

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Eden and Rockingham County Host “The State of Our Rivers”

Eden, NC—The City of Eden and the Rockingham County Tourism Development Authority hosted a joint presentation today, “The State of Our Rivers,” to underscore the importance of the rivers to the community and highlight current river conditions. The event also emphasized the minimal environmental impacts noted to-date on portions of the Dan River in Eden and Rockingham County from the coal ash spill that occurred nearly one year ago.

“We want people to know that the state of our rivers is good and we are looking forward to a very bright 2015,” said Mike Dougherty, director of economic development for the City of Eden.

Leaders from public and private organizations with vested interests in the vitality of the rivers presented information during the event. Spokespeople represented the following organizations: City of Eden, Rockingham County Tourism Development Authority, Dan River Basin Association (DRBA), the Environmental Protection Agency, Duke Energy, Mayodan Outdoor Sports and Three Rivers Outfitters.

Dougherty presented information about how Rockingham County’s four rivers, the Dan, Haw, Mayo and Smith, played significant roles in the area’s history. For Eden, the Dan and the Smith powered the textile industries and were the original commercial transportation corridors with the use of bateaux, flat-bottomed wooden boats. He also presented the importance of the rivers today for Eden with examples of the “Land of Two Rivers” slogan and development of public accesses on the Dan and Smith rivers.

Cindy Adams, coordinator of Tourism, Special Events/Projects for Eden, provided information about how Eden is currently working to promote the rivers. “Eden Tourism Development is constantly looking for new and exciting ways to bring attention to our treasures – the Dan and the Smith Rivers. Thanks to a grant from REI through DRBA, we were able to work with Gordon Allen, a local wildlife photographer, to develop a stunning permanent photo display at City Hall that showcases the wildlife that lives and thrives along our rivers,” she said. “And our award winning RiverFest continues to grow and attract thousands of visitors from all over the state of North Carolina and southern Virginia.”

Adams also mentioned the City is working with Bouvier Kelly, an advertising and public relations agency, to implement the “Eden Loves the Dan” campaign and upgrade the City’s web site to highlight all of its outdoor recreation opportunities. She announced the launch of that new web site today:

www.ExploreEdenNC.com

Robin Yount, director of Tourism for Rockingham County discussed how Rockingham County began promoting the rivers for tourism in 2003 when public access points were only found on the Dan and Mayo. As the Rockingham County Tourism Development Authority worked over the years to promote river recreation for tourism, it has grown to include the county’s four rivers, two river-side state parks, four local outfitters, Eden’s RiverFest, and the Dan River Boat Race, which celebrates 26 years in 2015.

Both Dougherty and Yount addressed last year’s coal ash spill on the Dan River. It had no impact on the Haw, Mayo or Smith Rivers and only affected a little more than eight and half miles of the Dan River near Eden. It took place three and half miles upstream from Eden’s raw water intake, thus having zero effect on Eden or Danville’s water quality. Only one out of six public access points on the Dan River was within the affected area. That means 95% of Eden and Rockingham County’s river recreation was completely unaffected by the spill.

Yount shared that local outfitters put over 4,300 people on the rivers in 2014, with roughly an additional 1,000 people doing their own trips. The Mayo River State Park and the Haw River State Park, which has a small portion in Rockingham County, attracted over 70,000 people combined. River recreation also helped spur small business growth in 2014 with the opening of a new river-related business, Mayodan Outdoor Sports.

“The message we want people to take away from today is that the Dan River’s water in Eden and Rockingham County is perfectly safe for recreation,” said Yount. “Duke Energy has completed the clean-up and all advisories have been lifted. We are moving forward and with the collaboration of the partners here today and many others, we look forward to a great 2015.”

Tiffany Haworth, executive director of the Dan River Basin Association, presented information on the group’s efforts to expand and connect the trail system and river development in Rockingham County. The group will continue to focus on the health and protection of the Dan River and be instrumental in the long-term monitoring of its water quality. Part of this will include implementing a citizen water quality monitoring program in 2015 in Rockingham County.

Paul Newton, state president of North Carolina for Duke Energy, cited several third-party studies that point the fact that science shows the Dan River is thriving. He also noted that the company’s Water Resources Fund is creating new opportunities for the Dan River Basin and waterways in the Carolinas.

In late July 2014, the NC Department of Health and Human Services lifted all recreational advisories on the Dan and the EPA also declared the water quality to be back to pre-spill levels.

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