

## Reflections

When reflecting on the list of accomplishments PEJ has achieved to date, members are grateful to the many key people who have helped bring the vision forward. Rev. Calloway and Rev. Gose were instrumental in the beginning. Dr. Norman Camp, Ed Milligan and Robin Moore picked up the effort and ran with it. Moreover, Camp's participation on various boards—including the Parks, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board, has given PEJ visibility, helped make the wetland park vision concrete, and helped to push the Bond Referendum along.

This small group of Southeast Raleigh residents, moved to action by faith, has been able to address the goals they articulated

when they first sat down together. In addition, they have attracted the interest and assistance from experts in area universities and museums. They also learned how to maneuver through city bureaucracy to come up with a vision for a vital new city amenity. This

group "has accomplished things other groups dream about and never do," reflected Bill Flournoy, Triangle Greenways Councilor and PEJ member. When the park is created, a valuable wetland along an urbanized tributary of the Neuse River will be

restored, recreational opportunities will be expanded, and citizens of Raleigh will have demonstrated how to be good stewards of both wetlands and neighborhoods.

### PEJ AWARDS

Appearance Honor Roll Awards  
2000 & 2001  
*Raleigh Citizen Advisory Council*

"In recognition of and sincere appreciation for outstanding service contributed to Walnut Creek 2000"  
*City Council Certificate of Appreciation*

## Next Steps

Although very optimistic about the future creation of the Walnut Creek Wetland Education Park, PEJ recognizes the need for continuing their effort to raise funds and friends of the project. Though funding for the park was approved through a bond package, the money is not guaranteed. City politics can alter the priorities of city budgets at any time. Come walk the Walnut Creek Greenway already established. Encourage City Council to fund the park. Volunteer your time and effort to cleanup the creek and restore the wetland.

**Get your feet wet.  
Become a member of  
Partners for  
Environmental Justice.**

Meetings are held 1st  
Wed of the month at  
7:30 pm at St.  
Ambrose Church  
813 Darby Street  
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[www.naturalearning.org/  
walnutcreek.html](http://www.naturalearning.org/walnutcreek.html)



