheds exceeded their mandated goals. The Upper New Hope subwatershed reported a 52% nitrogen loss reduction from baseline, the Lower New Hope subwatershed reported a 40% nitrogen loss reduction from baseline, and the Haw subwatershed reported a 56% nitrogen loss reduction from baseline. For pasture accounting, 2002 was chosen as the baseline year because the closest possible Agriculture Census was collected and published based on 2002 data. Table 3 lists each county's baseline, 2017 and 2022 nitrogen (lbs/yr) loss values from pastureland, along with nitrogen loss percent reductions from the baseline in 2017 and 2022. The next pasture-based nitrogen loss calculations will be included in a future report when the 2027 Agriculture Census is published.

**Table 3. Estimated reductions in pastureland nitrogen loss from baseline (2002 Cycle) for 2017 Cycle and 2022 Cycle, Jordan Lake Watershed**

Upper New Hope: Goal of 35% Nitrogen Loss Reduction					
County	2002 Nitrogen Loss (lbs) - Baseline †	2017 Nitrogen Loss (lbs) *	2017 N Loss Reduction (%) *	2022 Nitrogen Loss (lbs)	2022 N Loss Reduction (%)
Chatham	28,977	16,016	45%	17,670	39%
Durham	19,572**	6,969	64%	7,520	62%
Orange	20,350	9,940	51%	7,664	62%
Wake	655	272	58%	303	54%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69,554</b>	<b>33,197</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>33,157</b>	<b>52%</b>
Lower New Hope: Goal of no net increase in Nitrogen Loss					
County	2002 Nitrogen Loss (lbs) - Baseline †	2017 Nitrogen Loss (lbs) *	2017 N Loss Reduction (%) *	2022 Nitrogen Loss (lbs)	2022 N Loss Reduction (%)
Chatham	57,923	32,032	45%	35,359	39%
Wake	1,617**	569	65%	569	65%
<b>Total</b>	<b>59,540**</b>	<b>32,601</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>35,928</b>	<b>40%</b>

† These figures were originally calculated using total watershed pasture acres. The Pasture Points Committee determined that nitrogen loss should instead be calculated using only unbuffered pasture acres at the time of data collection; this column has been updated accordingly.

\* Nitrogen loss (lbs) and loss reduction (%) values for the 2017 pasture accounting cycle differ from those reported in the CY2019 report due to a fertilizer rate calculation error identified during the 2022 accounting cycle. The error primarily affected the Lower New Hope subwatershed. All values have been corrected and now align with NLEW v.6.0 results.

\*\* All values reflect results from NLEW v.6.0. Minor discrepancies between 2002 nitrogen loss values shown and previously reported figures may be due to previous data entry errors or software updates before baseline values were finalized in NLEW v.6.0.

**Table 3 continued. Estimated reductions in pastureland nitrogen loss from baseline (2002 Cycle) for 2017 Cycle and 2022 Cycle, Jordan Lake Watershed**

<b>Haw: Goal of 8% Nitrogen Loss Reduction</b>					
<b>County</b>	<b>2002 Nitrogen Loss (lbs) - Baseline †</b>	<b>2017 Nitrogen Loss (lbs)*</b>	<b>2017 N Loss Reduction (%)*</b>	<b>2022 Nitrogen Loss (lbs)</b>	<b>2022 N Loss Reduction (%)</b>
Alamance	201,646	129,551	36%	84,227	58%
Caswell	61,026	28,509	53%	28,072	54%
Chatham	132,263	68,424	48%	76,488	42%
Guilford	211,059**	74,645	65%	81,721	61%
Orange	20,316**	8,281	59%	5,632	72%
Rockingham	46,637	33,846	27%	17,636	62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>672,947**</b>	<b>343,256</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>293,777</b>	<b>56%</b>

† These figures were originally calculated using total watershed pasture acres. The Pasture Points Committee determined that nitrogen loss should instead be calculated using only unbuffered pasture acres at the time of data collection; this column has been updated accordingly.

\* Nitrogen loss (lbs) and loss reduction (%) values for the 2017 pasture accounting cycle differ from those reported in CY2019 report due to a fertilizer rate calculation error identified during the 2022 accounting cycle. The error primarily affected the Lower New Hope subwatershed. All values have been corrected and now align with NLEW v.6.0 results.

\*\* All values reflect results from NLEW v.6.0. Minor discrepancies between 2002 nitrogen loss values shown and previously reported figures may be due to previous data entry errors or software updates before baseline values were finalized in NLEW v.6.0.

