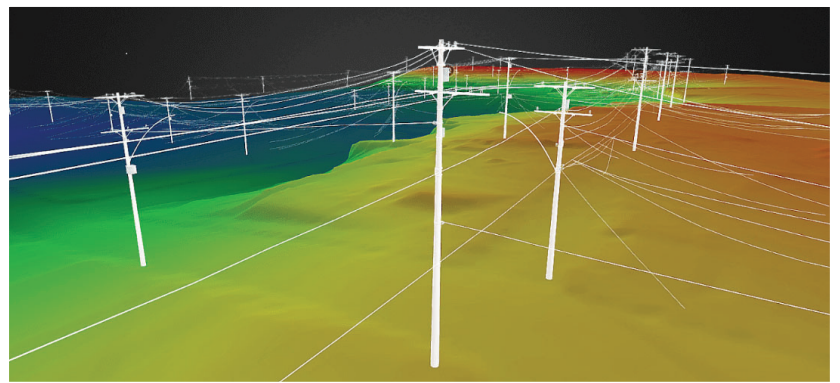
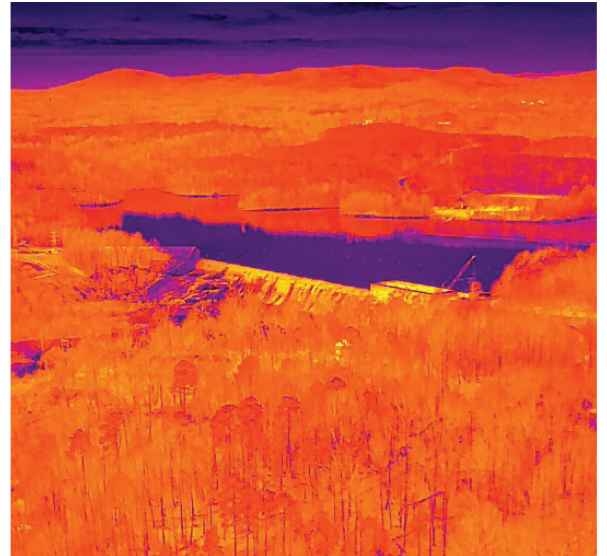


WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER MARCH 2023



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The 2022 Review of REACH, a Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Article by Kim Duncan

On the national level, 2022 was a historic year for HUD's Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program. After a four-year long process, a new FSS Final Rule was published which resulted in the creation of new regulations and policies. Locally, the WPCOG Regional Housing Authority's (RHA) FSS program called REACH experienced a year of positive outcomes, while working through the new changes.

The Family Self-Sufficiency program gives participants the opportunity to set goals that will move their lives in a positive direction, such as going to school or improving their credit. Finding suitable employment is the primary goal that HUD requires each participant to complete in order to graduate from the program.

In 2022, thirteen participants – a dozen women and one man - successfully graduated from WPCOG's REACH program. The age range of the graduates spanned from 31 to 52 years old, with an average age around 40.

Goals completed by the 2022 graduates included:

- Updating and improving resumes
- Completing continuing education/ college courses
- Exploring options for college scholarships
- Taking steps to improve health
- Completing career assessments/ counseling
- Obtaining credit counseling
- Completing a homebuyer education workshop (One graduate is completely credit-ready to buy a home, but has not found an affordable house yet.)

Better-paying jobs significantly impacted the 2022 graduates in a positive way. Nine participants graduated because they obtained jobs that paid well enough that they went over the income limits to stay in the self-sufficiency program.

Seven REACH participants left the program without graduating. Two left the program to live in non-subsidized housing, two had their vouchers expire while looking for new places to live, one moved to another state, one did not finish her goals before her contract extension ended, and unfortunately, two were terminated by the RHA, which also voided their FSS contract.

Sixteen new participants enrolled in 2022 so the program ended the year with a total of 63 families participating in REACH.



"As a whole, our REACH program had many positive outcomes in 2022. Navigating through all the new regulatory mandates, while working with my participants, was a challenge, but it is always a joy to celebrate their accomplishments, especially when they graduate," said Kim Duncan, REACH coordinator.

