



Times-News

Protecting Our Water, One Stream At A Time

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ECO NOTES



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Water is a transformational resource. Watch what happens when children get into streams. There's no tears, no sadness, just the sheer joy of being in the waterway reconnecting to human wisdom that goes back to the dawn of our species. It's not much different for adults, who immediately transform into children when they hit the wet stuff. We all value waterways, we can't help it. It's in our genes.

Of course, beyond the natural link we have with water, we couldn't survive for more than a few days without clean water to drink, clean water to nurture the food we eat and to cleanse us and keep us healthy. Our financial health is also protected by clean water. \$178 million comes into WNC annually by fly fishers. \$90 million in revenue from summer camps. Thousands of kayakers and other recreational boaters use our streams each weekend in the summer, bringing millions of dollars more into our local economy. Farming is the backbone of our community and its economic effect is substantial yet it is totally dependent on clean water to produce our delicious produce and beautiful plants.

Surprisingly, waterways are very fragile ecosystems. What we do to our streams can have a tremendous impact to our downstream neighbors. Fortunately we have many good stewards in this area including farmer Joel McCraw of Linda's Plants who has installed an artificial wetland so that his nursery's runoff can be captured by plants that take up nitrogen and phosphorus before it gets into the stream to damage wildlife or drinking water. Guides at Green River Adventures train their trip leaders to pickup bottles and cans they find while leading their trips down the whitewater. Camps including Green River Preserves and Camp Glen Arden schedule annual stream cleanups to protect this important resource.

ECO's ongoing water monitoring work helps identify problem waterways and works with landowners and the rest of the community to take action before major havoc causes great damage. In some cases, problems in streams require policy action to protect them. Boylston Creek is one such example.

Trout streams are rapidly disappearing from WNC. Although 30% of former trout streams no longer support trout, Boylston Creek continues to be a good habitat for native trout. The bad news is that this waterway has faced growing silt problems caused by development and stormwater runoff. Sedimentation kills the bugs that support life in the stream, it costs counties millions of dollars to remediate or restore them, and it dramatically limits recreational activities formerly conducted in waterways thereby cutting a reliable source of revenues we urgently need in these difficult times. Many studies have proven that the best way to limit the corrosive effects of silt in waterways is by strengthening the buffers that filter out this runoff.

Last year, the NC Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR) held public hearings and as a result reclassified Boylston Creek as a trout stream. The Clean Water Act requires that streams supporting native trout be classified as such given trout's sensitivity to changes in temperature and an excess of sediment, both of which are protected by buffers.

Some members of the NC State Legislature have been attempting to overturn this reclassification prodded by some landowners who more than likely are unaware of the value of requiring 25 foot buffers, the minimum standard for protecting trout. Requiring buffers protects against dangerous flooding, tainted drinking water, poisoned fish, drought, exposure to disease causing bacteria and more.

Trout streams add value, both to adjoining property owners' land as well as to county coffers. A small buffer is a small price to pay to protect this valuable natural resource. Having a buffer does not mean we are giving our land away, that someone else can use it or that someone is taking something away from us. Landowners with streams benefit from having this natural wonder on their property. With that benefit comes the responsibility to insure its protection. As Dennis McCraw is fond of saying, its not just about the trout, its about the kids downstream who play in the stream, catch frogs in our rivers, and fish in our waterways.

DENR is holding a public meeting on October 26 from 1-4 PM at the Mills River Community Center to allow the public to comment on this issue. Please come and tell DENR how important it is to protect the health of our streams by keeping this classification. For more information, check ECO's website at www.eco-wnc.org or call ECO at 692-0385.

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