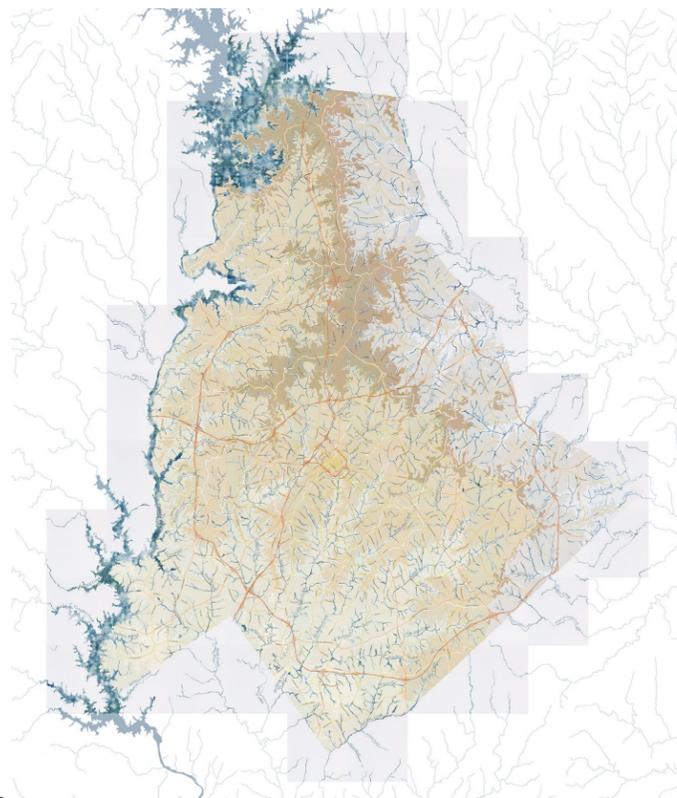


# DID YOU KNOW?

- Every Mecklenburg County creek except two starts in Mecklenburg.
- Mecklenburg County has 3,000 miles of creeks.
- Of those 3,000-some miles, about 1,000 have water year-round.
- Two-thirds of Mecklenburg County is in the Catawba River watershed, and the creeks eventually flow into Lake Norman, Mountain Island Lake, Lake Wylie or other parts of the Catawba River.
- The eastern third of Mecklenburg County is in the Yadkin-Pee Dee watershed. Those creeks flow eventually into the Pee Dee River.
- Six creeks in Mecklenburg have a name that starts “Mc...” They are McAlpine, McCullough, McDowell, McIntyre, McKee and McMullen creeks. Their names reflect the Scots-Irish heritage of many of the early white settlers.
- Six creeks have names related to animals: Swan Run, plus Beaverdam, Duck, Gar, Goose and Mallard creeks.
- Unlike older cities, Charlotte does not combine its storm drain pipes with its sanitary sewer system pipes. In those older cities a heavy rainfall can make water in the sanitary sewers back up into houses. (Yuck.)
- Every creekshed in Mecklenburg County has problems, including fish tissue with too much mercury.
- When the term “impaired,” is used for water, it means the body of water does not meet the standards that environmental laws set for it.
- Many of Mecklenburg’s creeks begin as small springs.
- Water from springs is cleaner than water in creeks and colder in the summertime, a constant 54 degrees Fahrenheit in Charlotte.
- About 15 percent of the people living in Mecklenburg County get their drinking water from wells (groundwater).