For more information about the REACH program, contact Kim at 828.485.4299 or kim.duncan@wpcog.org.

WPCOG Receives Grant Funds for Burke Home Repairs; Seeks Alexander Applications

Article by Paul Teague

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments has been awarded a \$40,000 grant from the Gateway Wellness Foundation, which will be utilized to make roof repairs to homeowners in Burke County who are already on the waiting list.

According to WPCOG staff, the funds should be enough to rehabilitate up to four housing units.

Meanwhile, the WPCOG is seeking Alexander County homeowner applicants for the Urgent Repair Program for roof replacement and/or HVAC replacement. To be eligible, the applicant must own the home/land and live there as a primary residence. The applicant must also be elderly, disabled, a veteran, a single parent with a child under 18, or a family of five. In addition, the gross household income must be below 50 percent of the median income.

For additional information about this program in Alexander County, contact Laurie Powell at 828-485-4289.



Great Hickory MPO Begins Prioritization 7.0

Article by Daniel Odom

The Greater Hickory MPO is beginning preparations for Prioritization 7.0, which determines the allocation of NCDOT Capital Funding (55% of the NCDOT Budget) to transportation projects statewide. Established by the Strategic Transportation Investments Law, this process is recognized as a needs-based and data-driven mechanism to ensure transparent, efficient, and effective transportation investment. Project scores are composed of quantitative criteria established by the STI Law and Prioritization Workgroup and local input points assigned by the MPO. For highway projects, quantitative criteria include

congestion, safety, cost-benefit, freight, and economic competitiveness scores.

Once scores are assigned, projects compete against one another for funding. Funding is separated into a statewide mobility, regional impact, and divisional needs pool, each with different goals and scoring formulas.

Due to the competitive nature of the prioritization process, GHMPO staff will meet with local officials to establish a transportation priority needs list that reflects the transportation needs and priorities of the region. This list will be quantitatively analyzed and refined. The Technical Advisory Committee will approve the final draft before submission to the NCDOT.