## Partners for Environmental Justice and the Walnut Creek Wetland

# A History



Source: Walnut Creek 2000 Urban Wetland Educational Park

**Partners  
for  
Environmental  
Justice**

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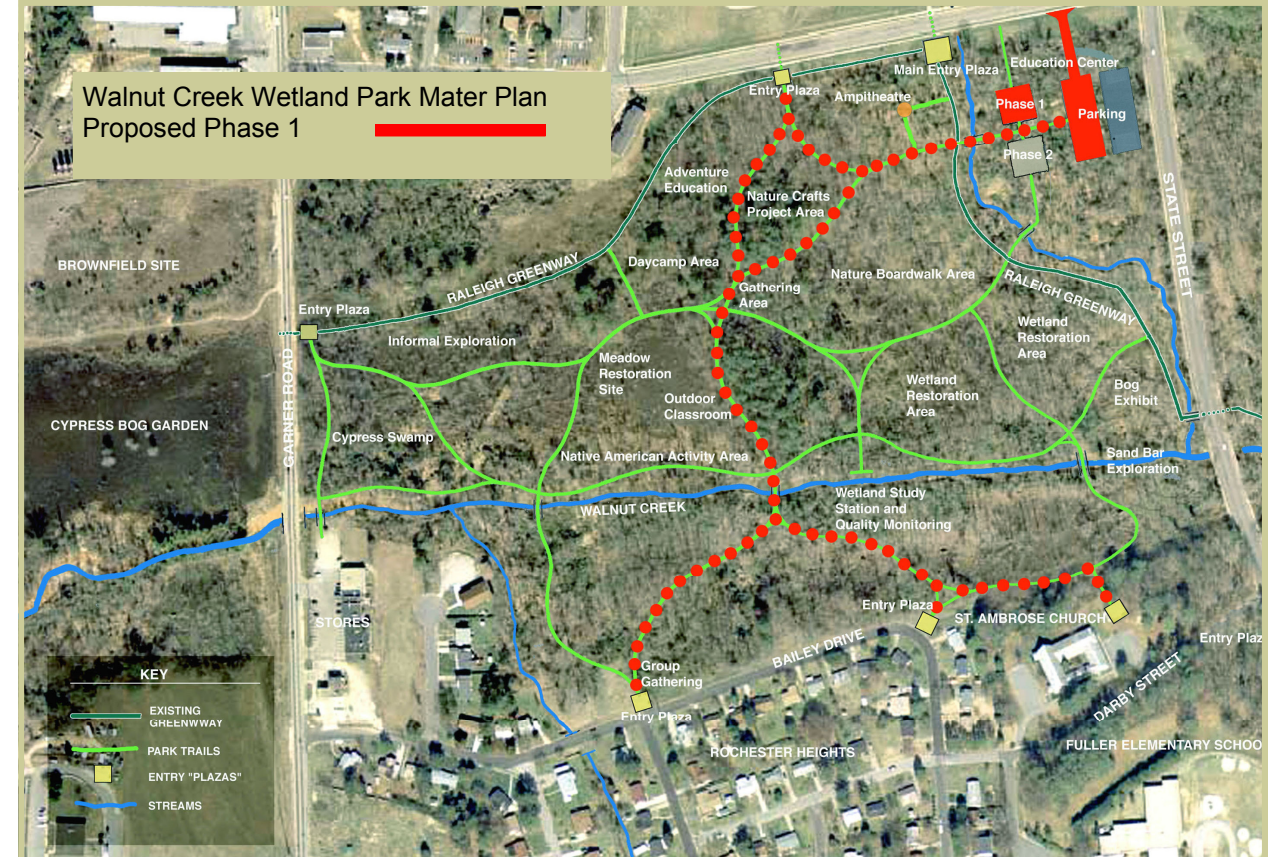
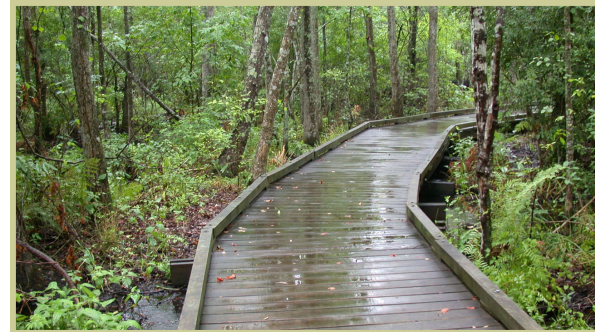
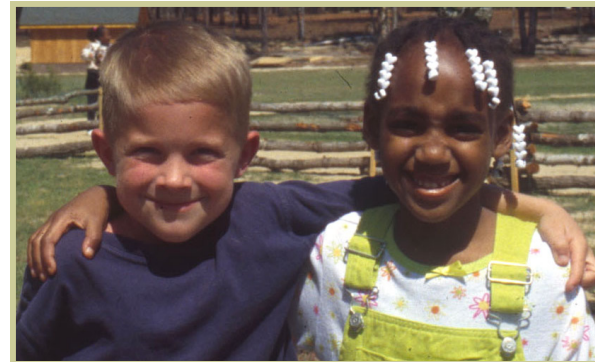
# Table of Contents

Overview.....3  
Walnut Creek.....4  
Walnut Creek Wetland .....5  
Rochester Heights .....6  
Environmental Injustice .....7  
Partners for Environmental Justice .....8  
Community Support.....9  
City Support.....10  
The Vision.....10  
Walnut Creek Wetland Park.....11  
Next Steps .....12

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July 2004

# A Wetland Education Park



Source: Walnut Creek 2000 Urban Wetland Educational Park

## City Support

The election in November 2002 brought a new mayoral administration and a new mix of city councilors to Raleigh. PEJ contacted the new mayor—Charles Meeker—and re-



Mayor Meeker tours the site.

