

CONNECTION WITH LAND USE PLANNING

Zoning

Zoning is the most common form of land use regulation used by towns and counties in North Carolina. Zoning is authorized by the North Carolina General Statutes and these regulations have been recently updated. The statute currently states the following on the purpose of zoning.

Zoning regulations shall be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan and shall be designed to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare. To that end, the regulations may address, among other things, the following public purposes: to provide adequate light and air; to prevent the overcrowding of land; to avoid undue concentration of population; to lessen congestion in the streets; to secure safety from fire, panic, and dangers; to facilitate the efficient and adequate provision of transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks, and other public requirements; and to promote the health, safety, morals, or general welfare of the community. (NCGS § 160D-701)

The Town of White Lake recently revised its Zoning Ordinance, including the Subdivision Ordinance, over a multi-year process of meeting with the Planning Board. On July 13, 2021 the White Lake Board of Commissioners adopted the update recommended by the Planning Board and it is being enforced today.

During this process, the Town Staff, LRCOG representative and the consultant retained by the Town for the Water Quality monitoring on the lake, Ms. Diane Lauritsen, reviewed the potential of managing inputs of surface water to the lake through the zoning ordinance. Zoning regulations are regularly utilized across the country by jurisdictions desiring to modify and manage stormwater. Stormwater, rain that does not permeate the ground surface but rather runs off following the path of least resistance, is a growing problem across North Carolina. As we increase the density of development, reduce lot setbacks and allow paved surface on smaller lots, the volume of stormwater increases. That volume can easily and quickly become unmanageable, causing destruction of property, road cave-ins, and causing upsets to surface water bodies such as lakes. In fact, the NC Department of Environmental Quality has just this summer given notice of a new program for funding “Best Management Practices” to manage stormwater runoff.

Zoning is often used to help reduce the potential for runoff and better manage stormwater. The tools within a zoning ordinance, among many others that are available for use, include:

- The ability to target specific areas to reduce runoff called watershed-based zoning.
- Increase lot size requirements so that the density of development is decreased and less paved/impervious surface exists to sheet water.
- Change density requirements for lot development, increasing the amount of open space on a lot where rain can permeate the ground surface.
- Enhancing buffer requirements around the lake to develop locations where surface water can infiltrate before reaching the lake.
- Use of overlay zones to mitigate stormwater impacts.

Following discussion, the Town staff determined that the time was not right to include stormwater management tools in the new zoning ordinance. Instead, the Town Staff recommended that the Planning Board take up the draft Stormwater Management Ordinance for review and consideration as a first step in beginning to manage stormwater inputs to the lake. This draft, *Stormwater Management Ordinance*, was provided to the Town by the LRCOG in April 2021 as a product of a 205(j) study done through the NC Department of Environmental Quality.

The following images speak to why improved land use controls are needed. It has been established that the density of development around the lake is significant and that there are no true, unrestricted public access points on the lake similar to those established along North Carolina beaches. With the use of minimal set-back requirements and the amount of associated impervious surfaces (i.e. hard surface parking lots), there is little area for the absorption of stormwater or other runoff. **Figures 1 and 2** are maps showing the density of development and land coverage today. On both maps the land coverage is 75 – 100%.

