

## Lower Neuse RIVERKEEPER Travis Graves Says Goodbye

I'm going to try not to be too sentimental, or ramble on, but the operative word here is 'try'. After long debate, and with no small amount of heartache, my family and I have decided to embark on the next chapter of this adventure that is our lives. I began working with this organization in March of 2014, focused primarily on swine CAFOs as an unpaid intern, and I really had no expectations other than the opportunity to get my hands dirty and, if I was lucky and I worked hard, find gainful employment. Little did I know, I had stumbled into one of the most important opportunities of my life. On June 16, 2014, I was hired as your Riverkeeper, and it changed my life forever.

For me, there has never been any debate as to the importance of clean water, and I hoped that I could contribute to protecting our environment in some undefined way, but I had no idea how absolutely vital the role of an advocate was. Nor did I understand how much impact a well-organized and motivated group of people could have through hard work, persistence, and creativity. The group of people that I am referring to are the Waterkeepers around the world, and specifically, the Waterkeepers and their organizations here in North Carolina. I have never seen such pure, distilled passion in all of my life. For them, there is never enough time, never enough resources, and always too much opposition, but still they manage to make a difference every day. That is because for a Waterkeeper, the goal is never corrupted by profit motives, the choices are always clear, and the work is always very personal. I don't have the words to express my admiration for all of you.

I will always reflect on my years as your Lower Neuse Riverkeeper with reverence and pride, but also with a bit of regret – regret that there is, and seemingly will always be, more work to do in defense of clean water. It has been my privilege to serve the communities of the Lower Neuse basin and to be a voice for our river as we have stood up against polluters with sound science and the idea that swimmable, fishable, drinkable water is a human right, and that right supersedes any profit motive. Because, without our most precious resource, everything else is irrelevant.

Although my time here is ending, I have the utmost confidence that Sound Rivers will continue to build on the more than 30 year tradition of science-based advocacy that has grown to become the voice for nearly a quarter of our state, and that the Riverkeeper chosen to take my place will carry that longstanding tradition on for many years to come. There isn't enough space or time to thank everyone that deserves thanking, (and I wouldn't subject you to that) so let me put it this way; If you are reading this, then you already have some connection to our water, and that connection is what I am truly thankful for.

I will end here with a quote from Margaret Mead that reminds of what is at the core of our work, and what is the foundation of any effort to advocate for change. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Keep up the good fight, and thank you for supporting Sound Rivers!

Travis Graves