

Washington County Cooperative Extension is happy to welcome a horticulture agent to the list of services we can provide. Gene Fox started on Dec. 1, 2015 and serves Beaufort, Washington, Hyde and Tyrrell Counties. He is funded 100% by University Funds. Rebecca Liverman, County Extension Director is excited that Extension was able to hire a qualified person to fill the position because of the vast needs these counties have. While Anna-Beth Stewart, Washington County Agricultural agent continues her work in the commercial farming sector, Fox will be available to help area homeowners with landscaping and gardening issues.

"Having someone doing that kind of work is huge with the number of people in these four counties that invest yearly in gardening and landscaping," Liverman said. "They're always calling, looking for answers. So having someone here to help that audience is huge."

Fox will be training volunteers in hopes of expanding the Master Gardeners program through Extension and cover Beaufort, Hyde, Tyrrell and Washington counties.

"He'll be based in Beaufort County, working from here and going to other counties as needed,"

Liverman

said. "He'll be in those counties looking at some sites and doing some programming. We're excited to have him and get the position filled. He's really excited and ready to get going. It will be good to have someone back in the lead role. County homeowners will benefit from that as well. He knows people here, he has roots here, he knows the climate and growing conditions so he understands the problems we would face and might encounter, so he can relate directly to that. It's less of a learning curve."

Fox, a native of western Maryland, received bachelor's degree in Environmental Science from Catawba College in Salisbury, North Carolina. He ended up in Eastern North Carolina 15 years ago and has since worked in land management in Hyde, Tyrrell and Beaufort counties, covering an extensive array of concentrations including commercial vegetable production, farm management, wetland creation and wildlife management, he said.

Focusing heavily on botany and wildlife in college, Fox has worked for the Department of Agriculture and spent time working on research projects in a greenhouse at Tidewater Research Station, Fox said.

"(My experience) prepared me quite well for the issues I will face," Fox said. "Through those different jobs and land management, in general, I have a pretty good idea about what happens around here, and I think it's prepared me well to help folks."

Fox said the Extension is a free resource that is undervalued at times and looks forward to helping it gain more exposure.

"I think it's going to be great," Fox said. "I've had a passion for this type of thing, and I'm happy to be here, working with the Master Gardeners, growing that program, and just helping folks out."