Figure 1. Town of White Lake Impervious Surfaces 2022

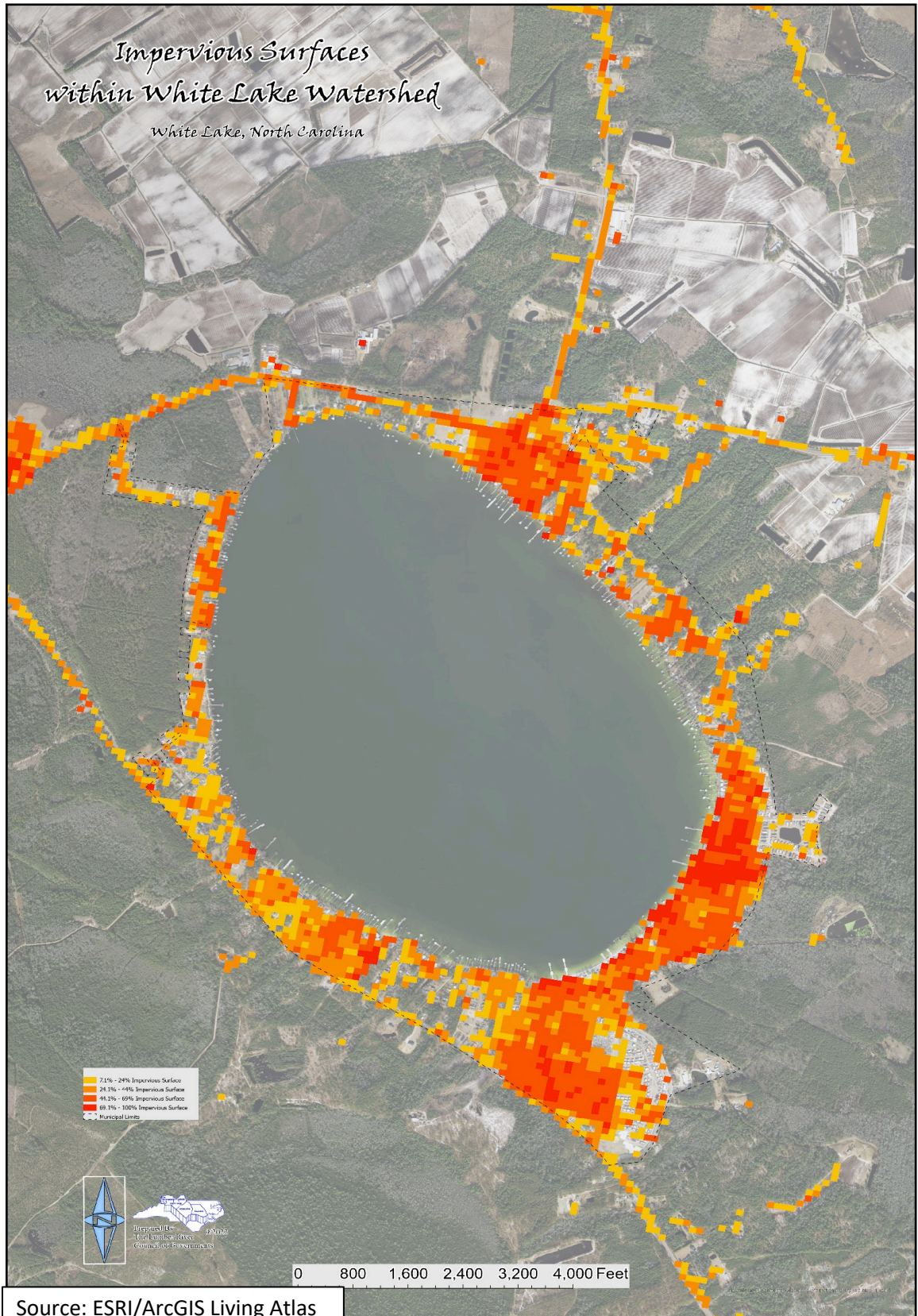
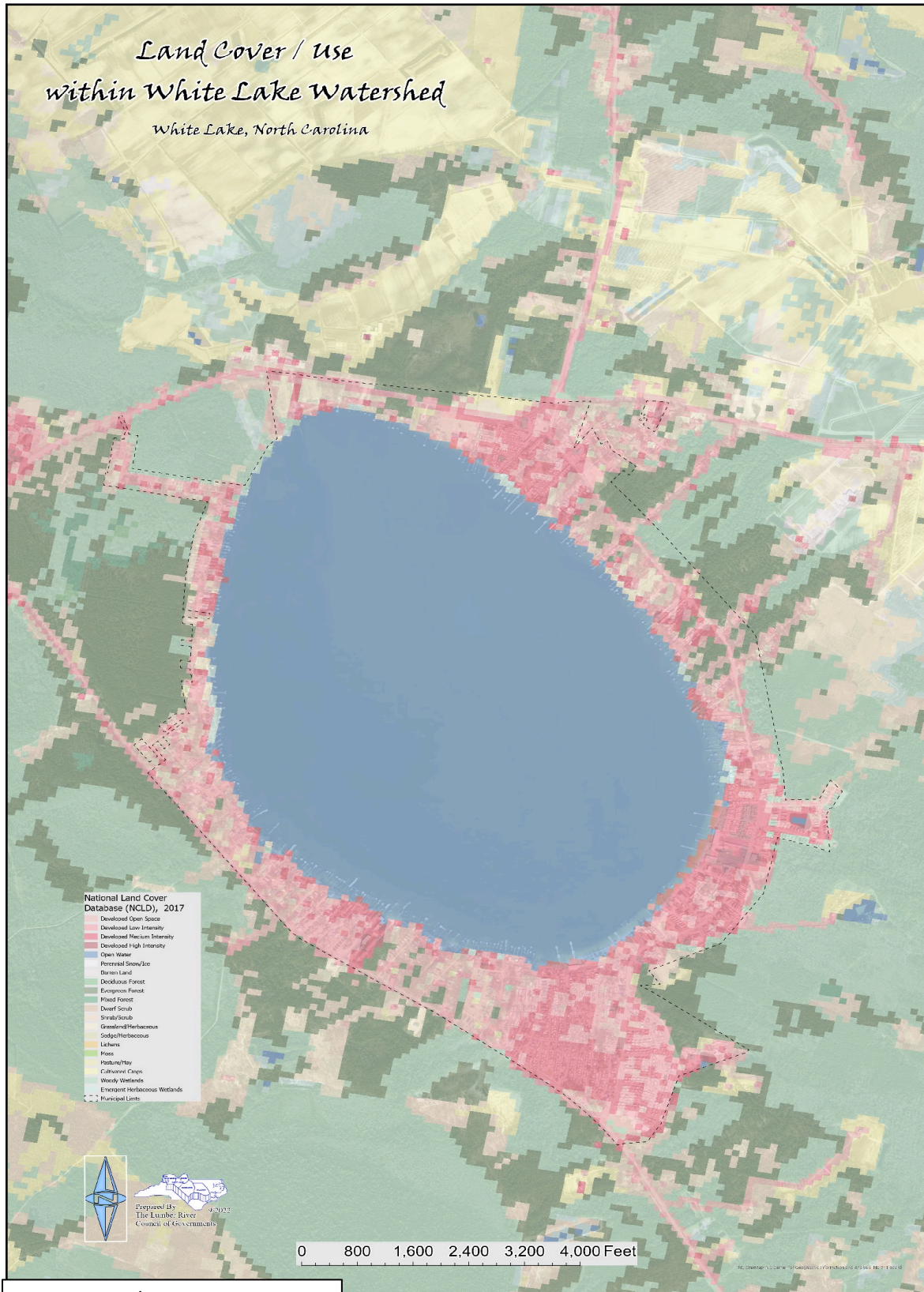