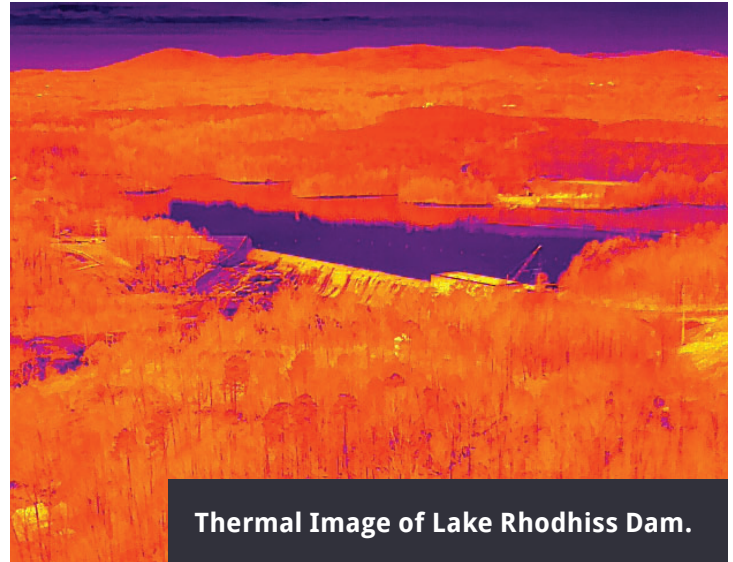


WPCOG Adds New Drone Capabilities

Article by Trey Schweitzer



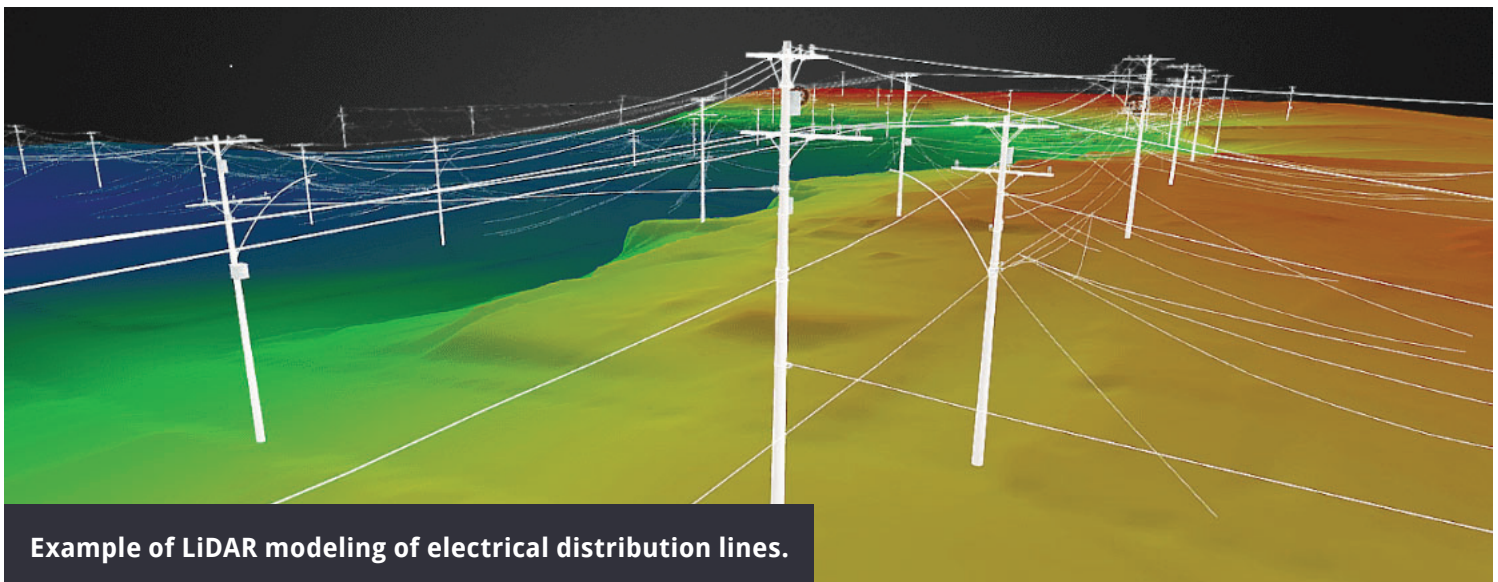
The North Carolina General Assembly recently provided funding to the North Carolina Association of Regional Councils of Government (NCARCOG) to improve disaster recovery and mitigation efforts statewide.



From that funding, NCARCOG awarded \$331,250 to each COG to assist emergency management agencies with disaster mitigation and recovery planning and to provide grant application and administration training. In addition, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments used some of this funding to purchase a DJI Matrice 300 RTK drone, which will be used to develop a new regional mapping application to help local governments prepare for and respond to disasters.

The WPCOG is pleased to announce this addition to our drone program. The Matrice 300 RTK is an absolute workhorse for public safety, utility, construction, inspections, and many more applications. It is capable of more than 50 minutes of flight time, has a transmission range of over 9 miles, and can carry up to three payload cameras or sensors. It is also rugged and can operate in wet environments and temperatures ranging from -4 °F to 122 °F. The drone is equipped with a 4-sensor payload consisting of a laser range finder, a zoom camera, a wide-angle camera, and a thermal camera.

Additionally, the Community and Regional Planning department is acquiring a Lidar sensor for precision mapping. Lidar provides a complete solution for real-time 3D data gathering and can efficiently capture the details of complex environments to deliver highly accurate reconstructed models. Lidar, which stands for Light Detection and Ranging, is a remote sensing method that uses a pulsed laser to measure ranges (variable distances) to the Earth. These laser pulses – combined with other data recorded by the airborne system – generate precise, three-dimensional information about the shape of the Earth and its surface characteristics. Lidar systems allow mapping professionals to examine natural and artificial environments with accuracy, precision, and flexibility. This technology will enable us to generate geospatial products, such as digital elevation models, canopy models, building models, and contours.



