

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Water Quality Woes

Good morning and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature. This week, we're going to look at the precarious situation of our Southern Appalachian rivers.

When you have a child, certain sacrifices are made, some of which are temporary. Since our daughter's birth more than two years ago, our canoe, which used to get frequent use, languished in the basement, getting used only as a convenient basement shelf. However, that changed a couple of weeks ago.

We loaded up the boat, grabbed the paddles and life jackets, including one very small and very bright orange life jacket, and started Madeline's first canoe trip at Asheville's Carrier Park, home of the old raceway. Not knowing what to make of the experience, she spent the first ten minutes of the paddle sitting on the bottom of the boat, holding onto the yoke, just as we told her, without moving. Perhaps the longest she's been in one place without the use of straps and buckles since she learned to crawl. Eventually she relaxed and her hand made it over to the edge of the boat and her fingers dipped into the water.

And part of me cringed a bit. We were paddling the French Broad, not the highest quality river in the world, through Asheville, not the highest quality stretch of the French Broad.

My previous week had been preoccupied with problems at a wastewater treatment plant in North Carolina's Yancey County. The plant sits on the Cane River, and driving along it, it seems like a perfect, pristine, rural, Appalachian River - a beautiful place to spend an afternoon fishing or floating. Unfortunately there's also been a lot of dead fish in the river, and biologists aren't finding mussels in places where they were previously known - impacts seemingly linked to problems at the wastewater treatment plant upstream.

That incident was followed by the recent report of a fish kill in Transylvania County's Davidson River, apparently stemming from an accident during clean up of the old Eucusta paper mill. The Davidson River is one of the Southern Appalachian's most heavily used rivers. Flowing through Pisgah National Forest, people fish it, they swim in it, they picnic and camp beside it. The river's headwaters are sheathed in Forest Service land, so the problem occurred downstream of where the river is most heavily used, but it does raise the cynical question of whether our rivers need to be surrounded by national forest or national park land to be protected.

Our canoe trip was a short, calm paddle through Asheville. We actually saw a family of Canada geese and a family of wood ducks. Though our trip was pleasant along a French Broad that's cleaner than it used to be, the problems in the Cane and Davidson highlight the fragility of

rivers, they can be damaged by a single person. Keeping them clean is everyone's challenge and responsibility.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.