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Nursery is Friend of the River

Last week Van Wingerden International won the Friend of the River Award given by the Land-of-Sky Regional Council. They were nominated by the Environmental and Conservation Organization of Hendersonville. Bert Lemkes, the president, accepted the award. Van Wingerden has installed many measures to protect water quality in the Mills River, a trout stream and a water supply. These measures go above and beyond standards established by the State of North Carolina.

One of the first practices that they implemented was the recycling of their greenhouse irrigation water. This practice allows them to save water as well as fertilizer while greatly reducing their runoff into nearby streams.

Van Wingerden International has also worked with the Mills River Partnership to implement other practices that improve water quality.

Three quarters of an acre of riparian trees were planted next to Brandy Branch to improve bank stability and nutrient uptake will providing additional shade so that the Mills River can maintain its cool waters for trout.

Two stormwater wetlands were designed for a new greenhouse on Hooper Lane. These wetlands will capture the large runoff that will come off the greenhouse roofs. The wetlands will also provide wildlife habitat.

Again working with the Mills River Partnership, Van Wingerden International has approved plans to convert their existing pond along Highway 191 into a wetland.

The wetland will allow the treatment of runoff from over 18 acres of roofs. By resurfacing the edges on the pond so that the water is less deep, wetland plants will be able to grow. This wetland will also store stormwater so that it will not adversely impact Mills River. These wetlands serve as an example to any facility with large areas of roofs or parking lots. By storing and treating stormwater created by these impervious surfaces, water quality degradation and flood damage downstream can be reduced.

Bert Lemkes said the company is following in the tradition of Aart Van Wingerden who founded the Van Winderden family of companies. To Aart giving back to the community was a company standard.

It has been a pleasure to work with Bert on the riparian planting and the wetlands. From the start he has put a lot of energy and thought into the conservation of Mills River.

Tom Burnet is the resource coordinator for the Mills River Watershed Protection Project