Mainstream Voucher Program

Affordable Housing for Disabled Families

- *Security Deposit Assistance for Renters**
- *Utility Deposit Assistance for Renters**
- *Damage Mitigation Assistance for Owners**

**A household member must be between
the age of 18-61 AND Disabled**

Apply at
housing.wpcog.net
Call 828.322.9191
for assistance



*Subject to available funding. Contact the RHA for details.

Senior Tar Heel Legislature

Article by Ricky Handoo

What is the Senior Tar Heel Legislature?

The Senior Tar Heel Legislature is a legislative body, created by the N.C. General Assembly, whose purpose is to:

- Educate senior adults on the N.C. legislative process and agenda.
- Promote citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the N.C. General Assembly.
- Assess the legislative needs of older adults by convening a forum modeled after the N.C. General Assembly.

The Senior Tar Heel Legislators (STHL) report and make recommendations to the NC General Assembly. The STHL is made up of Delegates and Alternates representing all counties in NC. Each county has one Delegate and one Alternate, and they must meet the requirement of being 60 years old or older. Delegates and Alternates representing our four-county service area meet to review local and regional needs and priorities to pursue at the statewide meetings. In addition, each STHL delegate works in their county advocating for resources and solutions for older adults. The efforts of the STHL are supported by the local Area Agency on Aging and the NC Division of Aging and Adult Services.

The delegates and alternates meet three times yearly to discuss and establish their “legislative priorities” for the year. These priorities are advocated for in the NC General Assembly, where the delegates will travel to Raleigh to meet with representatives. The STHL have been very successful with past legislative priorities and their efforts to advocate for needed changes, increased funding, and expanded services for older adults in NC.

2023 Legislative Priorities:

1. Increase Home and Community Care Block Grant Funding
2. Increase Senior Center Funding
3. Increase Long Term Care Ombudsmen Funding
4. Strengthen funding for Adult Protective Services
5. Strengthen Long Term Care Staffing Standards

There is an opening for an Alternate representing Alexander County. If interested, contact Ricky Handoo at ricky.handoo@wpcog.org with Area Agency on Aging for an application. To learn more about the NC STHL, please visit their website at www.ncseniortarheellegislature.org.



Pictured:

Top Row from left to right: George Holleman (Alexander County - Delegate), Maxine Childres (Burke County - Alternate), Dr. Judith Ray (Catawba County - Alternate).

Bottom Row from left to right: Paulette Huffman (Alexander County - no longer affiliated with STHL), Karen Robinson (Burke County - Delegate), Linda Vitsyn (Caldwell County - Delegate), Richard Smith (Catawba County - Delegate).

Missing: Trilla Annas (Caldwell County - Alternate).

2023 Western Piedmont Youth Council

Article by Donna Gilbert

On Thursday, March 23, 2023, the Western Piedmont Youth Council held its annual Youth Summit. It was the first in-person event since 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was great to see all the young people together again. We had 79 students attend, representing every school system in the Western Piedmont area. In addition, there were approximately 20 adults who assisted with getting the students there and assisting the groups to each station throughout the day. The event was held at Conover Station in Conover. It included the Beta Box Learning Team from NC State, sharing about autonomous vehicles and drones. Also, a tour of the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) and a close-up of the labs, learning about the Small Business Incubator and some of the products developed at the MSC. Matthew Xiong presented about STEM jobs in our local area and the businesses with those positions. We finished with lunch before the students loaded their buses and headed back to their respective schools. Drones and autonomous vehicles were a big hit with the group! It was a great day for all involved!



Veterans Treatment Court Graduation

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

On March 3, 2023, Western Piedmont Workforce Development staff and staff from NCWorks Career Centers in Catawba and Burke counties, attended the Veterans Treatment Court Graduation.

The 25th Judicial District and 36th Prosecutorial District Veterans Treatment Court is the fifth veterans court in North Carolina. The court provides a means to divert veterans from the traditional criminal justice system and provide them with the support they need to lead productive and law-abiding lives by providing referrals for treatment, education, vocational programs, and community resources, all while being engaged in a judicially monitored environment.





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