

Apr 18, 2006

Grant targets river pollutionBy [Harrison Metzger](#)

Times-News Staff Writer

MILLS RIVER -- Finding ways to keep oil, gasoline and other pollutants out of the Mills River and other streams is the goal of a grant request town leaders authorized Monday. The Mills River Town Council gave its blessing for the Mills River Watershed Protection Project to seek a grant estimated at \$50,000. The project will use it to study stormwater pollution sources across the town's 22-square-mile area. The watershed protection effort, also known as the Mills River Partnership, was formed six years ago to look for voluntary ways to safeguard and improve water quality in the Mills River. The river is the main drinking water source for Henderson County and its towns through Hendersonville's water system, and a supplemental source for Asheville. Originating in Pisgah National Forest, the river flows through the rural but rapidly developing Mills River Valley. As parking lots, buildings and roads replace pastures and woods, uncontrolled stormwater runoff poses a threat to the stream's high quality water, Shaun Moore told Council. Federal and state rules that require large and medium sized towns to control stormwater are expected to eventually be mandated for all towns, said Moore, watershed coordinator. Grant funding now available to help towns study and plan may dry up once all towns are required to comply, he said. Until Monday, the Town Council had not expressed much interest in studying stormwater. Concerned it could lead to more government regulation, Councilman Wayne Carland last month asked the board to table Moore's request until they could discuss it with him further. But in a budget workshop Monday, Carland said the Council should get behind Moore's request. "We can't vote at this meeting (but) I think we need to indicate to Shaun we don't want to wait until our next meeting to proceed with this grant," Carland said. They agreed by consensus that Mayor Roger Snyder will write a letter indicating Council's support. The board will formerly vote at its next meeting April 27. Only about one quarter of the town is within the Mills River Watershed with other parts draining into the French Broad River, Boyleston Creek and McDowell Creek. Councilman Ed Glenn said it is important to him the study take in the whole town. Glenn said property owners in the Mills River watershed already are limited in how much they can develop their land by the state's watershed protection rules. They face these restrictions because they have taken better care of the Mills River than have other parts of the county with more polluted waterways. "There are other streams that could have been as clean as the Mills River if they hadn't been abused years ago," he said. State watershed rules restrict residential development to one home per acre in the Mills River basin, and set limits on the amount of land that can be commercially developed without stormwater controls. Such controls can include manmade wetlands or ponds to filter and slow runoff going into streams. Limiting damage from flood waters is an added benefit and among reasons cities and towns are being required to control stormwater, Moore said. June 1 is the deadline to apply for the grant. Moore estimated it will be a year before money might be available, while the study might take three months. The partnership will meet with the town to update them on progress, he said.