

High Country Program Director - Collaborative Educational Programs

Jessica Janc serves as the High Country Program Director for the Blue Ridge Resource Conservation and Development Council. For years, Jessica has cultivated a vibrant network of conservation partners, collaboratively implementing source water protection projects and inspiring people of all ages to protect their local resources.

In her time as High Country Program Director, Jessica has fostered many partnerships with other organizations throughout the mountains and foothills that resulted in numerous workshops for the public, educational programs, and stream restoration projects.

Partnering with New River Conservancy and local Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Jessica leads "Shade Your Stream" workshops, empowering landowners in the New and Watauga Watersheds to reduce erosion and protect water quality by giving away native plant material and providing educational material on how to plant stream buffers. She has also organized rain garden workshops in partnership with local Cooperative Extension offices.

As an expert in macroinvertebrates as water quality indicators, she regularly leads programs for K-12 students where she not only gets kids in the creeks near their schools, but secures grant funding to purchase water shoes and snorkels so all the kids are equally equipped to participate. Other educational programs have included creating your own watershed model, the water cycle journey, and building your own macroinvertebrate to learn about adaptations.

Jessica's organization has implemented numerous stream restoration and stormwater projects over the years but she is unique in that she always finds a way to involve the community. Whether it's inviting volunteers to plant the banks after a restoration, leading student tours of a stormwater project, or designing interpretive signage for visitors of a project, Jessica never stops thinking of how to use her role to inspire others to think of their impact on water quality.

Protecting source water quality requires engagement from diverse stakeholders and Jessica has worked tirelessly to engage and educate as many stakeholders as possible. Thanks to her efforts, the next generation is excited to become stewards of their natural resources.

Jessica's relentless dedication, combined with her innovative approach to community engagement, makes her an exceptional candidate for the NC Source Water Protection Award.



Bledsoe Creek Restoration Project

Protecting Veterans Park and the New River Watershed

When a stream channel experiences increased flow due to larger storm events, the banks erode to accommodate the excess water. As part of this project, streambanks were sloped and replanted to facilitate gentler flooding. Allowing floodwaters to access a floodplain reduces flood energy, protecting the land.

Rock structures, called crossvanes and j-hooks, were installed as part of this project. The structures span the channel to help disperse energy and redirect water towards Bledsoe Creek's center.

Let those plants grow!

Livestakes, hardwood cuttings from native shrubs, were planted after sloping the banks. These plants with robust root systems stabilize the soil during heavy rainfall and high-water flow, filtering pollutants from entering the river. The shrubs create shade, which helps maintain cooler temperatures vital for mountain fish and aquatic life. Their leaves provide habitat and food for insects and fish.

Cultivating vegetation along streambanks is crucial for preserving a healthy river. Whether you're tending to a park or living by a river or creek, remember not to mow the area, but let it grow!



Top left: aerial view of sloped bank between Bledsoe Creek and the trail, Top right: instream structure directing water to the center of the channel, Bottom: native shrub livestock

Who calls Bledsoe Creek home?

Mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians are dependent on riparian habitats. Mammal species depend on river corridors as safe travel routes and shelter. They frequently forage for food in the water. Birds patrol over the water to find prey. They nest and roost in the trees and shrubs. Frogs, toads, and salamanders hatch from eggs laid in the water. Snakes have the important task of keeping prey population numbers in balance. All of the native wildlife species that inhabit or visit the stream corridor play a vital role in maintaining the well-being of this unique ecosystem.

Partners: Allegheny SWCD, Allegheny County, NCDWR-WRDG, USFWS- Partners for Fish & Wildlife, New River Conservancy, NCDOG-EEG, Blue Ridge RC&D, NCSWCD