**Table 4. Pasture operation changes from baseline (2002) for the 2012, 2017, and 2022 Cycles, Jordan Lake Watershed**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Baseline (2002)</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2002-2022 % Change</b>
Pasture Land (acres)	99,595	83,096	74,478	71,360	-28%
Fertilization (lbs N/acre)†	103	81	80	70	-32%
Stocking Rate (animal units/acre)	0.58	0.72	0.68	0.60	+3%
Livestock Exclusion System Implementation (affected acres)	976	4,224	5,996*	6,311	+547%

† Total fertilization rate equals direct waste deposition times volatilization factor plus supplemental fertilizer application

\* This value changed from when it was originally reported in the CY2018 report. In the 2022 pasture accounting cycle, Guilford reported an affected acres correction for a livestock exclusion project originally included in the 2017 cycle.

## Phosphorus Indicators for CY2018 and CY2022 - CY2024 Since Baseline

The qualitative indicators included in Table 5 show the relative changes in land use and management parameters and their relative effect on phosphorus loss risk in the watershed from the baseline. This approach was recommended by the Phosphorus Technical Advisory Committee (PTAC) in 2005 due to the difficulty of developing an aggregate phosphorus tool parallel to the NLEW tool.<sup>7</sup> The PTAC reconvened in April 2010 to make minor revisions for the tool's use in the Jordan Lake watershed and the approach was approved for use by the Water Quality Committee of the EMC. This report includes phosphorus indicator data for the baseline period (1997-2001), CY2018, and CY2022 - CY2024. Most of the parameters indicate less risk of phosphorus loss than in the baseline.

Contributing to the reduced risk of phosphorus loss since baseline is the reduction in the acres of tobacco, the decrease in the amount of animal waste phosphorus, and significant conservation tillage on cropland in the watershed. The soil test phosphorus median number reported for the watershed fluctuates each year due to the nature of how the data is collected and compiled. The soil test phosphorus median numbers shown in Table 5 are generated by using NCDA&CS soil test laboratory results from voluntary soil testing on agricultural land and the data is reported by the NCDA&CS. The number of samples collected each year varies. The data does not include soil tests that were submitted to private laboratories. The soil test results from the NCDA&CS database represent data from entire counties in the watershed and have not been adjusted to include only those samples collected in the Jordan Lake watershed.

The WOC finds that the decreased risk of P loss from baseline is associated with the following three important parameters:

- continued high adoption of conservation tillage;
- decrease in animal waste phosphorus; and
- decrease in tobacco acreage.

A 33% reduction in animal waste phosphorus is due primarily to an overall reduction in watershed animal numbers. Many dairy operations in the watershed have permanently closed since baseline and a large poultry processing plant in Siler City was temporarily closed, which decreased the demand for broilers in the region and resulted in a significant downturn in production. The Siler City poultry processing plant reopened in 2019 and as of 2022 was operating at their 250,000 broilers per day production capacity. The WOC

### **Phosphorus Technical Advisory Committee (PTAC):**

The PTAC's overall purpose was to establish a phosphorus accounting method for agriculture. It determined that a defensible, aggregated, county-scale accounting method for estimating phosphorus losses from agricultural lands was not feasible due to "the complexity of phosphorus behavior and transport within a watershed, the lack of suitable data required to adequately quantify the various mechanisms of phosphorus loss and retention within watersheds of the basin, and the problem with not being able to capture agricultural conditions as they existed in 1991."<sup>6</sup> The PTAC instead developed recommendations for qualitatively tracking relative changes in practices in land use and management related to agricultural activity that increased or decreased the risk of phosphorus loss from agricultural lands on an annual basis.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, A. M., & Osmond, D. L. (2005, October 31). *Final report for the accounting method for tracking relative changes in agricultural phosphorus loading to the Tar-Pamlico River* (Report No. PB2016-101586). Department of Soil Science, North Carolina State University. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/accounting-method-for-tracking-relative-changes-in-agricultural-phosphorus-loading-to-the-tar-pamlico-river>

**Table 5. Relative Changes in Land Use and Management Parameters and their Relative Effect on Phosphorus Loss Risk in the Jordan Lake Watershed Since Baseline**

