



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

November 25, 2025

2025-2026 Board Members

President Patrick Baker
Pres Elect Bill Bartee
Past Pres Kim Brattain
Secretary Bill Gill
Treasurer Craig Field
Exec Dir Christine Cipriano

Directors 2024-2026

Benton Bragg
John Cantrell
Tish Atkins Charles
Dena Diorio
Jesse Hite
Virginia Owen

Directors 2025-2027

Byrd Bergeron
Karen Calder
J Hill
Ayo Johnson
Lori Keeton
Michael Orzech
Elizabeth Teagarden
Mike Wollinger

Membership Co-Chairs:

Linwood Bolles &
Shelley Dean

Programs

Elizabeth Teagarden



Barbara Bleiweis, Chair of the North Carolina Soil and Water Conservation Commission

by **Paul Bartholomy**

Barbara Bleiweis delivered a powerful and eye-opening program this week, giving Rotary members a front-row look at the past, present, and future of North Carolina's natural resources. As the Chair of the North Carolina Soil and Water Conservation Commission and current President of the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, she brought undeniable passion and urgency to the room. Her "triple crown" of statewide leadership, combined with her hands-on experience as an elected Mecklenburg Soil and Water Supervisor, made for a presentation rich in insight and real-world stories about a rapidly changing state. She reminded us that Charlotte's booming growth is a blessing, but one that requires thoughtful stewardship to protect our air, soil, water, and open space.

Barbara brought history to life as she walked us through the 88-year evolution of soil and water conservation, beginning with the devastation of the Dust Bowl. She highlighted North Carolina's deep agricultural roots, the creation of the state's first conservation districts, and the enduring importance of regenerative farming – long before the term became trendy. There was noteworthy spotlight on Mecklenburg's small farms, century farms, and innovative programs like aquaponic systems in local schools. These initiatives, she explained, not only strengthen food security but also help young people understand where their food truly comes from.

Barbara's account of Hurricane Helene and the Commission's role as first environmental responders was one of the most compelling moments of the afternoon. She described the massive scale of downed trees, the urgent need to

stabilize streams, and the frustrating bureaucratic roadblocks that slowed recovery efforts. Yet she also cast a hopeful vision of converting storm debris into biochar, revitalizing Western North Carolina's wood products economy, and using new resilience tools to reduce flood risk statewide. Her candid stories about navigating federal regulations, state politics, and emergency funding revealed the complexity of conservation work.

Barbara closed by challenging the room to imagine a stronger partnership between conservation leaders, local government, planners, developers, and engaged citizens. Her proposal to co-author a "Resilience Playbook" resonated deeply – an invitation for communities like ours to help protect the land and water that sustain North Carolina's future. Members left with a deeper understanding of the hidden infrastructure beneath our feet, a renewed respect for farmers and conservation districts, and an inspiring reminder that resilience is something we build long before the next storm arrives.

Here are the recordings:

With slides: <https://vimeo.com/1140842315?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Without slides: <https://vimeo.com/1140842518?fl=pl&fe=sh>

The speaker's introduction starts at about 26 minutes.