

Myth Buster: A Handy Chart to Separate Fact from Fiction

Opponents of the state’s new coastal stormwater rules have conjured up numerous myths about the rules. Carteret County’s Economic Development Council, or EDC, has been the source of many of these misrepresentations. They’ve changed and evolved over time. Only the most persistent are presented here.

Myth	Facts
<p>The rules limit density to 12% of a lot.</p>	<p>They do no such thing. Within a half-mile of shellfish waters, the rules would require that development that disturbs more than an acre include effective methods to control runoff <i>if</i> hard, constructed surfaces exceed 12 percent of the lot. There are no caps on density in the rules, except within 575 feet of designated Outstanding Resource Waters – the rarest and cleanest of state waters. Everywhere else, developers could theoretically pave every inch of a lot if they could effectively contain the resulting runoff.</p>
<p>Not even a mobile home can be built without a permit and expensive stormwater controls.</p>	<p>The crafty use of “mobile home” is meant to scare moderate-income families who want to build a home on a single lot. They can relax. Unless the mobile home or residence is part of a new subdivision, the family won’t even need a permit if the lot is less than an acre. On larger lots, the family would have to <i>disturb</i> at least an acre before a permit is needed. If the disturbance is less than an acre but more than 10,000 square feet, the family may be required to install inexpensive stormwater controls such as a cistern or a rain garden. Either can be done for as little as a few hundred dollars.</p>
<p>The rules could add as much as \$43,000 to the cost of a new house.</p>	<p>This particular gem is meant to scare the willies out of small private landowners. To make it even scarier, the price is sometimes raised to \$48,000. It includes the cost of consultants and engineers and topographic and wetland surveys. The price, according to an EDC “fact” sheet, is based on a 2,000 square-foot house built on a 35,000 square-foot lot. It’s all bogus. Since the lot used to arrive at the forecast is less than an acre, no stormwater permit would even be required for the example cited. No consultants, no engineers, no topo surveys. The N.C. Division of Water Quality estimates that it will cost owners of average-sized new homes subject to the regulations less than \$4,000 to meet them, and, as mentioned above, many homeowners won’t be subject to them.</p>
<p>The rules will bring development on the coast to a halt.</p>	<p>This is the logical if somewhat hyperventilated conclusion if the previous statements were true. This myth is usually coupled with unsubstantiated forecasts of drastic drops in property values and</p>

	<p>tax receipts. Tired economic arguments are always trotted out as weapons against new regulations. The same argument was used 20 years ago when the current stormwater rules were debated. We can now safely say that no one went broke meeting those rules. Opponents have no empirical evidence on which to base this prediction. In fact history argues against them. Economist Eban Goodstein found that, historically, the forecast cost of environmental regulations exceeds the actual cost by at least 50 percent. It's also worth noting that states such as Rhode Island and Georgia have more stringent coastal stormwater rules than these, and development hasn't ground to stop in those places.</p>
<p>The rules are scientifically unfounded.</p>	<p>More than a dozen coastal scientists whose resumes include decades of stormwater research spoke at public hearings or submitted written comments in support of the new rules. The state's review of scientific studies on stormwater and water quality fills several pages. See the June 2006 edition of <i>Scientific American</i> for a detailed look at the science of stormwater.</p>
<p>Shellfish closures are due mainly to septic tanks, marinas and sewer plants.</p>	<p>This argument overlooks all the science done on the subject. While they can close shellfish waters, failing septic tanks, sewer discharges and marinas aren't implicated in the great majority of permanently or temporarily closed waters along the coast. There are more than 63,000 acres and 150 miles of such waters in the 20 coastal counties. Septic tanks, marinas and sewer plants are implicated in very few of those impairments.</p>
<p>The bacteria closing the waters come from the populous Piedmont section of the state.</p>	<p>Such a statement once again ignores accepted science and overlooks reality. In saltwater, bacteria aren't long-lived. They certainly can't survive the days it would take to travel from Raleigh or Greensboro. Upstream sources can contribute many pollutants -- nutrients, sediments, toxins -- that can affect coastal water quality. Bacteria aren't among them. They're local. How else to explain closures in the lower White Oak River, for instance? That river starts in the megalopolis of Jones County before emptying in the sea some 60 miles later near Swansboro in Onslow County. How else to explain Hewlett's, Bradley or Howe creeks? All are closed and all start and end in New Hanover County. And how about Archers Creek? It's closed, too, and it's totally contained in Emerald Isle.</p>