Parameter	Units	Source	Baseline (average 1997-2001)	CY2018	CY2022	CY2023	CY2024	Percent change (baseline to CY2024)	CY2024 P Loss Risk +/-
Reported Cropland (annual)	Acres	NC Ag Statistics	88,031	95,004	- <sup>Ⓜ</sup>	78,695 <sup>Ⓜ</sup>	- <sup>Ⓜ</sup>	- <sup>Ⓜ</sup>	-/+
Cropland conversion to Grass & Trees (cumulative)	Acres	USDA-NRCS & NCACSP	1,359	2,266	2,413	2,416	2,442	80%	-
Conservation tillage <sup>8</sup> (10-year window)	Acres	USDA-NRCS & NCACSP	1,997	19,645	2,008	1,875	1,600	-20% <sup>†</sup>	+
Vegetated buffers (cumulative)	Acres	GIS analysis	58,561	52,861	52,919	52,927	52,927	-10% <sup>‡</sup>	+
Tobacco acres (annual)	Acres	USDA-NRCS & NCACSP	7,728	4,302	- <sup>§</sup>	2,793 <sup>§</sup>	- <sup>§</sup>	- <sup>§</sup>	-/+
Unfertilized Cover Crops (annual)	Acres	USDA-NRCS & NCACSP	0	2,895	2,765	2,700	2,208	2,208%	-
Animal waste P (annual)	lbs of P/ yr	NC Ag Statistics	7,310,274	4,539,692	4,727,941	4,866,964	4,900,825	-33%	-
Soil test P median (annual)	P-Index	NCDA& CS	72	64	76	71	72	0%	-

<sup>Ⓜ</sup> Total cropland was not reported for CY2022 or CY2024 given crop acreage data availability changes. Total cropland in CY2023 was estimated using annual NASS survey data for the 2023 crop season and 2022 Agriculture Census data. See the 'Scope of Report and Methodology' section for details.

<sup>†</sup> Contracted conservation tillage acres – approximated via a moving ten-year window – are notably lower because older contracts implemented at the start of annual reporting have expired. Conservation tillage continues to be widely implemented.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>‡</sup>Total acres of buffers have slightly decreased. Additional agricultural land in the Jordan Lake watershed may be buffered because of Division of Mitigation Services activities in the watershed, which cannot be included in this report for nutrient reduction credit.

<sup>§</sup> Annual survey tobacco acreage was last reported by NASS in 2018. The CY2023 acreage reported is from the 2022 Agriculture Census. Tobacco acreage declined in North Carolina since the phase out of the Federal Tobacco Quota Program and enactment of the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act in 2004. The Jordan Lake watershed is not an exception to this statewide trend and has seen a decline in tobacco acreage grown since baseline.

<sup>8</sup> Conservation tillage is being practiced on additional acres, but this number only reflects acres under active cost share contracts approximated by a ten-year rolling window. Acres where farmers have adopted the use of conservation tillage without cost share assistance are not included. An estimated 93% of producers are practicing conservation tillage on cropland in the Jordan Lake watershed. O'Connell, C., & Osmond, D. L. (2018). *Carolina Dreamin': A case for understanding farmers' decision-making and hybrid agri-environmental governance initiatives in agricultural communities as complex assemblages*. In J. Forney, H. Campbell, & C. Rosin (Eds.), *Agri-environmental governance as an assemblage: Multiplicity, power, and transformation*. Routledge.

expects local producers to meet increased demand incrementally, which could increase animal waste phosphorus produced annually. A substantial increase in animal waste phosphorus produced annually would have to occur to increase phosphorus loss risk from baseline (1997 – 2001) for the animal waste phosphorus category tracked in Table 5. From baseline (average of animal counts from 1997 to 2001) to CY2024, the Jordan Lake watershed has seen an increase in approximately 110,000 inventoried layers and pullets and declines of over 5.7 million broilers, over 12,700 swine, and over 21,300 cattle.

Most poultry operations are deemed permitted (by regulation) in North Carolina. Operations that are deemed permitted have: (1) fewer animals than the state requires to obtain a state permit or (2) have a waste management system that does not require a state or federal permit. Most poultry operations have dry-litter poultry waste management systems and do not require any additional state or federal permits. Owners or operators of dry-litter poultry waste facilities are, however, required to adhere to Rules set forth under 15A NCAC 02T .1303 (Permitting by Regulation) and General Statute 143-215.10C, which include minimum stream setbacks, land application rates, soil analysis, and recordkeeping requirements. Because specific information about the location, number of animals, amount of dry-litter poultry waste produced and fields on which the dry-litter poultry waste is applied is unknown, the extent of potential impacts to water quality due to nutrient contributions from dry-litter poultry waste is difficult to ascertain. However, the Jordan Lake watershed has significantly fewer poultry in CY2024 than in the baseline period.