requested a meeting. They were delighted to have one meeting scheduled before the end of the year. The goal of this meeting was to determine the next steps in developing the park concept. The city agreed to accept the master plan as written but wanted to conduct a feasibility study first. PEJ expected this process to take months but were again surprised and delighted to find that by the end of January the city had found the money to fund the study and the architect to do the work. The city pledged to pay Frank Harmon Architect to develop a site plan. This was a significant turning point for the project. “The \$60,000 that the city allocated for PEJ’s Wetland Park Master Plan was a windfall for the project,” said PEJ chairman, Dr. Norman Camp. “It was finally legitimate.” The feasibility study demonstrated to the city that the park concept was viable. It broke down the project into a four-phase, \$7 million endeavor. Phase I was priced at \$1.2 million. City officials were sold on the project and listed it as one several park projects in a \$47 million bond package sent to voters. Raleigh residents approved the bond package in November 2003.

Although very optimistic about the future creation of the Walnut Creek Wetland Education Park, PEJ recognizes the need for continuing their effort to raise funds and friends of the project. Though funding for the park was approved through a bond package, the money is not guaranteed. City politics can alter the priorities of city budgets at any time.

## The Vision



**The mission** is to promote understanding and protection of an urban wetland, enhance community pride, and encourage economic development. The park is to provide an accessible quiet zone for communing with nature. The park is to preserve the natural beauty of the wetland, provide habitat for native species, and lift the spirits of those who visit through educational and recreational experiences.

### **The objectives are to**

- Restore and protect the wetlands, providing a sanctuary and other ecological benefits.
- Serve the community.
- Serve as an educational resource to build environmental and wetland awareness.
- Provide recreational and cultural benefits to area residents.
- Offer educational programs on wetland ecology, urban forestry, art projects and local history.

**The facility** will consist of a Learning Center surrounded by various gardens and trails. The Learning Center will house many amenities for visitors including recreational facilities, an observation deck, snack bar, shop, auditorium, and classrooms.

Within the wetlands there will be stations for wildlife viewing, wetland studies, and weather monitoring. The Park will also have an outdoor amphitheater, a special-projects area, and a place for day camp use. A variety of gardens will showcase native plants, butterflies, and carnivorous plants.

Trails will lead through meadows, follow the creek and include an animal track-prints pathway. The circulation network of primary and secondary pathways will include walks of various elevations and materials, boardwalks, stepping-stones, and bridges.

## Overview



*PEJ realized that helping the turtle would help the neighborhood.*

*Restoring the wetland would help restore the community.*

In the mid 1990s, a group of people from three Episcopal churches sat down together to address issues of environmental justice. The group, which came to be called Partners for Environmental Justice (PEJ), focused on a shared concern about the injustice facing the Rochester Heights community. The partners identified three separate aspects associated with environmental injustice in their midst.

First, there was the frequent and demoralizing flooding of the homes in the neighborhood. The increase in development and impervious surface throughout Raleigh and its suburbs was sending more and more water downstream during a storm. Floodwaters swamped living rooms with every rain over 1 inch. Second, was the indignity of wetland dumping. Neighbors would clean out the tires, washing machines, garbage and trash that found its way into the wetland, then more trash would be deposited shortly thereafter. And finally, there was the damage to the wetland ecosystem. Invasive plants were out-competing the native flowers. Silt was burying the in-stream habitat of the aquatic organisms.

Over several years of monthly meetings, a

solution would not only stem the environmental injustice, but would result in a major ecological and recreational asset for the City of Raleigh.

