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to assess the quality of instruction & knowledge gained.

Registration is \$55/person or \$75/couple. Classes will be held Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Anson County Cooperative Extension, located at 501 McLaurin Street in Wadesboro. If you have questions or would like to register please contact Aimee Colf, Cooperative Extension Horticulture Agent, at aimee_colf@ncsu.edu or 704-694-2915. Class size is limited to 25. Instructors will share other learning opportunities, mentioned above, that new and experienced beekeepers use to network and build knowledge throughout the year.

NCDOT Seeks Public Input on Transportation Plan

A draft of the state's next long-range transportation improvements plan is now available for public review at ncdot.gov tip.

The State Transportation Improvement Program, or STIP, is the N.C. Department of Transportation's guide that shows how and when transportation projects are expected to be funded over the next 10 years. Projects scheduled in the first five years are generally considered to be scheduled for delivery, while those on the latter half of the schedule are funded for preliminary engineering only and are subject to be re-evaluated when the next STIP is developed.

A public comment period for the draft for years 2026-2035 is now open and runs through April 4. People can review the document and submit feedback online by visiting www.ncdot.gov. Local NCDOT offices across the state will also hold weeklong drop-in periods in the coming months for the public to ask questions and submit comments in person. More information on the times and locations of those meetings will be posted at www.ncdot.gov once schedules are finalized.

NCDOT typically updates the STIP every two years. The department uses data and local input to determine which projects get funded in the 10-year plan based on a specific formula created by the Efficiency Transportation Investment law. This allows NCDOT to use its funding more efficiently to enhance North Carolina's infrastructure, supporting economic growth, job creation and a higher quality of life.

Transportation officials are expected to adopt the 2026-2035 STIP in summer 2025. More information on the STIP process can be found at ncdot.gov tip.

Protect Your Home and Surrounding Woods

Many North Carolinians utilize their wood-burning stoves and fireplaces throughout the winter. The N.C. Forest Service is reminding stove users to never dump hot ashes or coals into a wooded area. If you do, you're risking not only your home, but your neighbor's as well.

Multiple wildfires spanning several Western North Carolina counties have ignited due to improper discarding of hot ashes from wood-burning stoves and fireplaces. Despite recent winter weather, low humidity and dry fuels can cause wildfires to spread quickly, threatening lives and property.

The simple solution to prevent this type of fire is to properly dispose of stove ashes. Soak them in water in a metal bucket, stir them about, or only put them in an area where the wind won't cause them to spread to combustible fuel such as leaves, pine needles or other forest litter.

To learn more about fire safety and preventing wildfires and loss of property, visit www.ncforestservice.gov. For information and tips to help create a defensible space around your home and protect your property from wildfire, visit www.resistwildfire.org.

Automobile Insurers Request 22.6% Increase in NC

North Carolina insurance companies have requested a statewide average 22.6% increase in automobile insurance rates. The North Carolina Rate Bureau, which represents the automobile insurance companies in the state and is not a part of the Department of Insurance, filed the request with the Department on Monday. The insurance companies requested that the rates take effect on Oct. 1.

State law gives the Commissioner of Insurance 60 days to review the rate request to determine if the increase is justified based on the data submitted. If Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey does not agree with the requested increase, he and the Department of Insurance can negotiate a settlement or call for a hearing.

Settlements have been reached on automobile rate filings in the past. If the case goes to a hearing, a hearing officer would make a ruling on the request.

This rate filing follows a February 2023 filing in which the insurance companies requested a statewide 28.4% increase. That filing resulted in a settlement of an overall average 4.5% increase per year for two years.

NCDOT Launches Garrett A. Morgan Page Program for High School Students

The N.C. Department of Transportation is launching a new page program and encouraging North Carolina high school students to apply for the program so they can spend a week working for the agency to learn more about careers in state government and the transportation industry.

The Garrett A. Morgan Page Program runs from March 24-28 and is designed for high school juniors and seniors attending Title I schools in North Carolina. Title I is a federally funded program that provides financial assistance and support to schools with high numbers of students from low-income families.

"NCDOT is committed to fostering the next generation of leaders in transportation," said Christy Dunston, director of the NCDOT Office of HBCU Outreach. "The Garrett A. Morgan Page Program not only honors an important figure in our history, but also empowers students by providing them with valuable insights and experiences that can shape their future careers."

Participants will engage with NCDOT professionals, enjoy hands-on activities, ride a state train, and learn about transportation planning, environmental analysis, public transit and public safety.

The program is named for Morgan, an African American inventor who created the modern traffic light 1923.

The program runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily the fourth full light in March at NCDOT's Highway Building, 1 South Wilmington St., in Raleigh.

Interested students from Title I schools are encouraged to apply and learn more at ncdot.gov/garrett.

Introduction to Beekeeping School

Article submitted by Aimee Colf, Horticulture/Forestry Agent: There are a number of ways to become educated in beekeeping. One way is to learn from local beekeepers and apiary inspectors. Another way is to attend a beekeeping conference. Some learn outside the classroom watching a demonstration or hands-on experiences. Either way, before you decide, it's important to know what you are getting into before purchasing your first hive of honey bees.

Anson County is hosting a 2025 Introduction to Beekeeping School, running from February 6 to March 18. This school targets aspiring beekeepers and those interested in gaining knowledge about the honey bee. It will provide an overview of what hobbyists should know as a responsible beekeeper. It will cover equipment, anatomy, honey bee life cycle, nutrition, pests, diseases, seasonal management, and products of the hive. Instructors are local beekeepers and members of the Anson County Chapter of the NC State Beekeepers Association. At the completion, students will be tested on their beekeeping knowledge

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