## LEARN MORE

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



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

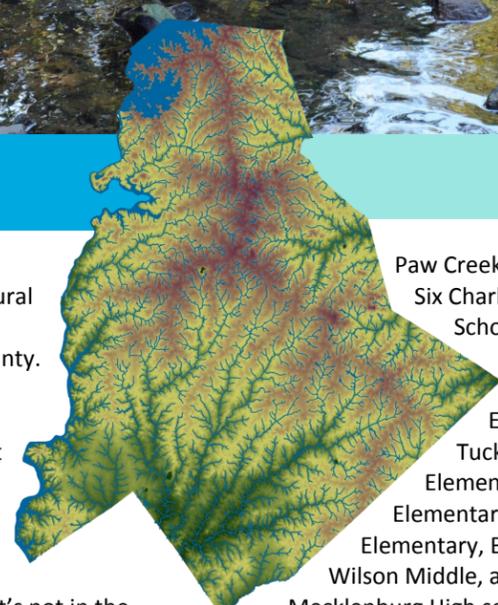
# PAW CREEK



Paw Creek flows through a once-rural part of western Mecklenburg County. It’s probably not named for an animal’s paw, but for the wild fruit trees, known as **pawpaws**, that once grew on its banks. Although it’s not in the middle of Charlotte, the area around the creek has had a history of pollution from industry.

Paw Creek begins near Toddville Road and runs past Allenbrook Elementary School. It isn’t known whether Paw Creek is the “brook” in the school’s name.

Paw Creek runs into the Catawba River south of I-85, and it has three main tributaries: Ticer Branch, which starts near Charlotte Douglas International Airport, Paw Creek Tributary No. 1 and



Paw Creek Tributary No. 2. Six Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools are in the Paw Creek watershed: Pawtuckett Elementary, Tuckaseegee Elementary, Allenbrook Elementary, Thomasboro Elementary, Berryhill Elementary, Wilson Middle, and West Mecklenburg High schools.

A map of Mecklenburg County made in 1789, just after the Revolutionary War, shows 12 creeks with names, and Paw Creek is one of them. In those days, that area of western Mecklenburg County was farmland and woods, and the rural community that developed near the creek was called the Paw Creek community.

Paw Creek Presbyterian Church was founded there in 1808. A history of the church says the creek got its name from Native Americans, who probably named

it Paw Creek for the pawpaw trees that grew along its banks.

One historic landmark near the creek is the 1881 home of Edward Rozzell, who was born in the Paw Creek community. The Rozzell family (sometimes spelled Rozzelle) was important in the area, because it operated the Rozzell Ferry – the only **ferryboat** operating on the Catawba River in Mecklenburg County before the Civil War. The ferry carried travelers between Mecklenburg and Gaston counties until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a bridge replaced it. Today the name of Rozzelles Ferry Road in western Charlotte is a reminder of the days before the bridge.

By the 1990s, residents in the Paw Creek community had complained of problems related to the huge collection of storage tanks for **petroleum** products that are in the area. Residents worried about breathing the petroleum fumes, and they said leaks from the tanks and pipes had contaminated the **groundwater**

that supplied wells where they got drinking water. Eventually, a long legal fight in court was settled, and today residents can get water from the city water system.

One interesting spot in the watershed is Berryhill Nature Preserve, on the southeastern shore of Paw Creek. It is a North Carolina natural heritage site with a mature hardwood forest, and it preserves habitat for many species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. The areas along Paw Creek are home to native species such as **little brown jug**, a wildflower with a jug-shaped flower and arrowhead-shaped leaves. Other colorfully named flowers found there are the crane fly orchid, downy rattlesnake orchid, foamflower, Christmas fern, and grape fern.

*Continued on next page*

### Key vocabulary

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

**Groundwater** – Water found in cracks and spaces in soil, sand and rock. Groundwater is the water source for wells and springs. An estimated 50 percent of the water in small streams, such as Mecklenburg’s creeks, comes from groundwater.