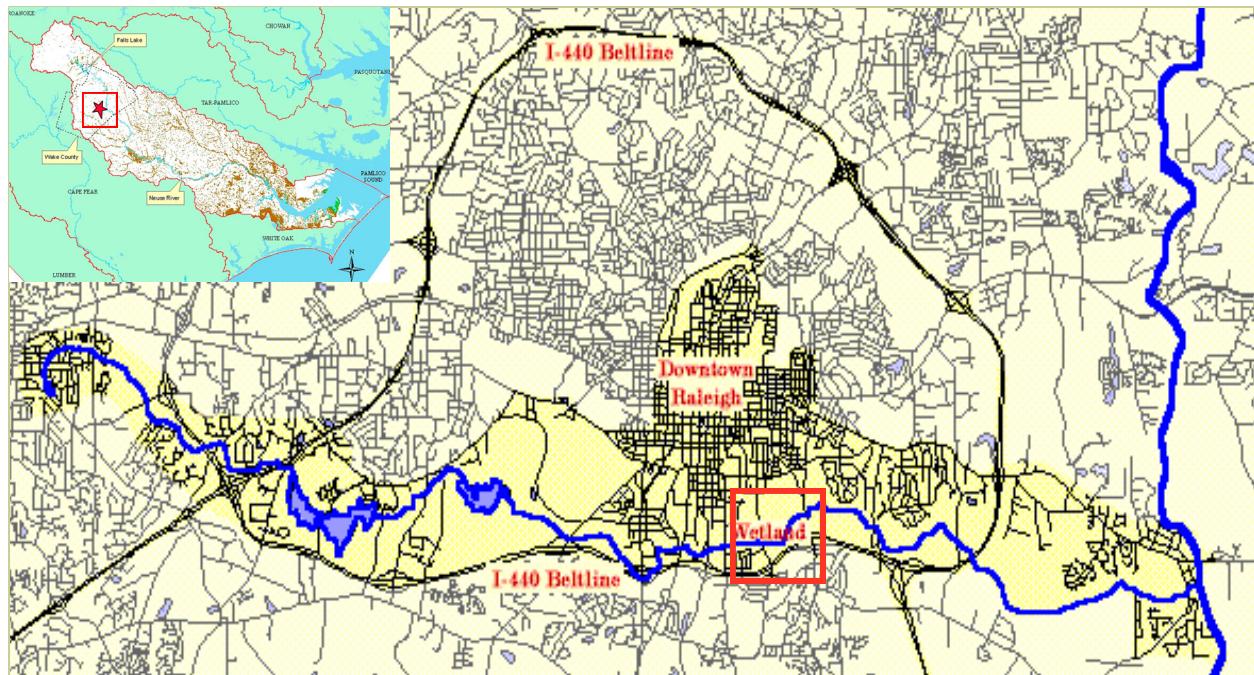
Since its inception, PEJ has raised over

If you have a very attractive recreational amenity, it can't do anything but help increase the economic value of the area. Property values go up, it's a destination for the region, and it affords this aging community a place to walk and enjoy nature.

*Dr. Norman Camp*

\$60,000, partnered with over 20 local community groups, and secured \$1.2 million in future bond money for the City of Raleigh's first Wetland Educational Park. The remainder of this document will bring the details of this remarkable history to light.

# Walnut Creek



Source: Walnut Creek 2000 □ Urban Wetland Educational Park

Location of Walnut Creek Wetland and Rochester Heights within the Neuse River Watershed.

The Walnut Creek watershed covers approximately 29,622 acres of piedmont and coastal plain terrain. The creek begins in Cary and meanders southwesterly, flowing through Lake Johnson and Lake Raleigh. Walnut Creek continues through Rochester Heights and southeast Raleigh before it merges into the Neuse River. The Walnut Creek Wetland functions as the 500-year floodplain for Walnut Creek and therefore plays a vital role in the Neuse River Watershed. The wetland consists of approximately 300 acres of piedmont alluvial forest, bottomland hardwood and open-water plant communities. The National Wetlands Inventory, in 1995, classified the creek and its adjoining waters on both sides of Garner Road as a palustrine, forested seasonally flooded wetland.

The Walnut Creek wetland is also a historically significant site. In the 1800s, H.H. and C.S. Brimley collected plants and animals for museums around the world in the unspoiled natural areas of the wetlands.

H.H. Brimley became the first curator of the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences. His brother, C.S., published 100 papers on birds found in Walnut Creek.

Green Ash and Box Elder roots make up the wetland sponge.



