

# KEY VOCABULARY

# CREEKS

**Storm drain system** – Pipes and drains that carry rain that does not soak into the ground naturally.

**Storm water runoff** – Water from rainfall that flows off rooftops, streets, parking lots and other paved surfaces.

**Subdivision** – Land divided into lots for development.

**Township** – Townships can be just a simple geographic reference or have their own local government.

**Tributary** – A river or stream flowing into a larger stream, river or lake.

**Turbidity** – Cloudiness or haziness due to a lot of small particles in the water, typically mud or sediment.

**Watershed** – The entire region that drains into a river, lake or other body of water.

**Wetlands** – A land area saturated with water, either all the time or during certain seasons. Wetlands help control floods, filter pollutants, trap sediment and gather nutrients, and are a nursery and home to many species of plants and animals.



A great blue heron takes off from Little Sugar Creek along the greenway. Photo: Nancy Pierce



Little Sugar Creek between Sharon Road West and Pineville-Matthews Road is wide and deep enough to allow kayaking. Photo: Nancy Pierce



Tom Phlegar, in Colonial garb, shows how early settlers drank spring water. Phlegar volunteers at the Hezekiah Alexander House at the Charlotte Museum of History. Photo: Nancy Pierce

## LEARN MORE

Visit [KeepingWatch.org](http://KeepingWatch.org) and click on “Explore Creeks” for stories, videos, maps and other information about Mecklenburg County’s creeks.



The Autobell® Creek Challenge is funded by Autobell® Car Wash.

**Archaeologist** – A scientist who studies human history by digging up artifacts and human remains.

**Biodiversity** – The variety of life in the world or a particular area.

**Branch** – A term, used more often in the South, for a creek or a tributary.

**Buffers** – Naturally vegetated area along a river or stream corridor.

**Census** – The U.S. Constitution orders that the population be counted every 10 years. That count is the census.

**Church elder** – A position of leadership in Presbyterian churches, elected by members of the church.

**Compost** – Decayed material such as vegetable or fruit scraps, leaves, flowers, tea leaves, cardboard, eggshells that is used to help plants grow.

**Conservation** – Protecting natural environment, wildlife, or vegetation.

**Cotton mill** – A factory where cotton is spun into thread or yarn or woven into fabric.

**Creek** – A natural stream of water normally smaller than and often a tributary to a river.

**Critical habitat** – An area of land that is crucial to the survival of a particular threatened species.

**'Cue** – a slang term for barbecue, which in North Carolina means pork, slow-roasted over coals or gas, and basted with a vinegary sauce.

**Culvert** – A tunnel carrying a stream under a street, road or railroad.

**Decade** – A period of 10 years.

**Dredge** – To scoop out mud, weeds or trash from the bed of a body of water in order to keep the waterway from getting too shallow.

**Ephemeral (rain-dependent) streams** – These flow only after precipitation, and runoff from rainfall is their primary water source. Like seasonal streams, they look unimportant but are critical to the health of the whole river system.

**Erode** – To eat into or eat away.

**Explosive** – Coming from an explosion, or so strong it seems like an explosion.

**Extinction** – When all members of a particular group, such as a species of animal or plant, die out.

**Extrude** – To thrust or force out.

**Fecal coliform** – A bacteria found in the waste of warm-blooded mammals, its presence indicates untreated sewage or droppings from pets or wildlife.

**Ferryboat** – A boat or ship that carries passengers or goods as a regular service, especially over a relatively short distance.

**Fieldwork** – Practical work performed in the natural environment instead of a laboratory or office.

**Floodplain** – Level land near a creek, river or lake that may be submerged by floodwaters.

**Great blue heron** – A large, blue-gray heron, often but incorrectly called a crane. Its Latin name is *Ardea herodias*. It eats mostly fish, but also other things including frogs, salamanders, insects, rodents and small waterbirds.

**Greenway** – A strip of undeveloped land set aside for recreation or environmental preservation. In Charlotte,

Above, Little Sugar Creek along Westfield Drive, after a creek restoration project. Photo: Nancy Pierce



Little Sugar Creek, surrounded by pavement near Sugar Creek Road. Photo: Nancy Pierce

greenways are usually along creeks and have paths for walking and bike riding.

**Grist mill** – A water-powered mill used to grind corn into cornmeal or wheat into flour, typically crushing the grain between large stones.

**Groundwater** – Water found in the cracks and spaces in soil, sand and rock. It is stored in, and moves slowly through those materials. Groundwater is the water source for wells and springs. An estimated 50 percent of the water in small streams comes from groundwater.

**Habitat** – The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.

**Headwaters** – These are the beginnings of rivers, the uppermost streams in the river network farthest from the river's endpoint or where it flows into another river. Changes that harm headwaters affect streams, lakes and rivers downstream.