Based on observed phosphorus indicator trends in the Jordan Lake watershed for CY2024 and prior years (Table 5), which generally reflect decreased risk, the WOC recommends that no additional management actions be required of agricultural operations to meet the phosphorus goals outlined in the Rule. The WOC will continue to record data and report results compared to baseline for the identified set of qualitative phosphorus indicators to the DWR annually. Any concerns raised by the results of this effort will be brought to DWR's attention, along with recommendations for any appropriate action. The WOC expects that BMP implementation may continue to increase throughout the watershed in future years, and notes that BMPs installed for nitrogen and sediment control often provide significant phosphorus benefits as well.

Due to the number of permitted human biosolids application fields in the piedmont, the WOC also initially recommended adding tracking of the annual application of biosolids, but ultimately removed this element from the tracking methodology due to lack of readily accessible biosolids data. Since then, human biosolids applicators have begun submitting annual reports electronically to DEQ in a digital Portable Document Format (PDF) and that data is manually entered into a DEQ database. However, the data are not complete nor in a useable format for spatial aggregation and analysis at a watershed level. The WOC recommends DEQ provide rate, soil test phosphorus results, nutrient content, and spatial application information for permitted biosolids application data in a usable format for incorporation in future reporting.

## BMP Implementation Not Tracked by NLEW

Not all types of conservation BMPs are tracked by NLEW. Other BMPs not tracked by NLEW include: livestock-related nitrogen and phosphorus reducing BMPs, BMPs that reduce soil and phosphorus loss, and BMPs that do not have enough scientific research to support estimating a nitrogen benefit. The WOC believes it is worthwhile to recognize these practices because overall conservation practice implementation gives a comprehensive picture of the work that is being done on agricultural land in the watershed. Table 6 identifies these BMPs and tracks their implementation in the watershed since the end of the baseline period.

**Table 6. Best Management Practices installed from 2002 to 2024, Jordan Lake Watershed\***

Conservation Practice	Units	2002-2024 (cumulative)	2014-2024 (active contracts – 10-year rolling window)
Ag road repair-stabilization	feet	4,061	1,181
Agricultural pond restoration/repair	units	27	7
Closure-waste impoundments	units	22	3
Conservation cover	acres	864	78
Constructed wetland	acres	2	-
Critical area planting	acres	91	20
Cropland conversion - grass	acres	1,348	322
Cropland conversion - trees	acres	1,094	144
Diversion	feet	5,412	-
Fencing (USDA programs)	feet	85,041	78,300
Field border	acres	169	25
Grassed waterway	acres	320	27
Habitat management	acres	332	35
Nutrient management	acres	5,599	489
Nutrient management plan	no.	31	2
Pasture renovation	acres	3,333	511
Pastureland conversion to trees	acres	31	-
Pond	no.	2	1
Prescribed grazing	acres	7,211	2,505
Sediment control basin	units	2	-
Sod-based rotation	acres	12,541	2,842
Streambank and shoreline protection	feet	18,816	1,911
Terrace	feet	20,409	-

\* Additional BMPs may exist in the watershed as producers may maintain practices after the life of a cost share contract, and other practices are installed by farmers without cost share assistance.

## Looking Forward

### **WOC recognizes the dynamic nature of agricultural business:**

- Urban encroachment (e.g., crop selection and production shifts as fields become smaller)
- Age of farmer (e.g., as retirement approaches farmers may move from row crops to livestock)
- Changes in the world economies, energy or trade policies
- Changes in government programs (e.g., commodity support, crop insurance or environmental regulations)
- Weather (e.g., long periods of drought or rain)
- Scientific advances in agronomics (e.g., production of new types of crops or improvements in crop sustainability)
- Plant disease or pest problems (e.g., viruses or foreign pests).

The Jordan Lake WOC will continue to improve Rule implementation, relying heavily on the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts working directly with farmers to assist with BMP design and installation.

Because cropping shifts are susceptible to various pressures, the WOC continues to encourage BMP implementation on both cropland and pastureland that provides for a lasting reduction in nitrogen and phosphorus loss in the watershed while monitoring cropping changes. Previously, members of the Falls and Jordan Lake WOCs worked with DWR on issues regarding nutrient offsets that arise from trades involving agricultural land. The WOC will continue to stay engaged if additional offset work involving agriculture land occurs in the watershed.

The WOC supports and recommends additional research on accounting procedures for pasture operations. Similarly, the WOC will support any DWR effort to provide information on human biosolids

applications on agricultural acres in a format that will allow for spatial aggregation and analysis at a watershed level. If data becomes available in a usable format, the WOC will consider whether separate accounting for human biosolids nutrient applications is feasible and appropriate.