Figure 2. Land Cover/Development Density 2022



Management

As part of the update for the *Comprehensive Plan* for the Town of White Lake to comply with new state Statutory requirements, the LRCOG staff conducted a public survey soliciting comments and suggestions of the future growth of the Town. The purpose of the *Comprehensive Plan*, which is the umbrella document for this *Strategic Lake Management Plan*, is to assess the current conditions and develop a guideline for growth over the next 20 years.

Clearly, the Town of White Lake is built on and depends on the attraction of the Lake to both its residents and visitors. The health of the economy in the Town and the surrounding area rests on the desire of people to live and visit the Lake. Several survey respondents noted that “if there is no healthy lake, there is no Town”. While this is a simple take on a many faceted issue, it is the simple truth.

It has been stated that “the future of White Lake lies not in the hands of nature but in the hands of men”. Given this responsibility, it is imperative that all partners work to restore and protect the future of this natural resource.

Prior to the development of a lake management plan for White Lake, partners must agree on a basic foundation of truths. Learning from the Lake’s history, it is imperative that we agree on a path going forward that prioritizes the health of the Lake. The tenets stated earlier in this strategic plan provide this foundation.

There are two elements to managing the lake’s future that must be included in a Lake Management Plan. Both will mean the engagement of several parties. The first involves the actual management of the lake in terms of implementing changes in use or altering activities that take place on and around the lake. The second will involve setting up long-term monitoring activities to deal with the issues surrounding water quality, lake levels, and other identified issues that can be measured over time.

Management Partners

Restating a fact established by statute, the body of water known as White Lake, is owned and controlled by the State of North Carolina. The Town of White Lake has authority only beyond the high water mark of the Lake waters. Thus, the need for a working partnership between the Town and the State is critical to the success of a lake management plan. This partnership must acknowledge the responsibilities and the jurisdiction of each partner and it must be a partnership that works together. The core partners needed for the development of any management plan for White Lake must include:

- NC Department of Parks and Recreation
- NC Division of Environmental Quality (including Division of Water Resources)
- NC Wildlife Resource Commission
- Town of White Lake

The Town of White Lake should take the lead in the establishment of a working technical committee as well as a lake management steering committee, ensuring that appropriate partners are identified and included. Transparency with all information for both committees is imperative to restore and promote public trust. These committees should prepare a public report on a regular established schedule.

Before success can be achieved, all entities must agree on shared goals and desired outcomes. The delineation of each partner's jurisdiction must be understood and accepted by all partners. A memorandum of understanding should be developed that spells out in clarity and detail the role and responsibility of each partner.

Due to the importance of White Lake to so many interested parties, several public and private groups have developed that attempt to influence the health and well-being of the lake. As we have discovered in the White Lake Comprehensive Plan process, communications concerning White Lake issues and activities travel at tremendous speed through "word of mouth". This often creates confusion and false information becomes "fact" very quickly. These individuals and groups will be instrumental in relaying factual information to the general public and all that have a vested interest in the Lake. These groups should be included in the partnership.

Monitoring

Monitoring activities will require the incorporation of stakeholders who have a vested interest in the future of the lake. There already exists several committees and groups looking at certain aspects of the lake. These groups should be reexamined to make sure that they are inclusive of the necessary stakeholder groups and are still relevant, functional, and engaged. There may be a need to reformulate some of these groups based on evolving needs and issues brought forth by this strategic plan and any future lake management plan. Each group will have representation on the Lake Management Steering Committee.

This group should include representation of the following:

- Town of White Lake
- Residents and property owners in and immediately around the Town
- Businesses in and immediately around the Town
- White Lake Planning Board
- Bladen County Board of Commissioners
- Elizabethtown/White Lake Chamber of Commerce
- DPR, DEQ, WRC
- NCDOT
- Bladen County Health Department
- Bladen County Soil and Water Conservation District

The establishment and logistical support of these two working committees must be completed and supported by the Town of White Lake. Information must be presented publicly and in entirety.