**Hydroelectric power** – Electricity generated using

Decorative rocks make a waterfall on the Little Sugar Creek Greenway. Photo: Nancy Pierce



flowing water (typically from a reservoir held behind a dam or other barrier) to drive a turbine that powers a generator.

**Immigrant** – A person who comes to live permanently in another country.

**Impaired** – Weakened or damaged. Relating to water quality, it means the water is not suitable for the uses assigned to it.

**Incidental** – In an unplanned or minor way. In water quality terms, incidental contact means the amount of water contact you might get from fishing or boating.

**Inherit** – Receive money or property from someone who



Mud and sediment pollute Little Sugar Creek near Morehead Street. Photo: Nancy Pierce

has died.

**Intermittent (seasonal) streams** – These streams flow during certain times of the year, when smaller upstream waters are flowing and when groundwater provides enough water. Rainfall or other precipitation adds to their flow. During dry periods, seasonal streams may not have flowing surface water. Like rain-dependent streams, they look unimportant but are critical to the health of the whole river system.

**Land grant** – A gift of land from a government. In Charlotte, before the Revolutionary War, some families received land grants from England's King George III. Some families still own the land the king gave their ancestors.

**Little brown jug** – An evergreen wildflower usually found at ground level. Its Latin name is *Hexastylis arifolia*. Little brown jug is in the same plant family as Wild Ginger and was used by early settlers as a substitute for ginger.

**Macroinvertebrates** – Organisms lacking backbones and visible to the eye without a microscope.

**Maximum** – The highest amount possible.

**Meck Dec** – The nickname for the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Historians don't agree on whether the Meck Dec really existed, but if so it was the first Declaration of Independence of any of the Thirteen Colonies before the Revolutionary War. It was reportedly signed on May 20, 1775, and that date is on the North Carolina State Flag.

**Migrate** – Move from one region or habitat to another, typically a regular journey according to the seasons. A term usually used for birds or fish. Bird migration usually takes place in spring and fall as birds fly south for the winter and north for the summer.

**Millstones** – Stones used for grinding wheat and corn.

**Mobile** – Able to move around easily.

**Native** – A plant or animal whose original home was in the region.

**Natural history** – The study of animals or plants through observation.

**Nonpoint-source pollution** – Coming from many different sources, such as runoff.

**Optimal** – The best result possible.

**Parallel** – Go in the same direction and never meet.

**Pawpaw** – Fruit tree native to the Eastern United States. Its Latin name is *Asimina triloba*. The fruit, which ripens in late summer, is the largest edible fruit native to the U.S. It tastes similar to banana and cantaloupe and is so sweet and custardy that one botanist said, "Only a boy can eat more than one at a time."

**Perennial stream** – Has water in it year-round.

**Petroleum** – Naturally occurring liquid that can be processed into many petroleum products, such as gasoline, kerosene, fuel oil, asphalt and plastics. It is a fossil fuel.

**Point-source pollution** – Coming from specific sources like factories or sewer treatment plants.

**Polluting** – Dirtying a place with harmful substances.

**Polluted runoff** – The materials in storm water runoff that damage water quality such as sediment, oil, grease, toxic chemicals from motor vehicles, heavy metals, pesticides and fertilizers from lawns, bacteria from pet waste and leaking sewer lines or septic systems.

**Rain garden** – A garden filled with plants and grasses, designed to slow or stop storm water runoff.

**Residential development** – An area with places where people live, like houses and apartments.

**Restoration** – Act of returning something to its original condition by cleaning or repairing.

**Rookery** – A place where large numbers of birds or marine animals nest and breed.

**Rosenwald Schools** – Schools built in the early 1900s for African-American children, at a time when Southern states spent far less to educate black children than white children. Money to build the schools came from Julius Rosenwald of Chicago, head of Sears stores, and from contributions from the African-American communities where the schools were built.

**Runoff** – Water from rainfall that flows off rooftops, streets, parking lots and other paved surfaces.

**Scots-Irish** – Scots-Irish Americans are descendants of people who moved from Scotland to Northern Ireland starting in the 1600s. But many did not stay long in Ireland. Starting in the 1700s many moved from Ireland to the British colonies in North America. Land along the coast was expensive so they settled the hillier, less expensive lands inland, including Mecklenburg County. They tended to be Presbyterian, which is why many of the oldest churches in the Charlotte area are Presbyterian. The 2000 census found that North Carolina has the highest percentage of residents of Scots-Irish ancestry of any state, with South Carolina and Tennessee tied for No. 2.

**Sediment** – Sand and dirt that settle in the bottom of lakes, rivers and streams.

**Spring** – A natural spot where groundwater flows to the surface.

