

[North Carolina's new voting districts are all over the map](#) (Charlotte Observer – July 11, 2011)

By Jim Morrill

When they split North Carolina's 9.5 million people into 13 congressional districts, Republican mapmakers reserved a special place for Sallie Stocks. They put everybody in Sampson County into the 2nd Congressional District. That is, except for the 85-year-old woman who lives off a country road near Duplin County. She alone would join the 3rd District, which stretches to the Outer Banks and the Virginia line. Stocks is just the most conspicuous anomaly in the map of proposed new voting districts. She illustrates the confusing arithmetic of a congressional redistricting process which splits counties, towns and neighborhoods. Consider:

-- In Wendell, a Wake County town of 5,845 east of Raleigh, everybody would be in the 1st District except for three people along Wendell Boulevard. They would be in the 13th.

-- Almost all of Statesville's 24,532 people would be in the 5th District. Twenty-seven would be in the 9th.

-- In Nashville, a Nash County town near Rocky Mount, 5,349 people would be in the 1st District. Three would be in the 3rd.

-- Most of Hickory's 40,000 people would be split between the 5th and 10th Districts. But 84 would move to an 11th District that stretches to the Georgia line. "By the stroke of a pen, the city of Hickory has been diced, sliced and divided," city resident Judy Ivester said at a public hearing last week. Republicans who control the General Assembly call the map "competitive," though it's expected to help GOP candidates at the expense of up to four incumbent Democrats. However partisan, the process also involves artful math. The ideal population for each of the 13 congressional districts is 733,499. Court rulings call for "zero deviation," meaning districts have to be virtually equal in size. Under the GOP plan, seven districts are right at the ideal. Five others have 744,498 people. One has 733,500. So for mapmakers, North Carolina's 289,000 census blocks were

like a jigsaw puzzle with no single solution . And in rural Sampson County, near the crossroads community of Turkey, Sallie Stocks has a census block all to herself. So when she joins her neighbors to vote at the Turkey town hall, she'll be the only one to get a ballot for the 3rd District. "When our totals come in for the 3rd District they would know exactly how she voted, and the law will not allow that," said Donna Marshburn, Sampson County's elections director. "If that were me, I'd raise the roof." By state law, votes are confidential.

"Ballots shall not be disclosed to members of the public in such a way as to disclose how a particular voter voted," it says. Stocks declined to comment. But Sen. Bob Rucho, a Matthews Republican who chairs the Senate Redistricting Committee, said he expects Stocks will be moved. "There are hundreds of thousands of census blocks and one of them could have been misplaced, and hopefully those are things we'll be able to correct as long as it's not a 'zero deviation' issue," he said. "If it's a 'zero deviation' issue, there's not a darn thing we can do about it." The GOP congressional plan splits a third of North Carolina's 100 counties. It splits even more towns and cities. Most of Charlotte would be in the 9th and 12th Districts. But less than 4 percent of the population would be in the 8th. Raleigh would be split into four districts: the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 13th. Only 4,500 of its 404,000 people would be in the 2nd. Smaller towns also would split. In Asheboro, a city of 25,000, 103 people would leave the 6th District for the 8th. In the Rowan County town of East Spencer, five of its 1,500 people would move from the 12th District to the 8th. Every time a county and precinct is divided, election officials have to print separate ballots. Hickory's Judy Ivester, an independent voter, said it also can make it harder to get involved with political organizations or campaigns and mean less attention from elected officials. "Why should (5th District U.S. Rep.) Virginia Foxx use up her time and her resources to help 15,000 people (in Hickory) when she can put it in someplace like Winston-Salem?" she said. "We used to be an important player." Complete legislative maps are due out today. Lawmakers are scheduled to vote on all the maps later this month. Rucho said they'll try to correct anomalies such as Sallie Stocks' where they can. "It's like pushing a balloon," he said. "There's a ripple effect."