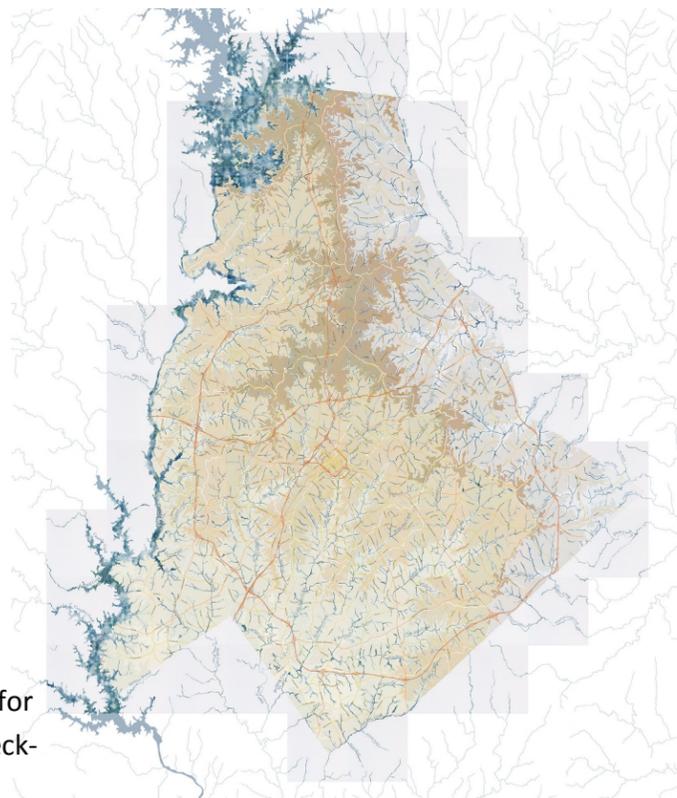


# DID YOU KNOW?

- Native Americans and early Colonial settlers put their trading paths and wagon roads on ridge-tops where the soil would be less muddy than along creek banks.
- Of the 126 named creeks in Mecklenburg County, 81 have names of their own, not “tributary of.”
- The most widespread problems for streams across the U.S. are nitrogen and phosphorus (called “nutrients”), sediments in the streambed, and activities that disturb the stream’s banks such as construction, farming or removing vegetation.
- The excess nitrogen and phosphorus that pollute creeks can come from fertilizer on lawns and gardens, sewage treatment plants or leaking septic systems.
- An estimated 50 percent of the water in small streams comes from groundwater.
- Springs are where groundwater flows out of the ground.
- Creeks were important in the early economy of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.
- By the 1900s, raw sewage was routinely dumped into Charlotte creeks.
- Flooding and bad smells were so common along Little Sugar Creek that a newspaper in 1907 called it a “death-dealing nuisance.”
- The worst pollution problems for Mecklenburg County’s creeks are storm water runoff from pavement, sediment (mud) and bacteria from sewer spills, wildlife and pets.
- Car washing can pollute creeks. The soapy water can wash metals and automotive fluids into storm drains and then into creeks.
- Small headwaters streams are critical to the health of the entire river network, because the small streams feed into and create our big rivers.



## 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.

# GAR CREEK



Gar Creek watershed is in the northwestern part of Mecklenburg County, and it flows through parts of Charlotte and Huntersville. Gar Creek empties into Mountain Island Lake, which provides drinking water to more than 800,000 residents in Mecklenburg and Gaston counties.

This watershed was named after the gar fish, which are found in Mountain Island Lake. Gar fish are long and skinny, and the scales and skin of gar fish would have been useful to the county’s Native Americans. Native Americans used gar fish scales as arrow heads, and also used the skin to make protective breast plates.

Only 17 percent of this watershed is used for residential purposes. Some of

the neighborhoods in the creekshed are Mountain Point and Overlook. Most of the watershed is covered in woods, and more than 73 percent is undeveloped, though that’s likely to change over the next few years with several incoming developments.

One reason it has so much undeveloped land is because of three nature preserves: Latta Plantation Nature Preserve, Gar Creek Nature Preserve and Haymarket Nature Preserve. These preserves protect numerous species of plants and animals, including a sunflower that is on the federal endangered species list: Schweinitz’s sunflower. They also help protect the drinking water supply in Mountain Island Lake, because development is one of the main causes of water pollution today. Speeding storm water that runs off pavement causes erosion, which can

destroy the habitat for aquatic life. It also brings sediment and other pollutants.

Latta Plantation is the county’s largest nature preserve, with 1,351 acres on Mountain Island Lake. It has 16 miles of trails, the Latta Plantation Equestrian Center and the Carolina Raptor Center.

The Carolina Raptor Center helps rehabilitate injured or orphaned birds of prey, such as vultures, eagles, hawks and owls. More than 100 birds live there permanently. Seven bald eagles, the U.S. national bird that was once almost extinct, live on the Raptor Trail. One eagle couple, Savannah and Derek, have been laying eggs and hatching them for at least five years.

The most notable feature of the Latta nature preserve is the Latta Plantation Historic Site. During the 1800s, most of the area was a cotton plantation owned by James Latta, who was one of many Scots-Irish immigrants to settle in

Mecklenburg County. Today, it operates as a living history farm and offers visitors a glimpse into how people lived and how they ran farms in the 1800s.

