

N.C. Source Water Protection Awards Program

Mills River Partnership

The Mills River Partnership (MRP) is a non-governmental organization working to protect the surface waters of the Mills River which is the drinking water source for Henderson County and part of Buncombe County. MRP has been partnering with local residents, farmers, and businesses since 1998 to protect water quality in the Mills River watershed.

In January of 2015, a comprehensive watershed plan was adopted to guide our work for the next ten years. Historical and potential water quality problems are identified and potential responses, preventions and solutions are proposed for a ten year time frame.

The known and potential water quality problems and solutions in the Mills River Watershed are described in physical and biological terms: 1500 feet of stream bank restoration or improvement of benthic biota from fair to excellent. Long-term care of Mills River will depend upon attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of landowners, residents, and business operators within the watershed and the willingness of water users to provide financial support for watershed protection.

Currently, the Mills River Partnership is engaged in a six year project designed to provide cost-share and technical assistance to farmer cooperators. This initiative is funded by an EPA-Section 319 Grant with matching funds from the Cities of Hendersonville and Asheville as well as cost sharing from cooperators. A full-time Watershed Coordinator collaborates with Henderson County Soil and Water Conservation District staff and farmers to identify sites for designing and installing best management practices for reducing stormwater runoff. Protocols have been designed to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices in reducing sediment in Mills River and its tributaries.

The Board of Directors of the Mills River Partnership includes farmers, citizens-at-large, leaders of environmental and agricultural organizations, representatives of the Town of Mills River, and the Cities of Hendersonville and Asheville (advisory), Henderson County government, and members of the Henderson County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Meeting monthly for about three years, the Board members have gained understanding and respect for the watershed as a community in which competing needs and interests are difficult to balance. By adopting this plan, the Mills River Partnership accepts the challenge of providing local leadership in protecting this vital water resource for future generations.

"I'm working with the Mills River Partnership because they are building bridges, working for water quality and also supporting local farmers."

- Jason Davis, North River Farms