# Community Support

## PEJ Partners

Carnage GT Middle School	Southeast Raleigh High School
Centennial Campus Middle School	St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
City of Raleigh	St. Marks Episcopal Church
Environmental Defense	St. Mary's High School
Ligon GT Magnet Middle School	St. Paul's Episcopal Church
NC Museum of Natural Sciences	Top Ladies of Distinction
NC State University College of Design	Triangle Greenways Council
Natural Learning Initiative	Trinity Episcopal Church
People for Parks	Wake County Keep America Beautiful
Prince of Peace Episcopal Church	
South Citizens Advisory Council	

dent focused on an aspect of PEJ's vision and created a web page on their research. (See <http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/ciwetlands/>)

CCMS students on a field trip to Walnut Creek



Source: Walnut Creek 2000 □ Urban Wetland Educational Park

Bolstered by community support and armed with documents and posters that communicated their vision, PEJ now had a package with which to communicate with Raleigh City Council, the Parks, Recreation and Greenways Advisory Board, and philanthropists. Funders were quick to recognize the value of the wetland park plan. First to provide financial support was the Triangle Community Foundation with \$16,000—the largest amount they'd ever given to one group. Second, was \$11,000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

With grant money in hand, PEJ contracted with the Natural Learning Initiative (directed by Robin Moore), NC State University, to develop a design program for a full master plan concept document. The NC State University design team worked on the project for a year. Four more stakeholder meetings were conducted. Environmental educators from the NC Museum of Natural Sciences were invited. Teachers from the neighborhood schools—Carnage, Fuller and Ligon—were interviewed on how the park could complement the K-12 curriculum. Concept sketches were presented, critiqued and revised. By fall, 2002, the Master Plan document was ready for distribution. (See <http://www.naturalearning.org/fullwalnutcreek.pdf>)

“After learning about wetland biology, the Walnut Creek watershed, and the Partners for Environmental Justice, we studied the problem and actually got to see with our own eyes the beauty of the wetlands and how this wonderful paradise was being destroyed.

On the field trip we saw the different aspects of the wetlands by doing many different activities.”

*Student, CCMS.*

## Partners for Environmental Justice

EEJ then began a long journey of educating themselves about wetland function and mobilizing community support. To do this, they toured the neighborhood, inventoried clogged culverts, analyzed the sources of trash, and began to learn about wetland biology. Concurrently, they networked with philanthropists, set up meetings with natural scientists and talked to student groups and faculty at local colleges. As their understanding of wetlands grew, their vision was enlarged. Restoring a wetland would allow the wetlands to handle the floodwaters, discourage people from dumping trash, and uplift the neighborhood with the natural beauty and economic benefits of a recreational resource. Creating a wetland educational park around a restored wetland would bolster the community with a major recreational amenity and give the citizens of Raleigh a better appreciation for the importance of wetlands.

EEJ began the educational process immediately. They sponsored creek clean ups with neighbors and community groups. Volunteers from Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, YMCA, NC State University, local churches and the Re-entry youth program have spent hours picking up trash and restoring the wetland aesthetics. To restore the floodplain function of the wetland, volunteers planted over 700 wetland-specific trees, such as bald

PEJ Co-Chairs Norman Camp and Ed Milligan



Trash picked out of the wetland.

cypress, water tupelo, green ash, sugarberry, water oak, and black walnut. Education in watershed ecology, tree identification and environmental stewardship was presented to each of the volunteer groups. Everyone who found out about the vision was taken with the idea. Networking led to increased partnerships. With such valuable help from many organizations, EEJ realized that a more accurate name for their group would be Partners for Environmental Justice (PEJ).

One of the partners they found during this time was Robin Moore, landscape architecture professor in the College of Design at NC State University. Moore, with four graduate students, conducted community meetings to get ideas for the park concept from the local stakeholders. PEJ donated \$600 toward the cost of materials and the resulting posters visualized a first concept for the Wetland Park.

