

Mother Nature needs our help

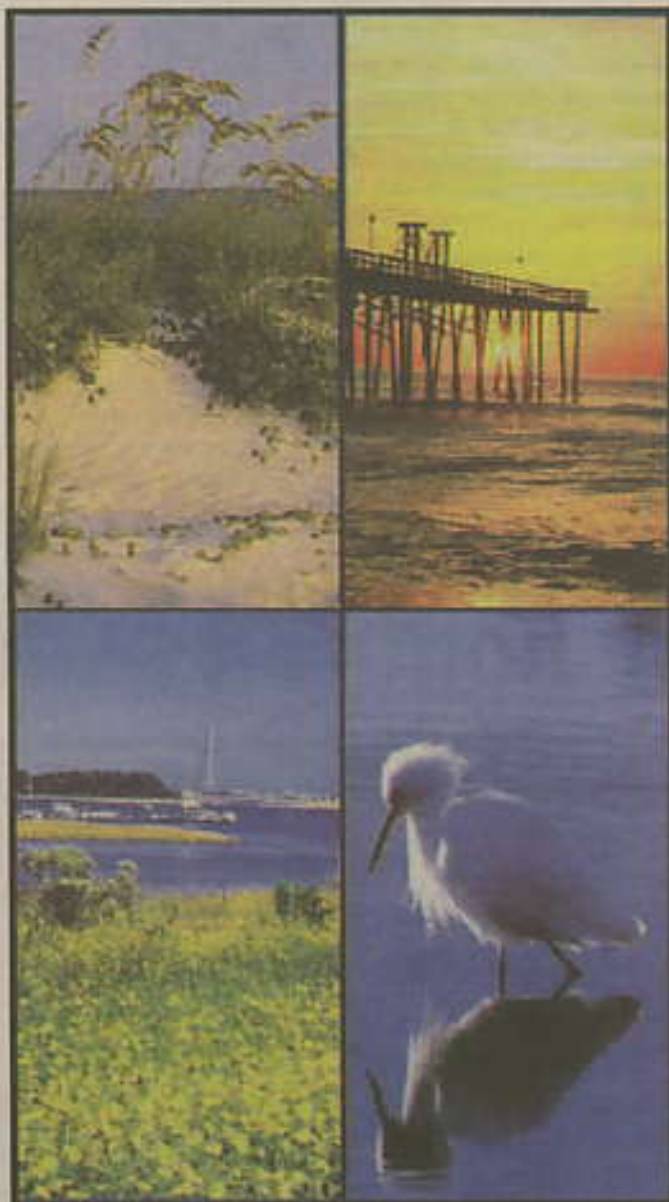
PenderWatch and Conservancy

BRIAN GORECKI
TOPSAIL ADVERTISER

When you take a walk down the coastline, or near a pond or stream, most people see the beautiful landscape that Mother Nature has created. It sometimes looks like art instead of life. Unfortunately, if people continue in the destruction and neglect of Mother Nature, all we will have to remember it by, will be art. One area organization is doing their best to stop the demise of our gorgeous landscape, but they need all the help they can get.

PenderWatch is a conservancy organization that has six main goals. To protect the ecosystems from development, to work with government officials in order to keep the environments point in mind, to work with other environmental groups, measure and report water quality, educate the young individuals of their community on the concerns of the environment and to enjoy the very best that nature has to offer.

PenderWatch has been in the area since 1986. The members are all from Pender County. Most are on the Highway 17 stretch, and in the coastal towns. President Burt



If groups like PenderWatch weren't here to speak up for Mother Nature, these majestic scenes will be a thing of the past.

Millette has held his position for two years and has been an active member in the group for ten.

"It was something that I

really had an interest in," said Millette. "The environment has always been a concern."

PenderWatch has had

some great accomplishments in its short history. They were an instrumental part of the decision to keep ThermalChem, a toxic waste incinerator plan for the area, out of development. They also defeated the possibility of a sandpit mine being built in the Hampstead area. They were involved in the relief efforts after the devastation of Hurricane Floyd and they are constantly monitoring the pollution levels in the area water. They also have an ongoing project monitoring bluebirds in the area. PenderWatch has over eighty bluebird houses that are regularly monitored.

PenderWatch has two hundred members in its organization but unfortunately reports that membership is declining. The majority of the people involved include retirement age members, and the group would like to see the younger age groups get involved in the efforts.

"We are hoping to gain some new membership and continue in our goals," said PenderWatch President Burt Millette. "There is always work to be done."

SEE PENDER / 2

Another large obstacle of PenderWatch is the cooperation of government agencies. Getting Mother Nature's point of view in on government decisions can sometimes be an uphill battle. PenderWatch does feel that the local government organizations, including area Board of Directors and Town Officials have been very positive. Above the local level, cooperation is difficult to obtain.

PenderWatch has many different goals in mind for the future, but the one that stands out the most in the area is clean water. With a very high amount of storm run off due to inclement weather, and the ongoing pollution problem, clean water is a large concern.

Education is obviously one of the biggest goals for any organization, no matter what the issue. PenderWatch is no different. The environmental group works closely with North Topsail Elementary and Burgaw Elementary

schools. The group sponsors field trips, has helped install weather stations, and overall environmental education so the younger kids in the area can understand how delicate the areas ecosystem truly is.

Another large education project for PenderWatch involved the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. The program is with Marine Quest, the universities Marine Sciences Division. The program sponsors education summer camps for underprivileged children to attend an environmental camp and program. The children are middle school students, and spend time learning about water, marine life, and how to prevent pollution. PenderWatch will be sending four students to the program this upcoming summer.

"It is important that we



educate people," said Millette. "That is the beginning."

At this year's annual meeting, on January 22, PenderWatch will continue their education on the problems with the environment. North Carolina Conservation Networks Environmental Liaison, Grady McCallie, will be speaking to the group concerning water quality and shortages in North Carolina. The meeting is free, and open to the public, and President Burt Millette hopes many area residents will attend.

"We hope to gain some more support," said Millette. "Maybe we can get some area residents concerned about the issues at hand."

PenderWatch may be a young organization, just celebrating its decade anniversary, but the issues that they tackle have been around for much longer. It is no easy



PenderWatch President Burt Millette hopes that some needed new membership will help the group carry out some important tasks in the upcoming year.

battle and it is no doubt a never-ending task. With two hundred members, and hopes that membership will increase, PenderWatch will continue to be heard by local and state governments. The issues that affect the Pender County environment affect the people who live there as well. Pender residents should be mindful of the problems that surround them. Pollution, over development, disregard for

marine wildlife, these are all real issues that can have real solutions. The more people that are involved, the louder the message will be to our elected officials. Mother Nature will always need your help.

Burt Millette, President of PenderWatch can be contacted at 910-270-9610. You can also visit the organizations website at www.eunymus.com/penderwatch/index.htm.