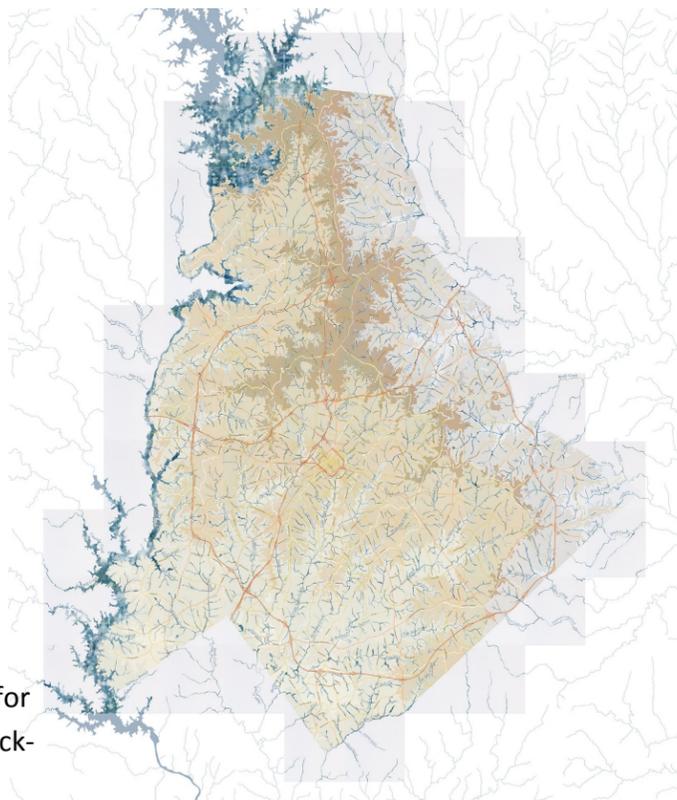


DID YOU KNOW?

- Every Mecklenburg County creek except two starts in Mecklenburg.
- Mecklenburg County has 3,000 miles of creeks and streams.
- 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.
- 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.)
- 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, in Charlotte a constant 54 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Flooding is a natural event caused by heavy rain.
- An estimated 50 percent of the water in small streams comes from groundwater.



LEARN MORE

Visit 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.

SUGAR CREEK



Sugar Creek is often confused with Little Sugar Creek, but they are treated as two separate creeksheds. Going strictly by geography, Little Sugar Creek is a tributary of Sugar Creek, so it’s part of the same watershed. But Little Sugar, like several other major Mecklenburg County creeks that eventually flow into Sugar Creek, is treated as a separate creekshed by Mecklenburg County environmental officials because of its size.

Other major creeks that flow into Sugar Creek south of the South Carolina state line are Little Sugar, McAlpine, McMullen (which flows into McAlpine) and Steele creeks. People who canoe or kayak the Catawba River find huge amounts of litter and trash in the river where Sugar Creek flows in. Kayaker Bill Stokes of Lancaster, S.C., has found more than

17,000 basketballs in the river that have floated downstream from Charlotte. Sometimes, to keep down the confusion, people call Sugar Creek “Big Sugar Creek.” And it’s bigger than Little Sugar Creek in terms of size, with about 15 more miles of **perennial** streams in Mecklenburg County.

The creeks were named for the Sugaree Indians, whose name meant “people of the river of water which is unfit to drink.” That name holds true today. You wouldn’t want to drink water from Sugar Creek or Little Sugar Creek, because of pollution.

What we nowadays call Sugar Creek begins where Irwin Creek joins Taggart Creek in west Charlotte near the Charlotte Regional Farmers Market and the Billy Graham Parkway-Tyvola Road interchange.

One reason more people are familiar with Little Sugar Creek is because of its **greenway**, which will run for 20 miles when it is completed. A greenway is planned eventually for Sugar Creek but it isn’t built yet.

Another reason people are more familiar with Little Sugar Creek is that its watershed has many more people living in it. More than 50 percent of the land in the Little Sugar Creek watershed is **residential development**, compared to less than 20 percent of Sugar Creek. Much more of the Sugar Creek watershed is used for industrial or commercial purposes, such as Charlotte Douglas International Airport, than many of the other watersheds.

Mecklenburg is not the only home to a “Big” Sugar Creek. The Big Sugar creek in Missouri is a popular creek used for fishing, swimming and kayaking. It’s healthier than Charlotte’s “Big Sugar” because it’s far from any cities and runs mainly through a state park. Some of the tribu-

taries that feed our Sugar Creek flow next to the sixth busiest airport in the United States, Charlotte Douglas International Airport.

Sugar Creek is considered impaired. When scientists test to see whether a creek is impaired, they test different sections. If any of the sections are impaired, the whole creek is considered impaired, even though there may be parts that are not impaired.

County environmental workers regularly measure the bacterial content in the creeks and assess what percentage of creeks are “suitable for **incidental** contact.” A 2009-2013 chart, for instance, showed that in December 2013, more than 90 percent of streams were considered safe for incidental contact. But in September 2012, less than 30 percent were. That means sometimes some Charlotte creeks might be OK to wade in briefly—but unless you’re a scientist testing the water that day, you can’t know if the water is safe or contaminated with bacteria or other pollutants.

Multiple parts of Sugar Creek are considered **impaired**, but for different reasons. Two sections are rated impaired because they don’t have enough different kinds of aquatic insects. Another impaired section lacks aquatic insect diversity and has too much copper.

Key vocabulary

Greenway – A strip of land near an urban area that is set aside for recreational use and/or environmental protection. In Charlotte, greenways are usually along creeks and have paths for walking and bike riding.

Impaired – Damaged or weakened.

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

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.