Another partnership with Centennial Campus Middle School (CCMS) brought the enthusiasm and energy of young people to project. In the fall of 2000, a class of eighth grade students and NC State University professors partnered with PEJ for a service-learning project in their local watershed. When they found out that the PEJ project was downstream, they took a field trip. Each stu-

## The Walnut Creek Wetland

In 1954, Hurricane Hazel devastated North Carolina as it tore up the East coast with wind gusts at 100 m.p.h. In Raleigh, an average of two or three trees fell per block. Many fell on cars, homes and other structures, and power lines were left tangled and broken. The Walnut Creek Wetland acted like a huge sponge for this excessive water, soaking it up and releasing it slowly back down the creek. Perhaps, this is why the wetland was used as an unofficial sewage treatment plant before the Clean Water Act. A community resident remembers. "I used to walk the two miles to Walnut Creek as a kid. I loved to explore the area. As kids, we thought it was exciting and humorous to see and smell the raw sewage that was dumped into the stream."

Wetlands have the potential to improve both the ecological and spiritual health of any community. Ecologically, the unique physical and biological characteristics of freshwater wetlands, such as those found in

Walnut Creek, provide habitat for a large percentage of the nation's flora and fauna. These natural communities perform numerous important environmental and hydrologic functions. Walnut Creek absorbs sediment and nutrient flows, storm water runoff and floodwaters from the upstream towns of Cary and Raleigh. Combined with aesthetic value of majestic cypress and perched great blue herons, the educational and ecological value of this area is indisputable. Spiritually, the opportunity to experience an ecologically functional wetland instills an appreciation for the environment through fostering self worth and individual responsibility within the community.

Despite the history of valuable ecological function and unofficial sewage treatment, city planners thought that the wetland would make a good place to build Raleigh's first African American community, Rochester Heights.

Evidence of beaver in Walnut Creek wetland.



Pit pond provides habitat for frog and salamander eggs.



# Rochester Heights

The Rochester Heights neighborhood was built adjacent to Walnut Creek in the mid 1950s. Most of the residents moved into the area as young professionals in the mid 1960s. To the south, Interstate 40 now bounds the community. On the East Side is an abandoned industrial area, which is labeled a “brownfield” redevelopment site. With an aging population and declining rate of growth, Rochester Heights seems no different than many of the Southeast Raleigh neighborhoods that show signs of contraction and a corollary decline in business and industries that once flourished in the area. In actuality, the U.S. Census shows that the community structure of the primarily African American Rochester Heights is remarkably resilient. The predominately retired residents have ample time to care for their homes and neighbors. When the demographics of the census tract that encompass Rochester Heights are compared to the surrounding neighborhoods to the west, north, and northwest, the community stands out for defying downward trends.

Lillian Currin has lived in Rochester Heights for 44 years. “Flooding is our biggest problem,” she explains as to why the neighborhood is losing so many families. Despite the fact that her house has been flooded for several months at a time, Currin speaks of her neighborhood with great pride.

Rochester Heights Community Members



Source: Walnut Creek 2000 □ Urban Wetland Educational Park

Figure 1: General Demographic Trends in North Carolina  
Source: 2000 Census Data

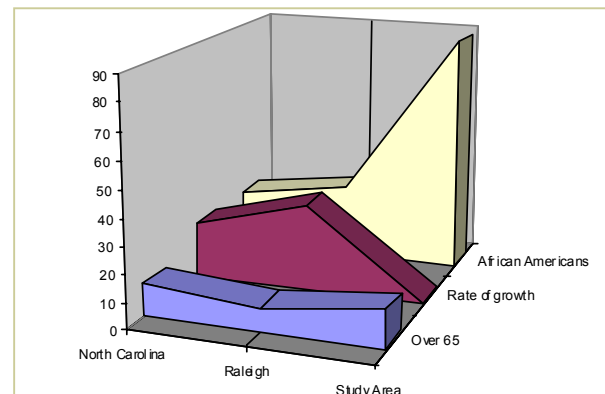
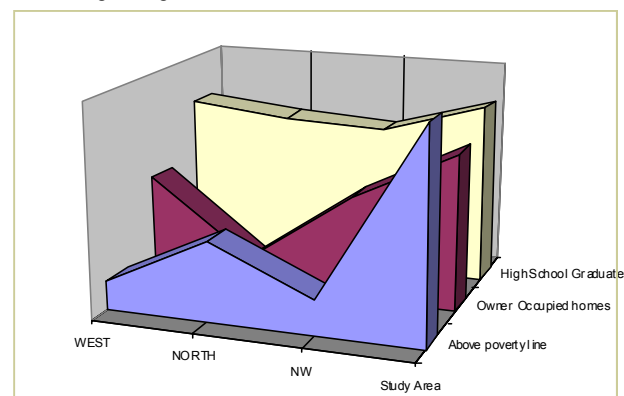


