

Donald van der Vaart: Protecting North Carolina's environment

HIGHLIGHTS

Regarding the Aug. 14 editorial “Water at risk due to weak regulation”: Today North Carolina’s public water supply is the safest it has ever been thanks to increased monitoring and tightened regulations. We are a national model for notifying customers when lead and copper exceed allowable levels. In fact, we have requested that the EPA adopt North Carolina’s rule for notifying customers within 48 hours, rather than 30 days as federal rules allow. We remain unsatisfied with the failed policies of the past and are searching for more effective means of reducing nutrients in our lakes. For the first time, the state environmental department has developed a nutrient-management plan approved by the EPA. Additionally, the McCrory administration was commended by the Obama administration’s EPA for updating North Carolina’s water quality standards after a required review was neglected by the Perdue regime.

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Our state environmental department has one of the most comprehensive animal feeding operation inspection programs in the nation. Even after record rainfall last spring and fall, waterways remained protected with no major incidents or unauthorized discharges.

North Carolina has also become a national leader in addressing the decades-old problem of coal ash. We were the first state to enact a comprehensive law that requires every coal ash pond to be closed. Well owners are being protected from potential health risks and will be provided with permanent water connections under a law signed by the governor.

North Carolinians are breathing the cleanest air in decades due to fundamental changes in our energy sector, including converting coal-fired plans to natural gas to create cleaner and cheaper energy. For the first time in 20 years, every region in the state meets all federal air quality standards. That milestone capped years of improvements in air quality across North Carolina. Ozone levels were among the lowest on record in 2015 despite hot and dry summer weather.

Over the last three years, we have taken steps that benefit consumers and businesses by eliminating outdated or overly burdensome regulations. For example, we gained federal approval for a change in gasoline standards that will save North Carolina drivers tens of millions of dollars.

As part of the governor’s initiative to safeguard the environment while improving government efficiency, we put in place a rule that protects air quality and relieves the regulatory burden on small businesses. About 1,200 very small industrial facilities that account for less than 1 percent of statewide emissions will remain subject to environmental standards but will no longer be required to hold an air quality permit.

When editorializing on environmental issues, it is important to tell the whole story, not just the parts that paint the department in a negative light. North Carolina is proof that citizens can enjoy a vibrant economy while successfully protecting the environment.

DONALD VAN DER VAART
SECRETARY, N.C. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
RALEIGH
The length limit was waived to permit a fuller response to the editorial.

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