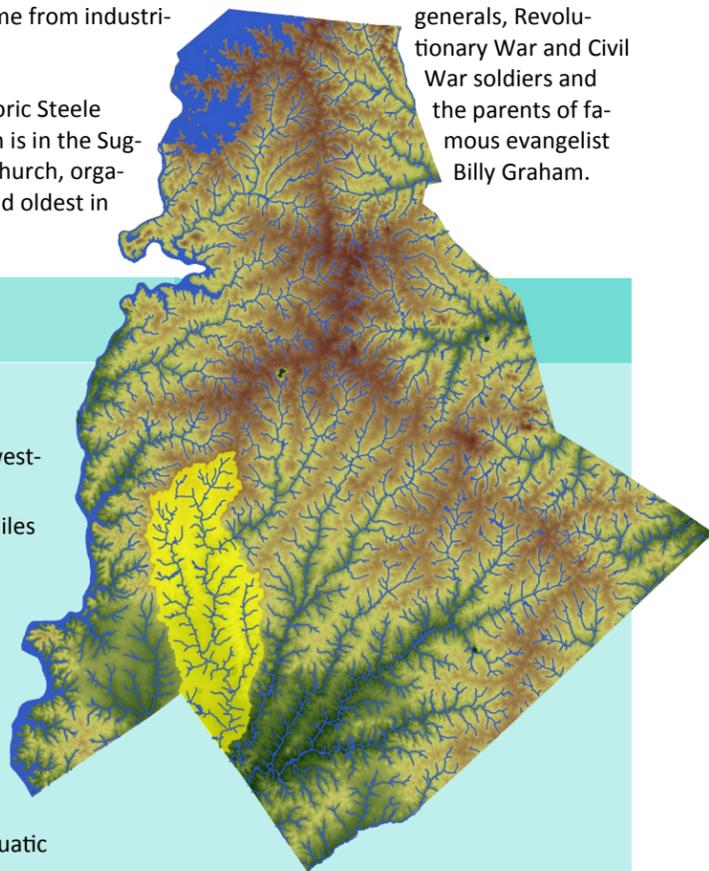
Perennial – Stream flows all year round during years of normal rainfall.

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

We do need small amounts of copper to be healthy, but too much copper can cause long-term liver or kidney problems. Copper occurs naturally, but sometimes extra copper in our creeks comes from industrial pollution or copper pipes in household plumbing. Copper can stay in the soil for many years, so copper in the water today may have come from industrial pollution decades ago.

Despite its name, the historic Steele Creek Presbyterian Church is in the Sugar Creek watershed. The church, organized in 1760, is the second oldest in

Mecklenburg County. Its current sanctuary was built in 1889. Both the building and the cemetery are historic landmarks. The cemetery is surrounded by a field stone rock wall gathered by church members long ago. Among the people buried there are a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence (**Meck Dec**), four generals, Revolutionary War and Civil War soldiers and the parents of famous evangelist Billy Graham.



Profile

- **Location:** Sections of western and southwestern Charlotte and western Pineville (zip codes: 28134, 28208, 28217, 28273)
- **Approximate land area in Mecklenburg County:** 37.39 square miles
- **Estimated population in 2010:** 41,560
- **Creeks and tributaries:** Sugar Creek, Coffey Creek, Kings Branch, McCullough Branch, Taggart Creek
- **Drains into:** Catawba River watershed in South Carolina
- **Miles of perennial streams:** 62.517
- **Impaired streams and reasons for impairment:** Sugar Creek from source to State Road 1156 for lack of aquatic insect diversity; Sugar Creek from N.C. 51 to S.C. state line for copper and lack of aquatic insect diversity, McCullough Branch for lack of aquatic insect diversity

Fun facts

- Sugar Creek was formerly named Sugaw Creek, named for the Sugaree Indians. The word Sugaree means “people of the river of water which is unfit to drink.” But other historic sources say “Sugaw” is a Native American word meaning a collection of huts.
- Technically, many of the largest creeks in Mecklenburg County are tributaries of Sugar Creek, although Mecklenburg County environmental officials treat many of those large creeks as separate creeksheds.
- The waterway known as Sugar Creek begins where Irwin Creek joins Taggart Creek near the Charlotte Regional Farmers Market off Billy Graham Parkway.
- Other major creeks that flow into Sugar Creek south of the S.C. state line are Little Sugar, McAlpine and Steele creeks.
- Little Sugar Creek, which runs along the east side of uptown Charlotte, used to be called Sugar Creek.
- Irwin Creek, which runs along the west side of uptown Charlotte, also used to be called Sugar Creek.
- The historic Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, founded 1760 and the second oldest church in Mecklenburg County, is in Sugar Creek’s watershed, not that of the creek it’s named for—Steele Creek. But Steele Creek eventually flows into Sugar Creek in South Carolina.



Bill Stokes of Lancaster, S.C., kayaks the Catawba River and has found, along with lots of trash, 17,000 basketballs over the years. The balls wash into Sugar Creek and then float into the river from Charlotte. Here, he displays some basketballs and a manikin he found in the river. Photo: courtesy Bill Stokes

What’s in the Sugar Creek watershed?

- **Colleges:** Central Piedmont Community College-Harris Campus and Harper Campus
- **Landmarks:** Charlotte Douglas International Airport, Charlotte Regional Farmers Market, Billy Graham Library
- **Parks:** Jeff Adams Tennis Center, Renaissance Golf Course and Park, Ramblewood Park and Soccer Complex, Southview Recreation Center, Tuckaseegee Recreation Center, Westerly Hills Park, Wingate Park, Yorkmont Park



Aerial of Sugar Creek flowing into the Catawba River. Photo: Nancy Pierce



Satellite view of Charlotte Douglas International Airport. Photo: NASA World Wind



Steele Creek Presbyterian Church. Photo: Bagatar, Wikipedia CC BY-SA