Hopewell Presbyterian Church is another historic spot in the watershed. This church is one of the oldest Christian congregations in Mecklenburg County,

with church services beginning as early as the 1750s. Members of the congregation included several of the county's prominent historical figures, such as John McKnitt Alexander, Major John Davidson, and Alexander Caldwell. The church's cemetery was the burial site of four men who signed the 1775 Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, also known

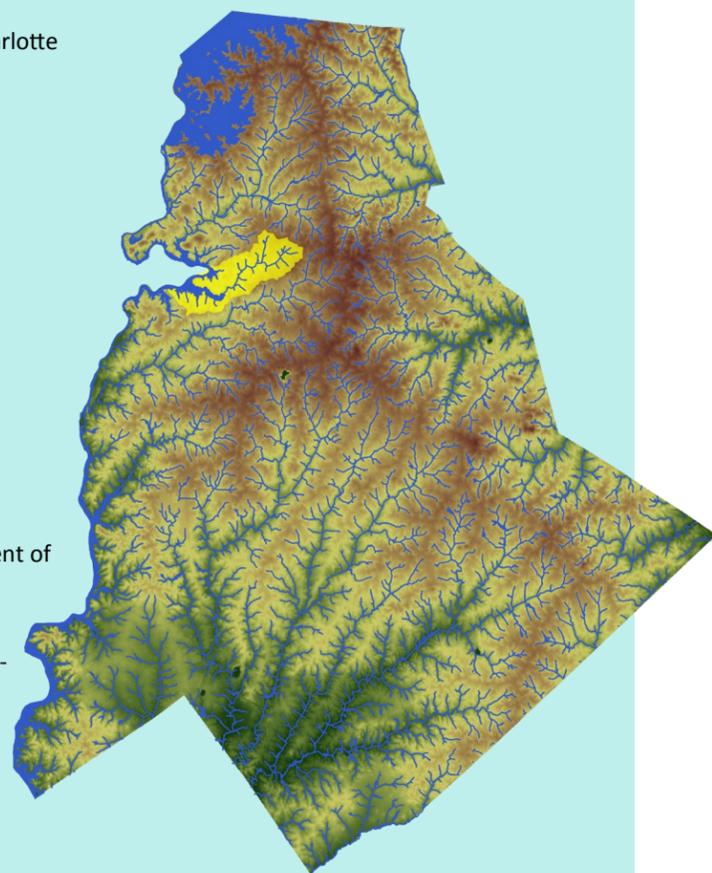
as the "Meck Dec." Historians don't agree on whether the Meck Dec really existed, but if it did, it was the first Declaration of Independence of any of the Thirteen Colonies before the Revolutionary War, and came a full year before the 1776 Declaration of Independence.

Gar fish, *Lepisosteus oculatus*. Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Brian Montague



### Profile

- **Location:** Northwestern Mecklenburg County including parts of southern / western Huntersville and the northwestern tip of Charlotte (zip codes: 28078 and 28216)
- **Approximate land area:** 8.29 square miles
- **Estimated population in 2010:** 2,158
- **Creeks and tributaries:** Gar Creek
- **Drains into:** Mountain Island Lake / Catawba River watershed
- **Miles of perennial streams:** 6.852
- **Impaired streams:** None



### Fun facts

- More than half the watershed is covered in woods, and 73 percent of the watershed is undeveloped.
- One of six creeks in Mecklenburg County that have names related to animals. The others are Beaver Dam, Duck, Goose and Mallard creeks and Swan Run.
- Long Creek Elementary School is named for Long Creek but in fact it is in the Gar Creek watershed.

### What's in the Gar Creek watershed?

- **Landmarks:** Carolina Raptor Center, Latta Plantation, Gar Creek Nature Preserve, Hopewell Presbyterian Church
- **Parks:** Latta Plantation Nature Preserve



Historic Latta Plantation is in the Gar Creek watershed. Photo: Carol M. Highsmith



Screech owl, at Carolina Raptor Center. Photo: Dick Daniels



Barn owl, at Carolina Raptor Center. Photo: Dick Daniels



Long Creek Elementary School. Photo: Mecklenburg County

### What you can do to protect our creeks

- **Don't dump hazardous chemicals down drains.** Take them to a recycling center.
- **Don't dump yard waste in drains or creeks.** Bag, recycle or compost it.
- **Prevent soil erosion.** Plant trees and bushes along creek banks and in bare areas of the yard.
- **Scoop the poop.** Dog waste can pollute local creeks.
- **Use a car wash, not the driveway.**
- **Use fewer fertilizers and chemicals** in your yard. Don't apply chemicals 48 hours before a heavy rain.

- **Don't dump cooking grease and oil down the sink.** Grease clogs are the most common cause of sewage spills into Mecklenburg County creeks.
- **Report pollution, including soil erosion.** Call 311. To report online, or use the Water Watcher app visit <http://charmec.org/stormwater/ReportPollution>
- **Reduce how much runoff leaves your property.** Plant trees, use rain barrels, limit the use of pavement and limit the use of pipes to send rainwater into storm drains.