Figure 2: Indicators of Community Stability in Surrounding SE Raleigh Neighborhoods.  
Source: 2000 Census Data



In the mid 1990s, following a plea from the pulpit to address environmental justice issues, two churches—St. Ambrose Episcopal of Raleigh and Trinity Episcopal Church of Fuquay Varina—partnered to respond. Rev. Arthur Calloway, rector of St. Ambrose church committed a small stipend to fund Rev. Franklin Gose, vicar of Trinity Episcopal and assistant rector at St. Ambrose, to lead the effort. In 1997, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church of Cary joined the effort. The group originally called itself Episcopalians for Environmental Justice. Meetings were held monthly in St. Ambrose Church. St. Ambrose sits on an upland rise adjacent to Walnut Creek in the heart of the Rochester Heights Community.

# Environmental Injustice

In 1996, when the whipping winds and torrential downpours of Hurricane Fran delivered another hard blow to Raleigh residents, the natural wetland sponge of the Walnut Creek Wetland had been reduced and degraded. The flooding in Rochester Heights was devastating: Floodwater stood in the living rooms of 27 of 29 homes in the Rochester Heights community. While residents of the neighborhood were coping with destroyed carpets and mildewed furniture, Episcopalians for Environmental Justice (EEJ) was surprised to hear that residents of Rochester Heights were being asked to pay part of the cost for infrastructure repairs while residents in affluent white neighborhoods were not.



Flooding from Hurricane Fran.

error of their original plan. The City found money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Federal Emergency Management Agency to dredge the sediment spoil and enlarge the undersized culverts in Rochester Heights. The residents did not have to mail Raleigh managers \$10 a month for the next 120 months to enjoy the same standard of infrastructure maintenance the City provided other more affluent neighborhoods.

With the dredging and culvert repair moving forward in Walnut Creek Wetland, EEJ member Norman Camp, while out jogging one day, saw a turtle struggling to make a nest in a pile of trash beside the creek. He shared the story with EEJ and the group was struck by the metaphor mirrored in the predicament of the turtle. The turtle’s struggle to raise her family in a degraded wetland was the exact struggle of African American families raising theirs in the degraded communities of Southeast Raleigh. EEJ realized that helping the turtle would help the neighborhood. Restoring the wetland would restore the community. Camp realized, “it was time for environmental justice—it is everyone’s right to live in a clean healthy, safe environment with equal enjoyment of nature’s resources and beauty.”

## City to Divvy Up Dredging Bill News & Observer June 21, 1997

RALEIGH. When A.J. Turner moved to Rochester Heights in 1958, contractors told him that Walnut Creek, less than a mile from his home would never flood. This week, the Raleigh City Council voted to bill him for living to see the prediction proved wrong. Turner, 96, is one of 27 homeowners affected by the council’s decision to charge residents part of the tab to dredge the creek’s Rochester Heights tributary. The council rejected a proposal for the city to pay the entire cost of the long-awaited dredging. Instead, it said homeowners should cover one-tenth of the cost by contributing about \$1,150 each over 10 years in monthly payments of ten dollars.

To a small group of Episcopalians concerned with environmental justice, this seemed to be a classic case of environmental racism. EEJ took on the issue and Rev. Gose began fighting for justice. It took a little over a year for the City of Raleigh to realize the