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

**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.

**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.

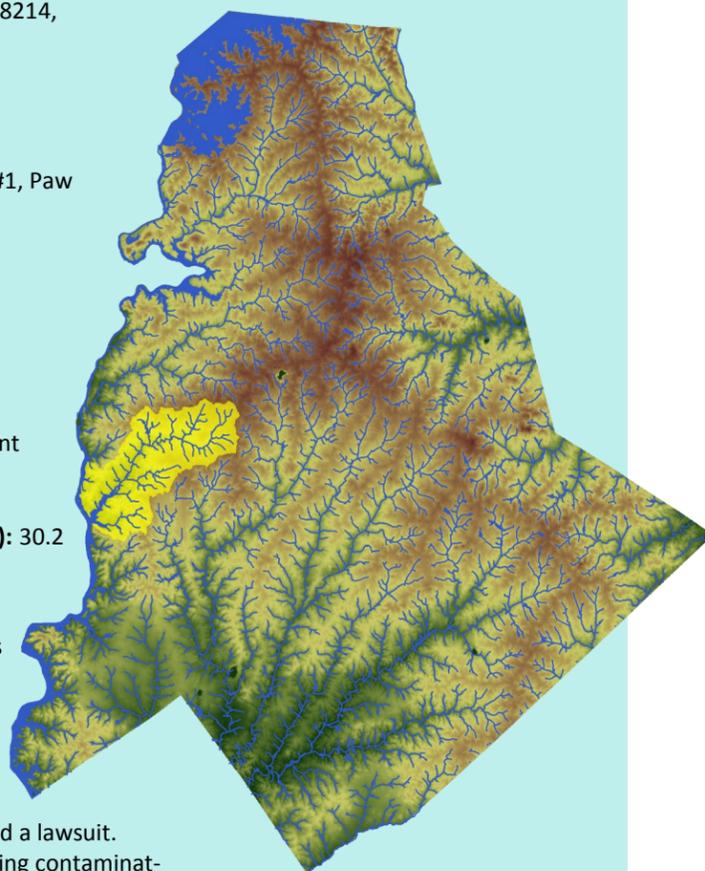
**Petroleum** – Naturally occurring liquid that can be processed into many petroleum products, such as gasoline, kerosene, fuel oil, asphalt and plastics. It is a fossil fuel, and burning it sends carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

### Profile

- **Location:** West-central Mecklenburg County (zip codes: 28208, 28214, 28278)
- **Approximate land area:** 19.97 square miles
- **Estimated population in 2010:** 20,315
- **Creeks and named tributaries:** Paw Creek, Paw Creek Tributary #1, Paw Creek Tributary #2, Ticer Branch
- **Drains into:** Catawba River
- **Miles of perennial streams:** 23.866
- **Miles of impaired streams:** none
- **Structures in the regulated floodplain:** 110
- **How much land in the watershed is used for industry:** 7.6 percent
- **How much land in the watershed is woods:** 34 percent
- **How much land in the watershed is used for homes (residential):** 30.2 percent

### Fun facts

- Paw Creek is one of about 12 named Mecklenburg County creeks shown on a hand-drawn map of the region created in 1789.
- Nearby petroleum tank farms gave the area the nickname “tanktown.”
- Petroleum businesses in the community of Paw Creek contaminated the groundwater, which resulted in years of complaints and a lawsuit. Eventually the residents were able to get city water and avoid using contaminated groundwater.



The Paw Creek watershed is home to 20,315 people, according to the 2010 Census. It covers almost 20 square miles and holds 23.866 miles of **perennial** streams, which means streams that carry water year-round.

The state water quality office does not list Paw Creek as **impaired**, although the state warns that it isn’t safe to eat fish from Paw Creek, or any creek in Mecklenburg County, due to mercury contamination.

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

- Berryhill Nature Preserve, Robert L. Smith District Park.
- West Mecklenburg High School.
- The northern and western edges of the Charlotte Douglas International Airport property. The main airport property drains to two different watersheds: Paw Creek and Sugar Creek.
- Paw Creek Elementary School is named for Paw Creek but in fact is in the Long Creek watershed.



Pawpaw tree, with fruit. The creek was probably named for pawpaws that once grew on its banks. Photo: Scott Bauer



Paw Creek area was nicknamed “tanktown” from petroleum tanks like these on Freedom Drive. Photo: Google Maps



The historic Edward M. Rozzell house. Photo: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission

### 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.