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Got a minute ... with Shaun Moore



Click here for an interview with Henderson County Water Resources Coordinator Shaun Moore.

By [Harrison Metzger](#)

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The Mills River has been in the news so much with this fish kill that happened last week. Have you been involved in looking into that at all?I really haven't. The Department of Water Quality it's really a regulatory issue and at this point they haven't asked me to involved... although I'm sure I'll be informed what the problem was when they finally get some data back, narrow it down.

I think I will be involved in some level to work with anyone or any issue that may have been related to that fish kill at kind of a remediation type level.

Everything you do is voluntary. You don't have any sort of enforcement role, right?

Yeah exactly, and it is I think a really good position to be in...You need folks who can be the enforcers but I like to be in the role where I can go out and help the landowner or a land user to fix a problem. When you are not going out there to enforce something it is a lot easier to work with somebody.

The Mills River Watershed Protection Project helped to protect the lower section of the river from farm chemicals a few years ago. Explain for our readers how

that worked.

We got started in 1998 after some water quality samples were taken by UNCA in 1997 that showed there was a steep decline in water quality out there. So the community came together, a bunch of leaders from the community of Mills River and Henderson County...and said we should do something about this because the river always had a very good water quality rating and then all of a sudden just over about a two year period it became a poor rating.

We got started to work on that issue. What we really wanted to work on were pesticide issues primarily and secondarily sediment issues. We began by working with a lot of farmers to do pesticide management plans. We also did work to try to remove the stream side pesticide mixing stations away from the stream banks, and we built a couple of agro-

chemical handling facilities which is a building that was developed to be able to be able mix any agro-chemicals and contain any spills if they may happen and keep them from getting to the river.

We also did a lot of sediment issues, doing stream bank restoration and stabilization...So I think there has been a lot of progress made with the agriculture community in Mills River.

Are there plans to build more agro-chemical handling facilities to prevent spills on the upper parts of the Mills River?

We may be looking at building another one in the Mills River here soon in light of this fish kill....We haven't been able to get a building built up there in the past and a lot of the reason is the land in the upper part of the watershed is being leased by farmers from non-farming landowners.

Whenever we build a project we require a 10-year agreement with the landowner to maintain and use that facility whether it is a building or a streambank restoration project. And a lot of farmers were hesitant to be involved financially with building an agro-chemical building that required a 10-year agreement when they didn't own the land, they only leased the land.

Now there are some farmers in the upper watershed who are starting to own their land up there...so that has some potential.

How much do those things cost and how much does the government pay versus the landowner?

If there is an existing well and it is on high flat ground these things cost anywhere from \$25,000 to \$35,000...Our program right now pays 75 percent of the expense.

You've been with the Mills River Watershed Protection Project since September 2004 and you started out as the assistant watershed coordinator under Tom Burdett, the first watershed coordinator...Your position has been expanded county-wide now?

They liked the success we had in the Mills River and thought why not spread it countywide. Now it is a county funded position so I don't have to worry about grants running out and my job ending in the middle of a project.

We can think kind of longer term projects now...And I think in having a permanent locally funded position will make our grant applications a lot stronger; it will show a stronger local commitment to the work I do.

As water resources coordinator what exactly do you do? Describe a typical day.

Really there isn't a typical day like so many jobs I supposed. But over a typical week I may field a few calls from landowners who may have some erosion control issues along a stream bank or a perceived water quality stream.

They may call and say hey our stream is washing away our backyard is there anything you can do. I may go out and take a look at those and offer technical advice lots of time....I do a lot of planning trying to define where we want to work, what's the highest priority....We try to focus our efforts in a concentrated area so we will get measurable instream improvements in like we did in Mills River...And I'm looking at streams that are in good shape for preservation type projects and that are in bad shape for restoration type projects.

What go you into this line of work?

I'm actually probably one of the rare people I think that is doing almost exactly what he wanted to do ever since he was a little guy. I grew up with a muddy midwestern stream as my front yard and ever since

I was little I just had this ingrained sense that that river was not supposed to look the way it did and I wanted to do something about it...I've been pursuing this job probably since I was 12 years old

You are also a kayak paddler. How does that fit in with your love of rivers?

As you know, being a paddler when you are paddling you are just so intimately involved with water, in the river, on the river, sometimes unfortunately you are more in the river than you want to be.

The paddling just takes you to such beautiful places, takes you onto streams that are just so inspiring for me coming from a midwestern area where the streams there, 75 percent of the times the streams there are running just muddy, chocolate brown.

Then I come here to Western North Carolina and go out in my kayak and paddle around, you can see fish, you can see the bottom of the stream, the water is so clear and just looks so clean, it is just inspiring.

What are some of your favorite rivers here?

The Mills River. Maybe I'm a little biased but I really, really like the upper part of the Mills River. It has got so much going for it, it is well protected with the national forest and there are a lot of places you can go to get away from things up there, and it's accessible...It's easy to get to and you still feel it is away. I like fishing also.

I spend a lot of time trout fishing, I like to hike up into the national forest and fish on some really small streams. I like spending time kayaking on the French Broad River just because it is always different every time you go out there.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

I'm just really happy that I'm able to work county-wide now. I'm really looking forward to taking some of our successes on the Mills River to other watersheds. The Mills River project was noticed nationwide as a success story by

You can read about that, the EPA has a 319 success page that has a story about us. We are really happy with that success and I think we have found a model out there that works well to actually get measurable stream improvements and I'm looking forward to taking that to other watersheds.

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