Funding for technical assistance and BMP implementation is necessary to successfully reach and maintain agricultural nutrient reduction goals. In 2001, grants from several sources funded a total of two watershed technicians and two basin coordinators to work within the Jordan Lake watershed. The technicians' primary responsibility was to assist farmers with BMP implementation and to support existing county staff to expedite the installation of nutrient reducing BMPs in the basin. On June 30, 2015 the last technician funding was expended, and technician funding is no longer eligible for grant awards by funding entities in the state. Concurrent budget changes at the USDA in the early to mid-2000s also resulted in statewide restructuring of North Carolina NRCS field staff and led to a reduction in federally-funded technical capacity at the local level. Therefore, less technical assistance for BMP implementation is available and ongoing responsibility for conservation practice planning and installation now largely depends on local staff with other duties and escalating workload and capacity demands. In CY2024, Soil and Water Conservation Districts spent over \$147,000 through the Agriculture Cost Share Program for BMP implementation in the Jordan Lake Watershed. The Natural Resources Conservation Service spent over \$1.1 million through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program for BMP implementation in the counties lying in the Jordan Lake Watershed. Funds were also expended for installation of these practices by local farmers and landowners either through participation in these cost share programs, or by installing practices at their own cost.

Sufficient funding is also necessary for data collection and reporting activities to track the agriculture community's progress in meeting nutrient reduction goals. Technicians and basin coordinators previously supported by grant funds used to assist with reporting requirements for the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico

Agriculture Rules. At present, there is no funding for a specific Jordan Lake watershed coordinator. In addition to other duties, the Nonpoint Source Planning Coordinator position within the NCDA&CS Division of Soil and Water Conservation funded by EPA 319(h) funds has been assigned the agriculture data collection, compilation and reporting duties for all basins and watersheds under Nutrient Sensitive Waters Agriculture Rules. Because most district staff have neither the time nor financial resources to synthesize county level data, and with watershed technician and coordinator funding eliminated, a more centralized approach to annual reporting data collection and verification through GIS analysis or other tools is necessary. Automating data collection and verification may come at the expense of local knowledge. Annual agricultural reporting is required by the Rules; therefore, continued funding for the Division's only remaining nutrient coordinator position is essential for compliance.

Previously, funding was available for research on conservation practice effectiveness. Due to grant eligibility changes and other funding constraints, new data can only be developed intermittently. Prior funding sources for such research, which provided much of the scientific information on which NLEW was based, are no longer available. As new funding is made available, additional North Carolina-specific research information will be incorporated into future NLEW updates. The NLEW software (v6.0) is currently configured to pull revised realistic yield and nitrogen use efficiency data from the North Carolina Realistic Yield Database, which is intermittently updated when new research becomes available.

Ongoing phosphorus accounting will involve recording and reporting of qualitative factors that increase and decrease the risk of phosphorus loss from agricultural land and operations since baseline. Evaluation of trends in agricultural phosphorus loss annually will continue to be detailed in annual reports. Additionally, understanding of agricultural phosphorus management could be improved through in-stream monitoring and paired watershed studies, which are also contingent upon the availability of funding and staff resources.

In upcoming years, the WOC anticipates engaging with other watershed stakeholders in discussions on watershed-scale priorities and furthering a "One Water" framework for incentivizing work in and around the Jordan Lake watershed to promote pollutant reduction alongside economic development and community resilience. The "One Water" integrated watershed management movement in the Jordan Lake watershed is led by Jordan Lake One Water, a stakeholder coalition working in partnership to build watershed-wide consensus on how to address issues impacting water resources.

## Conclusion

The Jordan Lake WOC will continue to monitor and evaluate crop trends. The current shift to and from crops with higher nitrogen requirements may continue to influence the yearly reduction from baseline. Significant progress has been made in agricultural nitrogen and phosphorus loss reduction to achieve reduction goals; however, the measurable effects of BMPs on overall in-stream nitrogen reduction may take years to develop due to the nature of non-point source pollution. Nitrogen reduction values presented in this summary of agricultural reductions reflect "edge-of-management unit" calculations that contribute to achieving the nitrogen loss reduction goals. Significant quantities of agricultural BMPs have been installed since the adoption and implementation of the nutrient management strategy, and agriculture continues to fulfill its responsibilities toward achieving the overall nutrient reduction goals in the Jordan Lake watershed.